

THE CAUCASUS CULTURE - Postclassical Period

Overview

Many early kingdoms and empires have passed through the Caucasus over the centuries. Even after so many centuries of invasion and foreign domination, the peoples of the Caucasus have survived and continued to develop and preserve their unique cultures and traditions.

Between the Achaemenid era and the beginning of the 19th century, the Persian presence left lasting imprints on the cultures of the Caucasus. However, at various times the Caucasus was under the influence of Greece, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Russian Empire and aspects of their cultures were incorporated into painting, architecture, and literature.

LANGUAGE

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

Prior to the invention of their alphabet, Greek and Syriac were liturgical languages in Armenia and Georgia. With the expansion of Christianity, there was a need for a script for the native languages to write, translate liturgical texts and biblical texts, and conduct their liturgical practices in their own language. As a result, they created their own scripts at the end of the 4th century to access liturgical and biblical texts in their own language.

GEORGIA: Georgian is an Kartvelian language. Together with Mingrelian, Laz and Svan, Georgian forms the autochthonous South Caucasian language group. Mingrelian is used in western Georgia; Svan is spoken in the northwest Caucasus; and, Laz is spoken along the southeastern Black Sea coast. Old Georgian had its own unique alphabet with 38 letters.

Two periods were distinguished within Old Georgian: Early Old Georgian (5th to 8th centuries) and Classical Old Georgian (5th to 11th centuries). Two different dialects existed in Early Old Georgian, known as Khanmet'i (5th to 7th centuries) and Haemet'i (7th and 8th centuries). Literary material produced during the Old Georgian period were mainly religious works.

Iakob Tsurtaveli's *Martyrdom of Shushanik* was the first literary work written between 476 and 483. The oldest dated Georgian manuscript *the Sinai Polycephalon* of 864.



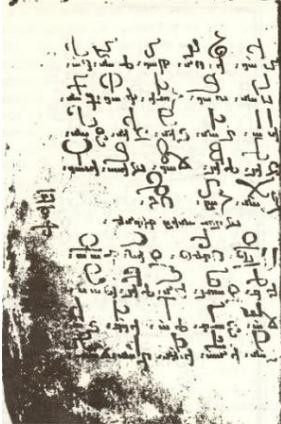
Georgian culture experienced a Renaissance period in the 11th–12th centuries and it lasted up to the second part of the 13th century until the Mongolian invasion. In the 12th century, there were two schools opened in Georgia, the Gelati Academy which was the first institution of higher education in western Georgia and the medieval educational center Ikalto Academy in the east where Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli studied.

By the 12th century, Old Georgian transformed into Middle Georgian. The epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli was the first written work in this period.

During the second half of the 13th century, the Mongols invaded Georgia which halted the cultural life of the Georgian kingdom. It was only after the defeat of the Mongols in the 15th century the period of restoration began.

In the early 17th century, Italian Catholic missionaries came to Georgia. They opened schools, students, besides learning Greek and Latin, studied Georgian grammar. These missionaries also wrote grammar of Georgian language and composed Italian-Georgian and Georgian-Italian dictionaries. A new Georgian literary language was created by the Georgian poet, writer and diplomat Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani. He also compiled a Georgian dictionary in the 17th century.

ARMENIA: Armenian belongs to the satem group of Indo-European languages. After the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century, the Armenian alphabet was invented by Mesrop Mashtots to translate religious texts and Bible. The alphabet is of Greek and Persian origin.



The earliest written records of the Armenian language dated from the 5th century. The language spoken in this century called classical Armenian (or Krapar) and the its lexicon consisted many loan-words from Parthian (Middle Iranian language).

In the 12th century, *Middle Armenian* (Mijin hayeren) spoken in Cilicia, in Turkey became a literary language used till the 18th century. Middle Armenian was divided into two periods: Cilician period (12th - 14th centuries) and East Armenian period (15th -16th centuries). Eastern and western dialects differs in pronunciation and spelling and also in vocabulary, grammar, and orthography.

AZERBAIJAN: With the spread of Christianity in Caucasus Albania in the 4th century, the Caucasian Albanian script was created by the monk Mesrop Mashtots and the translation of church books into Albanian began. Between the 5th - 7th centuries, there were schools opened inside churches in Albania, where only the children of aristocracy and clergy could study.

After the conquest of the territory by Arabs, Arabic became the language of instruction in schools opened as part of mesjids in big cities at the end of the 7th century, where only the children of rich families could study in Arabic and Persian. This period was which Albania's political and cultural revival.

The origin of Azerbaijani Turkic language goes back to the Oghuz Turkic of the Seljuks, who immigrated to the area in the 10th and 11th centuries.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: The inhabitants of the central southern slopes were predominantly speakers of Nakh until the 16th century when the highlanders began to migrate to the lowlands. In the same period that these highland migrants were establishing their own towns or merging with the populations of existing towns, the Georgian language was spreading into the highlands where it began to displace Nakh. By the end of the 18th century Nakh had been almost completely replaced by Georgian.

SCRIPT

SOUTH CAUCASUS



Nuskhuri Script of Mikael Modrekili 10th century

GEORGIA: There are two theories on the creation of the Georgian script. The first one was that it was created by King Parnavaz in the 4th or 3rd centuries BCE, and the second one was that Armenian script along with Albanian script was invented by the Armenian Bishop Mesrop Mashtots in 400 CE.

Georgian had three scripts: from the 5th to 9th century – *Asomtavruli* (Mrglovani - rounded), from the 9th to 11th century *Nuskhuri - Khutsuri* (angular) and from the 11th century the modern script *Mxedruli* (military; secular). *Asomtavruli* was found in Armazistsikhe (near Mtskheta) and Nekresi (in Kakheti). The Georgian oldest inscription was found in Georgian Church by Peter the Iberian in Bethlehem 430. In Georgia, the oldest inscription was discovered at *Bolnisi Sion* in 494.

Bolnisi inscriptions in Asomtavruli script in 494.

ARMENIA: In Armenian Churches, the liturgical services were conducted in Greek and Assyrian, and to understand the Bible, there was a need construct an alphabet for Armenian language. After the adoption of the Christianity in the 4th century, the Armenian alphabet was invented by Mesrob Mashtots to translate religious texts and Bible which was a pivotal invention in the development of Armenian history and national identity. The Armenian alphabet is of Greek and Persian origin. The Classical Armenian language *Grabar* was used until the 13th century, but is now only used as the liturgical language.



In the 17th century, Baldasar Dpir and the German historian Johann Joachim Schröder made great contributions in describing the spoken Armenian language which was called *Ašxarhabar* (civil language).



Albanian inscription found in a church in Mingachevir

AZERBAIJAN: Aramaic script was widely used in Southern Azerbaijan in the 1st century. The holy book of the Zoroastrians, the Avesta was written in the Pahlavi letters.

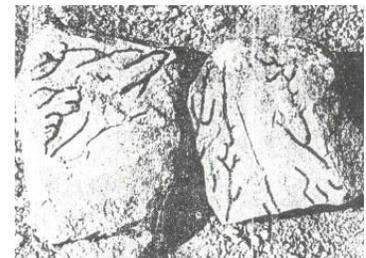
With the spread of Christianity in Caucasus Albania in the 4th century, a script was created by the monk Mesrop Mashtots and the translation of church books into Albanian began. There was one

Caucasian Albanian inscription carved on a stone found in Mingachevir, Azerbaijan dated back to the 7th century.

Between the 4th and the 8th centuries, early Turkic tribes settled in Nuvadi village used a Runic script.

Runic inscriptions on the Garga Dashi rocks

After the Arab conquest and with the spread of Islam in the 7th century, the Arabic script was used till the 20th century.



NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: In this period the Chechen language remained unwritten.

Questions:

- 1- With the spread of Christianity, why did the language scripts develop in the South Caucasus?
- 2- Why is the appearance of written texts in the writing manuscripts a significant development?

Readings:

- 1- Khachikyan, A., *History of Armenia, A Brief Review*, Edit Print, 2010.
- 2- Payaslian, S., *The History of Armenia, From the Origins to the Present*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.
- 3- Rayfield, D., *Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia*, Reaktion Books, 2012.
- 4- Zardabli, Ismail bey, *The History of Azerbaijan*, Rossendale Books, 2014.

- 5- Nichols, J., "The Origin of the Chechen and Ingush: A Study in Alpine Linguistic and Ethnic Geography", *Anthropological Linguistics*, Summer, 2004, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Summer, 2004), pp. 129-155.
- 6- Hewitt, G., *Georgian A Structural Reference Grammar*, John Benjamins Pub.Co, 1995.
- 7- *Concise Encyclopedia of Languages of the World*, Eds. Keith Brown & Sarah Ogilvie, Elsevier, 2009.
- 8- <https://ostarmenia.com/en/middle-cilician-armenian/>
- 9- Guérin, F. "The evolution of Chechen in asymmetrical contact with Russian", in *Language Empires in Comparative Perspective*, Edited by Christel Stolz, De Gruyter, 2015.
- 10- <https://www.rizvanhuseynov.com/2012/09/turkic-scripts-codex-of-inscriptions.html>

MYTHOLOGY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA:

The oldest religious tales of the Caucasian people carry motifs from the Prometheus myth. The Georgian Amirani and the Abkhazian Abrskil were heroes stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humanity.

In Georgian pagan cosmology, the universe consisted of three worlds (*skneli*): *Zeskneli* is the highest world, and it is the home of the gods; *the earthly world* is the middle world, it is the home of humans, animals, plants; and *Qveskneli* is the lowest world, below the earth inhabited by demons, evil spirits and dragons. Black is the colour of lowest world. After the spread of Christianity, traditional cosmology was combined with Christian teachings. While *Zeskneli* became *heaven*, *Qveskneli* turned into hell.

The head of the pantheon of gods, *Ghmerti* created the universe. Angels, saints and icons were named *Khat'i*. The supreme deity Armazi was his son and represented the male moon, and established order. The second one was his daughter, Barbale, the deity of the sun and fertility, who provided good harvests. The third one was Kviria who served as the mediator between Ghmerti and humans.



When the Georgian tribes began to unite, their religious notions began to merge and a certain order and hierarchy was established. The moon deity Tetri Giorgi (White George) was depicted as a warrior. The sacred animal, the bull, was often sacrificed to him. The bull's horns have the shape of a crescent moon. The bull's head with crescent shaped horns is also found in Christian Cathedrals during the Middle Ages as over the Gates of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, Georgia (11th century).

ARMENIA: The pre-Christian Armenian pantheon had strong links to the Greek pantheon. For example, Aramazd was identified with Zeus, Vahagn with Heracles, Astghik with Aphrodite, and Anahit with Hera. There was a newly organized national pantheon at the beginning of the Christian era with seven chief deities Aramazd, Anahit, Tiur, Mihr, Barshamina, Nane, and Astghik.

After the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century, some of the ancient myths and beliefs amalgamated with Christian beliefs. Some elements of pre-Christian Armenian mythology were transferred to Christian figures. For example, characteristics of Vahagn appear in Armenian legends of John the Baptist.

The Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi mentioned a legendary hero, *Ara the Handsome*, in his *History of Armenia*. He was presented as the son of Aram and a descendant of the legendary patriarch Hayk, the forefather of the Armenians. It has been claimed that this figure has connections with the *Handsome to the Myth of Er*, mentioned in Plato's *Republic*. In pre-Christian Armenia, in the 3rd century, *Ara* was regarded as a male god, but after Christianity he was considered a male hero. In his book, Khorenatsi also describes the birth of the god *Vahagn*.

AZERBAIJAN: The mythology of Azerbaijan includes the elements of cosmogonic myths concerning the creation of the world, calendar myths concerning seasonal processes, and ethnologic myths concerning the origin of the ethnos.



Azerbaijani mythology contains antropomorphic figures like Aghach kishi, Qulyabani, Div and Peri etc. and zoomorphic figures like the Simurg, the Wealth bird, Huma, the Samandar bird, the horse, the wolf, the goat etc. There are also ethnologic myths, myths connected with ancestor cults, myths connected with God and spirits, seasonal myths, myths connected with cults and Ongon (a spirit of shamanistic belief), and myths connected with world catastrophes and the end of the world.

Certain trees, like the oak and the iron tree, were regarded as sacred and people carried pieces of bark from these trees on their necks as amulets to protect themselves from the evil eye and illness. Fire and black rock were also viewed as sacred and having curative powers.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: The pre-Islamic Vainakh developed a pantheon of deities that reflected their ethno-cultural features and were the products of nature and geographical relief. Traditional religion in Chechnya is animistic with a number of nature and patron deities. The head of the Chechen pantheon was *Malkha-Dela* (the god of sky). There were other gods like *Sela* (god of thunder and lightning), *Furki* (goddess of the wind), *Aza* (goddess of the sun), *Elta* (god of hunting), *Dika-Dela* (goddess of truth), *Kchokha-Dela* (goddess of peace), *Pkha-Dela* (god of place) and *Tusholi* (goddess of fertility).

The wolf (*borz*) is a strong national symbol, and is an example to be followed by men. The cult of the wolf was widespread in medieval times.

Many folktales of the Caucasian people include motifs from the Greek Myth of Prometheus. Vainakh Nart Sagas introduce Pkharmat, the most important hero of all the Narts. Pkharmat is a blacksmith figure who steals heavenly fire from the god *Sela* for mortals. Another heroic figure is *Tulpar*, a horse with supernatural abilities who came to help Pkharmat when the god *Sela* chained Pkharmat to the summit of Mount Kazbek where *Ida*, a falcon, comes every morning to tear Pkharmat's liver.

FOLKLORE

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Georgia has a rich tradition of folklore that reflects the confluence of Eastern and Western traditions, both European Christian and pagan, Byzantine, and Persian influences. Georgian folklore contains characters including beasts, heroes, spirits, and magicians. One favorite character is the *mzetunakhavi* (the most beautiful woman in the world); others are the *modzalade devi* (a three-headed monster that eats humans), and the *natsarkeia* (a person who cannot do anything worthwhile). Georgian folktales were first printed in the 17th century and have also survived in songs and rituals.

ARMENIA: Armenian folklore contains a small number of national heroes. One of the most prominent figures in Armenian folklore is Mesrop Mashtots, creator of the Armenian alphabet. His image is portrayed in many Armenian works of art. Another important hero is the 5th century warrior Vartan Mamikonian who defended the Armenians against the Persians. There are also biblical heroes. One of them is Gregory the Illuminator (Grigor Lusavorich) who brought Christianity to Armenia and converted king Trdat III in 301. A legendary figure, the patriarch Hayk is considered the founder of the Armenian nation. Another legendary hero of the Armenian epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* (*Sasna Tsrer*) is the 8th century *David of Sassoun* who fought against the Arab invaders.

Folk songs were performed with violins and mandolins by wandering poets and singers called *ashughs* starting in the 16th century.

AZERBAIJAN: Azerbaijani culture has a rich collection of oral folklore such as songs, stories, dastans and sayings. One of the dastans is *Dede Qorkut* written in the 14th century. These stories reflect the pre-Islamic beliefs as well as the values of the nomadic Turkic peoples. The folk epic legend Koroghlu written in the 17th century was dedicated to the struggle against Turkish enslavement. These dastans were composed in the form of a heroic ballads and performed by *ashugi*. The first master ashug in Azerbaijan folklore was Gurbani.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: The genres of Chechen folklore are mythology, heroic epics, tales, legends, ritual songs, heroic epic songs (*illi*), religious folklore (Hadiths etc.), *zhukhurgs'* and *tyulliks'* plays, verse and songs. Chechen folk songs include ritual songs, incantations, ceremonial, lamentations (*belkham*, *tiizhar*). The composition of heroic epic songs, *Illl* in the 16th–18th centuries is a product of the age in which the Chechens battled local and foreign feudal lords to maintain their independence.

Questions:

1- How are elements of ancient mythology reflected in modern religious beliefs and practice in the Caucasus?

Readings:

- 1- https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/81_folder/81_articles/81_manuscripts.html
- 2- Jaimaukha, A., *The Chechens, A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.
- 3- <https://asfar.org.uk/the-mythological-and-cultural-traces-of-the-caucasian-folklore/>
- 4- Endoltseva, E., "A Motive of the Bull's Head as a Decoration of the Medieval Churches in Southern Caucasus", *ANASTASIS. Research in Medieval Culture and Art* Vol. IV, Nr. 1, May 2017.
- 5- Berman, M., et al, "Georgia Through Its Legends, Folklore and People", Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2011.
- 6- <https://www.allgeo.org/index.php/en/1865-georgian-mythology-key-characters-and-concepts>
- 7- Mikaberidze, A., *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.
- 8- https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/Asia/Armenia/_Texts/KURARM/34*.html
- 9- *Mythology of All Races*, Vol. VII, Armenian and African, Editors: CANON JOHN ARNOTT Macculloch, D.D., Editor George Foot Moore, A.M., D.D., LI.D., Consulting Editor, Archaeological Institute Of America Marshall Jones Company, Boston, 1925.
- 10- https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai141_folder/141_articles/141_bayati_poetry.html
- 11- Anchabadze, G., "The Vainakhs", (The Chechen And Ingush), "Caucasian House", Tbilisi, 2001, 2009.
- 12- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture*, UNESCO, 2009.
- 13- <https://www.waynakh.com/eng/chechens/religion/>

VISUAL ARTS:

PAINTING:

South Caucasus:

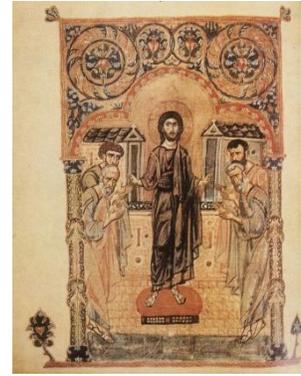
Georgia: With the introduction of Christianity transformation in arts in Georgia became unavoidable. Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Georgian Orthodox and Apostolic Church shaped Georgian culture which was reflected in icons and pictures portrayed on the walls of churches and monasteries.

The history of Georgian fresco dated back to the 4th century. From the 8th to 9th century there were first fresco schools opened in Davit Gareji and Tao-Klarjeti.

In the 9th – 10th centuries, monks like Ioane Zosime and Arsen Iqaltoeli began to reform the Georgian literary language and developed calligraphy.

During the reign of Queen Tamar, Georgian art, especially illustrated manuscripts and miniature painting reached their peak. One of these manuscripts, the Vani Gospels, was an illustrated manuscript that belongs to the end of the 12th century and was composed at the request of Queen Tamar.

Vani Gospels



Mural painting reached its golden age between the 11th-13th centuries.

Icon Painting: Byzantine art was the backbone of the origins of Georgian ecclesiastical art.

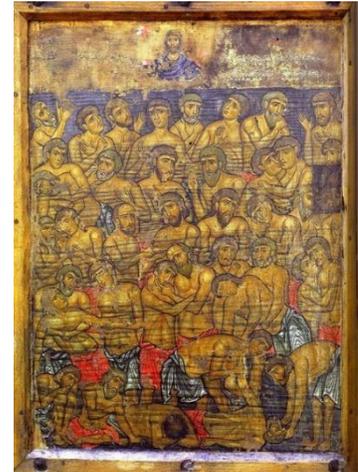


One of the oldest known icons in Georgia the Savior of Anchiskhati dates back to the 6th-7th centuries.

The ties with the Byzantine Empire had decisive influence in Georgian art at the end of the 10th – 11th centuries. The elements of Georgian icon painting *the Mother of God with the Child and St. Barbara* that appeared in the 10th showed some connection with the Byzantine art.

Georgian art reached its peak towards the end of the 12th century when the Georgian state was independent and powerful. Although it was under the influence of the Byzantine art, Georgian icon painting developed its unique style which was plainer than the Byzantine. One example is the icon of the *Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*. The icon of *St. John the Forerunner* also belongs to the same period.

Icon of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste



The *Khakhuli triptych* was one of the largest enamel artworks created in Georgia depicting the Virgin Mary. It comprised 115 examples of Byzantine and Georgian cloisonné enamel brought from Constantinople and Georgia in the 8th - 12th centuries.

Three-dimensional painting with central perspective iconography developed in Georgia between 10th -13th century.

Due to the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, the artists began to reproduce ancient styles with the utmost precision.

The Ksani valley Largvisi became a center for icon painting in the 14th century. Under the influence of Byzantine art, a number of icons were created there in the 14th - 15th centuries.

Mural Painting: Although mural paintings showed influences of the Byzantine art, it reached its peak in the 11th -13th centuries and displayed its own unique characteristics which distinguished it from the Byzantine style.

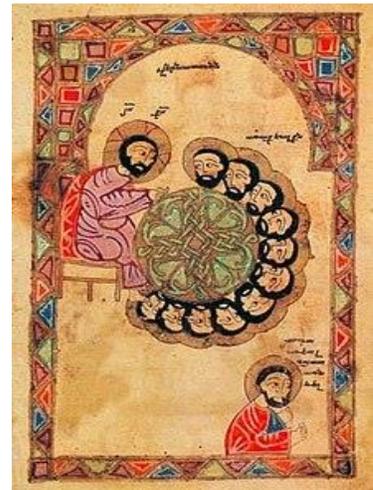
The monastery Vardzia contained frescos dating from the 12th century, including a portrait of Queen Tamara.

The monastery David-Garedja exhibits the best quality mural paintings from the 17th century. This period also witnessed wide introduction of European art, especially icon painting in Georgia.

Armenia: The Armenian painting flourished between the 9th and the 17th century when there appeared the illustration of religious manuscripts. Armenian artists combined their unique style with Byzantine by leaving monochrom use of color and adding Oriental themes adopted from the Mongols.

Miniature Painting: Armenian painting, mostly miniatures in religious manuscripts developed between the 9th and 17th centuries. These miniatures combined Western ideals with Eastern colors and themes.

Armenian miniature illustrative art gained its peak in the 10th and 14th centuries. Toros Rosslin and Sargis Pitsak were famous for their choice of colors and innovative solutions in iconography.



Stone Carving - Khachkars: In Armenia, Khachkars (cross-stones) were carved stones, a traditional monument that looked like a flat vertical stone with an image of a cross in the middle that represented the Tree of Life. Each khachkar has a unique character, and they can have different sizes.



Azerbaijan: In Azerbaijan decorative art dated back to the 8th-10th centuries.

Miniature Painting: In Azerbaijan, miniature paintings by Abdulmomin Muhammad al-Khoyi first appeared in the manuscript of *Varga and Gulsha* in the 13th century.

Maragha, Tabriz and other towns of Azerbaijan became centers for calligraphy and miniature painting. One of the best miniatures of the 14th century is contained in the manuscript of the *Great Tabriz Shahname* (Demott Shahname).



A new style of miniature was introduced in the 15th century by the Tabriz school. The best illustrations of this style appeared in the poems Nizami's *Khosrov and Shirin* by Abd-al-Khayin and *Sultan Ahmed* by the artist Abd al-Hayyi and *Mehr and Mustary* by Jafar Tabrizi.

Miniature art reached its peak in the 16th century. Manuscripts of *Shahnama* and *Khamsa* with their miniatures were the best illustrations of this period.

From the 18th century, the miniature art was under the influence of Qajar style which was introduced by the artists who were educated in Europe.

North Caucasus:

Chechnya: The Vainakh people were masters of stone carving. A dominant motif in traditional art was plant ornaments, the crescent, sun and water waves.

ARCHITECTURE:

South Caucasus:



Georgia:

Cruciform style: With the acceptance of Christianity, the construction of churches gained rapid improvement, and gradually a unique cruciform style of church architecture developed, evident in the basilica-type churches of Bolnisi and Urbnisi (5th century) and the cruciform domed Jvari Church (6th century).

Cross-dome style: The Georgian cross-dome style of

architecture became a characteristic feature of most medieval Georgian churches. One of the examples was the Gelati Monastery. The Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi, the Ikalto Monastery complex and Academy, and the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta also belong to this style of architecture.



In the 13th century, Georgian architecture reached a new level and is well represented in the Gelati Cathedral, the domed church at Tighva, the churches of Ikolta and Betania, and the rock-carved monastic complexes of David Gareja and Vardzia.

Armenia:

Basilicas: After the adoption to Christianity, the first Armenian churches were built between the 4th and 7th century. The early churches were mostly basilicas, arched structures with supporting columns. The construction of one of the best examples of early Christian architecture, the *Echmiadzin Cathedral* (Cathedral of the Only Begotten) belongs to the 4th century. It was built on the spot of a pre-Christian temple in Vagharshapat (Echmiadzin).

Cupola Cone: By the 5th century the typical cupola cone in the center had become widely used.

Hripsime style - dome structures: By the 7th century, centrally-planned Hripsime style churches were being built with niched buttress. The church of St. Hripsime has remained active throughout the centuries, and up to the present.

One of the best example of central dome structures was the *Temple of Zvartsnots* built in the mid-7th century with a three-story pyramidal structure set on strong circular columns.



Between the 9th and the 14th centuries, Armenian architecture reached its zenith. *The Monastery of Geghard*, the *Temple of Surb Khach* on Akhtamar Island built by the architect Manuel and the *Church of Noravank* built by Momik are all examples of this revival period. Haghpat and Haritchavank were built in this period. *The Monastery of Geghard* was partially carved in adjacent solid rock and the rest of the structure blends in with the surrounding landscape. Momik's church of Noravank was richly decorated with images of Our Lord and the angels, and this was a new style in Armenian architecture.

After the invasions of Armenia by the Timurids and the destruction of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia by the Mamluks at the end of the 14th century, architectural activity halted for nearly 250 years, and there were no new structures built until the 17th century.

The 17th century was another revival period under the rule of the Safavids. The churches at Mughni and Shoghakat at Etchmiadzin are churches built in this period.



Azerbaijan:

Dome Building: After the adoption of Christianity by the Caucasus Albanians, till the 7th century, basilicas replaced the pagan structures. The best examples of this period are the basilica in the village of Qum, a complex of temples in Minghachavir, Kilisadagh in the Gabala district, Mamruk in the Azqatala district, and Lekt in the Qakh district which reflect the high level of culture of that period.

Castle of Beshbarmaq that stretched from the shore of the Caspian Sea to Babadagh is clear evidence that the Azerbaijanis were constructing defensive fortifications at this time.

With the arrival of Islam, the formation of architecture received a new style reflecting the new religion as in the Juma Mosque built in the village Sundu of Shamakhi in the 8th century.



In the 9th – 10th century, one of the distinguished examples of architecture built on the banks of the river Agoglan, in Azerbaijan was the monastery Amaras.

The defensive walls of Baku, Shamakha, Beylagan, Ganja, Tabriz, Maragha, Absheron towers-in Mardakan, Nardaran, Ramana, Qiz qalasi (Maiden Tower) in Baku, the minaret of “Sima-qala” in Icheri Sheher in Baku, khanagha of Pir Hussein, mausoleum of Momina Khatun and Yusif ibn Kuseyr in Nakhichevan , the bridges of Khudaferin and Culfa, fortress walls in Gulustan and Kale-i Bughurd near Shamakha, Alinja and Organgala in Nakhichevan were all built in the 12th century.



Nakhchivan School - Tower Building: The use of towers with several identical sides was an important characteristic of the Nakhchivan School's architecture. The prominent figure of tower building in Azerbaijan was Ajami Abubakr oglu Nakhchivani. He was also the founder of the Nakhchivan School of Architecture in the 12th century. He built the Usif Kuseyir Oglu tomb (locals called it the Atababa dome) and the Momina Khatun tomb.

In the 12th century, a cylindrical eight story, 28 meter structure Maiden Tower was built by architect Massoud the son of Davud alongside a natural oil well in Baku.



Shirvan School: The Palace of the Shirvanshahs built in the 15th century by the Shirvanshah dynasty is the best example of Shirvan architecture. The Shirvan School was famous for the type of stone used, asymmetry and the carving style of the architects in the main building. During the 16th-17th centuries the architectural traditions of previous eras were continued.



North Caucasus:

Chechnya: From the 12th century, the temple Tkhaba-Yerdy was the most significant Christian monument in Chechnya and

Ingushetia.

Also, Alby-Yerdy and Targhim were churches constructed in Ingushetia and on the territory adjacent to Chechnya in the same period.



Vainakh tower: The Vainakh tower that was used for dwelling or defense in the Middle Ages was a kind of multi-floor structure assembled from large stones. These architectural techniques reached their peak in the 15th – 17th centuries.

In this period, numerous defense towers were built to defend the population from the raids of hostile communities. These constructions were built in Doshkhakle, Orsoi, Kart



and Tsecha-Akhk and mostly in the valley of the River Argun (ancient tower complexes -Vaserkelovsky complex, Tazbichi, Ikolchi, Upper Cockatoo, Meshi, Motsar, Nicara, Ushkaloi).

SCULPTURE:

South Caucasus

Georgia: Under the influence of Hellenistic and Persian sculpture, relief sculpture was developed, and the earliest examples of reliefs are located in the basilica *Bolnisi Sioni* in the 5th century, carved in the interior of the church. The relief depicts zoomorphic shapes with geometric and vegetal patterns. Stone crosses in medallions are featured throughout the reliefs that cover the facades of the church. The stone crosses, dating back to the 6th- 7th century, are surrounded with carved images.



The reliefs adorning the church of *Jvari* in Mtskheta are another example from this period. On facades of the church, there are carved images of the local governors *eristavi* of

Kartli and commissioners.

The 8th - 9th centuries are regarded as a transitional period with new forms of expression in Georgian sculpture. Some of the best examples of this period were *Ashot Kourapalates* in the Opiza Monastery and *David III of Tao* from the Oshki Monastery.



The 10th century was a period of development of new tendencies in reliefs as witnessed in the figure of *Ashot Kukhi*, the *Commissioner of Tbeti Cathedral*. Georgian artists sought to emphasize the figures by making them stand out from the surface.

At the beginning of the 11th century, the reliefs on church facades with their sophisticated forms exhibited a high level of artistry and technique. One of the best examples of reliefs from this period are found in the *Nikortsminda Cathedral*, the *Cathedral Svetitskhoveli* and the *Cathedral Samtavisi*.



In the 12th century, there was a tendency to shift from carved figures to geometric and vegetal ornamentations as in the *Church of Pitareti* and the *Church of St. Saba* in Sapara.

Political and economic developments halted the development of sculpture till the 17th century. The 17th century witnessed a revival of stone carving with eclectic elements as found in the *Ananuri Church of the Dormition* and *Sagarejo church of the Holy Apostles St. Peter and Paul*.

Armenia: In Armenia, the temple of Garni built in the Ionic order of Hellenistic temple architecture from the first century displays geometric and floral reliefs.



In the 6th and 7th centuries, Armenian churches had carved figures around the windows and in the space above the doorways as witnessed in the Cathedrals Zvartnots, Odzun, Ptghni and Mren. In the Cathedral Zvartnots, there were four supporting pillars with carved gigantic heraldic eagles wrapping around the sides.

In the 10th century, the *Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar* displayed the most sophisticated carvings covering the entire façade. Other monasteries like Tatev, Geghart, Hovhannavank, Haghpat, Sanahin and Tsakhatskar also had similar stone carvings.

Obelisks: Rectangular rock obelisks with figures of saints are found outside of the Church of Odzun from the 8th century.

Carved Stelae (Stone monuments): There is also a large body of upright stone monuments in the form of four-sided stelae from the 5th to 7th centuries. The stelae depicting saints were placed on the grounds of churches as the ones at Talin.

Khachkars: Khachkars (cross-stones) were carved stones looked like a flat vertical stone with an image of a cross in the middle that represented the Tree of Life. Each khachkar has a unique character, and they can

have different sizes. Some small khachkars were inserted into the walls of churches as in Hovhannavank. They were mostly used as gravestones or as memorials.



Azerbaijan: Stone carved sculpture was widely used in Caucasian Albania. The Minghachevir Church Complex had four temples built in the 4th and 7th centuries. In the temple of Minghachavir, there were two peacocks carved opposite each other on the right and on the left side of a holy tree of eternal life.



Stone carvings depicting people, animals, and mythical animals are also found in the Shirvanshahs' monument *Sabayil Castle* built in the 13th century in Baku Bay.

North Caucasus

Chechnya: In the 12th century temple *Tkhaba-Erdyi*, on both sides there are two standing figures. One of them is in the garments of a priest and has two bunches of grapes on his shoulders. The other figure holds a cross and a sword. In the upper part, next to the model of the church is carved a hand with a construction angle bar.

PERFORMING ARTS:

DANCE:

South Caucasus

Georgia: Dance in Georgia was a parallel development with agriculture and animal husbandry. The Kakhetian dance *Tsangala da Gogona* included features of agriculture such as sowing and watering.

Samaia: The folk dance *Samaia* was an old pagan dance. It was performed by three women who represented Queen Tamar of Georgia and her glory.

Armenia: In the 5th century Movsés Xorenats'i himself mentioned that the old descendants of Aram (Armenians) talk about the lyre, their songs and dances in their ballads.

In his *Parallel Lives*, the Greek historian Plutarch also mentioned Armenian traditional dances.

Shalakho: The dance *Shalakho* performed by two men in order to gain the affection of a woman was one of the oldest dances in Armenia.

Yarkhushta: Known from the early Middle Ages, the *Yarkhushta* was a warrior dance performed only by men in the Sassoun province in Western Armenia. In medieval times, before a battle, the army used to perform this dance that looked like a fight between two warriors.

Azerbaijan:

Asma Kasma was one of the oldest wedding dances accompanied by a song called *Asma Kasma*. It was a dance with some dance features and few jumps.

Abayi was a dance of the Middle ages from the Shaki and Zaqatala regions in Azerbaijan. This dance was performed by a group of people making exaggerated movements, and was accompanied by music.

The national dance *Kochari*, was a type of Yalli (halay), which had a rhythm, accompanied by a balaban (duruk) and nagara (a type of drum).

North Caucasus

Chechnya: The most important characteristic feature of Chechen dance was collectiveness. The main themes of the dances were usually love, freedom and pride. In traditional dances, both men and women performed together.

One of the traditional medieval Vainakh dances was the *Bakkhiychu nekhan khelkhar* (Dance of the Elderly), better known as lezginka performed by middle-aged people. Each village had its own version like Atagi, Gudermes, Shali.

Other traditional dances were the *Nokhchi dance*, *Dance of the Daggers* and *Dance of the Dzhigit* performed by men.

MUSIC:

South Caucasus

Georgia: Georgian folk music was mostly choral and polyphonic chanting. Polyphonic singing in Georgian music dates back to the introduction of Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century.

Georgian hymnography: In the 10th century, the monks like Ioane-Zosime developed Georgian hymnography.

Armenia:

Psalms: With the adoption of Christianity, monks began to write psalms (religious songs) and sermons. The first psalms were written by the monk Mesrop Mashtots and the patriarch Sahak Partev. The Priest Komitas, composer Stepanos Syunetsi and Hovhan Odzetsi further developed psalms during 7th and 8th centuries.

The psalms produced by Grigor Magistros, Petros Getadardz, Hovhannes Sarkavag, Hovhannes Erznkatsi and Nerses Shnorhali between the 11th and 12th centuries, are considered the masterpieces of this genre.

Sharakans (Chants): In the 7th century, Barsegh Chon, Anania Shirakaci and Komitas Aghtstsi were the first writers of a collection of sharakans called *Chonyntir sharaknots*. Armenian music reached its level of highest development between the 10th and 14th centuries. Mesrop Mashtots and his students wrote Sharakans sung in masses, and in the 12th century *Sharakans* were composed by the hymn composer Nerses Shnorhali.

New Musical Notation - Khazes: An Armenian special system of music notation was developed called *Khazes* (Haza) by Stephanos Syunetsi in the 8th century.

Gusans: *Gusans* were the travelling bards performing music and singing epical songs.

Azerbaijan:

New Musical Notation: A new system of musical notation found in the *Treatise on Music* was created by Sefieddin Urmavi in the 13th century.

Mugham: *Mugham* was developed based on the traditional Persian musical modal system *dastgah*. In the 15th century, the singers of the *Mugham* sang the *gazals* (odes) of Fuzuli, Habibi and Khata.

North Caucasus

Chechnya: One of the most important features of Vainakh folk music was polyphonic singing which could be performed in both religious and secular songs. Usually, the songs were performed without musical instruments.



Dechig-pandur: Some of the songs were accompanied by an instrument called a *dechig-pandur*, a three-string plucked instrument.

Phandar: A three-string plucked musical instrument, the phandar was similar to the panduri, used in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Illii: In the 13th century, the songs performed by bards included heroic ballads, *Illii* (or *illancha*), which were performed by male singers and depicted the struggle for freedom.

Yish: *Yishs* were comic, romantic, melancholic and love ballads sung by women. The lyrics were written by the singers themselves.

Nazmanash: The religious *nazmanash* (hymns) were performed by both male and female singers.

THEATER:

South Caucasus

Georgia: Georgian culture has been under the influence of both the Christian and Muslim (Sufi) religions since the 12th century. The king Teimuraz I gave Georgian poetry new direction with his translations of verses from Persian literature. He also germinated Georgian theater with his verse dialogues used by masked actors to entertain the Russian envoys in Kutaisi.

Giorgi Avalishvili, a diplomat, writer and dramatist, was the forefather of the first Georgian National Theater founded in Tiflis in 1791. He was also the writer of the first Georgian drama called *King Teimuraz*.

Armenia: In Armenia the great advances in theater were made in the 5th century. Even though from the 7th century to the 9th century these advances were slowed down by the Arab invasion, the theater was able to survive.

The 11th and the 14th centuries marked the recovery period of the Armenian theater. Different types of dramas (tragic, erotic, love, mime, comic, epic) began to be performed in the Armenian Cilicia area.

In the 18th century, the secular dramas from Europe were translated into the Classical Armenian language. These plays were not performed frequently at theaters, but mostly used at schools in teaching Classical Armenian. Plays were written by the *The Mekhitarists* clergy who contributed to the development of the Western Armenian Theater and performed by the students.

Azerbaijan:

In the Middle Ages, religious dramas like *Shabih* spectacles that were performed in the month of Muharram were the most common theatrical performances. In the 16th century, under the rule of the Safavids, *Shabih* was widely used. Folk performances played a great role in the development of the professional theater of Azerbaijan. Besides *Shabih*, the artists performed *godu-godu*, *kavsaj*, *yel baba*, *gudul*, *yugh*, *lal oyunu*, *garavelli*, *laghlaghi* in open spaces. The performances in open spaces continued until the second half of the 19th century.

North Caucasus

Chechnya: The earliest written accounts of Chechen dancing belong to 18th century European travelers.

The main sources of the medieval Chechen theater were the ancient pagan rituals and folk culture. For example, worshippers prayed the Mother of Cold, who symbolized evil, not to bring bad frost and not to destroy their livestock. After children ate treats presented on an oak branch, fire was placed on a log that had been kept from the old year. An adult would pray to the embodiment of good, the Father of Winter. Afterwards, embers from this sacred fire were taken home by the worshippers.

In the 16th century, these rituals turned into humorous theatrical acts. One of the best examples of this ritual is *Belkhi*, a collective effort to help a resident to build a house or to help him in harvesting his crops. This ritual was accompanied by music, singing, dancing and jokes. Boys and girls performed comic plays with a dialogue sung by a male solo and choir on the one side, and a female solo and choir on the other side.

Discussion / Questions:

- 1- What type of cultural influence did the Persians and the Ottomans have on the South Caucasus?
- 2- How were the inhabitants of the North Caucasus able to preserve their culture under strong influence of Russia?

Readings:

- 1- Roudik, P.L., Culture and the Customs of the Caucasus, Greenwood Press, 2009.
- 2- Khachikyan, A., History of Armenia, A Brief Review, Edit Print, 2010.
- 3- Coene, F., The Caucasus An Introduction, Routledge, 2010.
- 4- Rayfield, D., Edge of Empires, A History of Georgia, Reaktion Books, 2012.
- 5- Jaimoukha, A., *Chechens A Handbook*, Routledge, 2005.
- 6- Medieval Georgian Reliefs <https://www.atinati.com/news/5f927cf378d8520038287be3>
- 7- <https://fresnostate.edu/artshum/armenianstudies/resources/sculpture.html>
- 8- Zardabli, Ismail bey, The History of Azerbaijan, Rossendale Books, 2014.
http://elibrary.bsu.az/books_rax/N_92.pdf
- 9- Khachikyan, A., History of Armenia, A Brief Review, Edit Print, 2010.
- 10- Coene, F., The Caucasus An Introduction, Routledge, 2010.
- 11- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture: From Historical Roots to the Present*, UNESCO, 2009.
- 12- <https://unesco.preslib.az/en/page/iuK2MwRPjJ>
- 13- <http://karabakhfoundation.com/heritage-center-online/cultural-topics/architecture/>
- 14- https://www.circassianworld.com/pdf/The_Vainakhs_George_Anchabadze.pdf
- 15- <https://files.preslib.az/projects/azerbaijan/eng/gl5.pdf>
- 16- <https://www.critical-stages.org/19/azerbaijan-%CF%84heatre-from-performances-without-stage-to-theaters-without-spectacle/>
- 17- https://ostarmenia.com/en/medieval_music/
- 18- Historical Dictionary of Georgia, The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2007.
- 19- Akhundova, N., The History of Azerbaijan, "Short course of lectures", Baku Business University, 2018.
- 20- <https://catalog.obitel-minsk.com/blog/2020/05/medieval-icon-painting-of-georgia>