

# THE CAUCASUS PAINTING

## OVERVIEW

Paintings played an important role in the Caucasus civilization because they expressed people's ways of life, their culture and their activities.

Ancient Caucasus nations did not have written documents, so without paintings there would be no information about the time periods, the people's habits, customs and livelihood. Paintings also are an important way of communication and a crucial means of recording of the historical events. They are relics of the age in which they were created.

The medieval paintings of the Caucasus reveal a tremendous amount of information on people's values and beliefs. With the conversion to Christianity, religion played a major part of the daily life of the Caucasian people and icon painting and miniatures were a way to express their deep religious sentiments and devotion.

The influence of European art began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and while some artists continued to use the medieval style of painting, many artists used European styles in their art that had been adapted to their indigenous artistic traditions.

During Soviet rule, art was tightly controlled by the state. The main themes of the artists were the life of the workers, patriotism, historical events, and the harmony between the surroundings and the people. Soviet paintings exhibited an artificial style with the introduction of the Socialist Realism that only served the state's purposes. For the Soviets, the purpose of the art was to popularize proletarian culture, and to discourage non-political forms of art like experimental art, Avant-garde, by declaring it a bourgeois, decadent art movement.

## ANCIENT PERIOD

### VISUAL ARTS:



#### PAINTING:

**SOUTH CAUCASUS:** Cave paintings have been found in Gobustan, Caucasian Albania, depicting people fishing. This rock art dates back to Paleolithic period.

*Gobustan rock art*

In Ordubad Rayon, archeologists have also found cave paintings (Gamigaya petroglyphs) depicting dancing individuals dating back to the Bronze age.

*Gamigaya petroglyphs*





In the Tsalka Municipality, Georgia, archeologists discovered the Trialeti petroglyphs which consist of geometric images and animal shapes.

#### *Trialeti petroglyphs*

In Sukhumi a marble stela was found in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, portraying a young man and a women.

There were pieces of a carved stone chancel-barrier found in Tsebelda church portraying scenes from the Old and New Testaments from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.

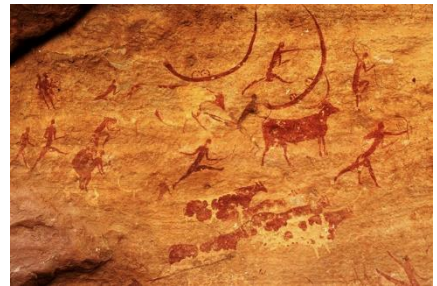


In Armenia, the stone carvings from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE found at Ughtasar depict agricultural activities.

#### **NORTH CAUCASUS:**

Around Lake Kezenoyam, archeologists found cave paintings depicting individuals and a boat.

In Khasaut Gorge, near the town of Kislovodsk, in the North Caucasus region of Russia archeologists found cave paintings depicting running and hunting people and animals.



*Cave paintings, Kislovodsk*



On the walls of the mosque of Old Kahib in Dagestan and Chechnya ancient petroglyphs were preserved.

#### *Ancient Petroglyphs in Old Kahib*

#### **Questions:**

1- What would cave paintings and rock art tell us about ancient people's daily lives?

#### **Readings:**

- 1- Jaimoukha, A., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005
- 2- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Publishing, 2009.
- 3- Mikaberidze, A., *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Ltd., 2015.
- 4- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture, From Historical Roots to the Present*, UNESCO, 2009.
- 4-Zardabli, I., *The History of Azerbaijan, from ancient times to present day*, Rossendale Books, 2014.
- 5- Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1076/>
- 6-Gamigaya petroglyphs [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Gamigaya\\_rock\\_petroglyphs\\_ancient\\_cultural\\_and\\_art\\_treasures\\_of\\_Azerbaijan-2047727](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Gamigaya_rock_petroglyphs_ancient_cultural_and_art_treasures_of_Azerbaijan-2047727)
- 7- Georgia's ancient rock carvings included in the Prehistoric Rock Art Trails <https://georgianjournal.ge/discover-georgia/34005-georgias-ancient-rock-carvings-included-in-the-prehistoric-rock-art-trails.html>
- 8- Ughtasar Rock Art Project <http://ughtasarrockartproject.org/page13.html>

## POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD

### SOUTH CAUCASUS:

**GEORGIA:** In the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> century and was composed at the request of Queen Tamar.

**Icon Painting:** Georgian icon painting appeared in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The most ancient one is *the Mother of God with the Child and St. Barbara*.

Georgian art reached its peak towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the Georgian state was independent and powerful. One example is the icon of the *Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*.

*Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, 11th – 12th c.*

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 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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

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

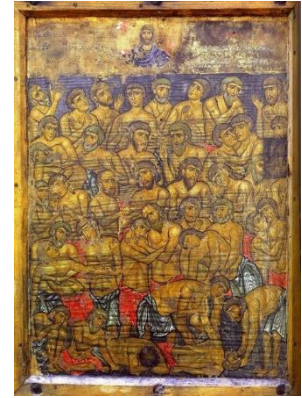
**Mural Painting:** The monastery Vardzia contained frescos dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, including a portrait of Queen Tamara.

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

### ARMENIA:

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

*Fiery furnace, Mashtots, Toros Rosslin 1266*



Armenian miniature illustrative art gained its peak in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 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 be of different sizes.

*Khachkars (cross-stones)*

**AZERBAIJAN:** In Azerbaijan decorative art dated back to the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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

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



A new style of miniature was introduced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Tabriz school. The best illustrations of this style appeared in the poems *Khosrov and Shirin* and *Mehr and Mustary* by the artist Abd al-Hayy.

Miniature art reached its peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Manuscripts by Shah and Darvish and *Khamsa* with their miniatures were the best illustrations of this period.

*Mugam trio miniature of Nizami Ganjavi's Khosrow and Shirin, 16<sup>th</sup> century*

## **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.

### **Questions:**

1- In the Post-Classical period, what cause the change in subject matter of art in the Caucasus?

### **Readings:**

1- Arts of Armenia-Miniatures

<https://cah.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies/resources/artsofarmenia/miniatures.html>

2- Medieval Georgian Icon Painting

<https://www.atinati.com/news/5fd72039fb72f400383d5ce4>

3- Azerbaijani Miniatures, <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/44>

4- Jaimoukha, A., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD

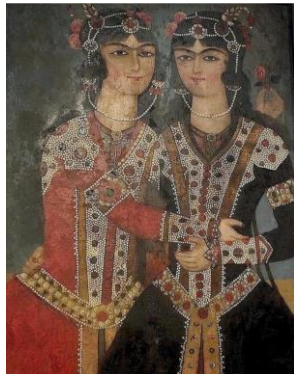
### SOUTH CAUCASUS

**GEORGIA:** At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian artists followed the medieval style of painting with concrete details of landscape and interior. The iconostasis sometimes followed the Russian style as in Katskhi, but sometimes the Greek style as in at Mghvimevi. But after 1720, artists tended to follow more European models. They also developed a new style with a mixture of Oriental and Western patterns still carrying an Orthodox approach.

The first easel art and portraits began to appear in Georgia in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Georgian painters Ioseb Turkestanishvili, Grigol and Solomon Meskhishvili, Nikoloz Apkhazi mastered the European style of painting in Russia. Unfortunately, the work of these painters was not studied at all.

*Prince Bagrat, Son of Giorgi XII. Second half of the 18th c.*

**ARMENIA:** This was the period marked by the continuous development of Armenian illustrative art. The best examples were *the Portrait of Solomon I* and *Prince Bagrat, Son of Giorgi XII*.



**AZERBAIJAN:** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, artists went to Europe to get an education. Under the European influence, Azerbaijani art developed a new style called the Qajar style as in the work of Allahverdi Afshar's *The lovers*.

*The lovers, Allahverdi Afshar*

In the Palace of Shaki Khans, there were images of people and animals, and battle and hunting scenes painted on the walls by the artists Abbasgulu, Aligulu, Gurban Ali, Gambar Garabaghi, Shukur.

*Palace of Shaki Khans*



### NORTH CAUCASUS

**CHECHNYA:** After the adoption of Islam by the Chechens in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, images of people and animals were strictly forbidden, and fine art gained abstract, stylized forms.

#### Questions:

1- What was the influence of invading peoples on the art of the Caucasus?

#### Readings:

- 1- Arsenishvili, I., *Georgian Easel Painting* (Second Half of the 18th Century to the 1920's), Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- 2- Jaimoukha, A., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005
- 3- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Publishing, 2009.
- Mikaberidze, A., *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Ltd., 2015.
- 4- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture*, From Historical Roots to the Present, UNESCO, 2009.
- 5- Zardabli, I., *The History of Azerbaijan, from ancient times to present day*, Rossendale Books, 2014.

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### PAINTING

#### GEORGIA:

**Portrait School of Tiflis:** At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Portrait School of Tiflis* replaced the *Ceremonial portraits* of 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian art with Romantic and Realistic portraits. The artists mostly portrayed single noble men or women, but they also made *Double portraits*. With their art, Gigo Gabashvili and Mose Ivanovich Toidze greatly contributed to the development of painting in Georgia.

**Gigo Gabashvili (Giorgi):** Gabashvili was one of the founders of Realism in Georgia. Gabashvili established his art studio in Tbilisi in 1897. His most famous paintings were *After the Rain*, *Tea Merchant*, *Mullah*, *Old Citizen* and *Ancient Eastern Weapons Shop*.



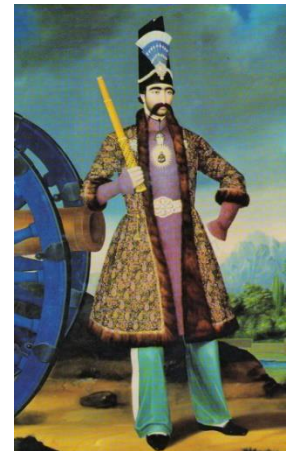
**Mose Ivanovich Toidze:** Toidze studied at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts in 1896 and in 1899 he began to live in Tbilisi.

*Mose Toidze The Village 1898*

**ARMENIA:** Armenian painting developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the contributions of the artists like portrait painter Hacop Hovnatanian.

**Hacop Hovnatanian:** Portrait artist Hovnatanian was the founder of the modern Armenian Painting School. He developed his own technique of portraits of wealthy people, princes, nobles, clerics etc. The portrait of Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the portrait of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar were his well known portraits.

*Hacop Hovnatanian Naser al-Din Shah*



**AZERBAIJAN:** Under European and Russian influence, traditional Azerbaijani romanticism was substituted with realistic trends. One of the representatives of this period was Mirza Kadym Irevani. He was the founder of easel painting, and one of his more famous portraits was his *Portrait of young man*.



Azerbaijani art, under the influence of the Realism, developed new genres to address political and social problems. In magazines like *Molla Nasraddin* artists such as A. Azimzade and Kh. Musayev, who were engaged in graphic art, began to use satirical graphics and illustrations.

An illustrative artist and a wall-painter, Mir Mohsun Navvab was well known for his illustrations in his own *Bahr-ul-Khazan* manuscripts and with his paintings of the famous Govhar Agha mosque in Shusha. Gambar Garabaghi was another wall-painter that painted the interiors of the houses in Shusha.

*Tree of life, Gambar Garabaghi*

Azerbaijani miniaturist Avazali Mughanli was well-known for his *Kalila and Dimna*. Other miniaturists were Mirza Aligulu (*Shahnameh*) and Najafgulu Shamakhili (*Yusuf and Zulaikha*).

## NORTH CAUCASUS

**CHECHNYA:** Portraitist Pyotr Zakharov was the first painter in Chechnya. He was sent to the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. His works included his *Self portrait*, and *Portrait of I.F. Ladygensky* and *Portrait of Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov*.

*Self-portrait* (1834)



### Questions:

1- How did Russia and Europe influence the style of art in the Caucasus? How were invasions and occupations by the foreign powers and their cultures integrated into modern Georgian culture?

### Readings:

1- Jaimoukha, A., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005

2- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Publishing, 2009.

Mikaberidze, A., *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Ltd., 2015.

3- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture, From Historical Roots to the Present*, UNESCO, 2009.

4- Zardabli, I., *The History of Azerbaijan, from ancient times to present day*, Rossendale Books, 2014.

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### SOUTH CAUCASUS

#### GEORGIA:

**Niko Pirosmani:** Pirosmani was a naïve painter focused mostly on the environment, people, animals, and food. He was the only Georgian animalist.



During the Soviet rule, the main themes of the artists were the life of the workers, patriotism, the historical events, and the harmony between the surroundings and people.

*Giraffe*, 1900

**Bagrat Shvelidze:** Bagrat Shvelidze depicted the strong patriotism of young Georgians as in the *Remembering the Fallen Sons* (1972).

**Radish Tordia:** Tordia was a painter of figurative art. His romantic female portraits such as *Woman in Green* (1999) and *Melancoly* (1998), provided all the details of a woman's life, her mood, her feelings, and her expectations.



*May Day in Tiflis in 1901 during Comrade Stalin. 1939-1941*

**Ucha Japaridze:** Japaridze was the first generation of Georgian painters trained under the Soviet rule, during Stalin where the art served for the state purpose.

## ARMENIA:

**Alexander Bazhbeuk-Melikian:** Melikian was a painter and sculpture depicted female figures dancing, working in a circus, magicians, jugglers, exotically dressed women, women at stage performances etc.

*Figures, 1928*



**Martiros Sarian:** Sarian was the best Armenian landscape painter who was also the founder of a modern Armenian national school of painting. Her paintings were known with their rich colors and simple natural forms.

**Minas Avetisian:** Avetisian was nature painter, who depicted the nature of his birth place Jajur, the religion, poor people, mountains, and fields.



## AZERBAIJAN:

**Azim Azimzade:** Azim Azimzade was an illustrator, painter and caricaturist. In his paintings, he often used the themes of society's injustices, educational opportunities and women's rights. Azimzade created a thematic series where he examined social inequality, as in *Wedding of the Rich People* and *Wedding of the Poor People*.

*Wedding of the Poor People, 1931*

**Gazanfar Khalykov:** In his paintings, Khalykov depicted historical and modern themes.

*Khalykov's self portrait*



**Sattar Bahlulzade:** Bahlulzade was an artist of landscape painting who depicted nature with his surrealistic style.

**Tahir Salahov:** Salahov depicted real life without any idealization as in his *At the Caspian Sea, 1967*. He became the First Secretary of the Artists' Union of the USSR (1973–1992), Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Arts.

## NORTH CAUCASUS

**CHECHNYA:** Painting and graphic art in Chechnya were born only after 1917. The Union of Painters of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was established in 1943.



**Amandi Asukhanov:** Asukhanov was a landscape painter who depicted his native land in his works as in *Lilac Castle*, and *Views of My Native Land*.

**Zamir Yushaev:** Yushaev was a surrealist artist. He depicted his people and his native land as in *the Letter on Mother*.

**Questions:**

1- How did the role of the artists change after the imposition of the Soviet rule?

**Readings:**

1- Jaimoukha, A., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005

2- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Publishing, 2009.

Mikaberidze, A., *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Ltd., 2015.

3- Ilyasov, L., *The Diversity of the Chechen Culture*, From Historical Roots to the Present, UNESCO, 2009.

4- Zardabli, I., *The History of Azerbaijan, from ancient times to present day*, Rossendale Books, 2014.

5- Soviet mosaics of Tbilisi. What they reflect and why they vanish

<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/04/30/soviet-mosaics-of-tbilisi-what-they-reflect-and-why-they-vanish/>

6- Brewin, J., "Ucha Japaridze, Lado Gudiashvili, and the Spiritual in Painting in Soviet Georgia",

<https://books.openedition.org/obp/4661>

7- May Day demonstration in Tiflis in 1901 under the leadership of Comrade Stalin. 1939-41, Pict.

<https://soviet-art.ru/japaridze-ucha-malakievich/>