

THE CAUCASUS CULTURE - Early Modern Period

OVERVIEW

The Caucasus contains numerous people and ethnic groups with their different languages, religions and cultures. In the 18th century, the Caucasus became an arena for geopolitical competition for the Ottomans, the Persians, the Arabs, and the Russians. Although the Caucasus was under foreign invasion, the war-torn Caucasus people, with so many nationalities, religions, languages and cultures, managed to survive and were able to develop their culture and preserve their traditions. A combination of popular traditions, the institution of the church, folklore and language in particular made this cultural survival and general awareness of sharing a distinct, common identity possible. The tremendous ethnic and linguistic diversity within the boundaries of the Russian Empire presented an obstacle to implementing their cultural and linguistic policies.

LANGUAGE

There are several well-established written languages in the Caucasus: Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian. In addition to these languages, there were also native languages that did not have any written forms.

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: In 1783, Catherine II the Great granted Georgia its independence, however, Georgia had to recognize Russian authority. In 1795, Paul I incorporated Georgia into the Russian Empire, and during the reign of Nicholas I, Georgian nobles were encouraged to learn the Russian language to serve the empire.



Many epic works were produced during the Medieval Georgian period which lasted till the 18th century. The Modern Georgian period started in the 18th century and it was a Renaissance period of Georgian culture, particularly during the reign of King Vakhtang VI of Kartli who brought positive advances. He established a printing house in 1709 publishing mostly religious texts. Vakhtang VI also published the first printed version of Shota Rustaveli's *Knight in the Tiger Skin* in 1712.

After Vakhtang VI went into exile in Russia in 1723 following the Ottoman invasion, the Georgian elites tried to continue his efforts to revive Georgian printing. However, after the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire in the 18th century, multilingualism began in Georgia, and Georgian nobles were encouraged to learn Russian language to serve in the Empire.

When Georgia was annexed by the Russians, the language of administration became Russian. The Georgian aristocracy signed a petition in 1806 demanding their right to use the Georgian language in state administration and courts, however, the petition was disregarded by the Russian government.

The policy of cultural Russification was also effective in the education system. The number of Georgian schools decreased, while the number of Russian schools increased. In 1804, the Russian authorities opened a school for nobles. The school provided education in the Georgian language to ethnic Georgians to raise future bilingual employees. However, the teaching of Georgian to the

Georgians in other schools was reduced to a minimum. Even the religious services at churches were conducted in Russian despite the fact that the majority of the population attending was Georgian.

Cultural assimilation was observed particularly among the Georgian nobles when they readily accepted the Tsarist requirement to study Russian to enter the Russian military and sent their children to Russian-language schools.

After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the government adopted strict rules in the educational system by introducing a new curriculum demanding children study the Russian language from the first school year. Georgian language and history were completely banned in the schools, and speaking Georgian was even forbidden during breaks. It was only permitted in some religious schools.

There were protests held in 1893 by the students of a Tbilisi religious school and a small number of teachers who opposed the colonial language policy and stood up against the discrimination against the Georgian language. The government brutally suppressed the demonstration.

Russia divided Georgia into eleven smaller ethnicities based on their respective provinces to avoid teaching Georgian. To change the demography, Russia began to send different ethnic and religious groups to live in Georgian territory.

After that many repressive attempts by the Russian government to prevent the survival of Georgian, there were some progressive people who continued to make a few positive advances to preserve the Georgian language. For example, the Georgian writer and creator of new Georgian literary language Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani compiled the first the Old Georgian dictionary.



ARMENIA: During the reign of Alexander III the Russian government ordered that Russian language, history and culture be compulsory subjects in all the empire's schools. The Armenian clergy resisted, but the tsar responded by closing all schools in Armenia.

From 1896 to 1905 not only were Armenian schools closed, but Armenians were removed from the civil service, and Russians were encouraged to colonize the region.

The earliest written language *Classical Armenian* (Grabar) developed in the 17th century became the literary language of Armenia until the 19th century. After the 18th century, Armenian developed its modern form and split into two dialects: East Armenian (Arewelahayerên) and West Armenian (Arewmtahayerên). East Armenian, spoken in Armenia, and West Armenian spoken in Turkey.

AZERBAIJAN: The Azerbaijani language belongs to the southwest group of the Turkic branch of the Ural- Altaic language family. The written literary language of Azerbaijan was first recorded in the 13th century. The history of the Azerbaijani language can be divided into two periods: the early period (13th to 18th centuries) and the modern period (18th century to the present). The early period was characterized by the dominance of large numbers of Arabic and Persian loanwords. The earlier language called Azari (Âdarî) is an extinct language. Azari was a Northwestern Iranian language that was spoken till the 17th century. The number of speakers began to decrease after the 11th century after the territory was invaded by the Seljuqs.

The Azerbaijani language of the modern period began in the 18th century with the transitions from being a language of epic poetry and prose to the language of literature, journalism and scientific research. The Baku dialect forms the basis of the modern Azerbaijani literary language.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: Under the influence of Islam, an alphabet was created in Chechnya in the 18th century based on Arabic characters, however, literacy was very low in Chechnya. The manuscripts produced were religious in nature. Sufism and Muslim clerics played a significant role in the development of literacy.

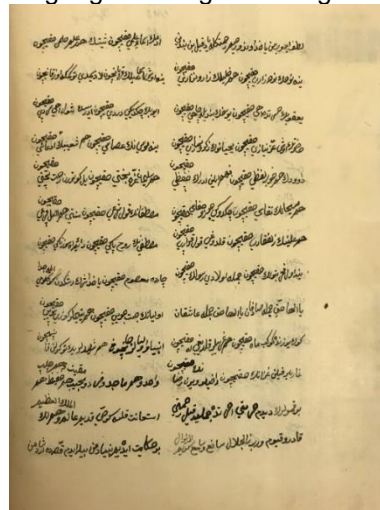
The first record of the Vainakh languages is found in *The Comparative Dictionary of Russian* by Catherine the Great compiled in the 1780s. The dictionary contained around 400 Chechen words.

SCRIPT

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: In the 18th century, punctuation marks for the Georgian alphabet were introduced by Patriarch Anton I of Georgia.

In the 18th century, the Georgian script was also used for North Caucasian languages during the Georgian missionary activities in the area.



ARMENIA: In the 18th century, a new form of cursive writing was created for Armenian under the name of *Notr'gir*. *Notr'gir* notary script was a mix of the scripts *Bolor'gir* and *Sla'gir*. It was developed by scribes to rapidly record information.

AZERBAIJAN: The 32-letter Perso-Arabic script was used in Azerbaijan in the 18th century.

Text from Leyli və Məcnun in Azerbaijani 18th century

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: After the spread of Islam, a script based on Arabic letters was created for Chechen language early in the 18th century. The Arabic

alphabet was used until 1924.

In the 18th century, the Georgian script was also used for writing North Caucasian languages during Georgian Orthodox missionary activities in the areas.

Questions:

- 1-Why did Azerbaijanis have a very low literacy level till the 18th century?
- 2-Why did Georgia and Armenia have a high literacy level in the 18th century?

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MYTHOLOGY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: After the adoption of Christianity, elements of pagan cosmology were incorporated into Christian doctrine. For example, the *zeskneli* was identified with heaven and the home of the Trinity; *qveskneli* was identified with hell and the home of devil, the principal figures in the pre-Christian pantheon of the Georgians *Giorgi* with St. George, *Mtavarangeloz*i with the Archangel, the fertility deity *Barbal* with St. Barbara and the protector of women *Lamaria* with St. Mary.

Sayat Nova: Of Armenian and Georgian origin, the bard and troubadour Nova was the first folk singer of King Erekle II in Tbilisi. He narrated and performed his poems in the Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri languages in Persian melodies.

ARMENIA:

Old national festivals, legends and beliefs were carried over into the folk traditions with new meanings. The Armenian church also incorporated some of these legends and beliefs into its rituals.

Calendar: Zoroastrian and mythological influences can be observed in the Armenian calendar. The days of the month carried the names of deities, heroes or natural objects as did the names of the months and days such as third month of the year *trē* (Zoroastrian *Tir*), the ninth month of the year *ahekan* (Iranian *āhrakān-; Zoroastrian *Ātarō*), and the eighth day of the month *Mihr* (Armenian deity *Mihr*) etc.

Before the 18th century, *Nawarsard* was the ancient Armenian New Year (August 11). In the 18th century, the calendar was reformed and *Nawasard* (Avestan *nava sarōdā*) January 1 was recognized as the New Year.



AZERBAIJAN:

Baku's oil was considered a source of holy fire. In the 18th century, for the burning oil of the Absheron peninsula Zoroastrian merchants from India came to Azerbaijan to build a fire temple known as an *Ateshgah* (fire temple) in the Surakhani village near Baku.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: Chechens used to observe a wolf cult that would prevent wolf raids on sheep by observing Saturday as being a special day. In a story, it was believed that the Chechen hero Turpalo-Noxchuo was raised by a Wolf Mother. The wolf symbolized freedom and power and the symbol has been used since the 18th century by the Chechens.

In the 18th to the early 19th century, some elements of pagan worship were preserved in Chechen mythology. For example, a statue of Tusholi, the fertility goddess, was found in the vicinity of Lake Galanchozh in Chechnya and dated to the 15th -18th century. Tusholi was worshipped for many centuries, by women to have sons. There was a Tusholi festival which was held every year in April.

FOLKLORE

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: At the beginning of the 18th century, the Georgian scholar Vakhushti Bagrationi recorded information concerning the proper oral narration of fairytales, fables and poetry.

In the 18th century the foremost writers were David Guramishvili, author of *The Woes of Kartli*, and the lyric poet Bessarion Gabashvili. Throughout these years troubadour literature also evolved.

The geographical position of Georgia lies between East and West. At the beginning of the 18th century, the oral folklore of Georgia had many genres which reflected the influence of European Christian and pagan, Byzantine, and Persian influences. In the mountainous regions of Georgia, oral folklore contains fairytales where the plot is based upon myth. Georgian fairytales always included elements of the nature-based religions of ancient times.

Sayat Nova: One of the prominent Armenian and Georgian ashughs and troubadours of this century was Sayat-Nova. He performed his songs in Georgian, Turkish, and Armenian.

ARMENIA: Armenian folklore contains fairy tales, legends, folk songs, proverbs, riddles and epics which carry elements of pre-Christian culture. In the 18th century, foreign invasions forced large segments of the society to move to other countries. For example, one of the prominent Armenian and Georgian ashughs and troubadours of this century Sayat-Nova lived in Georgia. He performed his songs in Georgian, Turkish, and Armenian.

AZERBAIJAN: The old ritual dances constituted the basis of various national dances like labor ("shepherds"), ceremonial (ritual, wedding), common, military, sport, round, game and others.

Folk tales: In the 18th century, the genre of Ashik poetry in particular had been developed. Ashik poetry was taken up by prominent poets and writers such as Khasta Qasim who was one of the famous folk poets in Azerbaijan. Qasim followed the footsteps of Dede Korkut, Gharib, Ashiq Qurbani, Ashik Abbas Tufarqanlı and created his own poetry. Ashiq Valeh and Ashiq Dilgam also were the well-known ashiks in Azerbaijan.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA:

Folk song *Illı* continued to be one of the most important genres in Chechen folklore depicting the heroic acts of young men to protect their community and their land. In the 18th century, folk dances were performed with people making a large circle sitting and singing and challenging young dancers by making jumps and throwing each other down. Then they held hands and made a circle. Their songs were accompanied by oboes, bagpipes and flutes.

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VISUAL ARTS

PAINTING

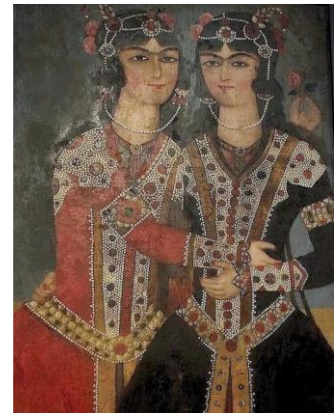
SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: At the beginning of the 18th century, Georgian artists followed the medieval style of painting with concrete details of landscape and interior. The iconostasis sometimes followed Russian style as in Katskhi, but sometimes Greek style as in at Mghvimevi. But after 1720, the artists followed 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 18th 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.

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



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.



NORTH CAUCASUS

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

SCULPTURE

SOUTH CAUCASUS

ARMENIA: In Khizan province in St. Khach monastery a stone carving was found dated back to 1750.

ARCHITECTURE

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: The 18th century Tbilisi royal palaces were built in the Persian style.

The Palace of Queen Darejan: The palace was built for the king Erekle II's wife, Queen Darejan. It also functioned as a castle to protect its inhabitants from invasions of foreign occupiers.





Kulbiti Church: Kulbiti church's façade was covered with reddish ashlar decorated with carved images.

The structure of the church reflected traditional Georgian architectural style with its arches on the dome, carved stonework and the ornaments on the cornices.

Church of Holy Virgin: The church of Holy Virgin built in the center of Tskhinvali. It had dome. The church walls were built with stone and brick.

Beloti Fortress: The fortress was built in the Patara Liakhvi River gorge belonged to the Eristavs of Ksani. It was built of stone and travertine. The fortress includes four towers. Three of them were circular in plan, whereas the fourth, used as a dwelling, was five-angled.

Batonis Tsikhe (Castle): The complex was built in the 17th – 18th century which included two royal basilica chapels, bathhouses, defensive wall and large circular corner towers. The palace has a rectangular building with a central hall with columns, arches and four balconies (ayvān) and some sections of the palace reflected Persian influence.



Amilakhvari Castle: The complex built in the 17th–18th century. It had three castles belonged to a noble family of Amilakhvari. The main castle included a rectangular fortress, a church, and two towers.

ARMENIA:

In the 18th century, there was a large scale resettlement of the Armenians to Russia and Europe.

AZERBAIJAN:

Palace of Shaki Khans: During the feudal period, many palaces and citadels were built. One of them was *Palace of Shaki Khans* built in 1763 by Muhammed Hasan Khan. The two-story palace was built with raw bricks, river stones, plane trees and oaks. The palace consisted of 6 rooms, 4 corridors and 2 balconies.

Govher Agha Mosque: Mosque was built in Shusha, Nagorno-Karabakh. It was built of stone while the two minarets were made of bricks.

Bayat Castle: The castle consisted of defence walls, bath house, market place and a mosque. It was built with backed bricks.

Shahbulag (Tarnakut) Castle: Large castle complex had a rectangular architectural design consisted of one rectangular tower, mosques, houses, baths and a market place. The Castle's external walls supported with semicylinder towers. It is constructed with limestone and dimension stone.

Panahabad (Shusha) fortresses: The defensive walls of Shusha fortress were made of stone and lime. The castle is constructed in Arran style of architecture and had a circular guard towers.



Sardar Palace: The palace was built in Erivan in 1798 during Huseyn-Ali khan's son, Mahmud. Its architecture was similar with the the Shaki Khans Palace. It had a square wide building many rooms, halls and corridors.

NORTH CAUCASUS



CHECHNYA: After the conversion to Islam in the 18th century, the Chechen pyramidal-stepped roof style of towers was ceased.

The buildings were made of clay-faced wattle, cane roofs and mud floor. 18th century monuments at Etkala and Khimoi reflected the Islamic style. But, the minarets were shaped like combat towers.

MUSIC:

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Till the 18th century, Georgian artists were under the influence of Middle-Eastern style since Georgian aristocrats regularly spent time in Persia and the Georgian kings had professional musicians like the Armenian musician *Sayat Nova*.

Ashughs:

Sayat Nova: Nova was an Armenian court a poet and a musician of the King Erekle II, and he wrote poems and performing them in Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri languages in Persian melodies.

Besarion Zakarias dze Gabashvili (Besiki): The Georgian poet Besiki was also a musician at the court of King Erekle II. He sang his songs accompanied by *saz* and *tar* and used oriental poetry such as *mukhambazi* and *baiati*.

Starting from the 18th century, the Georgian music was under Russian and European influences and many foreign musicians travelled to perform in Tbilisi.

During the reign of king Archil II great contributions to the musical culture were made with his *Dghisa Da Ghamisa Gabaaseba* (Conversation between Day and Night) and *Sarke Tkmulta* (The Mirror of the Told).

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani: Georgian scholar Orbeliani wrote his dictionary *Sitqvis Kona* (The Dictionary of Georgian Modes and Idioms) which he also included musical terminology and many important sources on Georgian music.

Vakhushti Batonishvili: Batonishvili also authored *Geography of Georgia* (Sakartvelos Georgapia) including some information about the Georgian musical culture.

ARMENIA:

Gusans: Folk music singers were called gusans. One of them was *Sayat-Nova* (Harutyun Sayatyan) who was a poet, singer and a composer.

Sharkans: *Sharkans* were hymns or prose written in *khaz* (a system of notation) and sang with a rhythm and pitch. Many women like Khosrovidukht of Goghthn and Sahakdukt of Siunik contributed to the development of *sharkans*.

Ashughs: The ashughs were the heirs of the gusans. The most notable ashugh was Sayat Nova (Harutyun Sayatian) was the first folk-song writer and performer.

In the 18th century, the ashughs were fully connected with the Armenian national school of ashughs.

AZERBAIJAN

Mugham: Mugham was performed by *khananda* (a singer) and *dastgah* (a trio). During this century, *tasnifs* (songs) were also included to mughams.

Ashiqs: Ashiq art was usually performed in coffee houses in all the major cities of east and west Azerbaijan in Iran. The most prominent ashiqs were Khasta Gasim and Abdalgulabli Valeh.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA:

Illli: Heroic ballads *Illli* were also performed by male singers in the 18th century, depicting the struggle for freedom, their battles for protecting their land and community.

DANCE:

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA:

Khorumi: Khorumi was a war dance from Adjara in Georgia. It was based on the numerous invasions of the country dating from the 18th century. It was performed by only a few men. The dance incorporates the themes of war, the courage of Georgian soldiers and the celebration of victory. Khorumi was accompanied by instruments such as the *doli* (drum) and the *chiboni* (bagpipe).

ARMENIA: In Armenia dance closely resembled the old traditional dances in the 18th century. Foreign invasions forced large segments of the society to move to other countries, and they brought their dances with them.

AZERBAIJAN: The old ritual dances constituted the basis of various national dances like labor ("shepherds"), ceremonial (ritual, wedding), common, military, sport, round, game and others.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: In the 18th century Chechens had dances with people making a large circle sitting and singing and challenging young dancers by making jumps and throwing each other down. Then they hold their hands and made a circle. Their songs were accompanied by oboe, bagpipes and flute.

THEATRE:

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: In Georgia, among the performing arts, theatre became particularly important as part of feasts and festivals that were held at the royal court.

The first professional Georgian theater was established by Giorgi Avalishvili and Gabriel Maiori at Erekle II's court in 1790. They translated the plays of some Russian and European authors into Georgian, but also created original dramas.

ARMENIA:

Mekhitarists: In Armenia, the Mekhitarists played a major role in the development of the Western Armenian Theatre. They wrote original plays and translated European plays into Classical Armenian. For example, the Mekhitarists published Homer's *The Iliad*.

Minstrel School: Minstrel school was established by Naghash Hovnatan. The famous mistrels were Savat Nova and Naghash Hovnatan.

Questions:

1- In what ways were the arts of the Caucasus influenced, both positively and negatively, by outside cultures?

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