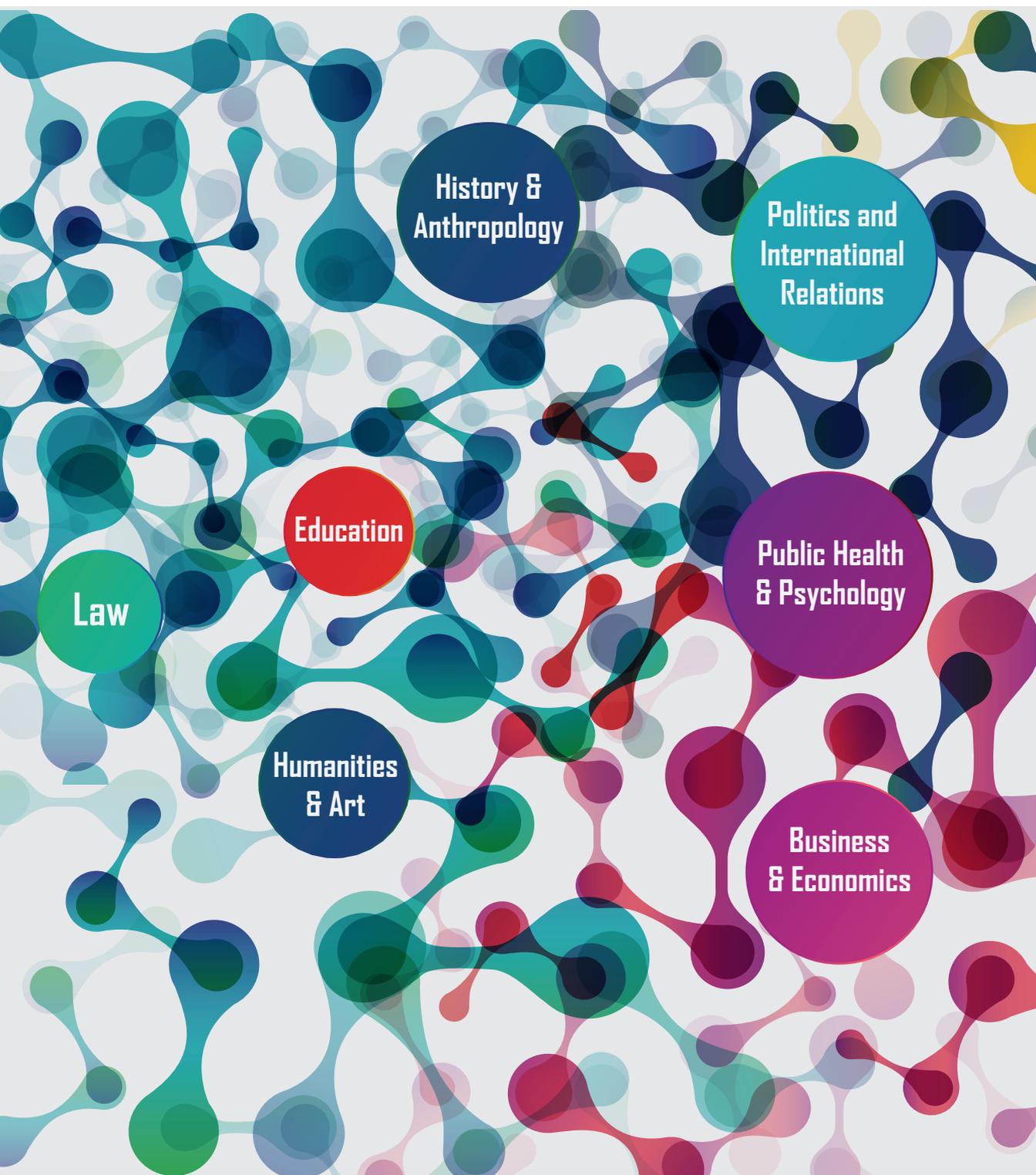


# Caucasus Journal of social sciences



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Salih Uçak

**Technical Editor**

Ana Gogelia

**Layout Designer**

Nino Suaridze

The University of Georgia  
77 M. Kostava Street, Building IV  
Tbilisi, Georgia, 0175

Contact Information:

Tel: (+995 32) 255 22 22

Email: [cjss\\_editor@ug.edu.ge](mailto:cjss_editor@ug.edu.ge)

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# Ossetians in Georgian Documentary Sources of the 17th-18th Centuries

*KARTVELISHVILI TEA, PHD*  
*KORNELI KEKELIDZE GEORGIAN*  
*NATIONAL CENTRE OF MANUSCRIPTS*  
*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*KHORAVA BEZHAN, PHD*  
*THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, TAMAZ*  
*BERADZE INSTITUTE OF GEORGIAN STUDIES*  
*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

ORCID: [0009-0002-2350-3535](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2350-3535)

ORCID: [0000-0002-1540-7386](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1540-7386)

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the settlement and establishment of the Ossetian population in Georgia, based on historical documents preserved at the K. Kekelidze Georgian National Center of Manuscripts. Documentary sources constitute the primary evidence regarding the settlement of the Ossetian population in Georgia. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Ossetian migration began into the territory of present-day Georgia. They engaged in raiding campaigns for the purpose of plunder, a practice that later became known as „Ossetian-ism“. Some of the migrating Ossetians became serfs of local feudal lords, received land, and fulfilled feudal obligations. The royal government and feudal lords sought to increase the number of serfs and peasants at the expense of the settled Ossetians, thereby boosting state revenues. To this end, they created conditions that enabled Ossetians to settle on the land. A significant number of Ossetians sought to enter the king's direct service as dominion serfs. The adaptation of mountain tribal societies to the feudal system proved difficult. Ossetian serfs often faced difficulties in their relations with Georgian feudal lords. Documentary sources indicate that they frequently did not pay taxes and refused to fulfill feudal obligations. Attacks and robberies committed by the settled Ossetians against the local population became so widespread that the authority of the local feudal lords proved insufficient, prompting the royal government to intervene to restore order. The royal government sought to reconcile Ossetian criminals by demanding hostages from them as a guarantee of peace and by providing for their protection. In addition, the royal government attempted to reconcile Georgians and Ossetians, requiring both sides to promise non-interference and mutual assistance.

*Keywords:* Ossetians, documentary sources, occupied Tskhinvali region

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Graphic language or written culture serves as a paramount marker of national identity. Manuscript heritage clearly reflects the societal attributes of its creators, encapsulating essential information about a region's administrative, ecclesiastical, cultural, and everyday communicative practices. Moreover, manuscripts constitute an intellectual heritage, mirroring the collective thought and intellectual milieu of the society that produced them. Through both their external features and intrinsic content, manuscripts stand as self-explanatory monuments.

Documentary material within manuscript heritage is highly reliable. In Georgia, where the falsification of the history of occupied territories has become a politically significant issue, the study of documentary sources has acquired renewed importance. These sources, in addition to serving their social function, also reflect the period's political, legal, ideological, and cultural conceptions.

The K. Kekelidze Georgian National Center for Manuscripts preserves hundreds of documents concerning the occupied Tskhinvali region. These documents are diverse in content and present the region's history from multiple perspectives. Documents relating to the settlement of the Ossetian population in the region and their activities are critical.

The Alan-Ossetians resided in the northern regions of Georgia, maintaining connections with Georgians since ancient times. These relations were predominantly peaceful, characterized by Georgian kings employing Ossetian soldiers and entering into dynastic marriages. However, occasional military conflicts also occurred.

Weakened by the invasions of the Mongols and Tamerlane and subsequently oppressed by the Kabardians, the Ossetians left the fertile fields of the North Caucasus in the fourteenth century and fled to the gorges of the Caucasus. The harsh and scarce nature of the mountainous terrain pushed them to seek new sources of income. The Ossetians assimilated the Dvals in the Nar-Mamisoni Cave and, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, moved to the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, mainly into the Kingdom of Kartli.

## **METHODS**

The article critically examines documentary material preserved at the National Center of Manuscripts, which is distinguished by its high reliability. The authors' goal is to allow the documentary material to speak for itself, rather than relying on preinterpreted knowledge in scientific works. Along with documentary sources, the study also uses narrative sources that reflect the realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A historical-comparative analysis has been conducted to examine how Ossetians are represented in various types of documentary sources. One of the key components of this work's methodological basis is the principle of historicism, which enables the authors to examine the issue in the context of various historical events. In addition, the authors address the identification and localization of historical figures and places, as well as the definition of historical terms, which facilitate the understanding of the documents' texts and, accordingly, the article.

## **RESULTS**

Ossetian migration to the territory of present-day Georgia began in the early seventeenth century. This movement was driven by two principal factors: (1) organizing raids for plunder, which resulted in the phenomenon known as “Ossianism” ([Itonishvili, 1996, pp. 228–257](#)); and (2) “peaceful” resettlement from sparsely populated mountain areas to fertile agricultural regions. In the first case, the marauding Ossetians maintained their clan-based lifestyle, whereas in the second, they integrated into the local feudal society and entered into vassal relations. They lived as migrant peasants on the lands of Georgian landlords and consequently paid taxes to them ([Berdzenishvili, 1990, p. 608](#)). Migrant peasants retained the right to leave the land, and landlords were likewise entitled to evict them. Over time, other categories of Ossetian peasants emerged ([Togoshvili, 1969, p. 207](#)). Even though the migrant Ossetian peasants involved in feudal relations suffered from Ossetian raids ([Gamkrelidze, 1996, p. 191](#)), their adaptation to Georgian feudal society was challenging. They found it difficult to abandon the characteristics of their mountain tribal community, and numerous instances occurred in which those who entered serfdom under various feudal lords refused to pay taxes.

## **DISCUSSION**

No extant documentary sources describe Ossetian migration into the mountains of Shida Kartli prior to the seventeenth century. It is only in the records from this period that we find evidence of Ossetian raids and their subsequent settlement as vassals and peasants on the lands of Georgian landlords.

The first Ossetian settlements appeared in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi River. The Ossetians who migrated to the Shida Kartli mountain range initially lived separately in the forests, without forming rural settlements, and relied solely on hunting rather than agriculture ([Topchishvili, 1997, p. 140](#)). Their early migration was characterized by aggression, with Ossetians occupying the Shida Kartli lands through violent confrontations. A document from the seventeenth century, the “purchase book of the estate given by Ivane and Zakaria to Kuabul and Zaal Machabelis,” vividly describes the dire situation created by the Ossetian invasions in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi. It states: “The region of Upper Jaba was ravaged, the Ossetians were displaced. God stands as a witness; it was thoroughly devastated, devoid of any trace of human construction.”

In such a situation, Ivan and Zakaria sold the Dziganiidze estate in Upper Java to Kuabul and Zaal Machabeli. Dziganiidze and his heir were lost, and this land was the inheritance of Ivan and Zakaria. The document continues: “We sold you the estate at a time of unimaginable hardship, when the mother was forced to eat two or three children, a man to sell his wife and stay alone. At that time, a terrible hardship befell us. From a family of ten, only five remained... God bless you; your purchase of our estate during the bleak time was a godsend rescuing us from the brink of despair. Without your intervention, we would have surely been lost” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1959, 1621–1650](#)).

The Ossetian settlement in Georgia occurred in an uncoordinated and irregular manner. The royal authorities and feudal lords sought to regulate this process and use it to their advantage. The demographic crisis in the Shida Kartli mountains and foothills made the arrival of a new productive force in the form of the Ossetians beneficial for both central and local rulers ([Topchishvili, 2021a, pp. 35–36](#)). Ossetian vassals were resettled in the mountains of Shida Kartli with the support of the royal authorities and the feudal lords of Kartli, as confirmed by documentary sources. For example, King Rostom's order to officials emphasized the inviolability of the Ossetians who were expelled from Ossetia and from the area above Java (1633–1658) ([Documentary, 2021, p. 489](#)).

It was important for the Georgian kings to repopulate territories left vacant by local populations during enemy invasions. Consequently, they settled foreign tribes, including the Ossetians, predominantly in the Shida Kartli region. Furthermore, the country's economic and military strength was significantly bolstered by the increase in the number of vassals.

While describing the Liakhvi Gorge, Vakhushti Batonishvili noted: “No matter how many Ossetians we have settled in these places, Georgian peasants were settled here first. After that, the Ossetians and Georgians, displaced by their owners, moved to the valley, because the number of people in the valley decreased drastically due to the enemies” ([Batonishvili Vakhushti, 1973, pp. 363–364](#)). Consequently, the Ossetians who migrated to the mountains of Shida Kartli became the vassals of the local feudal lords, including Machabeli, the Eristavi of Ksani, and Palavandishvili, among others.

Part of the Ossetians who settled in Shida Kartli became dominion vassals. After the abolition of the Saeristavo of Ksani in 1779, King Erekle declared the inhabitants of the Little Liakhvi Gorge, including the Ossetians, as well as the Ossetians of Gvidisi, Portisi, Tleeli, and Chiprane, to be dominion serfs (Ad-870). Additionally, the properties of the nobles, peasants, and Ossetians living in Gverdisdziri (Saeristavo of Ksani) were declared dominion estates ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14759 b, 1786, 15. IX](#)).

The Ossetians who had been resettled petitioned Erekle II to become vassals: “If you don't make us vassals and don't patronize us, we will not stay there.” While the king pledged protection to the Ossetians in both valleys, he emphasized the need for their compliance. He insisted they adhere to the established rules of serfdom and fulfill their obligations to him ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-2210, 1795, 1. VII](#)).

Similarly, King Giorgi XII (1798–1800) of Kartli-Kakheti sought to encourage Ossetian settlement in Kartli, issuing a decree in 1799 to resettle Ossetians from Tagaura to Kartli. He emphasized his benevolent intentions, declaring, “As our longing Father was merciful to you, we will be even more merciful... You will be our dominion vassals, so that no one else will ever say anything to you” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-1617](#)). The king entrusted the noble Ninia Gabashvili with the task of negotiation, assuring the Ossetians of a temporary settlement in Dighomi and promising eventual relocation to a more favorable location ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-1617](#)). However, the settled Ossetians began plundering the local population, prompting the inhabitants to expel them. Records from the early nineteenth-century census of the village

of Dighomi attest to the absence of Ossetian residents, suggesting their departure from the area (Topchishvili, 2019, p. 46).

The royal government provided bread, flour, cheese, meat, wine, and fabric to Ossetians who had moved to Shida Kartli. Many documents of this series have survived (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-2210, Hd-292, Hd-11763, Hd-13376, Hd-13354, Hd-13331, Hd-12836, Hd-12703, Hd-12580, Hd-13388, Hd-12294).

Evidently, the Ossetians settled within the dominion estates of Shida Kartli were categorized as dominion vassals. Following the dissolution of the Ksani Saeristavo, this domain fell under the jurisdiction of the Batonishvili family. Ioane Batonishvili held sway over the gorges of Ksani, Sapesheti, Alevi, Tskhramze, Churti, Karchokhi, and Zhamuri. Meanwhile, Iulon Batonishvili presided over Patara Liakhvi Gorge and Gverdisdziri, and Bagrat Batonishvili claimed authority over Mejudi and Isroli Gorges, Sakorintlo, and Kolot-Kvitkiri (Gvritishvili, 1955, p. 330).

A map delineating the villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in the Rukhuli Valley provides insight into the settlements of members of the royal family in the mountainous terrain of Shida Kartli (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts, Hd-1464, 1789, late eighteenth century). The “List of Villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in Rukhuli Gorge” provides insight into the villages owned by members of the royal family in the highland region of Shida Kartli. This document lists the Georgian villages of Bagrat Batonishvili in the “Rukhuli<sup>1</sup> Gorge”: Sakorintlo, Isroli Gorge, and Mejuda – Koloti, Second Koloti, Vani, Kolot-Kvitkiriani, and others – as well as Ossetian villages including Kardisi, Kashaturi, Tba, Valishvilebi, Benderi, Nakalakevi, and others. According to another document, Bagrat Batonishvili possessed lands in Isroliskhevi, Ashaturi, Koloti, Sakorintlo, Meria Nakalakevi, Boselta, and Tskhratskaro. The title deeds for these properties were lost during Agha-Mohammed Khan’s invasion, prompting Giorgi Batonishvili to renew the book of the lands for Ketevan<sup>2</sup> on April 14, 1796 (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1522). The ownership of lands in Isroliskhevi, Koloti, and Mejvriskhevi by Bagrat Batonishvili is documented in an edict issued by Davit Batonishvili, the heir to the royal throne of Kartli-Kakheti and the governor of the kingdom (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1499, 1801. 27. II). On June 21, 1798, King Giorgi XII bestowed the Ksani Gorge upon Ioane Batonishvili (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14759 d). Additionally, Ketevan, the king’s daughter-in-law, governed the villages of Tskhratskaro and Beselta. She addressed the Ossetians of Tskhratskaro and Beselta, emphasizing their longstanding allegiance and obligation to the crown: “You know very well that you have been our servants for so long, and you serve us, and now our men will be arriving shortly to collect my gifts and duties” (Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1497, 1802, 26. XII).

The integration of Ossetians into feudal ownership within the Kartli kingdom was contin-

1 Rukhula, Rekhula – the Lekhura river, left tributary of Mtkvari. It originates in the southern part of the Kharuli ridge.

2 Ketevan, the King’s daughter-in-law (1746-1808), widow of King Erekle’s son, Vakhtang (Good) Batonishvili, daughter of Konstantine Mukhran-Batoni.

gent upon royal approval. Evidently, migrant Ossetians who settled within the domain of a specific prince were subject to his jurisdiction.

Following the establishment of the Kizilbash rule in Kartli, on August 1, 1737, Safi Khan<sup>1</sup> entrusted the Ossetians of the Java Valley to Otar Amilakhvari, mandating a census of the newly settled families ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-393, 1737. 1. VIII](#)). Similarly, Ossetians residing in the Isroli Gorge were assigned by King Erekle to Shalva Eristavi ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-1052, 1774, 14. XII](#)). In 1749, Erekle II dispatched the village constable Orbeliani to the villages of the Java Valley – Gupta, Koda, and Koshki Chala – and consigned the Ossetians dwelling there to Baadur Machabeli, who assumed responsibility for overseeing the villages and their vassals ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-9205 a](#)).

In 1765, Zaza Machabeli petitioned King Erekle, requesting, “Since the Ossetians are to be settled in Kartli by your decree, may it be your benevolence to leave my estate alone so that I may settle there whom I want to” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8703](#)). An inscription is attached to this document, in which King Erekle accedes to Zaza Machabeli’s appeal, a decision authenticated by his seal.

As previously mentioned, the integration of vassals and peasants into the feudal hierarchy of Shida Kartli often occurred through the settlement of Ossetians, a process keenly facilitated by local feudal lords seeking to bolster their estates. Documentation concerning the Saeristavo estates in Ksani reveals instances where Shanshe Eristavi (1718–1753) undertook the settlement of Ossetians on his lands, establishing a village that endured for eighty years, while Davit Eristavi (1753–1774) similarly engaged in the clearance of forests four decades prior, erecting another village and accommodating Ossetian settlers ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8820, first quarter of the nineteenth century; Qd-8864, first half of the nineteenth century](#)).

However, the aspirations of the Ksani nobility regarding Ossetian settlers were not entirely realized. Tornike Eristavi of Ksani voiced grievances to the representative Besarion Saginov (in the original language), asserting demands for payment from the Ossetians inhabiting Dzeglevi for their use of his estate ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8902, 1843, 12. II](#)). In another document, Tornike Eristavi expressed discontent regarding Ossetian vassals, addressing Ioane Avalov to assert that the Ossetians residing in the Khopi and Dzeglevi estates were remiss in tax payments, prompting his request for their expulsion ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8903, first half of the nineteenth century](#)). This sentiment persisted, as evidenced by Tornike Eristavi’s subsequent appeal to Ioane Avalov in 1844, reiterating the plea for tax collection and the subsequent eviction of Ossetians from his estates ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8919](#)).

In some cases, Ossetians engaged in raiding activities were compelled to enter serfdom

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<sup>1</sup> Safi Khan, also known as “Khanjal Khan,” was a Persianized Georgian noble from the Orbelishvili family. He participated in the Mughan assembly, where he participated in the proclamation of Nadir Khan as Shah. From 1735 to 1737, he effectively assumed control over the governance of Kartli and Kakheti.

under Georgian feudal lords. Notably, Chibirashvili Choba and his sibling Apha engaged in a hostile pursuit of Georgians”. Their actions included multiple assaults on the men of Giorgi Palavandishvili. During one such encounter, they caught Paata from Atotsi and killed Bidzina Abramishvili; on another occasion, their victim was an attendant accompanying Palavandishvili. Subsequently, Palavandishvili captured them, demanding retribution for the bloodshed. In an attempt to settle the matter, they sacrificed four bulls for the deceased’s “inheritance and burial”. However, the sum demanded as blood price exceeded their means, leading them to offer themselves as serfs, signifying their acknowledgment of responsibility: “I, Choba, along with my wife, my brother Apha, and my mother, hereby pledge ourselves for the blood debt” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-647, 1783. 10. XI](#)).

The settlement of Ossetians in certain regions led to a decline in the local population due to frequent attacks on villages and the looting of people. This situation prompted the royal authorities to intervene to restore order. On May 2, 1771, King Erekle issued a specific directive to Giorgi Kularaghas<sup>1</sup> regarding the Ossetian issue: “You are familiar with our Ossetians. Those from Vanati are particularly troublesome, and we have witnessed many undesirable actions from them. Currently, due to food shortages, they are venturing into the lowlands. Apprehend any of them you encounter”. This document is significant because it illuminates the geographic distribution of Ossetians. It explicitly states that Ossetians reside in the mountains and, due to food scarcity, resort to raiding lowland areas.

Instances of Ossetian robbery and theft are documented in various historical records. In 1788, Giorgi Batonishvili issued a special order to Bardzim and Zaza Machabeli to return the bulls stolen by Ossetian vassals to Petre Avalishvili: “Your Ossetians will not be able to help you. Return the bulls to settle the case” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8691](#)). In 1798, during his reign, King Giorgi XII issued an order to the Machabeli, Ioane of Regional governor of Tskhinvali, and the residents of Tskhinvali concerning the robbery of two Jews and the Kereselidzes due to Ossetian incursions into Achabeti and Tskhinvali: “Did you do anything? This is bad for the country, and we are very upset” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8685](#)).

The Machabeli made concerted efforts to curb the lawlessness of the Ossetians. In 1806, the serfs of Luarsab Machabeli and his uncle Zaza, along with the Ossetians of the Java Valley and the Tchvirivi Gorge, provided hostages as a guarantee against further kidnappings ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts, Qd-9062](#)). Concurrently, the inhabitants of the Great Liakhvi gorge pledged not to shelter perpetrators of violence and

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgi Kularaghas, Giorgi Eristavi of Ksani – Eristavi (Pribnce) of Ksani from 1774 to 1777, Kularaghas. He frequently defied King Erekle II and, with a hired band of Lezghins, raided villages in Kartli. He was married to the daughter of Erekle II. In 1777, he rebelled, and when Erekle II sent envoys for reconciliation, Eristavi of Ksani refused to submit. Consequently, the king sent an army led by Giorgi and Levan Batonishvili against him. The army captured the fortresses of the principality, apprehended the lord, and brought him to Tbilisi in December 1777. Erekle II spared the life of Giorgi Eristavi of Ksani but abolished the principality, declared a large portion as a domain, and transferred it to Giorgi and Iulon Batonishvili. The children of the Eristavi were left with a small estate in Gverdisdziri.

theft, nor to engage in trade with them, reinforcing their oath by providing hostages ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-9036](#)).

Royal authorities endeavored to mediate disputes involving Ossetian offenders and ensured sustenance for the detained hostages, as evidenced by various documents. For instance, “correspondence from official Ioane to Tumanian in 1790 about the provision of flour to Ossetian hostages” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-13256, 1790. 4. VI](#)). Similarly, “correspondence to prefect Bardzim about provision of meat, bread, and wine to the Ossetian hostage in Khishi” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-12720, 1791. 5. VI](#)). Furthermore, “correspondence to prefect Bardzim about provision of wine to the Ossetian hostages in Java” ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-13206, 1791. 5. VI](#)).

The royal administration endeavored to foster reconciliation between the Georgians and the Ossetians by facilitating a pledge of mutual assistance and collaboration. A document dating back to 1796 illustrates this effort, stating: “We, Vanati Ossetians and Georgians, have compiled this oath, promise, and a fine book, and exchanged it with each other...” The Ossetians residing in Vanati have caused significant disturbance through acts of theft, violence, extortion, and harassment. Hence, the commitment is made to support each other until the end of our days, emphasizing that if any Georgian encounters an issue with an Ossetian or vice versa, it would constitute a sin against God, our master, and ourselves ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-664, 1796 7. IV](#)). Iulon Batonishvili’s protocol complements this document.

Their religious beliefs posed obstacles to their integration into the Christian social and legal order of the Georgian kingdoms. They were pagans. Christian church laws prohibited marriage with pagans. Since the issue of marriage and divorce was a matter of church legislation, the Catholicos-Patriarch had the prerogative of control over it. In a document from 1750, Anton Catholicos specifically appeals to Baadur Machabeli to prevent the marriage of the Christian daughter of Farsadana Nabichvrishvili to a pagan Ossetian ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Qd-8706](#)). The Catholicos demands that the woman be taken away and married to David uriapavil. It seems that the Jewish David converted to Christianity, which is why he is called Uriapavil. Marriage between Georgians and Ossetians is discussed in the 1782 document “Decree on the Plain and Mountainous Places”, which is addressed to the residents of the Aragvi Saeristavo and directly states that if a Christian marries an Ossetian, it will be considered a crime and he will be held accountable, and if he marries an Ossetian woman, he must be baptized ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Sd-493; Togoshvili, 1969, p. 205](#)).

The Christianization of Ossetians was made a state policy by the Russian Empire, which had established itself in Georgia and the Caucasus in the 19th century. Before that, the revival of Russian-Georgian relations in the 18th century made the Tergi Gorge route relevant. Political-diplomatic and military missions passed through the Dariali Gorge; trade and caravan traffic were also resumed. This route was called the “Ossetian Road” or the “Caravan Road through Ossetia,” and King Erekle II entrusted the guardian of Stepants-

minda, Gabriel Kazibegishvili.<sup>1</sup>, with supervision over it and relations with the Ossetians of Tagauri. In a letter sent by Gabriel to the king in 1789, it is noted that the Ossetians of Tagauri did not allow caravans to pass through the Tergi Gorge ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-4021, 1789. 7. I](#)). The document also indicates that King Erekle possessed judicial authority over the Ossetians of Tagauri.

In isolated cases, Ossetians also appear in 18th-century statistical lists. The “List of Men Deported from Krtskhinvali” dates back to the first half of the 18th century ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-14876](#)). The document is damaged. It lists 17 families displaced from Tskhinvali, and indicates where they are. For example: “Khakhana’s son Gigina is in Samachablo”, “Estate Makara’s son is in Ossetia”; “Petre Khabareli is in Ossetia”, “Khasovani are in Ossetia”. The fact that peasants displaced from Tskhinvali are mentioned among those displaced to Ossetia clearly indicates that Ossetians did not yet live in the city of Tskhinvali.

The “List of Uncollected Begara in the Mgviri Gorge” dates back to the end of the 18th century ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-5888; History, 1962, 211, doc. 178](#)). It lists the villages of the Mgviri Gorge: Sheliuri, Maraleti, Klartsvi, Geri, Tsiari, Chvrivi.<sup>2</sup> Peasants performing forced labor are referred to by their surnames. They are ethnically mainly Georgians, and Ossetians are also named. For example, Badri Kulunbegashvili, a resident of Klartsvi, who seems to have already been Georgianized, since his surname has a Georgian form and is integrated into the Georgian feudal space, with taxes imposed on him.

One of the obligations of feudal service was military service. After Erekle II created the regular army, lists of people to be drafted were drawn up. One of them is the “List of the Schedule for Drafting from the Villages of Zemo Kartli in April”, in which, along with other villages of Shida Kartli, men to be drafted into the army from Tskhinvali are named ([Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts Hd-11644, 1774-1800](#)). The absolute majority of them are Georgian. These are the serfs of the Machabeli, Kherkheulidze, Tsitsishvili, Orjonikidze, and Baadurishvili families. The Ossetian Dokhchikoshvili Tiko is also mentioned there, as is the Echmiadzin serf Fil Buzashvili Papa.

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1 Gabriel Kazibegishvili, the eldest son of Dimitri (Kazibeg) Chopikashvili. After his father’s death, he was appointed as the guardian of Stepantsminda. His guardianship included the Dariali Gorge, which he was responsible for protecting and guarding. From the end of the 18th century, he was called not Chopikashvili, but Kazibegishvili. It was from this time that Stepantsminda and Mkinvartsveri were called Kazbegi in Russian sources of that time, because Gabriel already had a new surname. He was in close relations with King Erekle and his family. He was distinguished by his loyalty to Erekle II. After the signing of the Treaty of Georgievsky, he pursued a policy of strengthening the alliance with Russia and actively assisted the Russian army advancing towards Tbilisi through the Dariali Gorge. In 1813, the Russian government awarded him the rank of Major General. He died in 1817 ([Shaduri, 1985, pp. 19-27](#)).

2 Mgviri, Ghvria – a ravine and community in the Patara Liakhvi Gorge, also known as Geri Gorge. The Mgviri Gorge included the villages of Ghvria, Geri, Gudisi, Klartsvi, Maraleti, Mipareti, Sabloke, Sheleuri, Tsira, Chvrivi ([Makalatia, 1971, p. 59-60; Sosiashvili, 2022, p. 16](#)).

## **CONCLUSION**

According to documentary sources, Ossetian migration to the territory of present-day Georgia began at the beginning of the 17th century and became active in the second half of the 18th century. The Ossetians, to seize booty, mainly attacked the Kingdom of Kartli. They were conquering territories in the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi. The royal authorities and the nobility attempted to incorporate the settled Ossetians into feudal relations. This would neutralize the threat of their attacks and, at the same time, increase the number of serfs and peasants, thereby increasing state revenues. The kings of Kartli and local feudal lords created appropriate conditions for Ossetians to settle on the land. The majority of Ossetians sought to become the king's personal serfs.

The mountain noble society found it difficult to adapt to the feudal system. Documentary sources indicate they did not pay taxes and refused to fulfill their feudal obligations. The settled Ossetians attacked and robbed the local population, which became so widespread that the forces of the local feudal lords were not enough, and the royal government intervened to restore order.

The royal government tried to reconcile the Ossetian criminals, demanding hostages from them as a guarantee of peace and providing for the Ossetian hostages themselves. In addition, the royal government attempted to reconcile the Georgians and Ossetians, requiring them to promise non-interference and mutual assistance.

Documentary sources portray Ossetian migration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as frequently accompanied by armed incursions and aggressive actions, and, despite the efforts of the royal court, full integration into the Georgian feudal space remained limited.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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# The Lost Pages in the History of Sixth-Century Georgia

KHORAVA BEZHAN, PHD

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TAMAZ BERADZE INSTITUTE OF GEORGIAN STUDIES

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0000-0002-1540-7386](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1540-7386)

## ABSTRACT

The chronicle *The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* by Juansher Juansheriani relates that after the death of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, his eldest son, Dachi, ascended the throne. Little information about Dachi Ujarmeli (Dachi of Ujarma), also known as King Darchil, has survived. Until recently, even the years of his reign had not been determined. This article reviews Professor Manana Sanadze's monograph *The King of Kartli of the Sixth Century, Darchil (the Son of Vakhtang Gorgasali), and the Chronicles Describing His Life* (Tbilisi, 2020).

*Keywords:* Dachi of Ujarma, Vakhtang Gorgasali, Kartli of the 6<sup>th</sup> c., Manana Sanadze

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## INTRODUCTION

The famous chronicle *The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* by Juansher Juansheriani relates that after the death of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, his eldest son, Dachi, ascended the throne: “And his son Dachi sat on his throne” ([The Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 204](#)). According to the same work, Vakhtang Gorgasali and his wife, Queen Balendukht, the daughter of the king of Persia, had twins – a son and a daughter. The queen “passed away during childbirth”. Vakhtang “named his son Darchil in Persian and Dachi in Georgian” ([The Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 178](#)). Little information about Dachi of Ujarma, also known as King Darchil, has survived to the present day. Until recent times, even the years of his reign had not been determined. Scholarly and reference literature refer to him as Dachi of Ujarma, king of Kartli in the early sixth century. He was brought up in Ujarma and is therefore known by this epithet. According to Juansher’s account, King Dachi completed the construction of Tbilisi’s city walls, a project initiated during his father’s reign, Vakhtang Gorgasali. Following his father’s will, he also relocated the capital from Mtskheta to Tbilisi ([Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, 1978, p. 410](#); [Encyclopedia Saqartvelo, 2012, p. 342](#)).

Professor Manana Sanadze has dedicated a monographic study to the life and deeds of Dachi of Ujarma, entitled *The King of Kartli of the Sixth Century, Darchil (the Son of Vakhtang Gorgasali), and the Chronicles Describing His Life* ([Sanadze, 2020](#)). In this review, we aim to highlight the significance of Prof. M. Sanadze’s research in the field of history.

Recently, M. Sanadze has been actively researching issues related to the history of ancient and early medieval Georgia, particularly the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali and his successors, as well as the composition of the opening part of *The Kartlis Tskhovreba* (A History of Georgia). Notably, the researcher proposes a new dating for the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali.

Refining the period of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s reign is essential for accurately determining the year of his death. Ivane Javakhishvili (1876–1940) proposed that Vakhtang Gorgasali died in 502. This date is based on Juan’s accounts, which indicate that Vakhtang’s death occurred at the onset of the Byzantine–Persian War. Javakhishvili identified this conflict as the war between Byzantium and Persia from 502 to 506, thereby dating Vakhtang’s death to the autumn of 502 ([Javakhishvili, 1979, p. 329](#)).

Historian and literary critic Sergi Gorgadze (1876–1929) proposed a slightly later date, placing this event in 503 ([Gorgadze, 1913, pp. 64–67](#)). The date of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s death is usually regarded in Georgian historiography as 502/503, or the end of the fifth and the start of the sixth centuries ([Berdzenishvili, 1958, p. 97](#); [Janashia, 1979, p. 336](#); [Lordkipanidze, 1979, pp. 87–88](#); [Alasania, 2008, pp. 34–45](#); [Silogava & Shengelia, 2007, pp. 49–50](#)). Nonetheless, alternative interpretations have been imposed. For example, researcher Vakhtang Goiladze suggests an earlier date of 491 ([Goiladze, 1991, pp. 70–76](#)).

Some scholars initially believed that Vakhtang’s death occurred after the late 5th or early 6th century. Historian Mose Janashvili (1855–1934) dated the event initially to 499 ([Janashvili, 1894, p. 43](#)). However, in his later work, *History of Georgia* (1906), he re-

vised his position, dating Vakhtang's death to 532 and associating it with the battle against Khosrow I Anushirvan ([Janashvili, 1906, p. 225](#)). The distinguished medieval Caucasian historian Cyril Toumanoff (1913–1997) estimated Vakhtang Gorgasali's death around 523 ([Toumanoff, 1963, pp. 369-370](#)). Manana Sanadze has also drawn attention to Janashvili's dating of Vakhtang's death to 532.

According to Manana Sanadze, Vakhtang Gorgasali's reign, instead of the traditionally accepted second half of the 5th century, covers the end of the 5th century and the first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. She links his death 531 to his battle with the Persian Shah, Khosrow Anushirvan (531–579).

Scant information about King Dachi (Darchil) is preserved in noted works by Juansher and other chronicles, as well as in *Moktsevai Kartlisai* (The Conversion of Kartli). However, as M. Sanadze has found, the chronicles, which supposedly recount the lives of the Princes of Kartli – Mihr and Archil, actually describe the life and deeds of Dachi (Darchil) and his half-brother, Mihrdat (Mihr). This is because Leonti Mroveli (11<sup>th</sup> century) mistakenly identified Darchil and his brother Mihrdat as the sons of King Stephanos III of Kartli, Mihr and Archil.

After the death of Vakhtang Gorgasali and following the Persian occupation of the big parties of Kartli, Dachi (Darchil) moved to Western Georgia and sought help from the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527–565). Meanwhile, in 532, a peace treaty was signed between the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Persia, known as the Treaty of Eternal Peace.

Based on various sources, earlier, a researcher, Tamaz Beradze, assumed that the provisions of the 532 Byzantine-Persian Treaty of Eternal Peace were reflected in Vakhtang Gorgasali's will. Still, he believed that Juansher had synthesized the events of Vakhtang Gorgasali's period with those of the Great Persian-Byzantine War of 542-562 ([Beradze, 2023, pp. 342-343](#)). New dating of Vakhtang Gorgasali's reign by Sanadze has clarified that the provisions of the Treaty of Eternal Peace were indeed reflected in his will.

According to Vakhtang Gorgasali's will, Dachi (Darchil), as his heir, succeeded to the royal throne, while his half-brothers received the benefice. The principalities of Tsunda, Klarjeti, and Odzrkhe (Saeristavo) are equivalent to those of Samtskhe, Klarjeti, and Javakheti. They also received the region between Egristskali and Klisura rivers as their inheritance from their mother. According to the terms of the Treaty of 532, Vakhtang Gorgasali's second wife, Queen Elena, along with her children, inherited three principalities located in the southwestern region of the Kingdom of Kartli – Tsunda, Klarjeti, and Odzrkhe. This territory came under the Byzantine protectorate. The ruler of this part of Kartli, holding the title of Patricius (Byzantine governor), was Vakhtang Gorgasali's son, Mihrdat (Mihr).

According to Sanadze's interpretation, Dachi was in Egrisi (western Georgia) between 532 and 542, before the start of military hostilities between the Byzantines and Persians in Georgia. At that time, Kartli was governed by a Persian official, a Marzpan, appointed by the Shah, who was stationed in Tfilisi. During the treaty period, Dachi of Ujarma asked his brother, Mihrdat, to yield control of the territory between the Egristskali and Klisura rivers in exchange for receiving the northern part of Javakheti, from the Mtkvari (Kura) River to

Lake Paravani. For Dachi, who was stationed in Egrisi, the territory between Egristskali (the Enguri River) and Klisura (Kelasuri) was more important than the northern part of Javakheti, which lay between the Mtkvari River and Lake Paravani; for Mihrdat, however, the region between the Mtkvari River and Paravani Lake was of greater significance. Therefore, their interests aligned, and the territories were exchanged.

## **METHODS**

This review is based on established research methods in historical source studies and historiography. We employed methods of corroborating various written sources and critically analyzing primary sources and scholarly literature, which enabled us to present historical facts and events comprehensively and to assess the scholarly value of the work.

## **RESULTS**

In our review, we noted that M. Sanadze's work is a fascinating monographic study that presents much scientific news. The author argues that the chronicles, which supposedly recount the lives of the princes of Kartli, Mihr and Archil, in fact describe the life and deeds of Dachi (Darchil) and his half-brother, Mihrdat (Mihr). This is because Leonti Mroveli (11<sup>th</sup> century) mistakenly identified Darchil and his brother Mihrdat as the sons of King Stephanos III of Kartli, Mihr and Archil. The work studies the activities of Dachi (Darchil) in Egrisi, his subsequent settlement in Kakheti, his state activities, and his tragic end. The hagiographer used the era of the Arabs as a historical backdrop when rewriting the events described in the 6th-century historical chronicle. This resulted in the narrative being placed two centuries later than its actual historical timeframe. Based on relevant excerpts from *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*, *The Kartlis Tskhovreba*, and *The Martyrdom of Archil* by Leonti Mroveli, our researcher has restored the lost pages of the 6th-century history of Georgia. M. Sanadze also observes that Leonti Mroveli did not always adhere to the chronology of the original source when working with the chronicle at his disposal. She suggests that the hagiographer placed the events against the backdrop of the rule of Mervan ibn Muhammad and the Arab period, which caused a disconnection between the story's actual timeline and its presentation. Moreover, Leonti Mroveli didn't seem particularly concerned with preserving the chronology of the source. Leonti Mroveli placed Archil's reconstruction activities in Egrisi after the Arab invasion had ended. Furthermore, M. Sanadze reasonably suggests that the fortress being constructed on the border between Guria and Greece, as described in the text by Leonti Mroveli, is the one built by Dachi (Darchil) upon his arrival in Egrisi, with the permission and support of the Byzantine emperor. This fortress-city was situated in the far southwestern region of the country, near the sea, at the border between Guria and the Byzantine Empire. The border of the Byzantine Empire was a day's journey away from this fortress. M. Sanadze also writes that the one goal of the Persian campaign during the Great War was not only to capture Byzantine fortresses but also to capture the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali – Dachi (Darchil) and his younger brother, Patricius Mihrdat (Mihr). In the final part of the monograph, the Georgian

Historian discusses Dachi of Ujarma's activities in Kakheti. According to the researcher, the king's martyrdom occurred between 558 and 564. The martyred king's body was buried in the church he had built in Notkori (Nodokra).

In conclusion, we are presented with a fascinating monographic study offering numerous new insights into the life and deeds of Dachi (Darchil), son of King Vakhtang I Gorgasali, a heroic and martyred king. Some of the arguments presented in the monograph will undoubtedly provoke debate, and certain theses will require further clarification and substantiation in the future, but this is perfectly natural for a scientific work that addresses a relatively less studied and distant historical period. It can confidently be said that the monograph is a valuable contribution to historical science and will undoubtedly benefit further development of the field.

## ***DISCUSSION***

M. Sanadze correctly emphasizes that the cause of the military conflict between the Byzantine Empire and Persia in the mid-6th century was control over the Great Silk Road and associated trade routes. The Byzantine Empire sought to maintain control over the northern branch of the Silk Road, which passed from China and Sogdiana through the North Caucasus, Egrisi, and the Black Sea to Byzantine territory. Persia, on the other hand, sought to seize control of this route. Both empires needed to gain control over Egrisi to achieve this goal, but for Persia, it first required subduing Kartli. The researcher correctly notes that the best way for Persia to subdue Kartli would be to sever its spiritual ties with the Byzantine Empire and eradicate Christianity. This would break Kartli's spiritual, cultural, and ultimately political ties with the Byzantine Empire, which could be achieved only by converting the Royal Court of Kartli to Zoroastrianism or by abolishing the monarchy. Therefore, Vakhtang Gorgasali addressed Patriarch Peter with the following words: "You should be aware, for it is not the payment of tribute that they demand, but the abandonment of Christ" ([The Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 201](#)).

According to M. Sanadze, the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali and his successors became unacceptable to Persia because the King of Kartli had offered the Byzantine Empire the right to pass through his kingdom along the northern branch of the Silk Road. To facilitate this, Vakhtang Gorgasali conquered and subdued the historical regions of Khunzeti and Tsukheti in southern Dagestan and built or strengthened a chain of fortresses: Khornabuji, Cheremi, Ujarma, Mtskheta, and Artanuji, in the territory from the sources of the River Samur to the Black Sea. The latter – Artanuji – was connected to the Black Sea through the Nigali Gorge. Earlier, researcher Manana Gabashvili studied the circumstances surrounding the founding of Artanuji. Through Artanuji and the Pontic city of Trapezus, the Kingdom of Kartli was involved in international trade between the East and West, particularly Levantine trade, with Tbilisi, the northern key point of this network, also founded by Vakhtang Gorgasali ([Gabashvili, 2009, pp. 144-145](#)).

The Prince Dachi (Darchil) played a crucial role in implementing his father's foreign political agenda. As a co-regent, he was entrusted with the governance of the principality of

Hereti. It was Dachi who, together with his father, and sometimes on his own, subdued Khunzeti, Tsuketi, and “the mountainous region of Kakheti“ as described in *The Kartlis Tskhovreba* (The Life of Kartli).

Under the Treaty of 532, Persia, which had established control over Kartli, blocked the Silk Road leading from the sources of the River Samur toward Kartli. Following this, Persia’s primary objectives were to reach the Black Sea, directly subjugate Egrisi (also known as Lazica in Byzantine sources), and close the northern route through the Caucasus Mountains, which led from western Georgia to the Byzantine Empire.

In 541, hostilities resumed between Persia and the Byzantine Empire in the historical region of Mesopotamia. In this situation, the ruler of Egrisi, King Gubaz I, invited the Persians to Egrisi to free himself from the domination of Vakhtang Gorgasali and his ally, the Byzantine Empire. As a result, in 542, the Persian army entered Georgia. Due to the campaign’s significance, it was led by the Persian Shah, Khosrow Anushirvan himself. According to M. Sanadze, the battle between Dachi (Darchil) and his younger brother Mihrdat (Mihr) against the Persians invading Egrisi and the subsequent events are reflected in Georgian chronicles. One of these, likely written in Greek, formed the basis for an unknown author’s 11th-century hagiographical work, *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*. In 2013, M. Sanadze and Goneli Arakhamia published the reconstructed text and relevant research on this 6th-century historical chronicle (Sanadze, Arakhamia, 2013).

It appears that, while rephrasing the story described in the sixth-century historical chronicle, the hagiographer used the Arab period as the historical background. In doing so, he distanced the story narrated in the newly created hagiographic work from the real time by two centuries. M. Sanadze, based on the relevant excerpts from *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*, *The Kartlis Tskhovreba*, and *The Martyrdom of Archil* by Leonti Mroveli, has restored the lost pages of the 6<sup>th</sup>-century history of Georgia.

M. Sanadze also notes that Leonti Mroveli, when working with the chronicle at his disposal, did not always adhere to the original source’s chronology. She suggests that the hagiographer placed the events against the backdrop of the rule of Mervan ibn Muhammad and the Arab period, which caused a disconnection between the story’s actual timeline and its presentation. Moreover, Leonti Mroveli did not appear to be particularly concerned with preserving the chronology of the source. For example, if Archil had fled from the Arab general to Egrisi, who is believed to have chased after him, as accounted by Leonti Mroveli, he would not have had time to carry out peaceful reconstruction activities in Egrisi. Therefore, Leonti Mroveli placed Archil’s reconstruction activities in Egrisi after the Arab invasion had ended. Furthermore, M. Sanadze reasonably suggests that the fortress being constructed on the border between Guria and Greece, as described in the text by Leonti Mroveli, is the one built by Dachi (Darchil) upon his arrival in Egrisi, with the permission and support of the Emperor of Byzantium. This fortress might be Petra, referenced in Byzantine sources. This fortress-city was located in the extreme southwestern part of the country, on the border between Guria and the Byzantine Empire, near the sea. The border of the Byzantine Empire was a day’s journey away from this fortress.

It is noteworthy that, during the time of Vakhtang Gorgasali and his successor, Egrisi, as part of the Kingdom of Kartli, consisted of two significant areas: Egrisi (comprising Inner Egrisi and Svaneti) and the principalities of Argveti. The latter region was located on the left bank of the Rioni River and encompassed Guria and Takveri (Lechkhumi). Based on the accounts of Procopius of Caesarea and the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian chronicles, M. Sanadze has reconstructed the route by which the Persians invaded Egrisi. The old Georgian chronicle, which served as the basis for *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*, states: “And when the ungodly took the rule of the Persians ... and they attacked the Christians ... they came to Samtskhe and camped near the strongholds”. Then it continues: “The pagans rose in Samtskhe and moved toward the country of Argveti”.

Thus, the Persians advanced from Samtskhe, crossing the foothills of the Odzrkhe and the ridge of Meskheta-Imerti (Persati), and entered Egrisi through the mountain pass of Rkinisjvari. The Persian army that crossed into Egrisi from Samtskhe headed left through the Khanistskali River gorge, toward Petra. At the same time, Khosrow Anushirvan decided to attack Sebastopolis (modern-day Sokhumi) and Pitiunt (modern-day Bichvinta) and sent part of his army in that direction. According to M. Sanadze, the goal of the Persian campaign was not only to capture Byzantine fortresses but also to capture the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali – Dachi (Darchil) and his younger brother, Patricius Mihrdat (Mihr) - who had taken refuge there. It was against this Persian army that the rulers of Argveti, David and Constantine, confronted.

According to *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*, the Georgians defeated the vanguard of the Persian army advancing toward Sebastopolis. It was only after the main Persian army arrived that the resistance of the Argveti princes was overcome. In the unequal battle, the army of the Argveti princes was defeated, and the Persians captured David and his brother Constantine. The Persian commander demanded that they renounce Christianity, but after they refused, the Persians tortured and executed them. The political centre of the Argveti principality – the fortress-city of Tskaltsitela – was plundered and burnt to ashes. Afterward, the Persian army advanced to seize Sebastopolis and Pitiunt. The Byzantines, to prevent these fortresses from falling into enemy hands, burned Sebastopolis and Pitiunt, tore down the walls of their fortifications, and withdrew by sea. The Persian army raided the areas around Sebastopolis and Pitiunt but was unable to establish a foothold there due to the Byzantines’ destruction of the fortifications.

This episode from *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine* is recounted as follows: “And the sons of the great King Vakhtang Gorgasali, Archil (Mihr, – B. Kh.) and Darchil, went to the fortress called Anakopia, because they were terrified of the Persians. However, they managed to repel the pagans after a battle with them, with their modest army”.

According to Procopius of Caesarea, many Persians perished during the retreat from Anakopia due to the difficult terrain, a plague, and a food shortage. Meanwhile, Khosrow Anushirvan took the fortress of Petra, but due to Byzantine successes in Mesopotamia, he was forced to abandon Egrisi. The Persian army, while retreating from Anakopia, crossed the Rioni and Khanistskali rivers and, passing through Guria, joined the main Persian force at Petra. From there, together with Khosrow, they left Egrisi via the Speri route.

Subsequently, a temporary peace agreement was reached between the Byzantine Empire and Persia in 545, and Persia began to strengthen its control over Egrisi. Soon after, the ruler of Inner Egrisi and Svaneti, Gubaz, sided with the Byzantines and sought assistance from the Emperor in expelling the Persians from the region. Fearing that the Byzantines would capture Petra, the Shah sent a large army in 550, led by the renowned commander Mermeroes. From this point onward, the Persians firmly controlled all of Egrisi until 554.

In the final part of her monograph, Manana Sanadze discusses Dachi's activities in Kakheti, recounting that after the Persians had taken complete control of Egrisi, Dachi's presence in the region became unsafe, and therefore, he moved to Kakheti. The researcher argued that this event occurred during the signing of the peace treaty between Byzantium and Persia in 545.

Dachi (Darchil) rule extended over Kakhet-Kukheti and Hereti, where he worked to strengthen and develop the left bank of the Alazani River in Hereti. He built the fortresses of Kasri and Lakuasti and converted the population of Nukhpati (Nukha, Shaki) to Christianity. He also attempted to restore influence over Khundzeti and Tsuketi, which had been subdued earlier by Vakhtang Gorgasali. In this context, a Persian army invaded Kakheti to capture him.

King Dachi decided to approach the Persian commander and request peace, protection of the churches, and the "non-requirement of renouncing the faith" ([The Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 245](#)). Thus, Dachi requested that the Persian commander not punish them for renouncing the faith. This reference suggests that the kings of Kartli were of Sassanian descent, having abandoned Zoroastrianism and adopted Christianity. In the past, King Vakhtang himself had addressed the Persian ruler, saying: "If you fight us for having renounced the faith..." ([The Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955, p. 181](#)). The Persian commander, upon hearing that the king of Kartli had refused to renounce Christianity and return to Zoroastrianism, ordered his execution on March 20. According to the researcher, the king's martyrdom occurred sometime between 558 and 564. The martyred king's body was buried in the church he had built in Notkori (Nodokra).

The work includes excerpts from *The Moktsevai Kartlisai*, *The Kartlis Tskhovreba*, and *The Martyrdom of David and Constantine*, which describe the life and deeds of King Dachi (Darchil), as well as relevant passages from Procopius of Caesarea, allowing the reader to access the primary sources directly. The monograph is well-illustrated with appropriate maps, making the content more comprehensible.

## **CONCLUSION**

To sum up, we are presented with a fascinating monographic study offering numerous new insights into the life and deeds of Dachi (Darchil), son of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, a heroic and martyred king. Some of the arguments presented in the monograph will undoubtedly provoke debate, and certain theses will require further clarification and substantiation in the future, but this is perfectly natural for a scientific work that addresses a relatively less stud-

ied and distant historical period. It can confidently be said that the monograph is a valuable contribution to historical science and will undoubtedly benefit further development of the field.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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# Soviet Russia – Great Britain Trade Negotiations and the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1920-1921)

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SHVELIDZE DIMITRI, PHD

IVANE JAVAKHISHVILI TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0001-0051-8817](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0051-8817)

## ABSTRACT

The article explores the dynamics of trade negotiations between the Soviet Union and Great Britain during 1920-1921. The study aims to examine how the question of Georgia’s independence played a role in the negotiation process and to assess which of the negotiating powers was expected to retain Georgia within its sphere of influence. The research reveals that, for a significant portion of negotiations, Georgia was considered part of the United Kingdom’s area of interest and influence. However, at the final stage, Britain was compelled to relinquish its political interest in Georgia, a shift that was reflected in the treaty signed between the two states on March 16, 1921, in which Georgia was no longer mentioned. The dynamics of the Democratic Republic of Georgia’s independence within the broader context of the long-term negotiations between Russia and Britain are examined for the first time in historiography.

*Keywords:* Trade agreement, Democratic Republic of Georgia, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, negotiations

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The impact of the trade agreement signed between Soviet Russia and Great Britain on the Democratic Republic of Georgia is generally acknowledged in Georgian historiography. It is commonly assumed that one of the provisions of the agreement declared that “Britain renounced any interest in Caucasian affairs.”

However, our findings indicate that the situation was more complex and nuanced. This article seeks to reconstruct that historical reality and reassess prevailing interpretations.

The dramatic, three-year downfall of the Democratic Republic of Georgia serves as yet another example of how powerful geopolitical actors often determine the fate of small nations. For a specific period, Georgia was of interest to Great Britain. However, the British government at the time proved unable to counterbalance the traditional and formidable influence of Soviet Russia in the strategic South Caucasus region.

## **METHODS**

The study employs a range of methodological approaches appropriate to historical research, with particular emphasis on primary sources, especially the text of the trade agreement at the center of analysis. Additionally, the research applies Karl Popper’s falsificationist framework, which advocates minimizing unfounded claims and unsubstantiated interpretations in the examination and analysis of historical events. By adhering to this approach, the study expands the boundaries of historical knowledge and reconstructs the actual course of events with greater accuracy.

During 1920–1921, negotiations between Great Britain and the Soviet Union directly affected the question of the Democratic Republic of Georgia’s independence. It may be argued that the outcome of these negotiations proved fatal for the fate of Georgia’s First Republic.

On January 16, 1920, the Supreme Council of the Entente lifted the blockade imposed on Soviet Russia in October 1919. Around the same time, the Soviet Russian trade mission based in Denmark, commonly referred to as “Centrosyuz”, attempted to establish contact with the British trade authorities. In May 1920, a Centrosyuz delegation arrived in London under the leadership of Leonid Krasin, the People’s Commissar for Trade of Soviet Russia. Krasin’s objective was to secure the trade agreement with Great Britain.

From the Soviet perspective, the trade agreement also encompassed areas of broader political significance, such as the demand that Britain cease supporting Poland, with which Soviet Russia was at war at the time.

The British side also had its own initial objectives and was not opposed to reaching an agreement. Moreover, Prime Minister Lloyd George’s objective approached a pacifist stance: to resolve the “Russian problem” as swiftly as possible and to withdraw British troops from the former territories of the Russian Empire, including the Caucasus. Accord-

ing to the foundational work of Beka Kobakhidze, Lloyd George had already begun advocating for the withdrawal of British forces from various regions of the world, including former Russian imperial territories, as early as January 1918 (Kobakhidze, 2015, p.80)

At the same time, Lloyd George articulated his own vision for Britain's policy toward Russia in the form of a three-point plan: "1. Disengagement from the Russian Civil War; 2. Initiation of trade relations with the Soviet government; 3. The disintegration of Russia, which implied support for the independence of small nationalities" (Kobakhidze, 2018, p.138).

At the initial stage of negotiations with Soviet Russia, Prime Minister Lloyd George adopted what can be described as a maximalist position. Specifically, his demands included the following: "Soviet Russia was required to renounce support for hostile actions against Britain in Asia Minor, Iran, Afghanistan, India and Georgia; to refrain from propaganda and agitation; to cease its support for the Kemalists in Turkey; to pledge not to attack the Baltic States; and to refrain from initiating military operations in the Black Sea against Wrangel or in the Caspian Sea against Iran. Additionally, the British side demanded that Soviet Russia formally acknowledge responsibility for the Tsarist debts" (Anglo-Soviet, 1921, March 16).

It is important to note that when negotiations began on June 30, 1920, between Lloyd George and Krasin, they adopted a "joint draft agreement, which was to serve as the basis for subsequent negotiations." Clause three of the draft acknowledged that "the stated claims would be discussed at a future peace conference; however, the ongoing trade negotiations should not be interrupted." This indicates that, at that point, Lloyd George's demands concerning Georgia were still in effect.

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that negotiations between Russia and Georgia, as well as between Russia and Britain, were underway simultaneously and were interconnected. Soviet Russia's recognition of Georgia was likely closely linked to its trade negotiations with Britain. Given that Georgia was mentioned in the initial British demands and that Britain had shown interest in Georgia, the Soviet leadership may have found it necessary to diplomatically maneuver by recognizing Georgia's independence.

The subsequent development of events unfolded as follows. On July 2, 1920, Krasin, head of the Centrosoyuz delegation, returned to Moscow for consultations with the Soviet government, intending to return to London shortly thereafter. However, the ongoing war with Poland complicated the broader situation and led to renewed tensions in British-Soviet relations. France and Britain urged Soviet Russia to seek peace with Poland, warning that failure to do so could result in their entry into the war on Poland's side. On August 2, the Soviet delegation traveled to London to resume trade negotiations. However, by September 10, tensions between the parties had escalated once again, prompting Prime Minister Lloyd George to demand the Soviet delegation's departure from British territory.

On October 12, 1920, a preliminary peace agreement was signed between Poland and Soviet Russia. As a result, the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs approached the British government with a proposal to resume negotiations. This occurred on November 9, 1920, and trade negotiations resumed on November 29.

At this point, it is necessary to examine a phase of negotiations that has not been previously analyzed, neither in this article nor in the existing literature. The fact is that during the negotiation process, a disagreement emerged between the parties, which led to a temporary disruption. On July 1, 1920, the British government presented its demands to Moscow. The most critical of these was a provision requiring Soviet Russia to renounce its interest in the East.

Let us enumerate the three conditions upon which Britain was prepared to conclude a trade agreement. 1. The Soviet government renounces all hostile actions and propaganda against British institutions. 2. The Soviet government refrains from any actions or propaganda intended to incite the peoples of Asia against British interests and the British state. 3. The Soviet government permits British subjects to return from Russia, and in return, the British government will not obstruct the repatriation of Russians from Britain and its colonies.

These issues were discussed in detail in *The Daily Telegraph*, which served as a source for the Social-Democratic newspaper *Ertoba*, where Victor Nozadze published materials based on the article (Nozadze, 1920, November 4). Let us now turn to the content of that report.

According to available accounts, the negotiations continued, and on July 7, Chicherin informed the British side accordingly. The talks were conducted by Krasin and the British Foreign Secretary, Curzon, with Lev Kamenev joining the negotiation process from that point onward. A preliminary “black” draft of the agreement was nearly complete when, on October 1, 1920, Lord Curzon protested, claiming that the Soviet side was failing to meet the agreed conditions. It is essential to note that by this stage, the situation had become increasingly complex, and the issue of Georgia remained unresolved and effectively suspended. Notably, *The Daily Telegraph* article appears to make no mention of Georgia. “These conditions,” Curzon’s note stated, “have been and continue to be flagrantly violated. Mr. Kamenev has engaged in what amounts to open propaganda and has attempted to support a campaign in England against the British Constitution and British institutions. For this reason, he was not permitted to enter the country.”

In summary, the Soviet government consistently continued its anti-British propaganda efforts. The Communist Third International openly declared that “all institutions of the world must be overthrown.” A conference of representatives of Asian peoples was held in Baku, and what is particularly relevant for our purpose is that Curzon’s note explicitly stated: “The actions of the Soviet government in the Caucasus, Persia, Central Asia, and Afghanistan are directly aimed against Great Britain” (Nozadze, 1920, November 4). The note that Soviet Russia was required to fulfill its obligations if it wished to conclude the trade agreement. At that point, the future of the negotiations rested with the Soviet leadership.

As for the “Caucasus,” this primarily referred to Georgia and, at that time, still unoccupied Armenia. Azerbaijan, by contrast, had already been “written off” by Britain, as Baku’s oil fields were under Soviet control. Curzon’s note indicated that negotiations between Britain and Soviet Russia were either progressing slowly or had been suspended altogether. Ultimately, the note issued a categorical demand: the Soviet side was required to provide clear responses on all disputed matters no later than October 10.

For his part, Krasin's note took the opposite position, accusing the British side of violating the agreed terms by providing support to Wrangel, Poland, and others. Nevertheless, Krasin concluded with a categorical demand to resume and finalize negotiations on a trade and economic agreement. As he stated: "The Russian government, acting in the interests of the working masses of both Russia and England, demands the immediate restoration of economic and commercial relations and the conclusion of a comprehensive truce between the two countries. It is prepared at any moment to demonstrate its sincere desire to reach a prompt agreement and to take every necessary step to accelerate such settlement (Nozadze, 1920, November 4).

The issue of British prisoners held in Azerbaijan was a particularly sensitive point. According to Krasin, negotiations between Azerbaijani and British representatives should continue in "Tiflis", where Russia would also send its own representative. After the fulfillment of these mutual obligations, Krasin once again returned to the topic of the trade agreement, concluding: "... The Russian government is prepared to come to terms with the British government and to continue negotiations toward an economic agreement." For his part, Viktor Nozadze offered the following conclusion: "What this negotiation will bring and what outcomes it will yield, this we shall soon see." (Nozadze, 1920, November 4).

#### Chronology of British-Soviet Russian Negotiations

- July 1, 1920, Britain presented Soviet Russia with the principal conditions for concluding a trade agreement (three main points).
- July 7, Chicherin informed London that the Soviet government had accepted these conditions.
- October 1, Curzon sent a formal note to Soviet Russia, accusing it of failing to comply with the terms outlined in the 1 July note, without which the trade agreement could not be concluded. A deadline of October 10 was given for a response.
- In his reply, Krasin fulfilled several of London's demands and firmly insisted on the continuation of negotiations.
- The 17 November issue of *Ertoba*, citing information from the newspaper *Izvestia*, reported that the draft trade agreement was under review in London and that its signing was expected soon. The newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika* also reported that Britain had prepared a draft agreement and that the cabinet would review it in the near future.

Throughout these months, the issue of the "Caucasus" and, by implication, Georgia remained within the scope of British strategic interests and protection. This was evident in Curzon's note of October 1; in other words, up to that point, Britain had not yet formally withdrawn its support for Georgia, or so it appeared. The following development further reinforces this view: in the second half of November, Lord Curzon reportedly expressed concern that Batumi, which was part of independent Georgia, faced a threat from Soviet Russia. In response, on November 28, 1920, Chicherin sent a radio message to Curzon, protesting the Soviet government's stance against Britain's alleged occupation of Batumi.

In that message, Chicherin reaffirmed Soviet support for Georgia's independence, declaring that "...the Russian government consistently defends Georgia's independence and, under no circumstances, will it violate the sovereign rights of Georgia, by any means whatsoever" (Ertoba, 1920, December 1). This statement was made by Soviet Russia's Foreign Commissar Georgy Chicherin just two and a half months prior to the occupation of Georgia.

One way or another, as we can observe, in this particular case, it was not only Russia but also Great Britain that assumed the role of protector and defender of Georgia's independence. This was the second half of November 1920. Britain's eventual "abandonment" of Georgia likely occurred shortly after this phase of diplomatic exchange, especially following Soviet Russia's occupation of Armenia on November 29, 1920. The establishment of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Armenia on the map of the Caucasus marked the full assertion of Soviet dominance in the region. With this development, Britain's capacity to maintain any effective presence in the Caucasus was effectively exhausted.

During this period, the trade agreement between Russia and Great Britain was expected to include a provision under which the British government would assume the obligation to refrain from any hostile actions against the Soviet government. Following this, negotiations continued, though the agreement was repeatedly postponed for various reasons. Ultimately, as is well known, the agreement was signed on March 16, 1921.

Although Georgia was not explicitly mentioned in the agreement, it was implied. Specifically, in the preamble of the treaty, where general principles were outlined, we read the following in paragraph A:

"This agreement is conditional upon the fulfillment of the following provisions, in particular:

a) Each party shall refrain from any hostile actions or measures against the other, as well as from conducting, beyond its own borders, any form of official propaganda, direct or indirect, against the institutions of the British Empire or of the RSFSR. In particular, the Soviet Government of Russia shall refrain from any attempt, whether by military, diplomatic, or any other means, including propaganda that may incite any of the Asian peoples to engage in hostile actions against British interests or the British Empire, especially in India and the independent state of Afghanistan. The British government undertakes a reciprocal obligation toward the Soviet government with respect to those countries which formerly constituted parts of the Russian Empire and have now become independent." (Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, March 16, 1921).

The final text of the agreement makes it clear that the Soviet side either persuaded or mutually agreed with the British that neither party would interfere in the affairs of each other's former or current colonies. Of particular relevance to this study is the provision stating that the United Kingdom would not, in any form, infringe upon Soviet Russia's interests "regarding those countries which formerly constituted parts of the Russian Empire and have now become independent." This provision referred to Georgia and other newly independent states that had declared sovereignty following the collapse of the Russian Empire.

This provision carried two key implications. First, the United Kingdom effectively granted the Soviet government freedom of action in Georgia. Second, it explicitly referred to

the matter as concerning “independent states”, meaning that Russia, whatever measures it might have taken in Georgia, was still expected to acknowledge its status as an independent entity at least formally. This circumstance represented the sole residual benefit of Britain’s earlier goodwill toward Georgia.

During these months, while negotiations between Britain and Soviet Russia were underway, Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin, the principal architect of the Soviet State, closely followed their progress. The trade agreement was of vital importance to Soviet Russia, which was economically devastated at the time. For this reason, Lenin repeatedly warned his devoted Georgian Bolshevik comrades, Orjonikidze and Stalin, to act cautiously and diplomatically regarding the Georgian issue so as not to jeopardize the ongoing negotiations with Britain, which were progressing favorably.

The Anglo-Russian trade agreement was signed at a time when it had already lost its significance for Georgia. Nevertheless, The essential terms of the agreement had been in place since negotiations resumed on November 19, 1920. From that point onward, the fundamental provisions of the agreement remained unchanged, and both parties took care to ensure compliance with the obligations they had previously undertaken.

In essence, the two imperial powers reached an understanding not to interfere in each other’s colonial affairs. As a result, Soviet Russia effectively completed the process of Georgia’s international isolation. Should it choose to occupy Georgia, neither of the world’s two most powerful states – Great Britain and the United States would oppose it. The latter, indeed, had never recognized Georgia’s independence at all.

At this point, it is appropriate to cite in full Stalin’s well-known words, which, given his awareness of the finalized draft of the British-Soviet agreement, effectively pronounced a death sentence upon democratic and independent Georgia: “This Georgia is now counting the last days of its existence... There can be little doubt that, in a critical moment, the Entente will abandon Georgia just as it abandoned Armenia.” (Stalin, 1948, p. 447)

It is evident that the Russian *Narkomnats* (People’s Commissar for Nationalities) already knew that the British “imperialists” had abandoned Georgia.

## ***DISCUSSION***

Specific details still remained unresolved. If not earlier, then by December 1920, the issue of occupying Georgia had already been placed on the Soviet government’s agenda. The process, however, was intended to unfold gradually and systematically, with a preparatory phase preceding direct action. This preparatory stage entailed a series of intensified provocations against the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The first significant wave of these provocations was launched almost simultaneously from three directions: from the Russian Soviet Republic and from the supposedly “independent” Soviet states of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

By order of the government of the RSFSR, all Georgian railway trains moving northward were halted. At the same time, oil supplies from Azerbaijan to Georgia were suspended. Along the republic’s borders, particularly around the Poilo Bridge, movements of Soviet

troops and the construction of military fortifications were observed. Meanwhile, the government of Soviet Armenia arrested Georgia's diplomatic representative in Yerevan, General Solomon Kharalashvili, along with his secretary.

On December 12, 1920, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia sent an urgent radio dispatch to the republic's diplomatic representatives in nearly all locations where legations were established: Moscow, Yerevan, Baku, London, Paris, Warsaw, and elsewhere. The representatives were instructed to inform the governments of their respective countries about the coordinated offensive being carried out against Georgia and the violation of all treaties that Georgia had concluded with Russia and its two puppet states.

Most importantly, in its radio communication to foreign governments, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that this was not a routine manifestation of the previously hostile attitude occasionally demonstrated by the Soviet side. Instead, the Georgian statement underlined the exceptional and unprecedented nature of the coordinated offensive, whose clear objective was to undermine Georgia's independence. As the ministry's declaration stated: "It may be concluded that in this case we are dealing with preparations of an aggressive nature, aimed at launching an attack against Georgia." (Ertoba, 1920, December 17).

The leaders of Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and government accurately assessed the nature of the recent developments and correctly identified the real purpose behind the provocations. In the concluding section of the radio dispatch, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Magieri" Konstantine Sabakhtarishvili, instructed the diplomatic missions to issue a "strong protest" to the governments of the states responsible for the provocations.

As noted earlier, Sabakhtarishvili's radio dispatch was sent to its recipients on December 12. Shortly thereafter, the Press Bureau of the Soviet Russian mission issued a public statement accusing the Georgian government of violating the principles of good-neighborly relations and the terms of the existing agreements. The statement claimed that Georgia had detained the train of the Soviet representative in Armenia, Legran, and halted a transit train bound for Armenia. The Georgian side categorically rejected these accusations as false and entirely fabricated (Ertoba, 1920, December 17).

The evidence clearly demonstrates that the accusations brought forward by Soviet Russia were false and fabricated. Nevertheless, this did not alter the situation. Nevertheless, Russia had already decided to proceed with the occupation of Georgia, and this plan included a targeted series of provocations designed to construct an image of the Republic of Georgia as an enemy. The central Soviet authorities sought not so much to prepare the world as the compliant Russian public for the justification of the forthcoming occupation. To this end, Georgia was to be portrayed as an adversary of Soviet Russia, a bastion of landlords and capitalists, and a loyal ally of world imperialism and the Entente, standing in opposition to the Soviet State.

During the months of November, December, and January 1920-1921, particularly following the Sovietization of Armenia, two main approaches toward Georgia emerged within the Soviet leadership. The first and decisive line was Lenin's official policy, which defined

the formal direction of Soviet strategy. Lenin consistently emphasized that the Georgian question required extreme caution and that the time for its direct occupation had not yet arrived. The second line was represented primarily by Stalin and Orjonikidze, especially the latter, who persistently demanded the immediate occupation of Georgia and presented the situation to Lenin in such a way that he would eventually authorize the necessary directive.

The prevailing view in the scholarly literature holds that the idea of an immediate Sovietization of Georgia originated with Stalin, Orjonikidze, and other Georgian-Caucasian Bolshevik renegades. This interpretation, however, is not accurate. In reality, the two tendencies differed only functionally. Lenin acted in accordance with the international conjuncture and set the official strategic line; Stalin and Orjonikidze's faction were merely its operational executors. Their role was to prepare the ground for occupation by every available means and, once they secured the Centre's assent, to carry it out without delay. That is precisely what occurred.

The decisive phase in resolving the issue of Georgia's occupation began on the threshold of 1921. Although the central authorities continued to resist the Caucasian Bureau's appeals, it had become evident that the process could no longer be prolonged. On January 2, 1921, the tandem of Orjonikidze and Kirov prepared a report and once again submitted the question of Georgia's occupation to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. In that report, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was portrayed as a threat to Soviet Russia and the other Soviet republics, as well as an instrument of the Entente that was blatantly violating the terms of the Treaty of May 7.

Naturally, the problem did not lie in whether Lenin genuinely believed the Caucasian Bureau's demagoguery and tales about Georgia's alleged aggression. The real issue was to ensure that Soviet Russia's impending attack on Georgia did not unduly provoke the British government, with whom a draft trade agreement was already nearing signature. Moreover, the broader international context at that time did not compel Soviet Russia to act with particular haste. In the Georgian question, it faced no real competitors.

The only constraint that might have prompted the Soviet authorities to exercise caution was the still-unsigned Russian-British trade agreement. As previously noted, on November 29, 1920, following Lloyd George's instructions, the final draft of the agreement was delivered from London to Leonid Krasin. According to Russian historiography, by that time, the draft approved by the British government already contained a provision stipulating that Britain would neither obstruct nor criticize Russia's actions in the former territories of the Russian Empire and the newly proclaimed independent states.

By January 12, 1921, when the Central Committee convened to review the Orjonikidze-Kirov report, Lenin and his circle were under considerable pressure, as the agreement was on the verge of being signed in London. What guarantee did Lenin have that Lloyd George would not reconsider at the last moment? Lenin was unlike Orjonikidze, who was fervently obsessed with the idea of bringing Georgia into the "paradise" of Russian socialism, or Stalin, who was already driven by ambitions of dictatorship.

Therefore, on January 12, 1921, the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Russian Com-

unist Party once again blocked the Caucasian Bureau's request for the immediate occupation of Georgia. The Democratic Republic of Georgia was, for the time being, spared once more.

It is interesting to consider what was happening in Georgia during this period, from December 17, 1920, to January 12, 1921. The fact that the situation surrounding Georgia had become catastrophic was already well understood within the country long before that. As early as June 30, 1920, Akaki Chkhenkeli confided his anxiety in his diary, writing: "Will Georgia withstand this experiment? I doubt it. Moreover, if it does, it will be either a miracle or the good fortune that has, until now, protected her. In any case, an agreement with England is essential for us. Lloyd George and his associates are already in talks with Krasin" (Chkhenkeli, 2021, p.234).

Naturally, the Georgian government could not avoid the complex issue of clarifying its relations with neighboring states, particularly with the newly established Turkey. In November 1920, the Georgian authorities submitted a peace treaty proposal to the Turkish government. Since the government in Angora maintained close allied relations with Soviet Russia and benefited from its military and financial support, it was interested in understanding Russia's position toward Georgia. For this reason, on December 15, 1920, the Angora government's commissioner for foreign Affairs, Muhtar, formally inquired with the Soviet government about how it should proceed, whether to conclude a treaty with Georgia, and what Moscow's stance on the matter would be. The Russian authorities did not respond at the time, and we believe that this silence was by no means accidental.

At this point, Angora's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Muhtar, once again addressed his great ally, asking how he should proceed. "I am awaiting your response", Muhtar wrote to his Soviet counterpart, "as is Georgia, ever since we delivered a note to Mr. Simon Mdivani, the representative of Georgia in Turkey".

However, for the Georgian side, another circumstance was even more noteworthy. The Angora Foreign Affairs Commissar wrote to Chicherin: "In a friendly manner, we request clarification of Russia's position on the question of Georgia, yet to this day we have received no response. At the same time, we understand that a war may break out between the Red Army and the Georgians. If this information is correct, then, in order to clarify the potential misunderstandings that may arise, we wish to know the intentions of your government" (Ertoba, 1921, January 6).

It was evident from the prevailing signals, indications, forecasts, and expectations that the isolated Georgia would not remain unconquered by Soviet Russia for long. This was precisely the reason why the Soviet government refrained from responding to Angora's inquiries.

Muhtar Ahmad's note also contained a second piece of information of particular interest to Georgia. The Turkish commissioner expressed dissatisfaction that his Russian ally was withholding information from Angora. For example, the Turks had learned from other sources that Soviet Russia intended to conclude an agreement with Britain: "We report to you the terms of the agreement we wish to conclude with you, yet we do not respond what-

soever to the proposals submitted by them (the British – D.Sh). Moreover, this happens at a time when the entire European press and our agents are already discussing the agreement concluded between Russia and England, an agreement that has sparked extensive debate in the House of Commons” (Ertoba, 1921, January 6).

Both pieces of information, each of vital importance to Georgia, made the position of the First Republic increasingly hopeless. The first, namely, the fact that Soviet Russia neither disclosed its stance toward Georgia nor provided any response to Turkey’s inquiries on the matter, clearly indicated that Moscow was concealing its true objective: to occupy Georgia, to bring about the dissolution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and to establish Soviet rule over the conquered nation.

According to the second piece of information, official London did not conceal the fact that it was concluding an agreement with Soviet Russia. This article may further note that reports on this matter also appeared in the Georgian press. For instance, the *Sakartvelos Respublika* of January 6, 1921, published information about debates in the British House of Commons on the agreement with Russia. However, these reports contained no mention of Georgia.

It remains unknown what details were or were not available to the highest representatives of the Georgian government regarding the ongoing negotiations surrounding the Anglo-Russian trade agreement. On January 7, 1921, the British Foreign Secretary, George Nathaniel Curzon, in his customary ultimatum-like manner, sent a note to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Chicherin. The note briefly outlined the history of negotiations on the agreement, a process that had lasted several months, or, more precisely, nearly a year. By that time, discussions about the negotiations between the two sides were already openly covered in both the international and Georgian press.

An excerpt from Curzon’s note provides perhaps the most reliable evidence: “The fact that the agreement has not yet been signed after such a long time is mainly the result of the Soviet government’s evasion of the conditions itself accepted on July 7. The question of interpreting the articles of the agreements reached on June 30 and July 7 has been the subject of repeated discussions. Krasin is well aware of the reasons that compel His Majesty’s Government to insist on inserting in the preliminary draft of the agreement specific provisions regarding those geographical regions in which the Soviet government has repeatedly pledged to cease its propaganda and hostile activities directed against the British Empire, and particularly against British interests” (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1921, January 12).

Curzon’s note asserted that omitting specific geographical regions from the agreement could later lead to misunderstanding and dispute. To prevent this, the British side “insistently” demanded the explicit designation of those geographical areas that both parties would henceforth refrain from targeting through criticism, propaganda, or any form of hostile action. In other words, as our interpretation suggests, the two sides effectively acknowledged these territories as belonging to their respective spheres of influence and renounced any claims to them. Although the note itself did not specify the “geographical regions” in question, it is evident that the reference was, on the one hand, to Afghanistan and India,

and on the other, to the former territories of the Russian Empire that had established new independent states, above all, to Georgia.

As it appears, Soviet Russia refrained from specifying such regions for a particular reason, while the British side remained steadfast in its insistence on doing so. Curzon's note states: "For its part, the British government has expressed the wish to also consider the situation of those geographical regions, in which the Soviet Government of Russia has special interest, and the British Government would regard this as forming the basis of the corresponding obligations which it would undertake" ([Sakartvelos Respublika, 1921, January 12](#)).

In its concluding section, the note urged the Russian side to put an end to the baseless disputes and to grant Krasin the authority to proceed with the signing of the agreement.

In short, by January 7, 1921, when Curzon's note was sent to his Soviet counterpart, Georgi Chicherin, not only had the trade agreement remained unsigned, but even the specific clause concerning the designation of regions regarded as falling within the respective spheres of influence of the two parties was still left unresolved. The Soviet side continued to hesitate. It was precisely this issue, the trade agreement itself, and particularly the controversy surrounding that clause, that preoccupied the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Russia and restrained him, for the time being, from launching an attack on Georgia.

However, following Curzon's note, it is likely that a significant shift occurred during negotiations between Russia and Britain. From that point onward, the Soviet authorities agreed to the political provisions of Curzon's conditions and to the formulation that was ultimately incorporated into the final text of the agreement, though with one crucial condition:

Britain explicitly named those countries, or in Curzon's terms, the "geographical regions", in which it held interests, such as Afghanistan, India, and others. Soviet Russia, by contrast, did not specify particular countries but indicated that its sphere of interest encompassed the former colonies of the Russian Empire that had declared independence. Consequently, around mid-January 1921, intensive negotiations were underway between the two sides, suggesting that both governments had reached an agreement on the principal political issues outlined in Curzon's note. The subsequent discussions focused primarily on trade and economic matters, Russia's pre-revolutionary debts, the establishment of a joint trade and economic framework, and related issues ([Sakartvelos Respublika, 1921, January 18](#)).

The shift in the course of the British-Russian negotiations was also felt within the Georgian government. Jordania wrote with evident disappointment that Evgeni Gegechkori, who had been dispatched to negotiate with Lloyd George, was entirely neglected by the British authorities: "It was clear that something had changed. Krasin was gradually gaining influence, and it was no longer in his interest for our minister to travel to England" ([Jordania, 1990, p. 118](#)). Drawing a historical parallel, Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs found himself in a situation reminiscent of that of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani. As is known, Sulkhan-Saba's presence in Paris was concealed because, at that time, the Iranian ambassador, Mohammad Reza Khan, had arrived in the French capital. Similarly, according to Noe Jordania, Evgeni Gegechkori, who was then in Istanbul, was denied passage on a British ship and was abandoned, treated merely as a private individual.

The shift that occurred during the process of concluding the agreement with Britain was rapidly reflected in Soviet Russia's attitude toward Georgia. Almost immediately, both wings of the Soviet leadership, ostensibly divided but in reality aligned, became active: on the one hand, the renegade tandem of Georgian-Russian Bolshevik leaders, Stalin and Orjonikidze, and on the other, the central figure himself, Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin. They joined forces and reached a unified decision: to occupy Georgia. This decision was made on January 26, 1921.

In a report delivered at the Congress of Railway Workers in early January 1921, Georgia's Minister of War, Grigol Lortkipanidze, provided a general overview of the republic's domestic and foreign situation. He enumerated and analyzed the positions of the neighboring states separately, concluding that Georgia was unable to maintain normal, friendly relations with any of them. As for the Soviet government of Russia, he argued, its social priorities had transformed into a policy of conquest, masked by a social façade, much as Napoleon had once done. It was a remarkable analysis, and for that reason, it is worth recalling, as the Georgian railway workers once did, Lordkipanidze's principal conclusion:

“Russian communism, in which social elements, however primitive and crude, had once more or less predominated, underwent profound changes, particularly after the Russian-Polish war. Just as the banner of revolution became a powerful weapon of conquest for Napoleon, so too, for Russian nationalist imperialism, communism has, regrettably, come to play an auxiliary role.” (Ertoba, 1921, January 11).

On February 14, 1921, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party convened to discuss the issue of Georgia. It approved the resolution drafted by Lenin, which was sent to the Revolutionary Military Council of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army: “The Central Committee is prepared to authorize the 11<sup>th</sup> army to actively assist the uprising in Georgia and to occupy Tbilisi, in accordance with international norms, on the condition that all members of the Revolutionary Military Council of the 11<sup>th</sup> army, after a thorough examination of all available data, provide guarantees of success, 14/II.” (Lenin, 1965, p.50).

“The Politburo proceeded with caution”, notes researcher Levan Toidze, and rightly so. Lenin was particularly cautious, not only because he was the party leader, but also because he served as the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and was thus to some extent accountable before international political, diplomatic, and governmental circles. True, he had the assurance of silence from both Great Britain and the United States, yet he still feared unnecessarily provoking them. This is why he emphasized that the occupation of Tbilisi must be carried out “in accordance with international norms”. In reality, such norms did not exist; there were only, according to Bolshevik terminology, the “imperialist states” and “empires” with which Soviet Russia had concluded agreements and divided the territories designated as “Spheres of influence”.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the beginning of 1920, Soviet Russia initiated negotiations with Great Britain to conclude a trade agreement. Beyond trade matters, the negotiations also encompassed certain political issues, one of which concerned the delineation of spheres of influence between the two parties. Research indicates that, at the initial stage, Georgia was regarded as falling within the scope of British interests. During the first phase of negotiations, which continued until the final months of 1920, the conditions set forth by the British side required Soviet Russia to refrain from any hostile activities directed against Britain in Asia Minor, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Georgia.

At a particular stage, the trade negotiations coincided with the talks between Soviet Russia and the Democratic Republic of Georgia and, in all likelihood, played a positive role in prompting Soviet Russia's recognition of Georgia's independence.

For several months, and even in Lord Curzon's note to Soviet Russia dated October 1, 1920, Georgia continued to be referred to as part of the British sphere of interest (In the form of Caucasus – D.Sh).

“Following the forcible Sovietization of Armenia, Great Britain appears to have withdrawn its interest in Georgia, leading to the emergence of a new formulation later reflected in the final text of the agreement, signed in London on March 16, 1921. In that document, Georgia was no longer mentioned explicitly, yet its inclusion was implied indirectly: the British government undertook the obligation not to interfere in the actions of the Soviet government with regard to those countries that had once formed part of the Russian Empire and had since become independent.

Despite the fundamental agreement concerning the countries of mutual interest, Ulyanov-Lenin continued to avoid provoking Britain, as the treaty had not yet been signed. The decision to occupy Georgia was made only on January 26, 1921, by the leadership of the Russian Communist Party.

To conclude, the two imperial powers agreed not to interfere in each other's affairs concerning their respective colonial territories. Soviet Russia thus completed the process of Georgia's international isolation: if it were to occupy Georgia, it would face no obstruction from the two most powerful states in the world – Great Britain and the United States, the latter having never recognized Georgia's independence in the first place.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# The Problem of Europeanism in Georgian Literature of the 1910s and 1920s

NIKOLEISHVILI AVTANDIL, PHD  
AKAKI TSERETELI STATE UNIVERSITY  
KUTAISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0006-3339-2778](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3339-2778)

## ABSTRACT

Georgia's relationship with the outside world has always been of particular importance for Georgian writers. This reality was shaped not only by the country's geographical position but also by the fact that, throughout much of its history, Georgia found itself surrounded by dominant imperial powers and became the target of their persistent aggression. Under these circumstances, Georgian rulers were repeatedly compelled to seek external support to preserve their statehood. Over the centuries, however, the accompanying hope of preserving national identity and political independence was interpreted differently by the leaders of various Georgian kingdoms and principalities on the one hand, and by Georgian patriots on the other. Specifically, most of these figures, including writers, directed their hopes primarily toward Europe. This orientation of Georgian writers was essentially determined by the fact that the historical development of Georgian literature was virtually inseparable from the significant events unfolding among European writers. Thus, the European creative world had become a powerful source of inner impulse for the leading Georgian writers, enriching Georgian literature with numerous innovations. In particular, the significant events in Georgia during the 1910s and 1920s further strengthened the pro-European outlook of most Georgian writers.

*Keywords:* Georgia, Europe, Asia, literature, history, Russia, orientation, independence

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## INTRODUCTION

In examining the issue outlined in the abstract of this study, the paper analyzes texts produced by Georgian writers of the 1910s and 1920s that primarily address Georgia's relationship with Europe. This relationship was generally interpreted in two main dimensions: the aspiration to establish stable political and state relations, and the effort to reinforce cultural and literary affinity. The perspectives expressed in these works were profoundly shaped by the significant historical developments of the time, Georgia's active struggle for independence, the recognition of the impracticality of sustained relations with the Russian Empire, the formation of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent occupation of Georgia by the renewed Russian imperial power. These political circumstances strongly influenced the literary output of Georgian writers of the period.

Georgian writers of this period approached the country's relationship with the outside world from several essential perspectives. One of the key factors shaping the development of modern Georgian literature was the growing influence of European literary movements of the time, most notably Symbolism (evident in the works of the Tsisperkantselebi [Blue Horns] and other contemporary authors), as well as Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, and others. The study of these influences later became a significant focus of Georgian literary criticism in the post-Soviet period. Since the primary aim of this essay is to analyze the pro-European perspectives of Georgian writers, our focus will be limited to texts from the 1910s and 1920s in which this issue becomes the central subject of reflection and imagination. Artistic and journalistic writings of the period demonstrate that Georgian authors articulated a range of perspectives regarding Georgia's political relations with the outside world and the literary innovations emerging in contemporary Europe. Despite these differences, the creative and journalistic discourse of most writers reveals a distinctly pro-European orientation, with European values occupying a prominent and often explicitly articulated place in their worldview. The assessment and understanding of this problem have reached such a scale in Georgian writing of the mentioned period that a comprehensive analysis of the material cannot be accommodated within a single journal article<sup>1</sup>. As is evident from the artistic and journalistic texts of the period, Georgian writers did not view the country's relationship with the outside world from a single, unified perspective. For the majority, Georgia's political future was closely tied to rapprochement and integration with Europe. A second group of writers argued that, because Georgia geographically lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the nation should continue to embrace this intermediary role. A third group maintained that, given its location, Georgia's future should be aligned primarily with the broader Asian regional space. In the aftermath of Russia's reconquest of Georgia and its incorporation into the Soviet Union, a fourth, forcefully articulated position emerged, one that regarded Georgia as an inseparable part of the Soviet (that is, Russian) political sphere. Regarding the research problem, several texts published by Georgian writers were reprinted in collected volumes such as *96 Essays, 1920s* (Khelaia, 1986) and *Europe or Asia?* (Khoperia, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> A more extensive discussion of this topic appears in the essay "Georgia and the Outside World through the Eyes of Georgian Writers (1910–1920s)", published in volume four of *Kartvelological studies* (Nikoleishvili, 2018, pp. 15–125).

## ***METHODS***

The research employs a multifaceted methodological approach integrating critical textual analysis, historicist principles, and interpretive analytical methods.

## ***RESULTS***

Analysis of the literary and journalistic texts produced by Georgian writers in the 1910s–1920s demonstrates that the authors evaluated Georgia's future in relation to significant international developments of the period and reflected on both the prospects for restoring state independence and the country's potential paths of development. While the writers of that period held different views on Georgia's future statehood, most regarded Georgia as an integral part of Europe and linked its political future and developmental trajectory to its continued, inseparable association with this part of the world. In the literary domain, a tendency to align with the modernist and avant-garde movements flourishing in European literature at the time was discernible in the works of several Georgian writers, albeit in forms adapted and transformed through the lens of national literary traditions.

## ***DISCUSSION***

As Georgia's long history of statehood demonstrates, the country's relationship with the outside world has always been of particular significance. This reality was shaped not only by Georgia's geographical position but also by the fact that, at nearly every stage of its history, the nation found itself encircled by dominant regional powers and subjected to their continual aggression. Under such circumstances, Georgian rulers were repeatedly compelled to seek external support to safeguard state independence.

Throughout this centuries-long search, the hope of preserving national identity and protecting state independence was understood differently by Georgia's political leaders and by its patriots. Although individual representatives of both groups attempted to secure national salvation through various strategies of political maneuvering with neighboring imperial powers, these efforts rarely produced the desired results. Support from abroad seldom extended beyond verbal sympathy, and Georgia's relationship with Europe, for the most part, remained confined to the reception and assimilation of its cultural, intellectual, and artistic achievements.

The aspiration toward rapprochement with the European literary world was particularly pronounced among Georgian writers in the 19th century. However, this should not be understood as an abandonment of their national roots. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the European literary world served as a powerful creative stimulus for leading Georgian writers of the period, enriching Georgian literature with numerous significant innovations.

From the Russian conquest of Georgia in 1801 until its restoration of independence in 1918, Georgia's relations with Europe were limited to cultural and educational channels mediated by Russia. During the short period of Georgia's restored independence from 1918 to 1921,

the situation changed significantly, and efforts to connect Georgia with Europe intensified.

Although the pursuit of a state-level connection with Europe effectively ceased after Georgia's re-occupation by Russia in 1921 and its incorporation into the Soviet Union, questions concerning European political orientation continued to attract the interest of several prominent Georgian writers into the late 1920s. From the 1930s onward, however, the drastic tightening of Soviet ideological control and the onset of mass repressions brought an end to this line of thought as well. As a result, Georgia's engagement with Europe became confined to narrowly regulated intellectual and cultural exchanges.

The pursuit of closer ties with Europe entered a fundamentally new phase after 1991, following the re-establishment of Georgia's state independence. Since then, successive governments have pursued policies to deepen political, economic, and cultural relations with Europe.

All of the above observations are particularly relevant in this context, as the question of Georgia's political and state orientation emerged as a central theme shaping the creative perspectives of Georgian writers. Following the restoration of Georgia's independence in 1918, this issue gained particular significance. Unfortunately, this chapter in the country's history lasted less than three years, and in February 1921, Georgia was occupied by Soviet Russia. Before that, however, debates over the political direction the newly independent state should pursue and the developmental path it ought to follow were both active and intense. Georgian writers of the period actively participated in these discussions, contributing their voices to the broader national dialogue.

Evidence from their writings indicates that most Georgian authors supported the necessity of pursuing a pro-European political orientation. They viewed alignment with Europe as essential not only for Georgia's statehood but also for the advancement of Georgian culture, literature, art, education, and broader intellectual development. This perspective can be illustrated through selected passages from authors who were particularly prominent in articulating such views.

One notable example is Mikheil Javakhishvili (1880-1937), whose pro-European outlook was manifested not only in his journalistic articles but also through his active practical work as a member of the governing bodies of the National Democratic Party. The writer, who was thoroughly versed in the essence of global events at the time, was deeply convinced that Georgia should permanently reject the Northern orientation and choose Western Europe as the central reference point for state development. He asserted that, unlike the previous era, the path of our country's state development "no longer went through Moscow and Petrograd, but cut across the Black Sea and passed over the Danube valley" (Javakhishvili, 2001, p. 569). The writer gave the following assessment to this kind of political-state vector shift towards Western Europe: "Enough of feeding on European culture sifted through Moscow and Petrograd. It contains more Mongol poison than the pure drink of the West" (Javakhishvili, 2001, p. 569).

Mikheil Javakhishvili's national, political, and state perspectives broadened in the articles he wrote between 1917 and 1921, following the collapse of the Russian Empire. Specifically, in his publications from that period, he uncompromisingly opposed the Russophile position of the Georgian Social Democrats and strongly condemned those who were, in the author's

words, “accustomed to someone else’s patronage” and still expected help from the North, even in the changed political situation. Dissatisfied with their stance, Javakhishvili once wrote with astonished indignation: “We could not internalize the obvious truth that we no longer have a ‘patron,’ and that instead of help and order from the North, we will inevitably face the wrath of God in the form of reaction and anarchy” (Javakhishvili, 2001, p. 570).

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (1893-1975) plays a particularly crucial role among the Georgian writers active in the 20th century, who contributed significantly to further establishing European values in Georgian reality. The writer, who was educated in Europe and thoroughly understood the essence of the events taking place there, was not only actively connected to contemporary European literary processes through his artistic work, but also actively sought to ensure that the Georgia of his time would become a more organic part of the European world.

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia’s positive attitude toward Europe led many contemporaries to regard him as an “apologist for European culture”. In his own words, he was not merely a writer and thinker oriented toward Europe; he actively sought to ensure that the future development of Georgian literature would be aligned with European cultural processes. His perspective was grounded in the conviction that, at that historical moment, the “only correct path” was the one charted by European culture, and that “without it, everything else belonged to the past and to a provincial world” (Gamsakhurdia, 1983, p. 438). Konstantine Gamsakhurdia asserted that, despite the fact that Georgia had been “severed from Europe” due to circumstances beyond its control, the “ideas from there often followed the airwaves, and the core of our newest literature was permeated by this general European spiritual mood” (Gamsakhurdia, 1983, p. 251).

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia emphasized that the inclusion of Georgian literature in the European space, as well as the beneficial influence of events there, was preceded by a relatively long period during which “Georgian literature was shaped by dominant Eastern cultural influences. There were Arabian, Persian, and Byzantine periods in Georgian literature. Aleksandre Chavchavadze ended the Persian influence. He also began the Russian cycle in Georgian literature. This cycle was ended by... Ilia Chavchavadze” (Gamsakhurdia, 1983, p. 418).

In Konstantine Gamsakhurdia’s opinion, a large number of writers who emerged on the literary arena in the 1900s and 1910s considered the main factor in the “renewal of the ancient tradition of Georgian literature” (the writer’s words) as closely linked to their efforts to introduce Symbolist, Impressionist, and Expressionist tendencies. Here is the assessment Konstantine Gamsakhurdia gave to this phenomenon in his 1922 article, *Impressionism or Expressionism*: “The Impressionist-Symbolist current came to Georgia through two paths. One through Russia, the other through Europe. Going to Europe was becoming commonplace. This was an unusual thing until now. However, the last five years of warfare completely severed Georgia from Europe” (Gamsakhurdia, 1983, p. 418).

According to K. Gamsakhurdia, the Georgian nation’s longstanding aspiration toward Europe, visible at nearly every stage of the country’s history, also implied a commitment to safeguarding the Christian faith from the “fanatical East”. For centuries, the Georgian

people fought continuous wars against enemies advancing predominantly from the East. Although they repeatedly appealed to Europe for assistance, usually in vain, Georgians nonetheless fought not only to defend a religious faith central to their national identity but also, to some extent, to shield Europe itself against eastern aggression.

For example, in his article *A Good European*, Gamsakhurdia offers the following assessment: “The tragedy of our history was our solitude. If there truly is a blind Moira in history, it was realized upon us. This joyless Moira assigned us such cultural-historical tasks in the East, to the realization of which we sacrificed our best energy and blood. Fate delivered us into the mouth of the fanatic East. The Georgian nation, a pioneer of Western Christian civilization, was crucified for the cross of Christ, and the Christian West practically never came to our aid. The Christian countries of the West also fought the East, but they always had a common front. Our kings and princes always called upon Europe, always looked for rescuers, and the response was only outlined in delicate epistles. Today, too, the Georgian race is alone” (Gamsakhurdia, 1985, p. 292).

Galaktion Tabidze (1891-1959) played a significant role in the “Europeanization” of 20th-century Georgian literature. He emerged as a poet who actively established European modernism through his creative work. From this perspective, his 1919 poetry collection *Artistic Flowers* (Tabidze, 1919) is particularly significant. According to many literary critics, it is the most innovative work in 20th-century Georgian poetry.

Galaktion Tabidze’s European perspective was manifested not only in his creative proximity to European literature but also in the critical attitude he displayed towards the negative phenomena in everyday life, including spiritual life, as a result of the powerful influence of the Asian factor. In the 1924 poem *We Are Asia*, for example, Tabidze expressed his critical stance toward the Asian world (Tabidze, 2005, p. 73):

Anger and hunger make us speak  
 We are Asia, we are Asia, we are uncultured.  
 And unculturedness is a dog, a huge dog,  
 Which is always snarling and biting.  
 No, it is even crueller than a rabid dog.  
 Nothing will be harmed if we kill it.  
 Let us go and kill the disgusting unculturedness.  
 They say we have a great capacity for patience.  
 What is patience? Show us some other capacity as well.  
 The capacity for work, the capacity for enlightenment, the capacity for feeling.  
 ... So, do away with the waste of the past, do away with the swamps,  
 Death to the merciless enemy of the masses - unculturedness.

Galaktion Tabidze was no exception. His critical attitude toward the Eastern (or Asian)

world and his active attempts to incorporate European literary innovations into Georgian literature were among the dominant trends in Georgian literature during the first third of the last century. From this point of view, the *Tsisperkantslebi* (*Blue Horns*)'s contribution to “aligning the Georgian verse with the European radius” (in the words of Titsian Tabidze) is particularly valuable. Although they were only partially able to realize their creative ambitions, the *Tsisperkantslebi* made a significant contribution to the establishment of new tendencies in Georgian literature.

In assessing their literary activity in this way, it is essential to note that the *Tsisperkantslebi* directed the developmental trajectory of Georgian literature toward Europe, thereby making European literary processes, together with national traditions, a central driving force in its evolution.

Their worldview is clearly evident in both poetic texts and essays and literary articles that reflect their artistic and aesthetic views. Despite the internal contradictions and dual approaches that sometimes characterize the thought expressing the creative credo of the *Tsisperkantslebi*, the main direction of their aesthetic perspective is, first and foremost, a clearly expressed European orientation.

For example, in the article *Translated Literature*, published in the first issue of the 1923 newspaper *Rubikoni*, Paolo Iashvili (1892-1937) noted with regret that, unlike the earlier centuries when “our ancestors read Plato in Georgian, and Greek philosophy had its own school among us”, the period of Georgian literature considered by many to be the age of revival is sinful “for being confined within ethnographic borders and for lagging behind European culture” (Iashvili, 1923).

Paolo Iashvili, as the head of the literary group he founded, considered their pro-European orientation to be the primary path to realizing the creative plans of the *Tsisperkantslebi*. He gave the following assessment to the process of renewal initiated by their entry into the literary arena: “Our thought was always directed toward the world arena of poetry... Within the limits of our ability, we conscientiously studied and worked on all the problems that exist today in the world poetry today” (Robakidze, 1920).

Other representatives of this group also gave such an ambitious assessment to the contribution of the *Tsisperkantslebi* in the process of establishing Europeanism in Georgian literature. Titsian Tabidze (1895–1937) articulated this view as follows: “Despite the fact that we were severed from reality and proved incapable of correctly comprehending social and political affairs, the new school of poets still played a great role against the background of the impoverished Georgian verse of that time. We were the first to introduce words into Georgian verse that had been banished or were never used at all. Real sonnets, tercets, and triolets were written for the first time. Rhyme was given a new scope. We used alliteration and assonance in a new way. The translations of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and other French and Russian poets expanded the scope of poetic themes and images. Georgian verse acquired a new sonority” (Tabidze, 1985, p.9).

As Titsian's statements clearly show, he considered *Tsisperkantslebi*'s most significant accomplishment to be their active effort to introduce European Modernist tendencies into Georgian literature.

For Tabidze, this pro-European orientation formed the foundation of his artistic and aesthetic worldview, leading him to fundamentally oppose, and even reject, the Asian world and its spiritual values. He openly and radically expressed this position in his Symbolist-period articles and poetic texts.

In this regard, his article *Manifesto to Asia*, published in the first issue of the newspaper *Barrikadi* in 1920, is of particular importance. In it, Titsian revealed his anti-Asian outlook with radicalism. Specifically, he gave a strongly critical assessment of Georgian writers' historical attitude towards Asia, conceiving the future of Georgian spiritual life as complete isolation from this world. Titsian Tabidze emphasized that, by expressing this opinion, he was not only revealing his personal position but also speaking on behalf of his entire creative group. He began and ended the aforementioned *Manifesto* with a call expressing this viewpoint. Specifically, he declared at the beginning: "The first thesis of the 'Blue Horns', Rejection of Asia". At the end, he wrote, "The first voice is the voice of fighter poets, the denial of Asia" (Robakidze, 1920, p. 2).

In Titsian's opinion, his attitude toward Asia stemmed from the belief that Georgia had been turned into its de facto part. At the same time, the doors connecting it to Europe remained so restricted that, despite centuries of attempts, it could not cross this threshold. Specifically, here is the assessment Titsian himself gave to this historical event in the aforementioned publication: "Georgia is never mentioned unless it is together with Asia.

Georgia exists on its own. The traditions of Asia are merely a nightmare... We abandoned all previous religions and approached the eunuch Byzantium. The nation, whose foot was set to cross immense Asia, could not fit into the worn-out measure of Byzantium. Its history is one magnificent revolt against Byzantium, which stood at the entrance of Europe's doors. The sea of Mongols, which surrounded Georgia, moved south across the Black Sea. The doors close forever. And Asia, that old and fat cretin, lay down upon Georgia" (Robakidze, 1920).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the anti-Asian perspective expressed by Titsian in the aforementioned fragment was the result of a subjective and unsubstantiated assessment of historical reality. The claim that this factor played only a negative role in Georgia's history is fundamentally wrong.

Titsian's markedly critical stance toward Asia was far from incidental, a point reinforced by several of his other writings. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is his article *Irony and Cynicism*, published in issues IX–X of *Dreaming Ibexes* in 1923, in which he not only elaborated further on his anti-Asian perspective but also addressed the question of integrating Georgian literature into the "radius of Europe". Titsian argued that nineteenth-century Georgian literature "reminds us of the song of a man sitting in a jar. The whole tragedy of Georgian poetry was that the poets lagged behind the native primitive, and the radius of Europe always bypassed Tiflis [Tbilisi]" (Tabidze, 1923, p. 6).

The primary purpose of such an assessment of the works of 19th-century Georgian writers (including Ilia and Akaki), which occupied an essential place in Titsian's Symbolist thought, was motivated by the ambitious desire to glorify the role that, in the poet's opinion, the representatives of the *Tsisperkantslebi* literary group were playing in the process

of aligning Georgian literature with the “European radius”. For example, Titsian asserted that it was primarily they who “first and consciously rejected the theory of the synthesis of Asia and Europe. Grigol Robakidze proved that any talk of Asian influence in Georgia was impossible. Here, the influence was not that of the Mongols and other conquering nations, but of complete destruction... This national decadence has persisted in us to this day. The Georgian verse and the Georgian word fell into the hands of the *Tsisperkantslebi* like a burnt-out firebrand. And a real miracle was needed for the verse to become a verse and for the primacy of form and idea to arise” (Tabidze, 1923, p. 6).

In addition to the subjective assessment of the historical development of Georgian literature and the creative role of the *Tsisperkantslebi* in the cited fragment, Titsian provided an incorrect interpretation of Grigol Robakidze’s views. Titsian noted that Robakidze had a similarly dismissive attitude toward the Eastern world, but this is not the case. In reality, this is not the case because Robakidze believed that historically, both Western and Eastern tendencies were strongly manifested in Georgian literature.

It is also important to note that, in the early phase of his creative career, Titsian Tabidze did not maintain a consistent position on this issue. In particular, in some of his publications of that time, he connected the path of Georgian literature’s development not only to European literary processes but also to the Eastern poetic values that he himself fundamentally rejected. For example, in the poem *From the Book “Cities of Chaldea”*, written in 1916, Titsian defined the factors that became the foundation of his own poetic individuality as follows (Tabidze, 1985, p.77):

I put Hafiz’s rose in Proudhon’s vase,  
I plant Baudelaire’s evil flowers in Besiki’s garden...

As the cited lines indicate, Titsian considered his main achievement to be his successful merging of European modernism, implied by the name of the famous French modernist poet Proudhon (or Prud’homme/Prudhon), and classical Persian verse, mentioned by the name of Hafez, the famous 14th-century Persian poet, into Georgian poetry (*Besiki’s garden*, in his words).

In discussing the worldview of pro-Western Georgian writers, particular attention should be given to an article by Geronti Kikodze (1886-1960) published in 1916 in issue No. 279 of the newspaper *Sakartvelo*, titled *The Gates of the West*. In the article, Kikodze argued that the only desirable path for the development of Georgian literature was its integration into the European literary space.

Geronti Kikodze asserted that the Eastern world played a significant role in the development of Georgian spiritual culture, but only in the past. At that time, “Persian, Arabian, Syrian, and Byzantine cultures flourished in the East, while Western Europe was sparsely populated. However, for a long time now, the world’s focus has shifted toward the West, with Western Europe serving as the primary source of contemporary intellectual and cultural vitality. Therefore, opening the gates to the West is paramount for any self-aware, active nation. Otherwise, its hearth will cool and its name will freeze” (Kikodze, 1916).

“This viewpoint was further reinforced by Kikodze’s interpretation of contemporary Georgian realities. As a result, he provided an overly biased assessment of Georgia’s creative heritage: “If we lacked cultural ideas until now, it was because unavoidable natural and social barriers were erected between our country and Western Europe” (Kikodze, 1916).

Alongside his affirmative stance toward Western European cultural values and his sharply critical attitude toward the Eastern world, Geronti Kikodze was equally severe toward authors with Slavophile orientations, evaluating the incorporation of Georgian as lacking meaningful future prospects. He attributed this to what he considered a fundamental circumstance: that “Slavic culture”, as an independent and fully “established type”, did not exist, and that the Slavs had merely “more or less assimilated elements of the great Western European culture”. As for the “Slavic tribes” themselves, Kikodze argued that Russians did not occupy a leading position even among them; in his view, the Poles and Czechs were more advanced in this regard, while Russia was a “half-European, half-Asian country that carried divisive forces within its very essence from the outset” (Kikodze, 1916).

Based on all of the above, Geronti Kikodze believed that the only path forward for Georgian culture was to establish closer ties with the Western world. He declared: “We must open the doors to the West wide so that European ideas can flow in abundantly”. Kikodze believed this was the only way for the Georgian nation to “enter the broad cultural arena and escape the narrow, damp cell where it was imprisoned” (Kikodze, 1916).

Although some of Geronti Kikodze’s opinions are the result of a biased assessment of events rather than an objective discussion and analysis of reality, the main point of his article, that a pro-Western orientation is the path forward for Georgia’s spiritual culture, aligns with the national perspective of that period and the view of a large part of contemporary Georgian society.

When discussing the pro-European views of Georgian writers active during the period under review, particular attention should also be paid to Grigol Robakidze (1880–1962). Notably, unlike in his earlier publications, where he regarded Georgian culture as the product of a synthesis between Eastern and Western elements, his speech, published in the first issue of the newspaper *Barricade* in 1920, delivered on behalf of Georgian writers during a meeting with a European socialist delegation, reveals a nuanced shift. Although the pro-Eastern orientation evident in his previous works is toned down, Robakidze nevertheless reaffirms the special role of the Eastern world in Georgia’s historical development. To clarify Robakidze’s perspective, the following passage from this address to the European guests is instructive: “For two thousand years, Georgians, by nature, have been waiting for you: the chosen children of the West.

We lived in the hot heart of Asia Minor, and, weary from the sun, we felt our drowsy gods in the burnt stones. The Eastern vision was alight within us. But we could not endure the lustfulness of the great midday of the East and rushed toward the North. We passed through the hot fields of Chaldea and took refuge on the slopes of the Caucasus... and, having forsaken the East, we yearned toward the West. Every stroke of our creativity is etched with this yearning” (Robakidze, 1920).

Grigol Robakidze argued that this dual orientation of the Georgian people was fundamentally shaped by what he called “the tragedy of geography”, a condition that placed Georgia in a suspended state, “separated from the East, yet unable to fully enter the West”. In Robakidze’s view, after centuries of enduring the consequences of this liminal position, and given the transformed circumstances of his own era, the Georgian people ultimately oriented their future not toward the East but toward Europe.

## CONCLUSION

As the foregoing analysis of artistic and journalistic texts from the 1910s and 1920s demonstrates, many Georgian writers of the period made significant contributions to bringing both the country and its literature closer to the European world. This tendency gained particular momentum following the restoration of Georgia’s independence on May 26, 1918. Although this trajectory was fundamentally disrupted by the Soviet occupation of Georgia in February 1921, the Europeanization of Georgian literature continued for a brief period thereafter. Soon, however, the dictatorial policies of the Soviet regime severely restricted not only Georgia’s political relations with Europe but also its cultural and literary connections, effectively halting the European-oriented development that had begun in the preceding years.

This governmental policy became particularly severe beginning in the 1930s and persisted until the 1980s. In the 1980s, however, the rise of National Liberation Movements within several of the so-called fraternal republics of the Soviet Union, most prominently in Georgia, set in motion a process that ultimately culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the restoration of Georgia’s state independence in 1991. With independence, the aspiration for firm integration into the European space, now accompanied by a pronounced pro-American orientation, became a priority direction for Georgia’s political, economic, and cultural-educational development. Georgian writers’ sustained engagement with the question of the nation’s relationship with the outside world was largely shaped by the country’s geographical location and the historical reality that, at nearly every stage of its past, Georgia was surrounded by powerful imperial states and frequently became the target of their aggression. The perspectives expressed in Georgian literature of the period under analysis regarding this issue may be conditionally grouped into the following main directions:

The representatives of the most widespread view (Galaktion Tabidze, Mikheil Javakhishvili, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, Grigol Robakidze, the *Tsisperkantslebi*, Niko Lordkipanidze, and Geronti Kikodze) actively supported the implementation of a pro-European policy. This policy was expected to establish Georgia as an integral part of the European world. They believed that this path was the primary means to preserve Georgia’s state independence and defeat its hostile environment. For the vast majority of Georgian writers, an important factor reinforcing the pro-European view was the belief that closer rapprochement with European spiritual values and creative processes would provide a powerful internal impetus for Georgian literature and establish new tendencies. Along with literary traditions, the restoration of Georgia’s state independence was a key factor in shaping its perspective.

In contrast, some individual representatives of Georgian literature did not share this perspective and linked the prospects for the country's future development not primarily to political factors, but instead to spiritual and cultural processes and to the strengthening of ties with the Eastern world. According to these writers, the internal impulses that had shaped the evolution of Georgian literature historically were drawn not only from Europe but also from the East; therefore, in their view, its future development should continue along this dual trajectory. For them, Georgian literature, and by extension, Georgian cultural identity, should not be cut off from either the European sphere or the Eastern world.

Unlike the proponents of the aforementioned perspectives, a third group of Georgian writers categorically distanced themselves from both positions. They regarded rapprochement with the Asian world as the most promising direction for developing Georgia's spiritual culture, including its literature.

Following the Soviet occupation and Georgia's incorporation into the Soviet Union, the ideologically oriented segment of Georgian writers embraced a sharply pronounced pro-Russian orientation as an alternative to these earlier views. It came to perceive Georgia's future as inseparable from Russia.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Types of Hunting in Medieval Georgia

*MACHARASHVILI TRISTAN, PHD*

*THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA*

*TAMAZ BERADZE INSTITUTE OF GEORGIAN STUDIES*

*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

ORCID: [0009-0005-4367-8385](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4367-8385)

## ABSTRACT

In medieval Georgia, hunting was regulated by the state. The planning of a hunting session called ‘hunting campaign’ was overseen by a board of the military department. In contrast, all matters related to ‘royal hunting’ were managed by a special unit with a large staff. Initially, this unit was led by a chief royal huntsman, and later by a chief falconer, whose rights and duties were strictly defined. Two types of hunting are recognized in Georgian historiography: “state hunting” and “common hunting”. Additionally, a third type can be identified – “royal hunting”. In feudal Georgia, the term “hunting campaign” referred to large-scale hunts organized by a king or a feudal lord. The entire population capable of using weapons participated in these hunts. It closely resembled a military campaign, and kings themselves viewed hunting in this way, resulting in similar treatment of campaigns and hunts in court regulations. Participation in state hunting was seen as an expression of vassal loyalty to the lord. This duty was referred to as “campaign-hunting” in Georgia. “Royal hunting” refers to the form of hunting where the king’s hunters, under the direction of the chief huntsman, would hunt and supply the court with prey. There was a special office within the court dedicated to this task. In the 14th century, 260 houses of the king’s hunters were spread across the country, all of which were subordinate to the chief huntsman. Throughout the year, these hunters primarily resided either at the court or in special palaces arranged on the king’s designated “hunting sites”, where they were responsible for providing the court with game. “Common hunting” refers to hunting practiced by representatives of the lower classes, typically targeting small animals and birds. While this form of hunting was not prohibited, it often required obtaining a hunting “permit,” which was granted upon payment of a special hunting tax known as the “lord’s tax.”

*Keywords:* Hunting, chief huntsman, royal hunting, hunting campaign, lord’s tax

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## INTRODUCTION

In Georgian historiography, medieval Georgian hunting practices are generally divided into “state hunting,” also referred to as the “hunting campaign,” and “common hunting.” This study seeks to identify an additional form of hunting, “royal hunting.” This distinction is particularly emphasized in K. Chkhatarashvili’s work *“Essays on the History of Military Affairs in Feudal Georgia.”* Accordingly, this discussion primarily relies on that work.

In Georgian historiography, Ivane Javakhishvili was the first to take an interest in hunting. Drawing on the *Regulations of the Royal Court*, he described the roles of the chief huntsman and rangers. Javakhishvili suggested that in feudal Georgia, hunting was viewed as “a certain kind of military and campaign training, where the human eye and hand became accustomed to skilful shooting, enduring hardships, and brisk action” (Javakhishvili, 1982, pp. 323-324). M. Tsursumia concurs with this opinion, noting that “in medieval times, hunting was a kind of ‘school of war.’ While hunting, participants not only became physically tougher but also tested weapons in real situations. They learned how to use weapons (especially the bow) and developed skills in interaction and communication with others” (Tsursumia, 2016, pp. 94-95).

A. Robakidze’s work *Vestiges of Collective Hunting in Racha* holds significant value in the study of hunting. The author provides a brief overview of the history of hunting in Georgia and the natural environment in which it occurred. He investigates the material aspects of hunting, focusing on clothing, armament, traps, and other related items. Robakidze also discusses the organization of hunting and its significance for sport and education. Furthermore, the researcher emphasizes the connection between hunting and military affairs, viewing hunting as a state obligation (Robakidze, 1941, pp. 148-151).

In his works *On the History of Georgian State and Law* and *State Taxes in the Kingdom of Kartli at the Beginning of the 18th Century*, I. Surguladze suggests that “in feudal times, hunting was an activity of the ruling class, with both military and household/domestic significance.”

K. Chkhatarashvili dedicated a special chapter to the study of the history of hunting in his work *Essays on the History of Military Affairs in Feudal Georgia*. In this chapter, he highlights the place and role of hunting as both a vassal duty and a military activity, examining its significance in the organization of military affairs in a feudal state.

In the study of hunting in Georgia, significant contributions have also been made by N. Shoshitaishvili, R. Gujejiani, S. Chanturishvili, M. Tsursumia, E. Bzarashvili, A. Nari-manishvili, Z. Kinkladze, and others.

## METHODS

The study relies on research methods widely accepted in historical scholarship, including content analysis of sources, the historical-comparative method, critical reflection on empirical material, and analysis and collation.

## RESULTS

In medieval Georgia, hunting was under state control. The organization of the ‘hunting campaign’ was supervised by the military body, while all matters related to royal hunting were managed by a special unit with a large staff. This unit was initially headed by the chief huntsman and later by the chief falconer, whose duties were clearly defined.

Two types of hunting are recognized in Georgian historiography: “state hunting” and “common hunting”. Additionally, a third type can be identified – “royal hunting”.

“Royal hunting” refers to the practice in which the king’s hunters, under the direction of the chief huntsman, would hunt and supply the court with prey.

## DISCUSSION

In Georgia, as in medieval Western Europe, state hunting, or the “hunting campaign,” was distinctly separated from “common hunting.” Additionally, another type can be identified, “royal hunting.”

In medieval Georgia, the planning of the “hunting campaign” was overseen by the board of the military department (Chkhatarashvili, 1979, p. 157). Meanwhile, all matters related to “royal hunting” were managed by a special unit with a large staff, headed by a chief royal huntsman, whose rights and duties were strictly defined (Dolidze, 1965, p. 302).

In feudal Georgia, the term “hunting campaign” referred to large-scale hunts organized by the king or a feudal lord. Participation was open to people from across the country who were eligible to bear arms. The preparation for hunting closely resembled that of a military campaign. Kings viewed hunting as a form of campaign, and the court regulations treated both military campaigns and hunting affairs similarly: gathering the army, dividing it into units, marching the army before the hunt, and so on (Surguladze, 1952a, p. 342).

As a rule, participants went hunting armed as if preparing for a campaign. Basil, the royal housekeeper, notes that when border guards informed Queen Tamar of the need for a military campaign while she was away hunting, she permitted them to depart and immediately dispatched them to war (Kaukhchishvili, 1959, p. 130). This account indicates that the campaigners were fully prepared for battle and would proceed directly to war without delay.

Pridon’s hunts in *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* serve as a clear example of a hunting campaign. His entire army participates in the hunt; they lay siege to a field, and Pridon climbs a hill in the field with forty archers, from where they shoot at the game (Rustaveli, 1938, p.178).

Archangelo Lamberti provides a detailed description of state hunting in the Odishi Principality. Although this account dates from the first half of the 17th century, the rules of hunting are likely to have been similar in earlier centuries as well: “The ruler invites all the nobles of Odishi, who arrive for the occasion mounted on the finest horses and dressed in their best attire. The day before, they bang drums, and all the hunters gather, heading into the woods

with their dogs to lay siege. They frighten the game with noise and the barking of the dogs, driving it far from the designated hunting site... On the following day, the chief huntsman assigns positions to the hunters, who wait for the driven game with bow and arrow... When the game approaches, each hunter gallops forward, draws the bowstring, and shoots an arrow... This is how they hunt until evening.” (Lamberti, 1938, p. 59; Chkhatarashvili, 1979, p. 160).

The “hunting campaign” was a vassalage duty, and all campaigners, regardless of their rank or title, were obliged to participate. Given its significance, the king never excused anyone from this obligation, except for the elderly and those physically incapable of participating. Failure to participate in the state hunt was equated with avoiding a military campaign and was regarded as desertion, a punishable offense (Chkhatarashvili, 1979, p. 157).

Throughout the Middle Ages, the population of Georgia was required to participate in hunting. The letter laying out the Shiomghvime tax, compiled between 893 and 918, states: “One day each year is designated for hunting, with the tax being two dishes, two loaves of bread, and two jugs of wine per person” (Dolidze, 1965, p. 4). Once a year, during the hunt, the village was obligated to provide the hunters with the food and drink specified in the document. Additionally, participation in the hunt was mandatory, as stated in the 1562 deed of King Alexander: “All of the young men from Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti are obliged to accompany you both in campaigns and hunting” (Dolidze, 1965, p. 191). The compulsory participation in the hunt, viewed as a form of tax, remained common in Georgia for the following centuries as well.

As noted in Georgian historiography (Chkhatarashvili and others), alongside Rustaveli and Archangelo Lamberti, the hunting campaign is also described in the *Rusudaniani* and in the works of Parsadan Gorgijanidze, Archil, Peshangi Khitarishvili, Vakhtang VI, Teimuraz II, Sekhnia Chkheidze, Papuna Orbeliani, and Vakhtang Batonishvili.

The hunting campaign was no longer organized after the reign of Teimuraz II (Batonishvili, 1914, p. 9). K. Chkhatarashvili attributes this to the obsolescence of the feudal army and the emergence of the concept of a regular army. In fact, with the creation of a standing army, regular training began, and as a result, the hunting campaign lost its previous significance.

State hunting was widely popular in Western Europe and some countries of the East, where kings and great lords organized hunts that resembled military events – a campaign. Such hunts often lasted for days or weeks. “Everywhere, in Europe and in the Far East, hunting and military affairs were inseparable” (Tsurtsunia, 2016, p. 95). Participation in hunting was an expression of the vassalage relationship with the patron. In Georgia, this duty was referred to as “campaign hunting.” When King Alexander II of Imereti subordinated the lords of Samegrelo and Guria, he obliged them to participate in state hunts alongside military campaigns: “He subordinated the Dadianis, Gurielis, and other nobles, to serve him in campaigns, hunts, and other services” (Vakhushti, 1973, p. 807). This account indicates that, in addition to participating in military campaigns, the lord was also required to take part in hunting. Avoiding this duty was seen as a denial of the king’s sovereignty and authority.

Participation in the state hunt was also mandatory for church serfs, who were often exempt from other state obligations and taxes. King Alexander’s book of obligations for the

Mtskheta division, dated to the 16th century, states that the Catholicosate serfs were required to accompany the Catholicos and stand under the king's flag during both campaigns and hunting (Dolidze, 1965, p. 191). The same is mentioned in the Svetitskhoveli deed of Alexander II, which specifies that church serfs were exempt from all duties except for participating in campaign hunting and watching the enemy (Dolidze, 1965, p. 201).

State hunts were often organized in honour of distinguished guests. Hunting played an important role during the visits of foreign ambassadors. For instance, Queen Tamar arranged a hunting session specifically to honour Mutafradin (Kaukhchishvili, 1959, p. 429) and Sharvanshah (Kaukhchishvili, 1959, p. 420).

“Royal hunting” refers to a form of hunting in which, at the order of the chief huntsman, the king's hunters would hunt and supply the court with game. Game meat formed an important part of the royal court's menu and was provided regularly. Consequently, the organization of the royal hunt was the responsibility of the chief huntsman.

The organization of the hunting unit is outlined in the *Regulations of the Royal Court* (Dolidze, 1965, pp. 80, 88). The position of the head of the unit, the chief huntsman, was highly respected and came with special privileges. During the New Year ceremony, the chief huntsman had the exclusive right to dress the king: “No one else can dress the king except for him” (Surguladze, 1970, p. 32). The chief huntsman would cover the king's head and neck with a yellow cloak and place a tall, tight upon him (Dolidze, 1965, p. 80).

Based on the account from the *Regulations of the Royal Court*, which states, “they were seated on a tall chair in front of the wine cellar, and a table with a boiled boar's head on it was placed in front of them” (Surguladze, 1970, p. 32), some Georgian historians (Chkhartaishvili, 1979, p. 173, and others) suggest that the chief huntsman occupied a prominent place at the New Year table – seated in front of the wine cellar, at the head of the table. However, the tall chair in front of the wine cellar was actually designated for the king, not for the huntsman. The huntsman would take a piece of barbeque from the table, return to the king, and ask where he would like the hunters to go the following day. After receiving the king's instructions and drinking a glass of wine offered by him, the huntsman would eat the meat, drink the wine, and only then take his seat (Dolidze, 1965, p. 80). It turns out that the table was placed for the king, rather than for the huntsman, who was assigned a seat elsewhere. However, the huntsman's role at the New Year table was distinct. Rangers and the king's hunters occupied seats near the chief huntsman, indicating their special position. It was during this time that they were registered to confirm whether all had arrived to serve the king. The royal hunts were always organized in connection with the New Year's celebration. According to the *Regulations of the Royal Court*, at the New Year's feast, the chief huntsman would ask where to hunt the following day, and the king would indicate his preferred location (Dolidze, 1965, p. 80).

In Georgia, accounts about the king's hunters have been preserved both in historical sources and through oral tradition. The earliest account that has reached us dates from the 12th century: “Our hunters are not allowed to stay in any other village, as our father Demetre secured the village of Kanda from the Shio Mghvime Monastery to serve as the hunters’

encampment. Instead, we will provide the monastery with other territories. The village of Kanda is where the hunters' encampment is located.“ (Dolidze, 1965, p. 23). As it appears from the deed, hunters had been present with King Demetre I even earlier. The village of Kanda served as the accommodation for hunters. It should be presumed that such hunters existed in early medieval times as well.

In the 14th century, the chief huntsman was responsible for 260 houses of royal hunters across the country: “there are hunters in Kakheti and Imereti, a total of 260 houses” (Dolidze, 1965, p. 88). These were professional hunters, and the fact that they are mentioned separately highlights the special necessity of their occupation, which they were paid for from the state budget (wages): “They were paid three tetri each upon release and, in addition, were given six skins on Meat Sunday” (Dolidze, 1965, p. 88). They were also entitled to a share of the obligatory payment, which took the form of a tax.

According to I. Javakhishvili, “Kakheti and Imereti were famous for their hunting areas... hunters were chosen from these two regions” (Javakhishvili, 1982, p. 323). However, this likely refers to the entire country, as Kartli also had equally rich hunting grounds. David's chronicler notes: “The river-bank groves of Kartli were full of deer and boars” (Kaukhchishvili, 1955, pp. 324-325). In fact, it was not just the groves that were renowned for their abundance of game in Kartli; other such sites likely existed as well.

The king's hunters held the title of servant-campaigners and “were not involved in farming: hunting requires special knowledge and skills, and it continues throughout the year.” As a result, they would not have had time for agricultural work, although their family members would have been occupied with household tasks. Hunters served kings or feudal lords personally. The position of hunter, along with their estate, was passed down to their successors, and they were exempt from agriculture-related taxes. K. Chkhatarashvili suggests that they were subject to a special, distinct judicial procedure – due to their status and their close relationship with the ruler, the price of life for hunters and other officials in this role would have been high (Chkhatarashvili, 1979, pp. 180, 183).

At the order of the chief huntsman, the king's hunters would gather at the royal court annually, in late fall, on the day of St. George (November 23) and remain there until spring, until the first Saturday of Lent. During this time, they likely went hunting, particularly after the Christmas celebration, once the fast had ended. In addition to hunting, the hunters were occupied with taking care of the dogs and other related tasks. They were provided with food and were given the skins of the game killed at the royal court. On St. Theodore's Day (the first Sunday of Lent), “they were paid three tetri each upon release and, in addition, were given six skins on Meat Sunday.”

Before leaving the palace, the hunters would register and distribute the dogs. “A clerk would set aside three or four dogs for the king. Then, they would select one – either a Berdzuli or a greyhound. Twelve dogs would be assigned to three hunters for feeding, and another twelve to three other hunters. Afterward, the hunters would be released from the palace.” (Dolidze, 1965, pp. 88-89).

The document does not specify the total number of dogs or their ownership. However, one thing is clear: the clerk would select three or four of the best dogs for the king, keeping one for himself as payment for his services, while six hunters were allotted twenty-four dogs to care for. It is likely that the overall number of dogs was much higher, but the ownership and caretakers of the remaining dogs remain unclear. Furthermore, the purpose of the dogs selected for the king is intriguing. Since no hunters remained at the court to use them, it is likely these dogs were assigned to guard the entrance.

Before leaving, on the Monday after St. Theodore's Day, before dawn, hunters would present "lamps" to the king, queen, their children, viziers, and treasurers. In return, the king, queen, viziers, and other officials would offer them bread, wine, and meat. The hunters would then approach the official in charge of gifts and wine (Dolidze, 1965, p. 89). If they were hosted correctly, the hunters would not offend the official; however, in other cases, they would not hesitate to swear at them (Dolidze, 1965, p. 89).

Afterward, the hunters performed a round dance and concluded the farewell ceremony with a feast. The feast does not appear to have been held at the royal court; it was likely arranged at a specially designated location, where the "offering" was transferred. Royal hunters probably went from the court to special accommodations arranged for them near the palace.

"Such palaces were built at royal hunting grounds, and kings stayed there during the hunting season." Fenced hunting areas, known as *philopats*, were located near these palaces (Kaukhchishvili, 1955, p. 64). There was also a designated area for gathering the game. The *Vita* of Serapion of Zarzma mentions that when Serapion inquires about a woody and rocky site, his guide responds: "This is a place for gathering the game, and it is called *bakta* (a compound for carts)" (Chanturishvili, 2011, pp. 70-73).

The king's hunters, hunting dogs, and birds of prey were provided with food by the population of the villages allocated to the hunting palaces. Kanda was one such village. However, it seems that hunters also stayed in other villages, which is why the king specifically emphasized that they were to stay at Kanda, where their accommodations were, rather than in other villages (Dolidze, 1965, p. 23). This indicates that the king found it necessary to explicitly instruct the hunters to remain at the designated locations, rather than at other places. It suggests that the hunters were quite insolent, as further evidenced by the Regulations of the Royal Court. In particular, during the court farewell ceremony, when performing the round dance, officers who failed to make offerings were cursed and sworn at: "Those who have not made offerings are sworn at" (Dolidze, 1965, p. 89).

The king's hunters played a crucial role in the hunting campaign, as they were professionals always ready to perform any task related to hunting. However, their primary duty was to provide the royal court with game. Extensive accounts in the *Regulations of the Royal Court* clearly demonstrate that having the king's hunters at the court was considered essential.

State hunting ("hunting campaign") and "royal hunting" can be considered forms of "high hunting." At the same time, in earlier times, so-called "common hunting," as well as hunting with traps and hawks, was also very popular in Georgia.

A similar situation existed in other countries: common, or lowly, hunting was reserved for the lower classes. Anyone could hunt small animals and birds, although complete bans on hunting were also frequently imposed.

Apparently, in Georgia, the appropriation of hunting areas and the prohibition of free hunting began in the 10th century. Basil of Zarzma describes an incident in which Giorgi Chorchaneli, while hunting in the Tskhrocha woods, was surprised to see smoke rising from the forest and remarked, “Who dares hunt for the game?” (Abuladze, 1963, p. 325). This suggests that no one was allowed to hunt in his domain without permission.

According to the same Basil of Zarzma, at the time, favorable hunting grounds on the territory adjacent to Goderdzi Pass were in common ownership, and everyone could go hunting there: ...because at the time, hunters gathered here from various estates and villages.” (Abuladze, 1963, p. 325).

According to Archangelo Lamberti, in Samegrelo, “hunting woods are distributed in such a way that each lord has their own hunting grounds, where no one can hunt without their permission. Even though the lord is the ruler of all, he himself cannot hunt in others’ lands, as he has established a strict law prohibiting hunting in his own woods, and no one dares to break the law.”

A special payment – the “hunting tax” or “lord’s tax” – was introduced to obtain permission for hunting in protected hunting grounds. In Imereti and Guria, lords did not forbid their serfs from hunting and fishing on their estates, but the peasants were required to give a portion of their catch to their ruler. The right to hunt in church woods was owned by the church, but peasants belonging to the church were allowed to hunt in these woods for a certain payment (Chkhataraisvili, 1979, pp. 190-191).

In Western Europe, breaking hunting regulations was strictly punishable: offenders could be executed or have a hand amputated, among other penalties. However, there are no accounts of such punishments in Georgia, and it is likely that cases were resolved through fines, either in products or money. Compensation through labour cannot be excluded either.

In feudal Georgia, hunting was an auxiliary branch of the economy and, in the 11th -15th centuries, it served as a significant means of subsistence for the population.

The meat of the game was primarily consumed raw, but curing was also standard, especially in the highlands. The meat of mountain goats, Alpine chamois, deer, wild boar, and other animals and birds was typically cured.

In addition to its role as an auxiliary food source, game meat served various purposes after being processed. Bear skins were used to line mattresses or cover other items, while bear fat was applied to grease weapons and treat scabies. Gall mixed with water was used to treat gastrointestinal diseases. Scabies was also cured with wolf fat. The smoked and dried gullet of a wolf was used as a remedy for swine plague. Knife and sword handles, as well as drinking vessels, were made from the horns of the prey. According to Vakhushti, similar to the population of Mtiuleti, the people of Gudamakari made bows from the horns of mountain goats and oxen (Vakhushti, 1973, p. 354; Robakidze, 1941, p. 142).

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus, in medieval Georgia, hunting was under state control. The organization of the ‘hunting campaign’ was supervised by the military body. In contrast, all matters related to royal hunting were managed by a special unit with a large staff, initially headed by the chief huntsman and later by the chief falconer, whose duties were clearly defined.

Participation in state hunting was seen as an expression of vassal loyalty to the lord. This duty was referred to as “campaign-hunting” in Georgia.

Two types of hunting are recognized in Georgian historiography: “state hunting” and “common hunting”. Additionally, a third type can be identified – “royal hunting”.

In feudal Georgia, the term “hunting campaign” referred to large-scale hunts organized by a king or a feudal lord. The entire population capable of bearing arms participated in these hunts. It closely resembled a military campaign, with kings viewing hunting as such, and both campaigns and hunts being treated similarly in court regulations.

“Royal hunting” refers to the practice where the king’s hunters, under the direction of the chief huntsman, would hunt and supply the court with prey. There was a special office within the court dedicated to this task. In the 14th century, 260 households of the king’s hunters were distributed across the country, all subordinate to the chief huntsman. Throughout the year, these hunters primarily resided either at the court or in special palaces arranged on the king’s designated “hunting sites”, where they were responsible for providing the court with game meat.

“Common hunting” refers to hunting practiced by the lower classes, typically targeting small animals and birds. While this form of hunting was not prohibited, it often required obtaining a hunting “permit,” which was granted upon payment of a special hunting tax known as the “lord’s tax.”

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## LEGAL HISTORY

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# Spravedlivost' or Samartlianoba: Language & the Reformed Courts in Georgia

SADLEIR WILLIAM TYSON, PHD CANDIDATE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
COLUMBIA, USA

ORCID: [0009-0003-3360-9728](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3360-9728)

### ABSTRACT

This essay explores the challenges of prosecuting crime in the borderlands of the Russian Empire, focusing on the Georgian provinces in the wake of the 1864 Judicial Reform. The requirement that all legal proceedings be conducted in Russian created significant obstacles to the administration of justice, as linguistic barriers hindered the effective evaluation of evidence and judicial decision-making. Georgian jurists, serving as investigators, lawyers, and judges, grappled with these complexities, advocating for solutions rooted in positivist legal principles. Though their efforts did not result in legislative change, their engagement with the legal system reflected an assertion of professional authority and a claim to judicial institutions within the empire.

*Keywords:* Russian Empire, Georgian legal history, criminal procedure, language

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## INTRODUCTION

*“What help could be expected from the courts in which one’s own language was forbidden and people, thanks to their ignorance of a foreign language, fell into the clutches of every thief and rascal.”*

- Akaki Tsereteli

In the October 1896 issue of the *Journal of the Ministry of Justice*, the Georgian jurist M.E. Gegidze recounted the story of a certain inhabitant of the mountainous region of Svaneti on trial in the Kutaisi Circuit Court, one of two circuit courts in the Georgian provinces of the Russian empire in the post-reform period. Gegidze does not provide the details of the individual or the criminal charge, but as the proceedings against him began, it became apparent that the Svan defendant understood only his native Svanetian. The one other individual in the courtroom with proficiency in Svanetian was an Abkhaz man, who knew only Svanetian and Abkhazian. A Mingrelian who knew Abkhazian was, therefore, engaged by the court, but he knew neither Georgian nor Russian. Finally, a Georgian-speaking Mingrelian was hurried into the courtroom to assist. Thus, at court, the Svan defendant gave testimony to the Abkhaz, who relayed it to the Mingrelian, who relayed it to the second Mingrelian, who relayed it to the Georgian interpreter, who finally rendered it to the judge in Russian (Gegidze, 1896, p.52).

This story illustrates an imperial problem understudied in the literature on legal reform in the Russian empire, namely, the problem of language in the administration of criminal justice in the post-reform Russian courts. At the same time, the story is significant for what it reveals of the role non-Russian jurists played in the discussion of Russian imperial law in the late nineteenth century. In the South Caucasus, Georgian jurists, such as Gegidze, were active participants in debates about judicial practice, and their position as both judicial official and indigenous inhabitant gave them particular insight into the operation of the new judiciary in the region.

Prosecuting crime in the borderlands of the Russian empire came with distinctive complexities in the post-reform era. The physical, linguistic, and cultural specificities of imperial environments regularly vexed Russian judicial personnel and bedeviled their efforts to administer justice according to the principles of criminal procedure enshrined in the Judicial Reform of Alexander II (1864). At the same time, local populations were often frustrated by what they perceived as a miscarriage of justice through the state’s inept handling of criminal evidence (Daly, 2000, p.360). In no region was this more apparent than in the Georgian provinces, where the Judicial Reform was enacted with numerous alterations. An especially problematic requirement of the new courts stated that all legal proceedings must be conducted in the Russian language. As few indigenous peoples spoke Russian and even fewer Russians understood the local languages, this requirement often thwarted Russian attempts to substantiate evidence at trial, in part, by preventing the judge from developing an “inner conviction” vis-à-vis culpability.

## METHODS

In this essay, I examine how Georgian jurists engaged with the complexities of the Russian language requirement in the post-reform courts. Serving as investigators, lawyers, and judges, Georgian jurists in the late nineteenth century saw first-hand the difficulties that language could pose in the administration of justice. As part of the Russian empire's burgeoning legal profession, Georgian jurists were invested in the efficient operation of the new courts, and while they held divergent opinions on how best to mitigate linguistic barriers, they all drew upon modern principles of positivist law to support their position. Though their efforts ultimately failed to bring about significant legislative change in the Caucasus, I argue that their discussion of law is nevertheless significant as it illustrates an effort to assert their legal authority and to stake a claim to the new judicial institutions. Not merely a passive service class, Georgian jurists criticized the legal system both to improve it and to demonstrate their own sense of professional belonging.

The Crimean War (1853–1856) had revealed the limitations of the old imperial hierarchy. In its aftermath, Russian officials sought a new political culture in which subjects would no longer passively obey but actively understand and support the goals of the tsarist state (Steinwedel, 2016, p.116). As Yanni Kotsonis has described, this ethos of civic participation – *grazhdanstvennost'* – entailed engagement with social and cultural institutions provided by the state, including the reformed courts (Kotsonis, 2004, p.222; Jersild, 1997, p.108). Yet the Russian language requirement complicated the state's vision of participatory politics in the judicial context. The empire wanted its subjects to believe in imperial justice, but could they believe in justice when it was delivered in a foreign language? Alternatively, could the empire believe in its subjects' commitment to justice when it turned out that they did not even speak the imperial lingua franca? This was a basic tension in the imperial body politic and one the Georgian example helps us to consider at length.

Comparative perspectives underscore the distinctive nature of the Russian imperial model, particularly its commitment to legal monism – a uniform legal order anchored in the imperial language and rationality. This approach contrasts sharply with the legal pluralism that characterized British imperial rule, especially in India, where local customs and languages were systematically incorporated into judicial and administrative frameworks. Scholars such as Farina Mir (2006) and Bernard Cohn (1996) have demonstrated how the British administration not only tolerated but actively promoted the use of local languages, viewing such incorporation as essential to both effective governance and the legitimation of imperial authority.

By contrast, language played a far less prominent role in Russian imperial discourse. While many Russian officials did acquire local languages and employed them in the service of state objectives, this was typically a matter of individual initiative rather than institutional policy. Nathaniel Knight (2000, p. 75), for instance, has shown how Vasili Vasil'evich Grigor'ev, a linguist and historian, used his knowledge of Central Asian languages to support Russian administrative aims. Yet such examples reflect personal enterprise rather than a systematic effort to cultivate linguistic expertise within the imperial bureaucracy. Thus,

despite the Russian Empire's long-standing reliance on a politics of difference to govern its diverse populations, the use of vernacular languages in provincial administration was never adopted as an official strategy.

Some scholars, such as Christian Burset (2023), attribute such a divergence in imperial strategies to the geographic and structural differences between empires: Britain, as a maritime and overseas empire, developed governance models suited to distant and culturally distinct colonies, while Russia's status as a contiguous, continental empire fostered a different approach to integration, centralization, and legal uniformity. This contrast highlights how legal regimes were not only instruments of control but also reflections of the spatial logic and ideological commitments of imperial rule. Given the enduring consequences of these divergent models of governance, further comparative legal study would be valuable. Such inquiry could illuminate the broader implications of legal structure for the negotiation of power, identity, and legitimacy in both imperial and post-imperial contexts.

## ***RESULTS***

The Russian language requirement unquestionably complicated the administration of justice in the Georgian provinces. The new Criminal Code's emphasis on witness testimony placed locals involved in criminal proceedings in an unprecedented position to subvert the adjudication process by exploiting linguistic diversity. In other words, it allowed them to obfuscate the truth advantageously during investigatory proceedings and at trial. At the same time, however, the challenges of administering justice in the Georgian provinces facilitated a greater articulation of legal principles by indigenous jurists. That is, to mitigate the negative effects of Russia's language policy, Georgian jurists were forced to think creatively and extensively about how to apply newly adopted positivist legal principles to their specific circumstances.

In her work on colonial law, Lauren Benton notes: "Cultural intermediaries of various types - including emerging groups of indigenous legal personnel - often played an active role in advocating change in procedural rules" (Benton, 1999, p.564). Georgian jurists were no exception and they worked on behalf of their compatriots to improve the operation of the new courts in the South Caucasus by responding to allegations of cultural backwardness by insisting instead on the need to address the fundamental problem of linguistic diversity.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The Judicial Reform of Alexander II established a court hierarchy. In the South Caucasus, the highest court was the Tiflis Judicial Chamber. Serving both as the court of first instance for crimes of official malfeasance, as well as the appellate court for cases of serious crime in the South Caucasus, the Tiflis Judicial Chamber held jurisdiction over circuit courts in Stavropol, Elisavetpol, Baku, Yerevan, Ekaterinodar, Vladikavkaz, and the two circuit courts in the Georgian provinces – Tiflis and Kutaisi. In 1885, the total area under the jurisdiction of the Tiflis Judicial Chamber reached approximately 270,000 sq. miles, with

a population of 7,284,548. For their part, the Tiflis and Kutaisi circuit courts had original jurisdiction over cases of serious crime in Georgia, which, in 1897, boasted a population of 2,109,273 and an area over 40,000 square miles. Finally, petty crimes were tried in the magistrate courts, which, after the acquisition of Abkhazia, Batumi, and Kars following the Russo-Turkish War in 1878, numbered 28 in total. Officially, then, any crime committed in the Georgian provinces, regardless of the social estate of the perpetrator, was to be tried under the general laws of the empire in one of the aforementioned courts.

The expansive territory of Georgia, along with its rugged topography, made access to justice a particular problem. Vast distances, poor roads, and extreme weather conditions frequently prevented legal parties from attending court sessions. As a result, in-absentia verdicts were a common, albeit contested issue. Not only did the rocky terrain of the South Caucasus make access to the new courts in the region difficult, but it also complicated the investigation of serious crime. In his assessment of judicial investigators in the Georgian provinces, Gegidze observed:

*Thanks to insufficient transportation networks, the investigator in the South Caucasus completes his district business exclusively on horseback...We often see two horsemen riding their nags in thick forests along narrow paths or scrambling up the rocks of the wild mountains of the South Caucasus. They ride slowly, at a walking pace, like two tourists studying the nature of the region. We do not initially suspect that these riders are the judicial investigator and his translator, who are hurrying off to a place where a serious crime has been committed, such as a murder or robbery. Desiring to make haste, these riders can only cover 20-25 versts per day. Therefore, to get to a crime scene located 60 versts away, they only arrive on the third day (Gegidze, 1896, p.42).*

In addition to topographical challenges, cultural norms also proved problematic to Russian legal practice in Georgia.

Numerous scholars have shown that blood feuds and kidnapping were not uncommon in the mountainous regions of the Caucasus, but even the more mundane aspects of culture could run afoul of the new laws and complicate the administration of justice in the reformed courts (Grigolia, 1939, p.142). For example, the dagger (*khanjali*) formed an integral part of national dress for men across the Caucasus, a custom that came into conflict with the Russian Criminal Code. According to article 1653 of the Code, a theft (*krazha*) would be considered aggravated “if, during the theft or the attempted theft, the culprit had on him any weapon or arms with which he could inflict death or serious injury.” Consequently, any theft committed by a local inhabitant in national dress could technically be considered an aggravated theft. When Muslim inhabitant Kerim olgi appealed such a conviction in 1870, the Governing Senate, the highest adjudicating body in the empire, maintained: “Article 1653 is applicable in cases where the weapon was possessed by the perpetrator according to local custom and thereby constituted, as it were, a part of his clothing.”

While cultural norms and geographic obstacles certainly complicated Russian legal practice in the late tsarist period, linguistic diversity was perhaps the peskiest barrier to the

administration of criminal justice in the Georgian provinces. The region boasted a panoply of languages, including Georgian and its dialects, Svanetian, Mingrelian, Laz, Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri, Turkish, Russian, and numerous North Caucasian languages. Given the diversity of languages spoken in the Caucasus, local jurists performed a crucial role in mitigating confusion during legal proceedings. As Valerie Kivelson has noted in her work on Muscovite cartography, “particularism and state centralization were linked in a mutually constitutive process of codifying knowledge but local knowledge when withheld, distorted or contested could undermine the functioning of the central government” (Kivelson, 1999, p.101). In other words, the state had no unmediated access to local “truth,” and, hampered by its own regulations, could resolve nothing without that truth. Similarly, in Georgia, local participation was necessary to render evidence legible at court. Without it, perjury could and frequently did emerge during criminal prosecution.

Georgia’s new courts reflected regional demographics, particularly in magistrate courts. In 1878, of 22 magistrates in Georgian provinces, seven were Georgian, three Armenian, and three “Turkic,” meaning 59% were local. This diversity remained stable until the Old Regime’s collapse, though ethnic Russians often held a plurality or majority. Higher courts, like the Tiflis Judicial Chamber, were staffed mostly by Russians, but Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, and Ossetians also served. Notably, Georgian Prince N.D. Chavchavadze chaired the Tiflis Circuit Court for over a decade. Lower court staff, including secretaries and bailiffs, were often locals, while interpreters were almost exclusively native. Sworn attorneys also reflected local diversity – by 1899, over 20 of Tiflis province’s 55 sworn attorneys were non-Russian, and 16 of 23 in Kutaisi province were Georgian.

Without a local university under imperial rule, aspiring jurists from the Caucasus studied in Russia or abroad, encountering European legal philosophy, including Bentham and Beccaria. Returning home, they shaped Georgia’s judicial practice. Three jurists illustrate these paths. Mikhail Egorovich Gegidze, trained at Imperial Moscow University, served in the North Caucasus and Vitebsk before joining the Tiflis Judicial Chamber and contributing to the *Journal of the Ministry of Justice*. Giorgi Mikhailovich Tumanov, from an Armeno-Georgian noble family, studied at Novorossiysk University, worked as a judicial investigator, and later became a journalist, co-editing *The New Review*. David Vissarionovich Kvirkelia, starting as an assistant justice of the peace in Zugdidi, later became a sworn attorney in Kutaisi and engaged in civic life, writing on legal inefficiencies. Like other late-imperial Georgian intellectuals, these jurists were staunchly pro-European and champions of the rule of law (Jones, 2005). They rejected opposition to Western legal traditions, as seen in an 1886 *Iveria* article criticizing *Moskovskie vedomosti* for portraying judicial reform as unpatriotic. They sought to refine criminal adjudication, recognizing the challenges of borderland justice.

When the new courts began operating in the Georgian provinces in 1868, the challenges of borderland justice became readily apparent and, consequently, generated much scholarly debate among professional jurists in the region. Engaging with an imperial audience, the legal opinions of these jurists frequently appeared in the Georgian and Russian periodicals of the South Caucasus, as well as the newspapers of Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The

Tiflis-based legal journals *The Judicial Review* (*Iuridicheskoe obozrenie*) and *Judicial Orders* (*Sudebnye poriadki*) provided an especially unique forum for Georgian jurists to voice opinions alongside their Russian peers. The Law Society of the Caucasus (*Kavkazskoe iuridicheskoe obshchestvo*) also provided a forum for Georgian and Russian jurists to come together to develop their views on relevant legal matters.

These forums encouraged robust debate about the problematic aspects of the Judicial Reform in the region, such as the non-application of the jury trial and the language requirement, with the hope that “once people begin speaking about [the Reform’s] shortcomings, which have been brought to light in our country through the activity of the new court, the Minister [of Justice] will pay close attention to them.” The primary remedies proposed by Georgian jurists in public debate centered on mitigating linguistic barriers in the adjudication process, most notably, by requiring judges to know the local language, improving the quality of interpreters, adopting trial by jury, and doing away with the Russian language requirement all together.

Russian imperial jurist D.G. Tal’berg praised Alexander II’s Judicial Reform, declaring that it introduced modern principles of justice to Russia, eliminated courtroom injustices, and fostered a sense of legality among the populace. His enthusiasm mirrored that of many liberal jurists who saw the reform as an application of scientific methods to justice (McReynolds, 2013, p.4). Historian Frances Nethercott notes that Russian criminal law theorists engaged critically with Western juridical science, moving from absolutist theories toward positivism, which emphasized individual rights in legal proceedings (Nethercott, 2009, p.190).

Alexander II aimed to establish a judicial system that was “swift, just, benevolent, and equal for all.” Focused on procedural rather than substantive law, the judicial reform transformed evidence collection and verification. Previously confined to inquisitorial procedures and rigid legal proofs, evidence was now debated in open court. However, the shift to an adversarial system raised questions about how judges should assess evidence. The *Judicial Review* countered concerns that abandoning formal evidence rules led to judicial arbitrariness, arguing that verdicts were instead grounded in scientific legal principles and thorough case examination.

John P. LeDonne observed that the previous system left judges bound to pass sentences even against their convictions (LeDonne, 1974, p.102). The new system replaced bureaucratic rigidity with judicial discretion, but its effectiveness was compromised in Georgia, where local exceptions abounded. Notably, jury trials – the cornerstone of the reform – were absent in the South Caucasus, deemed unsuitable due to perceptions of local backwardness (Afanas’ev, 1994, p.214; Frenkel, 1884, p.334). As a result, judges, often Russian, struggled to evaluate evidence fairly, hindered by linguistic and cultural barriers. This posed a particular problem, as the new code of criminal procedure required imperial judges to base their verdicts on their “inner conviction.”

The reliance on witness testimony made judges vulnerable to deception. Russian lawyer Alexander Frenkel noted that perjury became widespread, with witnesses often bribed (Frenkel, 1884, p.334). The *Judicial Review* reported that perjury was especially rampant in cases involving individuals of different nationalities or social classes, a common occur-

rence in the Caucasus. Newspapers like *Kavkaz* described false testimony as an entrenched local issue, while Russian officials viewed it as a sign of the population's supposed lack of morality. However, Georgian jurists contended that these claims were exaggerated.

To combat perjury, Russian jurists proposed stricter penalties, but enforcement proved difficult. In 1880, only five perjury cases were prosecuted in the entire South Caucasus, with similarly low numbers in subsequent years. Tumanov argued that the root of perjury lay in the alienation between local officials and the populace. He believed that the presence of native adjudicators would deter false testimony, as witnesses would be less inclined to lie before judges who understood their language and customs (Tumanov, 1886, p.169).

Recognizing the language barrier, tsarist officials provided court interpreters, but their skills were notoriously poor. Georgian prince Dimitri Kipiani criticized the lack of qualified interpreters, warning that mistranslations could lead to unjust convictions. An 1880 article in *Droeba* recounted how a Georgian insult was mistranslated as blasphemy, leading to exile in Siberia. Russian and Georgian jurists alike questioned interpreters' integrity, with some arguing that they wielded undue influence over verdicts. To improve justice, some jurists proposed elevating interpreters' rank and salary to attract more qualified candidates (Gegidze, 1896, p.56). Others suggested requiring judges to learn local languages to monitor interpreters and assess witness credibility more effectively (Tumanov, 1903, p.41).

Tumanov and his contemporaries also advocated for jury trials, arguing that local jurors could provide oversight of interpreters and bridge cultural gaps in adjudication. Many Georgians supported jury trials, viewing them as a way to integrate the region into the imperial legal framework. In 1892, twenty-four years after the Judicial Reform's adoption in Georgia, a group of Kutaisi nobles petitioned the tsar to introduce jury trials. Their request underscored the broader struggle to reconcile imperial legal principles with local realities in the South Caucasus.

Budget constraints limited potential reforms. The *New Review* reported in 1884 that the introduction of new courts in the Caucasus was contingent on minimal fiscal burden. As a result, judicial resources remained inadequate. Russian jurist A. Krasovskii lamented that cost-cutting measures undermined the courts' effectiveness, while A.S. Frenkel criticized the prioritization of financial savings over regional needs (Krasovskii, 1885, p.27; Frenkel, 1884, p.307).

Georgian jurists ultimately proposed eliminating language restrictions in legal proceedings, allowing cases to be conducted in local languages. Grigol Rtskhiladze, a key advocate, argued:

*For legal consciousness to take root, the people – who already view the courts with suspicion – must hear and understand the language in which justice is rendered. Without this, no matter how lawfully a court functions, it cannot foster trust in the legal system. Most people do not understand the court's language and thus do not believe they will receive justice. This explains why lower-class witnesses often feel no obligation to tell the truth and instead fabricate testimonies (Rtskhiladze, 1904, pp.2-3).*

Among the jurists championing this cause, D.V. Kvirkelia presented the most compelling legal argument in his essay “*Local Language in the Criminal Trial and the Principle of Immediacy.*”

The principle of immediacy, central to the new adversarial court system, required that all evidence be presented in its most original form. Kvirkelia contended that the use of interpreters – regardless of their skill – violated this principle. He noted that “modern legal science upholds the principle of immediacy, which opposes clerical, written proceedings and insists that no intermediary stand between the judge and the evidence. The judge must have a direct, unmediated relationship with everything that transpires in court” (Kvirkelia, 1881, pp.105-111). Kvirkelia reminded his readers that the outdated formal theory of evidence had been long discredited, replaced by the doctrine of “inner conviction.” He skillfully linked this to the immediacy principle:

*A judge’s conviction can only be just when it arises directly from the evidence presented at trial, formed through the vivid drama unfolding before his eyes. Witness and defendant testimonies are crucial, but their value depends on their correspondence to reality. The judge must assess their sincerity and reliability.*

To do so, Kvirkelia argued, the judge must perceive subtle external cues – facial expressions, gestures, and tone. Kvirkelia insisted that interpreters, no matter how competent, cannot fully convey these nuances, making them inadequate for ensuring just convictions:

*An interpreter cannot translate the inner world of the defendant or the spirit of the witnesses – elements central to criminal justice. And if this challenge exists even for highly educated interpreters, consider the reality of our actual interpreters, many of whom have an inadequate command of both Russian and their native languages. In such cases, the immediacy principle is entirely compromised.*

Few Georgian jurists articulated their case as eloquently as Kvirkelia. His essay remains the most cohesive and legally principled argument against the Russian language policy. At the same time, it underscores the broader challenge of judicial “inner conviction” in an imperial legal system. Yet, despite his persuasive reasoning and the broader push by Georgian jurists, substantive legislative change never materialized. By the Revolution of 1917, judicial practice in the South Caucasus remained constrained by exceptions to the Judicial Reform – most notably, the Russian language requirement.

## **CONCLUSION**

This essay has examined how jurists in the South Caucasus engaged with the Judicial Reform. The empire’s new evidentiary principle required courts to assess all case circumstances, yet linguistic barriers in the Georgian environment impeded this process. Imperial judges struggled to form an “inner conviction” of culpability due to these obstacles. In response, late imperial Georgian jurists sought to mitigate the Russian language require-

ment's negative effects – improving interpreter quality, monitoring their behavior, or advocating for abolishing the requirement altogether.

Through their writings, these jurists contested claims of cultural backwardness, instead highlighting how the regime's failure to address linguistic challenges undermined the legal reform's own goals. Though largely ignored by the tsarist bureaucracy, their work demonstrated a sophisticated engagement with modern criminal procedure. They participated actively in judicial culture alongside Russian peers, critically assessing and shaping legal practices rather than simply serving as a loyal administrative elite. The Russian language requirement became a focal point for asserting their authority within the legal system.

More broadly, their discussions of criminal justice illustrate the role language played in shaping – or obstructing – an integrated Russian imperial society. While the Great Reforms encouraged public participation in state affairs, linguistic barriers often undermined this ideal. In the realm of justice, *grazhdanstvennost'* and the Russian language mandate came into direct conflict. After the Old Regime's collapse, the Bolsheviks took a different approach, recognizing that a compulsory official language “involves coercion,” “sharpens antagonism,” and “increases resentment and mutual misunderstanding” (Lenin, 1914, p.1). Their rejection of an official state language extended to the courtroom, where proceedings were conducted in local languages (Comrie, 1981, p.22). Yet, the Soviet approach to linguistic diversity would bring its own administrative challenges.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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**ARCHAEOLOGY**

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**Essential Socio-Cultural Innovations of the III–II Millennia BC Trialeti Culture: The Determining Causes of Their Appearance**

*PUTURIDZE MARINA, PHD*

*IVANE JAVAKHISHVILI TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY*

*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0000-0001-6109-3157](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6109-3157)*

**ABSTRACT**

The article presents a special study of the socio-cultural innovative processes and a certain group of valuable artifacts of the III–II Millennium BC Trialeti Culture. Determining the causes of their emergence, and thus of the onset of this developed (II) stage of Middle Bronze Age culture is considered in the context of numerous essential artifacts from the Near East. The detailed evaluation of such items enabled us to better understand the intercultural relationship between the mentioned Ancient Oriental region and the South Caucasus. Attention is drawn to the various materials, which provide extensive information on the innovations and changes in the cultural and socio-economic life of the Trialetian society. Concentrate on burial traditions and the different types of luxury goods from the rich kurgans, enabling you to connect all this data to traditional Near Eastern features. Flourishment of high artistic craft also appears to be one of the most characteristic trends of this South Caucasian cultural unit.

*Keywords:* Trialeti culture, innovations, socio-cultural and craftsmanship development, Old World

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

During the developed (II) stage of the Middle Bronze Age, the most significant part of the South Caucasus was populated by the ethno-cultural group bearing the Trialeti culture, contemporary with the Old Hittites, Old Assyrians, and Hurrians, who inhabited different areas of the Near East. The role and importance of the Trialetian society, which reached its peak between the XXI and the mid XVII centuries BC, are clearly perceptible in ancient history, not only in the Caucasus but also in the Near East. Owing to this, there is an ever-growing feeling of necessity to conduct a detailed study of numerous assemblages of this culture in accordance with southern civilizations. Elucidation of the Trialeti culture in this context seems necessary to address the problem of its origin and the causes of the sudden appearance of several innovative features in material culture and across different spheres of life. The development of this culture was determined by several factors, among which we can mention the increasingly brisk contact with the Near Eastern world and the acceptance of the achievements that characterized the previous Bedeni culture period. The local tradition appears to be the strong background on which the further progress of the culture considered here was founded.

## ***METHODS***

Based on the research goals, we initially collected all types of archaeological data and source materials from both the South Caucasian and the Near Eastern cultural spheres. We critically examined all known scientific viewpoints in the literature. During the research process, all specific and concrete reasoning was generalized by comparing it with available data, forming the basis for our position on the main topic. Accordingly, the presented assumption about the determining causes of the socio-economic and cultural innovations of the late III-early II millennium BC Trialeti Culture elucidates the processes that happened in the remote past. Our aim is to develop a scientifically justified position and interpretation grounded in the analysis of all obtained results. While working on the article, we also applied descriptive, analytical, and historical-comparative methods.

## ***RESULTS***

The article evaluates the principal factors that determined the emergence of essential innovations and various categories of material culture, as reflected in the famous sites (almost exclusively burial mounds) of the Trialeti Culture. At present, there is an ever-growing need to conduct a thorough study of the Trialeti Culture assemblages in comparison with the rich complexes of different civilizations of the Near East. This is especially important for understanding the cultural change that occurred in the developed phase (II stage) of the Middle Bronze Age South Caucasian cultural unit under consideration.

Elucidation of the Trialeti Culture in such context seems necessary for understanding the reasons for the sudden and abrupt appearance of an 'alien' stylistic tradition, as well, for

solving the problem of the origin of this fascinating culture, which remains debatable chiefly because of the marked differences between it and the previous so-called Early Kurgan local culture. Concentration on those and other problems would facilitate the identification of obvious causes of visible changes, leading to the flourishing of the Trialetian cultural unit.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since the 30s of the 20th century, when the first sites of the Trialeti culture were discovered, investigators have shown keen interest in this culture. However, the basic questions concerning it have been more or less studied and the gaps filled in, owing to a number of objective reasons (among them are tenuously studied settlement sites). Some problems still remain unsolved. Among them is the question of the determining causes underlying the emergence of the various innovative trends recorded in the Trialeti Culture. Among the many publications evaluating different aspects of the culture (Kuftin, 1941, 78-100; Japaridze, 2006, pp. 341-359; Gogadze, 1972, pp. 55-61; 71-79; 82-89; Abramishvili, 2010, pp. 167-178; Narimanishvili, Shanshashvili, 2010, pp. 205-221; Oganessian, 1988, pp. 145-160; Japaridze, 1981; Rubinson, 2003, pp. 128-143; 2013, pp. 12-25; Puturidze, 2002, pp. 100-113; 2003, pp.111-127; 2017, pp. 213-227; 2020, pp. 194-209, etc.), it is possible to identify both previously noted issues and additional problems that remain unresolved. One of the essential tasks is to identify the main factors that ultimately determined the prosperity of the Trialeti Culture. From the point of view of determining all the causes of the unbelievable flourishing of this culture, it should be especially investigated the appearance of certain innovations, the measure of influence of outer civilizations, and the reasons for the evident successive progress in the economy and craftsmanship fields. Our analysis is focused precisely on these issues.

It is first necessary to outline briefly the distribution of the Trialeti Culture, which was distributed in the north adjacent area of the vast Near Eastern region and comprised the modern territories of Georgia, Armenia, and part of Azerbaijan, that is, nearly all of the South Caucasus. A notable exception in terms of distribution is western Georgia, where no Trialetian sites have been recorded. The Likhi mountain range – a geographical barrier between western and eastern Georgia – served as a natural boundary that halted the westward spread of this culture. The Middle Bronze Age Colchian culture does not relate to the Trialetian one at all and shows no apparent affinity with it. All other territory in the South Caucasus, including the Araxes River basin, was part of the Trialeti culture. Their bearers, whose ethnic affiliation is virtually unknown, inhabited most of the southern Caucasus and, presumably, extended further southwest into the easternmost regions of present-day Turkey (Puturidze, 2003, pp. 112, 114, fig. 5.1)

The appearance of the new, flourishing Trialeti culture on the map of the Old World at the very end of the 3rd millennium BC marks not only a developed stage of the Middle Bronze Age but also the beginning of profound social and cultural changes in local society. In our viewpoint, these changes are related to the process of activated interrelation with outer civilizations, first of all with the Anatolian region and Sumer. Supposing that, as a result

of the interaction of various cultural traditions at the crossroad area of the Caucasus, the formation of the new Trialeti Culture should be understood as a process in which multiple cultural layers can be distinguished. All of them create an attractive assemblage of this culture, among which are distinguishable some samples that stand apart from any 'alien' influence and are evidently of local origin, as well as another group of artifacts typical of the Ancient Near Eastern style.

Among the Trialetian materials, there is no detailed information about the farming activities of the communities buried in well-known kurgans. Economic data on societies, which usually contain such information, mainly come from settlement sites. Exactly this type of dwelling house, containing important evidence about the economic life of the bearers of the Trialetian community, unfortunately, is still lacking. The exception is the two so-called summer-type constructions, which scholars do not consider the basic housing habitations of Trialetians, but rather seasonal summer houses for groups engaged in cattle-breeding activities (Pitskhelauri, 2013, pp. 126-182). This simple dwelling cannot be considered a stable settlement for the elite population, who mostly constructed very complex, large-scale stone burials and was well-trained in engineering. Owing to the undiscovered main settlements of this culture, associated with the famous kurgans, it is impossible to judge their economy, constructional abilities in housing habitation, and daily life. Surveys using modern high-technology equipment have not yet been carried out. As for the surveys conducted in the late 50s and 60s of the 20th century (Muskhelishvili, Tskitishvili, 1960, pp. 185-196), they do not have any results. Therefore, scholars are limited by such insufficient evidence to discuss their farming activity in detail or with any certainty.

The Trialeti culture is well known for its burial complexes. Our knowledge of construction engineering capabilities and achievements is mainly based on kurgan buildings, which provide important insights into this field. In essence, the kurgan appears to be the only type of burial of the Trialeti culture. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the kurgan, as the principal burial construction, was well known in the so-called Early Kurgans culture (the earliest stage of the Middle Bronze Age) and in a few cases also even earlier, in the Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes culture or Chalcolithic period's certain site (Museibli, 2014; Makharadze, 2007, pp.123-131). So, it is important that this type of burial was familiar to previous cultures and was not news to the Trialeti alone. Burial sites contain extensive information about a society's social structure. The process of deep social stratification is quite evident in numerous kurgans and burial goods. The giant kurgans provide evidence of a massive concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the ruling elite and likely signal significant ideological and profound social changes. Changes in political structure in the South Caucasian region cannot be determined with any certainty, as in the Near Eastern civilizations, and can only be guessed at.

When focusing on excavated data related to burial constructions and detailed burial rituals, we should note that different types of burial constructions and rituals currently exist. Excavated kurgans in Zurtaketi and Tsalka (Lower, i.e., Kvemo Kartli) or in Kakheti districts, as well as in Vanadzor, Lori Berd, and Karasham tombs (Armenia), are of particular interest for their precious burial goods and constructional characteristics. Important features of Zu-

rtaketi burial assemblages include the large stone buildings and dromos unearthed beneath the kurgan's embankment (Japaridze, 1969). Scholars remarked that these buildings can be compared with the Hittite king's 'stone houses' (Kuftin, 1941, p.83). Another burial custom's similarity with the same Asia Minor's civilizations is the ritual of cremation recorded in Tsalka burials, and it is supposed to have been borrowed from the Hittite tradition of kings and queens' funerals, which is known from contemporary sites and also, cuneiform written archives (Kuftin, 1941, p.81). Kuftin deemed the existence of a cremation tradition plausible in the Tsalka burials he excavated, as animal bones were frequently documented in contexts where human skeletal remains were absent.

Thus, it is evident that cremation represented a quite new, non-traditional ritual in the South Caucasian region, and this 'alien', clearly non-local, funeral element was adopted only by the ruling strata of Trialetian society. This seems quite understandable, as the elite often created new and prestigious traditions from famous civilizations. Therefore, cremation was a remarkable feature of sharing an important 'alien' tradition, by which the Trialetian elite emphasized their privileges, at a time when the less wealthy or 'middle' class practiced inhumation, and their burial constructions were distinguished by limited size.

It is also important to focus on high-quality craftsmanship, which reveals many innovative features. In goldworking craft, 'alien' and innovative features are evident not only in the artistic-stylistic aspect but also in the clearly visible new technical methods used by craftsmen. Both contributed substantially to the onset of a critical transitional phase in this field. It seems reasonable to begin with consideration of toreutics, which are an important and richly represented group of precious metalwork. The beginning of their production clearly indicates a high level of artistic craft. Notably, this type of artifact is numerous and diverse in artistic style, indicating that craftsmen were already well-trained in this field. Their scale and characteristic details make it evident that they were shaped by intensive international contacts with a more southerly, "alien" cultural world. In Ancient Anatolia, Sumer, and other civilizations of the Near East, toreutic was widely known not only in the contemporary period but also in earlier periods, indicating the highest level of its development. Different characteristic features of the mentioned regions are clearly visible among the same type of items of the Trialeti culture, which allows many scholars (Rubinson, 2003, pp. 128-143; Boehmer, Kossack, 2000, pp. 9-71) to emphasize the significant influence of external civilizations. We suppose that metal vessels of the famous Trialeti culture might not have been reached so quickly at such a high level of elaboration without the impact of 'alien' cultural achievements. It seems highly symptomatic that in Trialetian, rich burials contained the same categories of precious goods as are usually found on Near Eastern sites. In both cases prestige patterns represented with gold plaques and foils (ornamented and as well with plain surface), pins, hanging spirals, gold figurines and pedestal boxes where they were attached, great number and various fashions beads, yet unrecognized gold items, which should be considered as the details of the certain artifacts, upholsteries, pendants of various shapes, details of standards, attaching decoration for the hair and, what is very important, precious metals vessels. All these artifacts indicate the existence of a single repertoire of prestigious burial goods, suggesting that Sumerians, Hattians, and early Hittites buried

their elite with a similar tradition and a similar set of artistic craft production categories.

Since the XXI century BC and afterward, quite a new production, like the precious metal vessels, began to appear in Trialetian assemblages, which can be considered as an indication not only of the extreme social stratification of this society, but also of the Near Eastern cultural influence and its certain push on the first one. Direct evidence of this is the innovative features revealed by many effective, well-designed samples. Precious-metal vessels from the developed stage of the Middle Bronze Age mark a turning point in artistic craft. The metal vessels known from Tsalka-Trialeti barrows (Kuftin, 1941, pls. LXXCVII, LXXXVIII, XCI, XCII, CI, CII ) and from Armenian kurgans (Devedjan, 2006, p. 261, fig. 141; Oganessian, 1988, pp. 145–160; Kushnareva, 1994, pp. 100–102) represent new, formerly unknown materials, which have no prototypes in preceding common tradition in the local region but clearly indicate an ‘alien’ style imagery. The choice in favor of making metal vessels and adopting the specific Near Eastern traditional style was conditioned by an activated interrelation and a certain contact with its well-organized trade-exchange system during the Trialeti culture period. The appearance of such vessels was quite sudden and unexpected, and at the same time, revealed the surprisingly high level of production of the elaborate samples. Therefore, it is reasonable for scholars to search for analogies among the production of neighboring civilizations. On the other side, it proves the economic strength of Trialetian’s ruling stratum, who can order precious metalwork patterns and semiprecious stones. Their wealth became evident in giant kurgans, complex burial rituals, various burial goods, and, above all, distinctly fine metal vessels. The concentration of power and the wealth it brought to the Trialetian elite undoubtedly allowed them to increase their riches, gain fashionable status, and thereby underline their social privileges. Such burial complexes, notable for precious metalwork, are mainly localized not in an entire territory but in a certain area of distribution of the Trialeti culture, situated adjacent to the upper part of the Near East. The giant kurgans of Tsalka-Trialeti, Kvemo Kartli, Vanadzor, Lori Berd, and Karashamb regions (Kuftin, 1941, pp. 78–100, pls. LXIV–LXVII, LXXII; Japaridze, 1969, Figs. I, II, IV–VI, VII, VIII–X, XVIII; Devedjian, 2006, figs. 5–65, pls. XV, XVI; Oganessian, 1988, pp. 145–160) provide certain information about a huge concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the ruling elite. This fact makes it evident that the above-mentioned regions and their surrounding parts represent the area where the infusion of Near Eastern cultural traditions was obvious. Thus, exactly this area can be supposed to be the place where local and ‘alien’ cultural traditions met. Another part, namely Kakheti district, also yielded some rich burials (Pitskhelauri, Orthmann, 2013, pp. 113–118), but they are not as widely characterized by the same traits as the above-mentioned regions.

Trialetian metal vessels featured different types, styles, and ornamental designs depending on the metal they were made of. Therefore, technical methods used for the decoration with varied motifs usually differ in cases of gold, silver, and bronze facture. It is clear that, for the Trialeti culture, the mentioned metal vessels were characteristic in roughly the exact quantities, indicating that local jewelers were familiar with all kinds of fabrication. Among the metal vessels discovered in burial sites, two general categories can be distinguished: items that represent a distinctly “pure” local tradition with no identifiable external parallels,

and those that display apparent similarities – and in some cases even direct correspondence – to specific Near Eastern artifacts or stylistic motifs. Accordingly, to these types, it is possible to judge the creativity, original stylistic tendencies, and the well-adapted from the Ancient Old World, an ‘alien’ and at that time widespread, achieved by the gold-workers of the Trialeti culture.

Here will be presented only the last type of items, as they indicate the innovative tendencies that have emerged widely from the beginning of the Trialeti culture. Such patterns, distinguishable by ‘alien’ stylistic traits, were well-known in the contemporary Near Eastern world and, for commercial purposes, reveal a real tendency to be widespread in adjacent areas through cultural influence and/or exchange-trade communication. It seems necessary to consider some characteristic examples, first of all, the silver ritual goblets from Tsalka # V and Karashamb # I kurgan. Both are exclusively richly designed cultic-ritual and similar pattern types that closely resemble the Near Eastern artistic style. One was unearthed in 30s of the 20th century in Tsalka (Kuftin, 1941, pls. XCI, XCII), and another was discovered much later in Karashamb kurgan (Oganesyan, 1988, pp. 145-161; Oganesyan, 1993, pp. 26-35, 159-168, Tabs. XXII- XXXII; Boehmer, Kossack, 2000, pp. 9-71). Despite the diversity of certain ornamental motives, these two goblets, by general image, are closely similar objects of the same artistic value, and supposing that the same workshop produced them. The entire surface of the Trialetian sample, like the Karashamb one, is covered with low-relief motifs and cultic-ritual narratives, represented in separate, following one another, friezes of different thicknesses. Their ornamentation presents diverse themes. The upper figural register of the Trialetian goblet depicts a complex ritual procession of 22 male human figures wearing tunics and what are usually described as ‘wolf tails’ as they approach a deity or an elite figure. Following it, and separated by the low-relief, narrow plain band, the lower figural register shows a motion of five female deer and four bucks. The upper and lower registers feature different geometric designs, making the entire decoration more effective. The slightly larger goblet from Karashamb is richly ornamented, with six registers containing a total of 25 human figures, 36 animal figures, and more than 60 objects on its decorated surface (Boehmer & Kossack, 2000, pp. 9–71). Many images of the decoration, such as humans and their garments, furniture, musical instruments, vessels, weapons, altars, fauna or flora, and the iconographic program and certain representations on both vessels, are obviously closely related and have direct analogues in Near Eastern imagery. For example, we can note that the drinking vessel, the Trialeti goblet, which holds every member of the ritual procession and stands apart from those known among the ceramic assemblages of the Trialeti culture, is frequently attested at Anatolian sites. A similar consideration can be made about the swords depicted on the Karashamb goblet. Identical images possible to observe on both goblets, like: a) the altar with long double feet’s, ended by the cloven-hoof and the lying down animal on altar’s background; b) the bigger than others, human figure, in the center of frieze, seated on a stool with crossed legs; c) iconographical representation of lions, deer and eagle with spread wings and etc., which finds closest similarities, or even identity, among designs recorded on several Near Eastern artifacts and as an example of it might be mentioned those one, which observed on a large clay, ritual Old Hittite vessel from Inandiktepe (Özguç, 1989, p. 163, pl. 40). In many publications (Kuftin, 1941,

pp. 78–100; Japaridze, 1981; Rubinson, 2003, pp. 128–143; Rubinson, 2013, pp. 12–25; Boehmer & Kossack, 2000, pp. 9–71; Puturidze, 2003, pp. 111–127; Puturidze, 2006, pp. 66–76), which are devoted to the detail analyses of these fashionable objects, are argues about the infiltration of the Near Eastern style in South Caucasian Trialeti culture. When underscoring the close similarities between the numerous details of the Trialeti culture goblets and various Near Eastern artefacts, first of all, scholars are focusing on the male figures, with their face and body in profile but eye given En face, as well, their peculiar manner of standing, cloths and shoes with specific upturned point and especially, the ritual procession's course. All the details mentioned, which closely parallel those in the Anatolian world, provide clear evidence that many of the images on these vessels and others presented in the Trialetian burial goods were derived from Near Eastern art.

Another sample revealing the resemblance between the mentioned regions is the handled silver bucket with golden appliqué work and rich ornamentation (Kuftin, 1941, Tab. LXXXVIII), which lacks a similar shape in southern civilizations. Though based on the style of representation of animals and vegetation, as well as the method of organizing the different images on the entire surface of a thin silver sheet, this sample stands very closely to those already evaluated silver goblets from Trialeti and Karashamb kurgans. It is symptomatic that the bucket's ornamental motifs and imagery are the same as those familiar from various Ancient Near Eastern artifacts.

From the point of view of outer influence, the handled 'basket-shaped' bronze bucket (Kuftin, 1941, Tab. LXXXVII), the origin of which, it seems to me, can apparently be discussed based on existing Near East evidence. The split pin of this vessel is held in position by a metal strip, decorated with an incised design and secured by four rivets. The rim of the vessel has been reinforced, and a flaring pedestal base ornamented with bands of *repoussé* decoration has been added to the object. D. Collon specifically studied this type of vessel, recorded in different areas of the Near East (Collon, 1982, fig. 1a), and compared it with the identical item from Trialeti kurgan #15. Exactly this type of vessel is known in Aegean world (shaft-grave #5 at Mycenae) (Collon, 1982, fig.2) and, as well, in Kültepe-Karum Kaneš II (Central Anatolia) at the beginning of the II millennium BC (Özguç, 1986, p.123, fig.58). An earlier handled bucket, though of a different, cylindrical shapes come from the rich assemblages of Assur grave #20 (Müller-Karpe, 1995, 300, Abb.49,1) and Kültepe-Kaneš I b (Müller-Karpe, 1995, p. 304, Abb.49,2) dated by scholars at the end of III-beginning of the II millenniums BC. The bucket from the Royal Cemetery of Ur in Sumer (Collon, 1982, fig. 1a) is considered one of the earliest examples of this type of vessel. All the listed analogues make it obvious that the tradition of producing this style of handled buckets and, even the manner of attaching the handle, was common for the ancient Near Eastern and Mycenaean regions and might be considered as the direct prototypes for the Trialetian bronze item, which itself represents a clear manifestation of this type's distribution far to the north (Puturidze, 2016, Tab. IV). It is symptomatic that nearly all forms of metal vessels known in Western and Central Anatolia became characteristic also for the Trialeti culture in the first quarter of the 2nd millennium BC: examples of this phenomenon are the above-described bronze bucket, the bronze wide-mouthed cauldrons (for detailed

discussion about this last specimen, see: [Puturidze, 2002, pp. 193-104](#); [Puturidze, 2016, pp. 139-162, Tabs.I-III](#)), and some other vessels considered here.

Discussing about the high artistic value of Trialetian vessels, special attention should be pointed to the small, undecorated gold cup from the # VII kurgan of Tsalka ([Kuftin, 1941, pl. CI](#)), which finds the relative analogy by hemispherical shape, if not a more horizontally stretched form, among the silver and bronze cups dated back from Akkadian including the Old Babylonian period, found in Kültepe, Byblos, Assur, Tell Harmal, Tell Sumeila, Nippur, Tello, Susa and other sites of the Near East ([Müller-Karpe, 1995, 269,270m Abb.9,10](#)). A typologically similar shape to the Trialetian one, but a richly ornamented golden cup, was discovered in Vanadzor (Armenia) kurgan #1 ([Devedjian, 2006, p. 261, Pl. 141](#)). Unlike the Trialetian, the Vanadzor sample is decorated with a few pairs of lions in heraldic pose, which encircle its surface with a large horizontal band. The lions with an aggressive, open mouth and upturned tails, depicted on the given cup, obviously recall a pair of lions on the golden standard at the top of # V kurgan of Tsalka ([Kuftin, 1941, pl. C](#)). The lion's image closely resembles all those well-known iconographical motifs found in Hittite and Hurrian art ([Wilhelm, 1989, pl. 21](#)).

From the point of view of Near Eastern parallels, attention is drawn to the different style of silver vessels with plain, undecorated surfaces, which belong to a different category than the above-considered, richly ornamented ones. Such artifacts with the plain surface and sometimes only miserly decorated handle ([Devedjian, 2006, p.262, pl.142<sub>1-4</sub>](#)) in the Trialeti culture are presented by two different types, namely, hemispherical and cylindrical. Both shapes are related and reveal clear analogues in different, adjacent sites to the south of the South Caucasus, like Qal'e Nisar, Tepe Guran, Assur grave # 20, and Kültepe, Karum-Kaniš ([Müller-Karpe, 1995, p. 266, Abb. 713, 14; 300, Abb. 385; 311, Abb. 491, 2](#)).

All the described items of the rich metal vessels clarified that among them, in general, are distinguishable a few categories: especially richly ornamented ones, another with surface decoration of limited extent, and the last with an absolutely plain surface. All of them were represented in rich kurgans and simultaneously were characteristic of the Trialetian barrows.

Besides the discussed precious-metal vessels, some types of jewelry clearly demonstrate a connection to Sumerian culture. Among this type of gold-working should be noted the agate pendant ([Kuftin, 1941, Tabs. XCIV, XCV](#)), which was the central component of the fascinating necklace from Tsalka # 8 kurgan. This semi-precious stone pendant was set in a gold frame, with small carnelian stones proportionally inset in three places. It remains the unique pattern for the Trialeti culture and evidently reflects the closest identity with the Uruk (Sumer) agate necklace, the several pieces of the agate details of which, is also upholstered by the golden frame ([Maxwell-Hyslop, 1971, pp.65,102, pl.45](#)). Another similar fashion agate beads, fitted with gold caps, existed in Ur cemetery's burial goods ([Maxwell-Hyslop, 1971, p.26, Fig.19<sub>a,b</sub>](#)). The artistic-stylistic resemblance, as well as the facture of agate stone with its characteristic white strand, of the mentioned gold-working samples, proves in favor of Sumer's influence on the jewelry production of the Trialeti culture. This assumption is not a debatable issue and is accepted by many scholars ([Puturidze, 2020, pp. 203-206](#)). Another item of jewelry from the Trialeti kurgan # 8, which is also related to

the Sumerian gold-working craft, is the hanging spirals (Kuftin, 1941, Tab. XCVII). The Trialetian one is an absolutely identical item to those that were recorded in Queen Pu Abi's burial at the Royal cemetery of Ur (Woolley, 1934, Pl. XXIX) and specially discussed by scholars (Maxwell-Hyslop, 1971, pp. 29, 69, Pls. 19<sub>b, c</sub>; 26; Puturidze, 2020, pp. 202-203, Tab III b<sub>1-3</sub>), therefore, we will not in detail stop on it.

It should be noted that, because of the great quantity of gold-working artifacts, in the presented article, it is unable to consider many of them. Therefore, we offer only an essential item, which undoubtedly supports Near Eastern cultural influence, particularly from Sumer, central Anatolia, etc., at the end of the III-beginning of the II millennium BC. A comparative study makes it possible to define an 'alien' image, i.e., non-local peculiarities in some valuable Trialetian patterns. Analyzing all gold-working assemblages raises certain legitimate questions. First, it is very important to understand whether the Trialetian craftsmen only shared and repeated the well-known Near Eastern cultural tradition or whether they were trying to relate and merge it with the original, local cultural onflow. Prevailing, it seems to me, is the last idea, which supports connectivity and the merging of the mentioned different cultural traditions. Exactly this approach of the Trialetian craftsmen makes it possible to create a production closely related to the Near Eastern, yet somehow original, which in the scientific world is known as the Trialetian gold-working phenomenon.

All the above assemblages are obvious manifestations of the unexpected flourishing, top-level artistic craft, and building-engineering achievements in the socio-economic field of the Trialetian society. The questions that, for sure, need explanation are as follows: a) what were the reasons that defined and stimulated all these processes of the development of various spheres of the South Caucasian Middle Bronze Age society? b) Is it possible that it might be caused by the external factor or only by the help of the economic strength of an already deeply stratified society? c) might be considered an intensive and broad use of natural sources (metal or any other) as a cause of established and activated international trade-economic network?, etc. All these factors need to be studied in detail, but the various kinds of existing data allow us to discuss and make some assumptions. It is well known that the III and early II millennia BC were a period of intensive development of metal production in the Old World, which implies, first of all, the acquisition of various sources, their technical organization, and the development of trade over a vast area. All this was a complicated process and required the involvement of certain communities/individuals, specialized in different fields of business. In the Near East and adjacent northern regions during the mentioned period, all processes connected with metalworking were particularly pronounced and involved a hard struggle and conflict between the various urban centers of certain cultural units. Different types of metalworking fields were connected with the organization of trade-exchange networks, which formed the main centers of economic relationships between various ethnicities.

All those artifacts, individual ornamental representations within the rich metal assemblages or separate traditions, which are so widely found in Trialetian burial sites, reveal a close analogy among the patterns recorded in trade-exchange colonies of the Near Eastern region. It is a clear indication that the considered South Caucasian culture was in some way

(directly or indirectly) connected with the economic centers of the Ancient Old World and, from there, provided with new, fashionable style productions. Otherwise, such close resemblance, or even the certain identity of some items discussed above, is inexplicable. Without access to such modern techniques and artistic craft patterns, the local Trialetian goldworkers could not adopt the characteristic technical methods and stylistic features that were exclusive to the neighboring Near Eastern civilizations. The topic of the international communication system is directly related to processes that occurred in the remote past and are reflected in the different types of excavated artifacts. What is required today is that the scholars delve into the processes that happened in the Old Near Eastern World and understand how they reflected in the neighboring South Caucasian region.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In our view, the widening of external interrelations and the great changes in the local South Caucasian community are directly related to the activation of intercommunication with the outer world, and first of all with the Anatolian and Sumer regions. The best illustration of this is the numerous patterns of artistic craft. It is thus that the beginning of the Trialeti culture means at the same time the start of a cultural orientation of the South Caucasian main area toward the Near Eastern civilizations.

With respect to the main aim of the present research, i.e., ascertaining the causes that determined the emergence of innovative developments and cultural tendencies, it seems possible to summarize that there may be different factors. From them, with more certainty, it is possible to accentuate the following: a) a high economic level of inhabitants of the Trialeti culture, with an increase in cattle breeding and occupation of higher altitude areas of the region. Exactly this activity contributed to economic strengthening and the flourishing of the upper and middle strata of society; b) development of the metalworking field, which enables an increase in economic strength and the productivity of the metal industry. The derivation of metal sources, necessary for the production of different types of bronze artifacts and, afterward, their trade, was one of the essential activities of the Middle Bronze Age society (Shanshashvili et al., 2016, pp. 33–83). These processes require establishing and managing metalworking workshops, as well as the specialization of craftsmen trained in these fields. All the above-mentioned spheres contributed to the economic flourishing and the accumulation of wealth; c) an extreme social differentiation of society determines the wealth privileges of already stratified (even in the previous stage Bedeni culture) elite strata. An economic stimulation of an affluent layer and gained in their hands wealthy and power was the main reason of top social stratification, which evidently reveals the burial sites of the Trialeti culture; d) development and sudden promotion of gold-working appears a direct result of the well-organized intercultural relations of elite and traveler merchant's and craftsmen's groups of society; e) strength of elite's power implied the exclusive richness and obtaining the precious, rare and an 'alien' items, which can emphasized their privileges. One important issue that must be clarified is how Trialetian craftsmen designed the iconographic programs on their metal vessels. Did they create new depictions by only slightly modifying characteristic Near Eastern artistic styles and iconographic concepts, or

did they base their work on these models while organizing a repertoire that was sufficiently similar yet still original? It may be assumed that Trialetian gold-workers developed their own stylistic versions and specific features, although in many cases they remained dependent on the established “pure” Near Eastern tradition. From these Old-World civilizations, the Trialetian craftsmen adopted numerous technical innovations, ornamental motifs, and methods of jewelry manufacture (Rubinson, 2003, pp. 128–143). The abrupt and distinct changes observed across various spheres of life within the Trialetian cultural milieu (following the Bedeni culture, where gold-working artifacts were first recorded) are unmistakable (Lordkipanidze, 2002, pp. 83–101; Puturidze, 2002, pp. 100–113).

These undoubted facts inevitably raise further questions, one of which is: what kind of events happened during the last century of the 3rd millennium BC that stimulated the extreme flourishing of the gold working craft? Supposing that this was determined by the simultaneous combination of different factors: the deepest social stratification of society, the accumulation of wealth by the elite group, the strengthening of the economy, increased intercultural relations and influences, and active participation in Near Eastern trade-exchange networks. Many close similarities and stylistic identities, considered above, lead us to conclude that, in the process of the formation of gold-working and burial ritual, the Trialeti culture was certainly involved with Near Eastern cultural traditions. What is obvious, anyway, is that the Trialeti craftsmen were very well aware of the Near Eastern artistic tradition. In sum, it seems acceptable to state that the formation of the new Trialeti culture should be understood as the result of interactions among several cultural orientations: a traditional one, a local one, and an “alien” tradition characteristic of the bordering southern regions. The coexistence of these diverse cultural traditions created a complex cultural milieu and endowed the culture under consideration with a distinctive and incomparable character.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial support.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

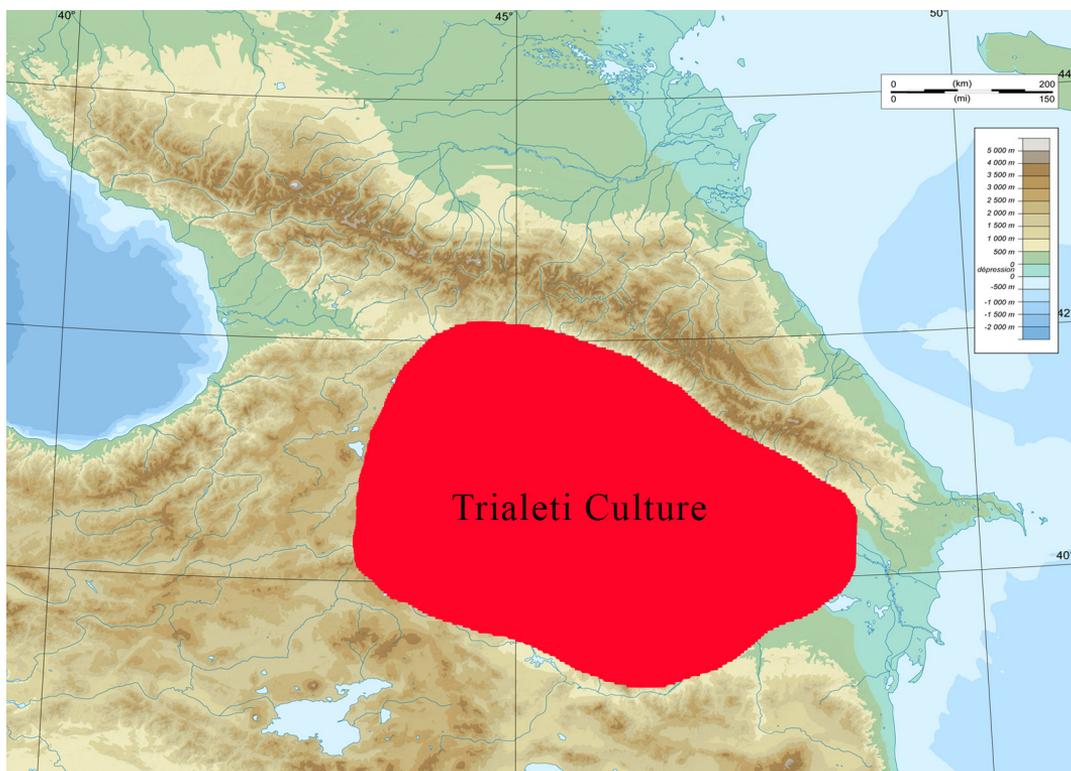
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**Figure 1.** Map of distribution of the Trialeti Culture (after Puturidze M. For the artifacts depicting Sumer's influence in the Trialeti Culture. in: *Oriental Studies*, # 9, Tbilisi, 2020, Tab. I)

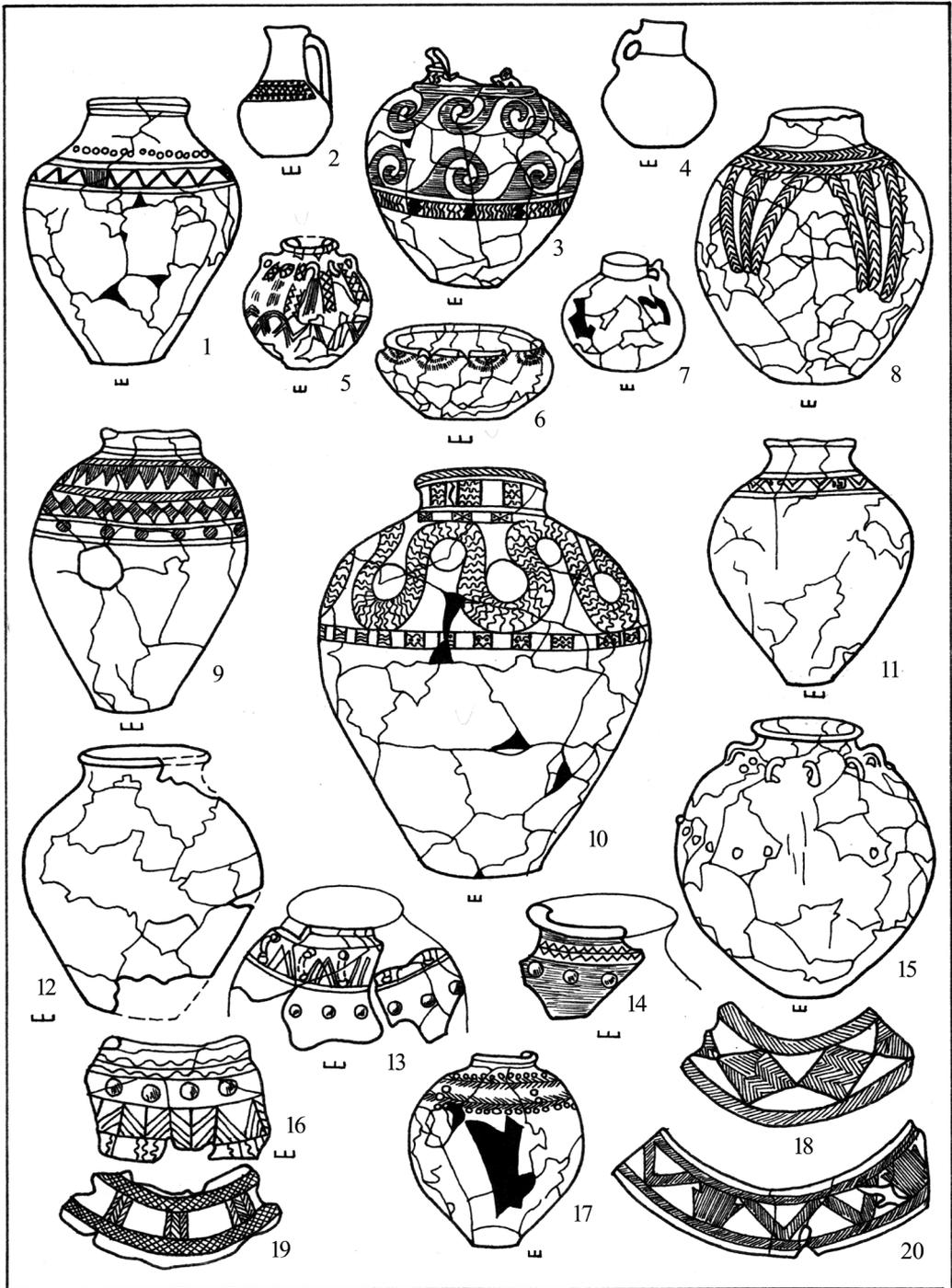


Figure 2. Typical black burnished, richly ornamented pottery and one (#3) painted brown on beige surface and ornamented with the curved spirals vessel of the Trialeti Culture



**Figure 3.** Painted black on the red surface by the so-called “water scheme motif” pottery



**Figure 4.** Gold jewelry of the Trialeti Culture (after Puturidze M. On the origins and development of the gold working in the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti Culture. in: *At the northern frontier of the Near Eastern archaeology. Recent research on Caucasia and Anatolia in the Bronze Age. SUBARTU, XXXVIII, Turnhout, 2017, Fig. 1).*



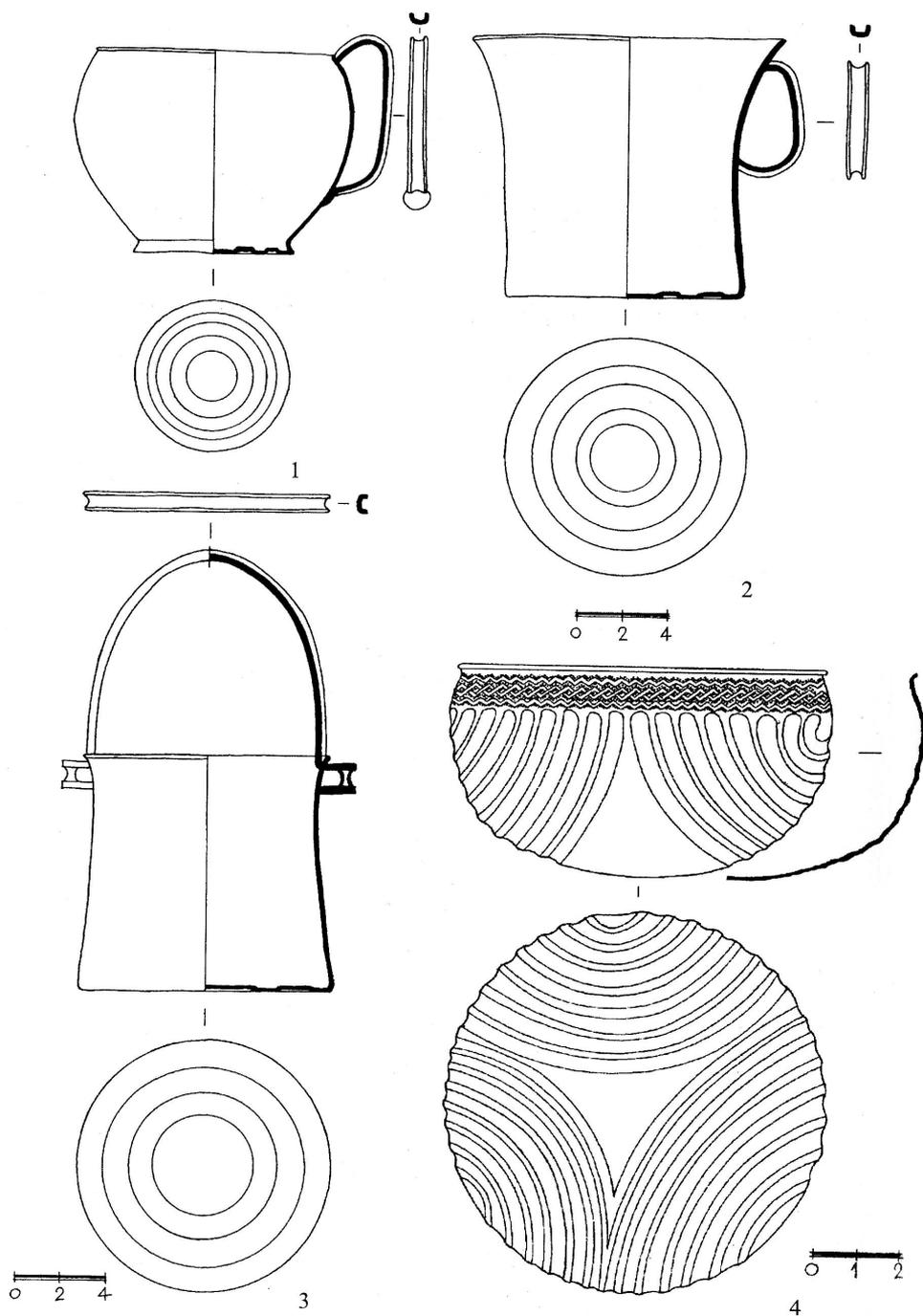
**Figure 5.** Gold and silver toreutics & one painted vessel (2) of the Trialeti Culture (after Puturidze M. On the origins and development of the gold working in the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti Culture. in: *At the northern frontier of the Near Eastern archaeology. Recent research on Caucasia and Anatolia in the Bronze Age. SUBARTU, XXXVIII, Turnhout, 2017, Fig. 3).*



**Figure 6.** Silver vessels, two gold spirals and silver pin of the Trialeti Culture (after Puturidze M. *On the origins and development of the gold working in the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti Culture. in: At the northern frontier of the Near Eastern archaeology. Recent research on Caucasia and Anatolia in the Bronze Age. SUBARTU, XXXVIII, Turnhout, 2017, Fig.2).*



**Figure 7.** Gold toreutics and different types of beards of the Trialeti Culture (after Puturidze M. *On the origins and development of the gold working in the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti Culture. in: At the northern frontier of the Near Eastern archaeology. Recent research on Caucasia and Anatolia in the Bronze Age. SUBARTU, XXXVIII, Turnhout, 2017, Fig. 5).*



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**Figure 8.** Silver vessels of the Trialeti Culture (1 – Lori Berd kurgan # 65; 2-5 Vanadzor royal kurgan # 1 (after Puturidze M. On the origins and development of the gold working in the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti Culture. in: *At the northern frontier of the Near Eastern archaeology. Recent research on Caucasia and Anatolia in the Bronze Age.* SUBARTU, XXXVIII, Turnhout, 2017, Fig. 4).



**Figure 9.** Gold and silver artifacts from the Trialeti Culture (Lori Berd kurgans: # 65 (Pl. IV 1-3,5) and # 94 (Pl. IV 4,6,7) (after Devedjian S. Lori Berd, II (Bronze Moyen), Erevan, 2006, Pl. IV).



**Figure 10.** Gold beaker, decorated with filigree, granulation and inlays with various semi-precious stones from Tsalka # 17 barrow (B. Kufin, *Archaeological excavations in Trialeti, I. An attempt of period-ization of sites*, 1941, Pl. XCIII).

## DIGITAL HUMANITIES

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# Computational Platforms for Deciphering Ancient Greek Papyrus Fragments

*MSHVIDOBADZE TINATIN, PHD*

*GORI STATE UNIVERSITY*

*GORI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0000-0003-3721-9252](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3721-9252)*

### ABSTRACT

In 79 AD, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius instantly turned hundreds of papyrus scrolls from ancient Herculaneum into carbon-carbon fragments. The scrolls contain valuable writings by Greek philosophers, including works by the “Epicurean Philodemus”. They were identified using X-ray phase contrast tomography. However, only a small part of the text hidden in the scrolls has been recovered. One of the main challenges in studying the Herculaneum papyri is their virtual unfolding, given their extremely complex structure and three-dimensional arrangement. In this paper, we discuss a computational platform for virtual unfolding and present the results of its application to two fragments of the Herculaneum papyri. The findings indicate potential for future applications and further interpretation of larger sections of text hidden in the carbonized Herculaneum papyrus. The paper also presents a computational pipeline for converting letter identifications into digital consensus transcriptions of papyrus fragments, using an interface to the Ancient Lives database. As a result, the paper explains the usefulness of the pipeline solution in the context of additional computational projects aimed at further accelerating the text fragment identification process.

*Keywords:* Greek texts, conservation, papyrus transcription, computer technology, crowdsourcing

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## INTRODUCTION

The ruins of Herculaneum offer a unique glimpse into the past with their remarkably well-preserved architecture and artifacts.

Ancient Greek carbonized papyrus scrolls survived the extraordinary conditions of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD and are now considered the last surviving ancient library. Although the scrolls have survived, they are unreadable due to the burning.

The paper aims to evaluate specific computational techniques for virtual unfolding and transcription.

Carbonization, due to the Vesuvius catastrophe and the natural effects of time on organic matter in the seventeenth century, has contributed to the degradation of the artifacts.

It should be noted that recently, thanks to creative technologies and innovative methods, the first word from the charred scrolls was readable - “Porphyras”, or purple. Researcher Handmer described how he enhanced the ink’s visibility. In doing so, he contributed to subsequent identification, including the term ‘Pharythor’ (Russell, 2023, pp. 145-156).

Modern conservation principles require preserving the integrity of historical documents when there is a risk of losing the information they contain. X-ray micro-computed tomography (micro-CT) provides digitization of the papyri and three-dimensional visualization of the scroll’s interior. The first use of micro-CT on two intact Herculaneum papyri occurred in 2009 (Seales et al., 2011, pp. 223–235). Data analysis revealed a tortured shape, with no traces of writing. Subsequently, Mocella et al. and Bukreeva et al. used X-ray phase contrast tomography (XPCT) to study Herculaneum papyrus rolls and fragments (Mocella et al., 2015; Bukreeva et al., 2016, p. 277). The potential utility of this technique for detecting traces of hidden handwriting within the scrolls was confirmed.

More than a century ago, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, of the University of Oxford, also discovered a vast hoard of papyri, numbering over 500,000 fragments, from the city of “Oxyrhynchus” (Bowman et al., 2007, p. 272). They began transcribing and editing the papyrus fragments, and to date, only a small portion of this vast treasure has been published. Transcribing the collection has been no easy task, as each fragment suffers from a unique level of deterioration due to different sections of the papyrus being lost or the manuscript text being illegible. The Ancient Lives project at the University of Oxford has developed a web-based interface for identifying letters on digital images of papyrus. Users can visit the Ancient Lives website and view transcriptions of ancient papyrus fragments at <https://ancientlives.org>. The identification of each letter and its associated features (x,y coordinates) is stored in a user identification database. To date, over 7 million letter identifications have been recorded internationally through the Ancient Lives interface.

A computational pipeline has been used to interpret large amounts of letter-identification data, automating letter identification in digital consensus transcriptions of papyrus fragments using existing sources. The paper provides an interpretation of the results found in each assessment. Several fragments from the outer part of the scroll are analyzed, and the

results of virtual unfolding of the papyrus fragments obtained with the developed computational platform are discussed. The letter identification components and all additional visualizations are implemented in the Python programming environment.

## ***METHODS***

This article uses descriptive, analytical, and explanatory methods to highlight the study's important issues. To formulate the concept, we examined the views of various researchers, which we used to illustrate the reasoning and conclusions.

All changes made to integrate the algorithms seamlessly are described in detail, and the relevant data were obtained from experiments.

The open-source software SYRMEP (Brun, 2017, pp. 125-134) and Tomo Project (STP) tools were used to reconstruct the 3D sample using the XPCT filtered back projection (FBP) method (Slaney, 2012, pp. 45-66).

Due to the complex structure and 3D arrangement of the papyrus sheets, a semi-manual segmentation procedure was used.

Image segmentation and surface extraction were performed with developed in-house macros and codes using the image processing software ImageJ and Python (Rueden, 2022, p. 529).

## ***RESULTS***

In Experiment 1, the surface parameterization process was used to generate a 3D mesh from 2D coordinates. In general, this operation produces geometric deformations that are responsible for image artifacts. The final result is obtained using appropriate methods. The results allow us to verify the reliability of the parameterization method with respect to a given sample.

*Experiment 2.* Let us consider the operation of the computational pipeline. As an evaluation criterion, 54 published fragments from the “Oxyrhynchus” collection were selected to measure the accuracy of consensus letter identification.

After processing, the pipeline outputs two files for each papyrus fragment. The first file contains the relative fragment consensus letter identifications with x and y coordinates. The second file, which is the final output of the pipeline, contains the relative fragment consensus line sequence, which closely resembles the original papyrus fragment (see Figure 2). The consensus letter identification components, the line sequence generation component, and all additional visualizations are implemented in Python using OpenCV image processing version 3.13.

```

1.py - C:/Users/ASUS/OneDrive/Рабочий стол/1.py (3.13.2)
File Edit Format Run Options Window Help
import cv2
import numpy as np

img = cv2.imread('eGaIy.jpg', 0)
img = cv2.threshold(img, 127, 255, cv2.THRESH_BINARY)[1] # ensure binary
num_labels, labels_im = cv2.connectedComponents(img)

def imshow_components(labels):
    # Map component labels to hue val
    label_hue = np.uint8(179*labels/np.max(labels))
    blank_ch = 255*np.ones_like(label_hue)
    labeled_img = cv2.merge([label_hue, blank_ch, blank_ch])

    # cvt to BGR for display
    labeled_img = cv2.cvtColor(labeled_img, cv2.COLOR_HSV2BGR)

    # set bg label to black
    labeled_img[label_hue==0] = 0

    cv2.imshow('labeled.png', labeled_img)
    cv2.waitKey()

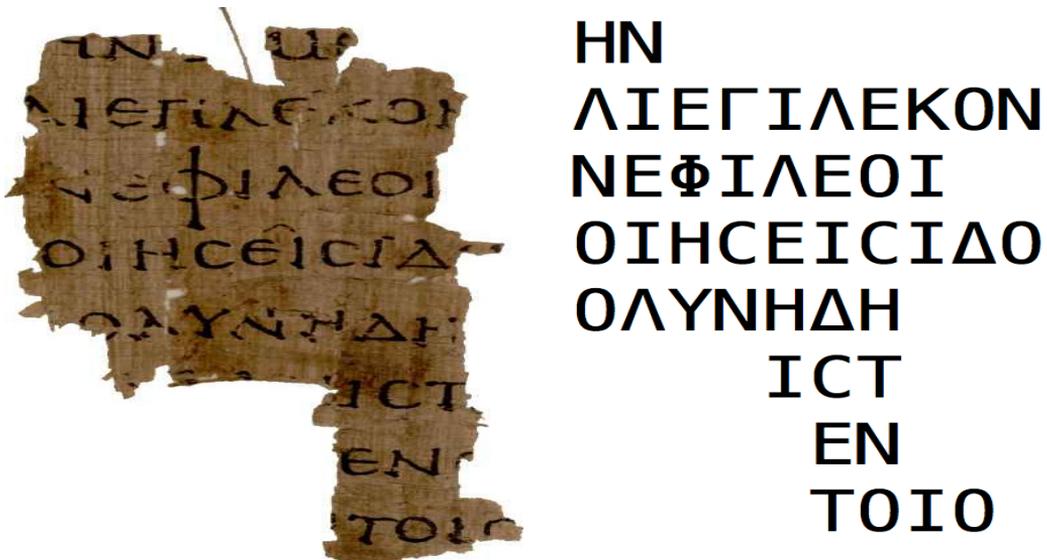
imshow_components(labels_im)

```

**Figure 1.** Visualization in Python.

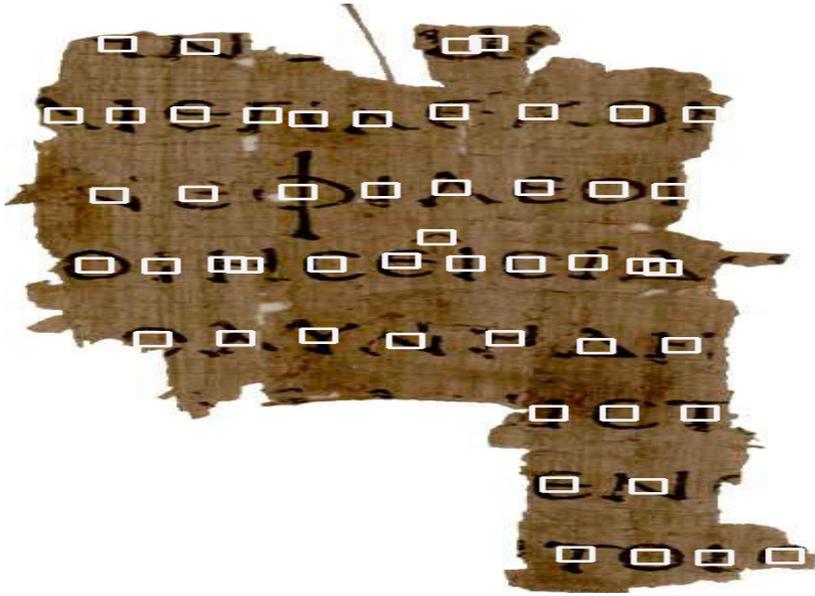
### Pre-processing stage

The Ancient Lives interface is directly connected to a MySQL relational database that contains all transcription information.



**Figure 2.** An Ancient Lives fragment image (left). A digital consensus transcription for the same Ancient Lives fragment (right). Source: <https://www.ancientlives.org/>

The MySQL database also reads the rotation information for each fragment.



**Figure 3.** A visualization of the processing performed by the pipeline using the same Ancient Lives fragment from Figure 2. Source:

Each fragment is categorized into groups based on handwriting style and readability.

The established metrics, precision, recall, and F1 score, are used to determine the classification performance of each approach. (van Rijsbergen, 2004, pp. 365–373).

Recall is calculated by dividing the number of correct letter identifications by the total number of letter identifications relative to the fragment in the P. Oxy. transcription. Precision and recall are combined into a composite metric called the F1 score. The equation for calculating the F1 score for an individual fragment is:

$$\varphi_1 = 2 \times \frac{C \times R}{C + R} \quad (2)$$

Where  $C$  da  $R$  are the precision and recall, respectively, of the fragment click data. An F1 score of 0.0 can be interpreted as an approach to correctly classifying almost no letters. In contrast, an F1 score of 1.0 can be interpreted as an approach to correctly classifying most or all letters.

As a result, the described approach could produce duplicate lines when multiple line regions are identified from a single curvilinear line, due to incorrect measurements of the vertical spacing between line regions. To filter duplicate line regions, a final post-processing stage will remove a line region if it shares 70% or more identity with its neighboring line region.

The results of the evaluation for Stage 1 suggest that the stepwise aggregation approach achieves higher accuracy in correctly identifying consensus letters than the kernel-based approach, especially for fragments with cursive handwriting.

In addition to achieving higher accuracy, the stepwise aggregation approach has faster execution time than the kernel-based approach.

## **DISCUSSION**

The main objective of the work was to develop a computational platform to perform virtual segmentation and flattening of a single sheet of a carbonized papyrus fragment.

*Experiment 1.* Sara Stabile et al., performed XPCT and micro-CT experiments to reconstruct three-dimensional images of two historical papyrus fragments, PHerc.1103 and PHerc (Stabile et al., 2021, p.143-147).

PHerc.1103 was scanned using synchrotron-based XPCT (Synchrotron radiation-based X-ray phase-contrast tomography imaging is an innovative modality for the quantitative analysis of three-dimensional morphology), while PHerc.110 was scanned using micro-CT using a laboratory source. According to technical expertise, the fragments belonged to different scrolls from Herculaneum. Both fragments have a highly compact internal structure and consist of multiple papyrus layers glued together, which cannot be separated by hand.

The most popular angle-preserving parameterization methods are used: least-squares conformal mapping (LSCM) and angle-based flattening (ABF). (Lévy et al., 2002; Sheffer et al., 2011, p.326–337).

A surface parameterization process is used to represent the 3D mesh in 2D coordinate space.

Recently, various digital procedures have been proposed to provide a digital version of the hidden text inside the rolled papyri, beginning with the non-invasive acquisition of their images. Nevertheless, the structure of the carbonized Herculaneum Papyrus is quite different from that of a conventional roulette wheel, where the standard “virtual scrolling” algorithm is used.

Future developments in specialized software may further enhance the ability to read the text from the Herculaneum Papyrus without actually reading it. The success lies in adapting the basic principles of XPCT, such as “virtual scrolling,” to the Herculaneum Papyrus and, consequently, to virtually open, read, and decipher parts of the text hidden within the unrolled papyrus.

X-ray phase contrast tomography is based on absorption and is a well-known tool for imaging the internal structure of thick objects with hard X-rays.

Standard absorption tomography is an inadequate technique for distinguishing details of similar density, for example, distinguishing carbon-fiber-based papyrus foil from carbon-based ink used for writing on papyrus. In this study, better contrast was achieved by

imaging the phase modulation induced by the object in a coherent or partially coherent beam. There are several experimental approaches to detecting phase contrast with X-rays. A series of experiments was carried out at ID17 of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) in Grenoble (F), using a free-space propagation setup.

The results of these experiments allow us to read and decipher letters and numbers previously written on a papyrus roll and to optimize the experimental conditions. Due to the flow of CO<sub>2</sub>, this complex internal structure was ideal for developing and testing new numerical algorithms for “virtual” unrolling and for adjusting and optimizing them to reveal the hidden writing.

XPCT experiments at PHerc. 375 and PHerc. 495, were performed using a monochromatized incident X-ray beam with an energy of 73 keV.

*Image processing.* 3D rendering and segmentation of the impurities were performed using Visage Amira 6 (an interactive system from FEI) and VolView (an interactive volume visualization system from Kitware Inc.). The 3D structure of the papyri was obtained through a segmentation procedure. Images were generated by associating colors with different gray-scale ranges in the 3D model.

*Virtual Unrolling.* In recent years, the problem of virtual unrolling using volumetric scanning in the virtual restoration and preservation of ancient artifacts, such as parchments or papyri, has been a highly active area of research. The use of X-ray computed tomography (CT) and X-ray microcomputed tomography for data digitization has facilitated the development of restoration algorithms. Various digital procedures have been proposed to provide a digital version of the text hidden within the rolled scrolls, starting with non-invasive acquisition.

*Digital restoration.* Surface flattening and rolling can be interpreted as an isometric mapping (i.e., maintaining distances) from 3D to 2D images, which reduces text distortion in the parchment.

Various approaches have been proposed to solve these problems. One of the most promising is described by Seales and colleagues. The authors developed software that combines the flattening and rolling functions based on the simulation of the surface of the mass source. Algorithms proposed by O. Samko et al. allow solving the problem of contact points between adjacent sheet layers (Samko, 2014, pp. 248–259).

The internal structure of the Herculaneum papyrus is quite different from a conventional roll, where a simple “virtual rolling” was used. However, the complex internal arrangement of the chaotic bundles of layers still consisted of layers that were similarly bent, torn, and twisted. The central part of the scroll is better preserved, and the papyrus layers are separated and loosely wound. The outer part of the papyrus is tightly rolled and stacked. It is clear that the virtual detection of the text requires different approaches and has its own challenges.

According to the experiment, the letters can be deformed due to thermal and pressure effects and due to the irregular surface of the fibers. It is not possible to know a priori the

aspect of the letters and even whether there is text in the analyzed part of the rolls.

The unsigned procedure for detecting hidden text was implemented using computational algorithms in MATLAB and various commercial software. Phase-contrast tomography provides a 3D volume of the books, revealing the Greek text hidden inside.

This method uses non-destructive X-ray imaging techniques, such as micro-CT and XPCT, to digitize fragile artifacts without damaging them, and employs a computer algorithm that virtually unfolds the Herculaneum papyrus fragments. Our analysis suggests that this technique is suitable for processing the scorza, the most damaged yet valuable part of the papyrus.

Searching for text within papyrus is the ultimate goal of virtual investigation. The widespread use of carbon-based black ink in the Herculaneum papyri is one of the most challenging issues in writing.

In terms of scientific accuracy, the analysis of the texts has revealed that XPCT has provided image contrast for lighter materials such as carbon. The technique can detect slight variations in density that distinguish areas of carbon ink from carbonized papyrus sheets. However, future XPCT experiments with higher spatial resolution are needed to differentiate text from papyrus structures reliably.

Choosing the proper flattening procedure is essential, as it helps distinguish between writing and papyrus and avoid misinterpretation of the data.

The segmentation procedures were carried out using specially developed ad hoc computational programs and free software.

For these purposes, we have developed and offer an accessible algorithm that can be reproduced, optimized, and improved.

Let us assume that the object consists of a single quasi-uniform material with a constant ratio between the real and imaginary parts of the refractive index.

( $C/\gamma$ ). With this condition, we develop the transport intensity equation (TIE) to investigate the phase:

$$\theta(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left( PT^{-1} \left\{ \frac{PT[I_N(x)/I_0(x)]}{\frac{\gamma}{C} + |f|^2 \left( \frac{\vartheta M}{4p} \right)} \right\} \right) \quad (1)$$

Where  $PT$  and  $PT^{-1}$  denote forward and inverse Fourier transformation, respectively,  $f = (f_x, f_y)$  re the Fourier coordinates,  $I_N(x)/I_0(x)$  is the normalized intensity detected at distance  $D$ .

In this experiment, which was carried out at ID17 of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility in Grenoble, PHerc. 1103 was measured with a monochromatic incident X-ray energy of 80 keV, selected with a Si(111) monochromator.

A two-step image reconstruction was applied to the XPCT experimental data: phase retrieval and tomographic reconstruction.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we present a novel computational pipeline for decoding transcriptions of ancient Greek papyri represented in digital images that closely resemble the original papyrus format. Palynologists can use the digital consensus transcriptions produced by the pipeline to explore, modify, and publish fragments with confidence more quickly.

The Ancient Lives project was implemented to help palynologists transcribe and evaluate fragments more quickly.

Several complementary tools have been developed to support and accelerate the transcription process, such as Greek-BLAST (Williams, 2020), a popular genetic sequence alignment tool specifically designed to identify literary papyrus fragments.

Consensus transcriptions of literary fragments generated by Ancient Lives can be directly fed into Greek-BLAST and rapidly aligned against databases of ancient Greek literary manuscripts (i.e., the Perseus Digital Library (Smith, 2021, pp. 15-25).

In addition, researchers at the University of Minnesota have developed a web-based tool to curate digital consensus transcriptions generated by the computational pipeline rapidly. Selected consensus transcriptions are stored in a database for later data mining.

Finally, the consensus transcriptions produced through Ancient Lives serve as the basis for many fragments that will be further studied, edited, and published in The Oxyrhynchus Papyri series and on Proteus. This new interactive, web-based platform uses advanced computational methods and techniques for both the study and analysis of ancient texts and the subsequent generation of digital texts.

A key component of future work is to improve the pipeline's line sequencing phase. The final redesign of the pipeline will be completed after additional classification information (e.g., methods for identifying linear information or missing papyri) is incorporated into the Ancient Lives framework.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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The research was carried out without financial aid.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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## GEOPOLITICS AND POLITICAL STUDIES

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# Argumentative Speech Analysis of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's First Speech as the President of Georgia

HASCHE JULIAN, PHD STUDENT  
GOETHE UNIVERSITY FRANKFURT  
FRANKFURT, GERMANY

ORCID: [0009-0002-3878-8457](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3878-8457)

### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes Zviad Gamsakhurdia's first speech following his victory in the presidential elections on May 26, 1991, which he delivered on June 7, 1991. Using political linguistic and corpus linguistic methods, particularly topos analysis, the speech was analyzed with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of Gamsakhurdia's political language and argumentative strategies. The analysis of the vocabulary revealed that the most frequent lexemes and their collocations have a politically official and statesmanlike connotation. Notably, the frequent use of the modal particle *unda*, which expresses necessity, stands out. This, along with the topos analysis revealing a strong dominance of goal-oriented topoi, suggests that Gamsakhurdia's speech was a programmatic appeal for his presidency. He covers a wide variety of topics, outlining the goals of his political course while also emphasizing his legitimacy and authority as president. In this context, he refers to both the support of the people and Georgia's historical mission, as well as the protection of God.

*Keywords:* Corpus linguistics, political linguistics, speech analysis, Zviad Gamsakhurdia

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## INTRODUCTION

The present paper focuses on Zviad Gamsakhurdia's first speech after his victory in the presidential election on May 26, 1991. The aim is to conduct an empirical analysis of the speech according to political-linguistic methodology to learn more about Gamsakhurdia's political language and to answer the following question:

What topics did Gamsakhurdia address in his first speech as Georgia's president, and what argumentative strategies did he use?

Analyzing this speech appears to be of particular relevance for research for two reasons: First, the initial appearances and speeches of presidents often have a programmatic and guiding character, making them especially significant for the subsequent legislative period; second, there is still a great need for research on Gamsakhurdia's language. In her empirical corpus analysis on Gamsakhurdia's hate speech against ethnic minorities in Abkhazia and Ossetia, Anastasia Kamarauli concludes "that there is a huge difference between what Gamsakhurdia uttered himself and what the scientific literature says about him [...] Gamsakhurdia did not systematically classify other ethnic groups or minorities as inferior and did not openly call for violence against them, at least not for the period for which the collected speeches are available." (Kamarauli, 2023, p. 164).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as the first president of the independent republic, is not only one of the most famous figures in modern Georgian politics but also one of the most controversially discussed. For a long time, he was active as a dissident, publicist, and writer, and with the founding of his electoral alliance "*Mrgvali magida – tavisupali sakartvelo*" (Georg. მრგვალი მაგიდა - თავისუფალი საქართველო), he became one of the most influential figures in the Georgian national movement (Suny, 1994, pp. 317–335).

In October 1990, his electoral alliance won the elections with 53.99%, making Gamsakhurdia one of the key political actors in Georgia's independence movement. In March 1991, he was elected president by the Supreme Soviet and played a leading role in the independence referendum on March 31, 1991, and the declaration of independence on April 9, 1991. Just weeks after Georgia's independence, the population was called to vote in the presidential election, in which Gamsakhurdia achieved a landslide victory with 86.5% of the votes (Iremadze, 2020, pp. 10–48). His speech on June 7, 1991, was his first official appearance after the election and marked his role as the first elected president of independent Georgia.

According to Suny, after winning the election with his political alliance, Gamsakhurdia used his power to pursue an exclusionary and authoritarian nationalism: he took control of the media, ordered the arrest of political opponents as well as leaders of ethnic minorities, and arranged for the appointment of his own prefects in the regions to consolidate his power. Even during the presidential election on May 26, Gamsakhurdia employed dishonest methods: smear campaigns, intimidation of opponents, and even physical violence (Suny, 1994, pp. 326–327). Not only does Suny describe Gamsakhurdia as increasingly dictatorial, but Jürgen Gerber also characterizes Gamsakhurdia's leadership style as totalitarian (Gerber, 1997, pp. 220–223). However, despite his authoritarian policies, Gamsakhurdia was unable to control

all parts of Georgia, and the divide with the opposition grew deeper until he was overthrown in a military coup from December 26, 1991, to January 2, 1992 (Suny, 1994, pp. 327–328).

The text of the speech, which serves as the basis for the analysis, originates from the newspaper *Sakartvelos respulika*<sup>1</sup>, issue 114 (134) from 11. June 1991 (*Sakartvelos respublika*, 1991, p. 1). It is likely that the speech was edited, so it cannot be guaranteed that it fully reflects the spoken words. The analysis is based on the speech in this exact form.

## METHODS

Political linguistics is a scientific discipline whose fundamental premise is that language is a central instrument of political action. Political actions are shaped through argumentation, where differing perspectives influence the representation of facts based on interests, reasoning supports one's position, and political opponents are attacked.

The question is not only about who the author of a political speech act is, but also, more importantly, how and in what way a specific target audience is addressed (Niehr, 2022, pp.1–9).

An important aspect is the pragmatic characterization of political speech acts. To examine these acts in more detail, methods such as the analysis of vocabulary, rhetorical devices, or argumentation strategies can be used. One approach to analyzing argumentation strategies is *topos* analysis, which is applied in this study.

The term *topos* (Anc. Greek *τόπος*, “place”; often used elliptically in the sense of *κοινός τόπος*, “commonplace”) not only has a conceptual history dating back to antiquity but also offers a broad scope for interpretation and holds particular significance for rhetorical analysis (Ostheeren, 2009, pp. 630–697). For this analysis, a specific definition of the term *topos*, specifically dealing with political argumentation, will be used, with Josef Klein's definition applied and outlined in the following section.

Argumentation is the central linguistic action in political rhetoric, where, at its core, there is always, even if implicitly, an open question being addressed, with arguments made for or against it, often preemptively. One specific form of argumentation is concessive construction, in which an argument from the opposing side is acknowledged as a concession while still maintaining one's own position in contrast. Within this framework, arguments can be categorized and grouped under the concept of *topos*. The following section will outline the *topoi* used in the analysis of the argumentation (Klein, 2019, 77, pp. 130–131):

- *Data topos*: Characteristic data of the starting situation are presented.
- *Valuation topos*: The data are evaluated.
- *Principle topos*: Reference to principles, norms, and values as the foundation of action.
- *Final topos*: Orientation of action towards the goal.
- *Consequence topos*: Reference to consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> The daily newspaper was published from December 1990 as the journalistic organ of the Supreme Soviet (<http://www.nplg.gov.ge/paperge/ka/browse/000197/>)

- *Cause topos*: Specification of causes for the starting situation.
- *Exemplum topos*: Citing analogies and examples.
- *Authority topos*: Appeal to an authority, e.g., higher entities like “God.”

As a prototype for a complex topical combination in relation to speeches, Klein presents the pattern (Klein, 2019, p. 130):

*[Data topos + Valuation topos + Principle topos + Final topos] -> Conclusion*

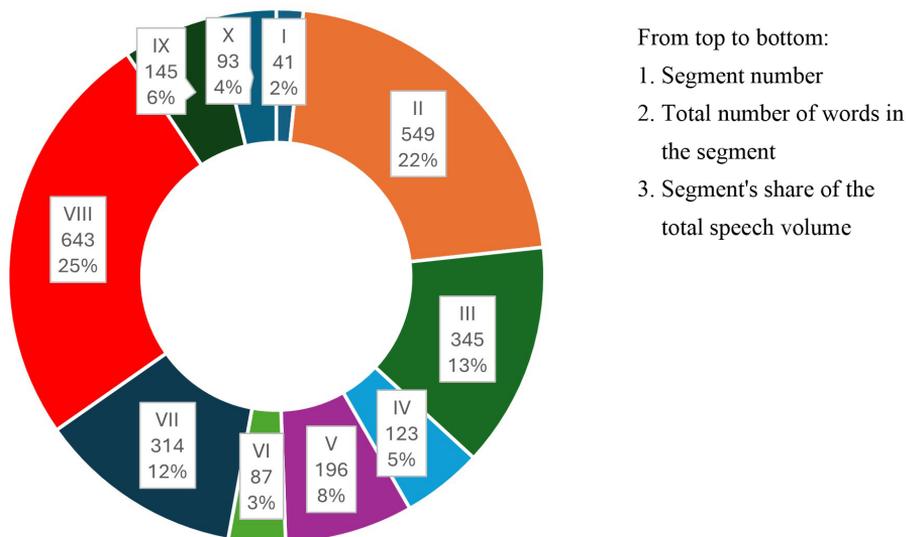
This model of various argumentative topoi, in conjunction with a corpus-linguistic approach, is applied in the political-linguistic analysis.

## **DISCUSSION**

The entire text of Gamsakhurdia’s speech consists of 2,532 words, with an average word count of 14.9 words per sentence. Initially, the text is divided into thematic segments, and their respective share of the total volume of the speech is illustrated to provide an overview of the structure and content of the speech. These segments are then summarized to gain a deeper insight into the content of the speech. Following this, the most frequent lexemes are extracted, their occurrence in the speech (according to the segments) is illustrated, and the collocations are briefly examined. This is followed by the core of the analysis, the topos analysis, where three segments have been selected to provide a representative overview of Gamsakhurdia’s argumentation structure.

The division into segments is done to outline the theme, though these are not meant to represent fixed boundaries. The segments do not claim objectivity or content coherence; rather, they serve as an orientation and structuring aid. Additionally, the proportions of the segments in the total text volume are visualized (Fig. 1).

- I. Addressing the recipients and expressing gratitude.
- II. Parliamentary elections on 28. October 1990, tasks of the new system, Georgia’s independence, and national rebirth.
- III. Georgia’s international integration, foreign affairs and Georgia’s role in the Caucasus.
- IV. Conflicts in Ačara, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- V. Rule of law and legislature.
- VI. Creation of a national defense.
- VII. Religion, the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the relationship with the state.
- VIII. Development of the economy and transformation of the economic system.
- IX. Labor market and social security.
- X. Final appeal and closing.



**Figure 1.** The share of each segment in the text volume of Gamsakhurdia's speech from June 7, 1991

A summary of the different segments of the speech is provided below:

- I. Gamsakhurdia addresses the recipients of the speech, making it clear that he is now speaking to them as the president of Georgia, elected by the people. Before continuing, he expresses his gratitude for the support during the election and announces that he will speak about the tense times ahead.
- II. He emphasizes the significance of the elections on October 28, stating that the path to freedom is challenging, both for the people and the elected government, especially when the initial euphoria fades. He underscores his legitimacy as president, which was previously confirmed by the parliament and now also by the Georgian people. Georgia stands at a historical crossroads, and he rejects worldly well-being in favor of the spiritual national rebirth. The elections, which were held under unprecedented anti-Georgian propaganda, not only demonstrated the population's support for the political course but also confirmed that the rights of all ethnicities are protected by internationally recognized rights. The national government established a democratic political system in the form of a presidential republic. The history of the Georgian nation, including the history of Georgian statehood, Georgian culture, and traditional values, is not only a part of the past but also a source of pride today. The Georgians are a nation that fights for freedom and democracy, a society that has revived its religious worldview and national consciousness – this is the present, the result of the struggle.
- III. The international recognition of the Republic of Georgia is a matter of international coexistence. He is confident that Georgia will find the support of democratic states. Georgia is building its relationships with the countries of the world based on the

principles of equality, respect, and mutual benefit. Georgia will join the most important agreements in all areas of peaceful coexistence among nations. The goal is also to normalize relations with the USSR, as they are of utmost importance to Georgia: on the one hand due to legal status, and on the other due to the shared border between the two states. International organizations should be involved in the further independence efforts in the rest of the USSR to ensure peace, economic stability, and democracy. He specifically mentions the Karabakh conflict and presents Georgia as a mediator, as the country has traditionally played a stabilizing role in the Caucasus when the political system has become consolidated.

- IV. He begins by calling for a resolution to the conflict in South Ossetia, emphasizing that Georgia's diplomatic recognition and its admission to the UN will help accelerate the negotiations. The state structure should enable self-governance while preserving national unity. A key foundation for this is the recognition of the political rights of the Abkhaz as an indigenous people of Georgia, alongside the revival of the traditional friendship between the two nations. The political autonomy of Abkhazia and the national rights of the Abkhaz people must be safeguarded. Finally, the future of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara should be determined by its own people.
- V. Gamsakhurdia demands that the formation of the nation-state and its system be based on the principles of the rule of law. The national legal system should be grounded in Georgian legal culture and tradition. He declares the rule of law and emphasizes the necessity of the rule of law and the adherence to the separation of powers.
- VI. It is necessary to establish a national defense system and consider the creation of a common European security system. The task of the armed forces is to protect national independence, territorial integrity, and constitutional order.
- VII. Gamsakhurdia emphasizes the importance of the Georgian Orthodox Church, particularly in the context of the state's existence in a hostile environment, and that the state should support the church in every possible way. The restoration of faith and the resulting moral revival are necessary for the revival of Georgia as a state. There is a close connection between the Georgian national movement and religious consciousness, so the movement can be described as a national-religious movement. The traditional connection between church and state must be restored, and the special function of the church must be recognized. While the church should be separate from the political system, this should not mean a separation of church and state. Church and state should not interfere in each other's affairs but enter a mutual relationship. He calls for the declaration of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion. The state must materially support the church, protect it, and restitute church property. However, the declaration of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion will not restrict the followers of other religions or atheists, as Georgia will remain true to its traditional tolerance.
- VIII. The imposed monopoly led to a disruption of the traditional Georgian economic system and the moral deformation of society. The current economic situation is extremely critical, which is why economic reforms must be carried out. The foundation

of these reforms should be rooted in national traditions and economic practices, with the state intervening in the economy only as necessary to serve the unified political and socio-economic interests of the country and foster entrepreneurial activity. The social market economy embodies the most important societal values: freedom, efficiency, and social independence. The goal is to achieve economic transformation with minimal disruption, ensuring that unemployment and inflation do not rise. It is urgent to address the land issue, as communist land policies led to the depopulation of rural areas, which is why he calls for land reform under the slogan “Return the land to the farmer.”<sup>1</sup>

- IX. Gamsakhurdia emphasizes the importance of ensuring employment for the population and providing a means of subsistence (especially for those who are unable to work for various reasons) and, in general, social protection.
- X. In his concluding appeal, he emphasizes the uniqueness of the Georgian nation. Georgia’s path to independence can be compared to the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. The nation is on the path of returning to the way of the ancestors and appeals to revive a free Georgia with faith. The people are undoubtedly ready for the decisive struggle, and the government is committed to being worthy of this historical mission of Georgia. He ends his speech with the appeal: “May the will of God be fulfilled! The will of the nation! Long live free Georgia! May God protect us!”<sup>2</sup>

The segmentation of Gamsakhurdia’s speech and the superficial content analysis show that Gamsakhurdia not only consistently defines his view of things but, above all, that the speech is a diverse catalog of demands and objectives for the near or distant future.

In the frequency analysis of the lexemes of the text (i.e., excluding stop words or grammatical elements), the following result emerges (Fig. 2):

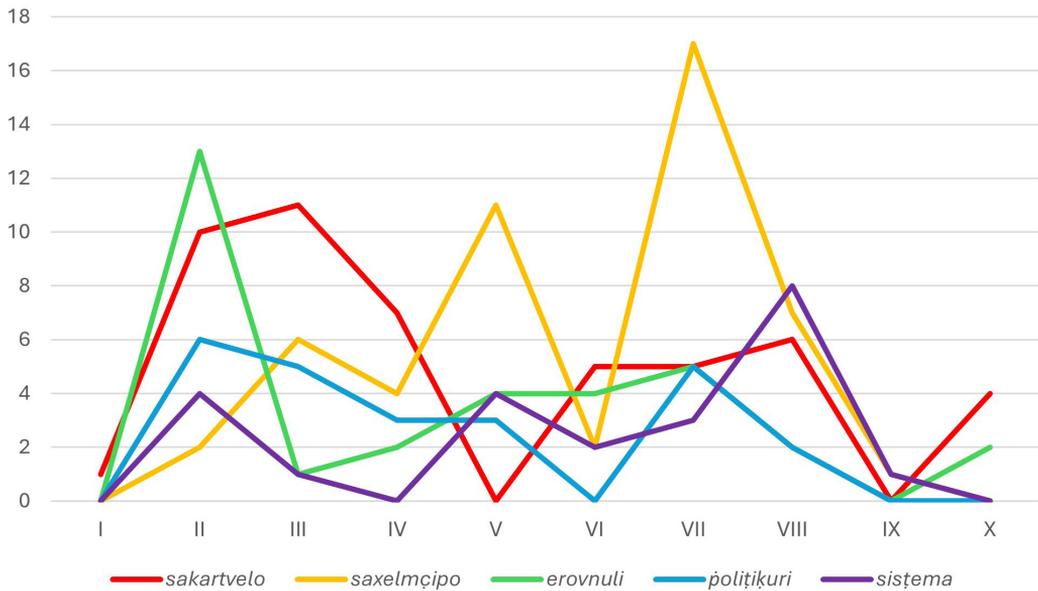
Lexeme	Number of occurrences
<i>sakartvelo</i> ‘Georgia’	49
<i>saxelmçipo</i> ‘state’	37
<i>erovnuli</i> ‘national’	33
<i>poliṭiḱuri</i> ‘political’	24
<i>sistema</i> ‘system’	23
<i>eḱlesia</i> ‘church’	20
<i>xelisupleba</i> ‘(political) power’	19
<i>samartlebrivi</i> ‘judicial, legal’	17
<i>kartveli</i> ‘Georgian’	17
<i>eri</i> ‘nation’	16
<i>eḱonomiḱuri</i> ‘economic’	13

**Figure 2.** The ten most frequent lexemes and their occurrence

1 “*Miça unda daubrundeḱs glẽx.*”

2 “*Dae, aḱsrulebdeḱs neba ḱvtisa! Neba erisa! Gaumarḱos tavisupal sakartvelos! Gvparavdeḱs ḱmert!*”

This shows that the most frequent words are related to the nation (*sakartvelo*, *erovnuli*, *kartveli*, *eri*), state power (*saxelmçipo*, *xelisupleba*), political terms (*poliṭiḳuri*, *sistema*, *samartlebrivi*), church (*eḳlesia*), and economy (*eḳonomiḳuri*). An overview of the distribution of the five most frequent words across segments presents the following result (Fig. 3)<sup>1</sup>:



**Figure 3.** Illustration of the occurrence of the five most frequent lexemes according to the segments

This overview shows that the terms referring to Georgia as a nation, *sakartvelo* ‘Georgia’ and *erovnuli* ‘national’, appear particularly in the early segments of the speech. Furthermore, the term *saxelmçipo* ‘state’, which denotes state power, dominates, especially in relation to foreign policy and religious policy. The term *sistema* ‘system’ appears particularly with regard to economic policy, and there is no significant rise in the use of *poliṭiḳuri* ‘political’.

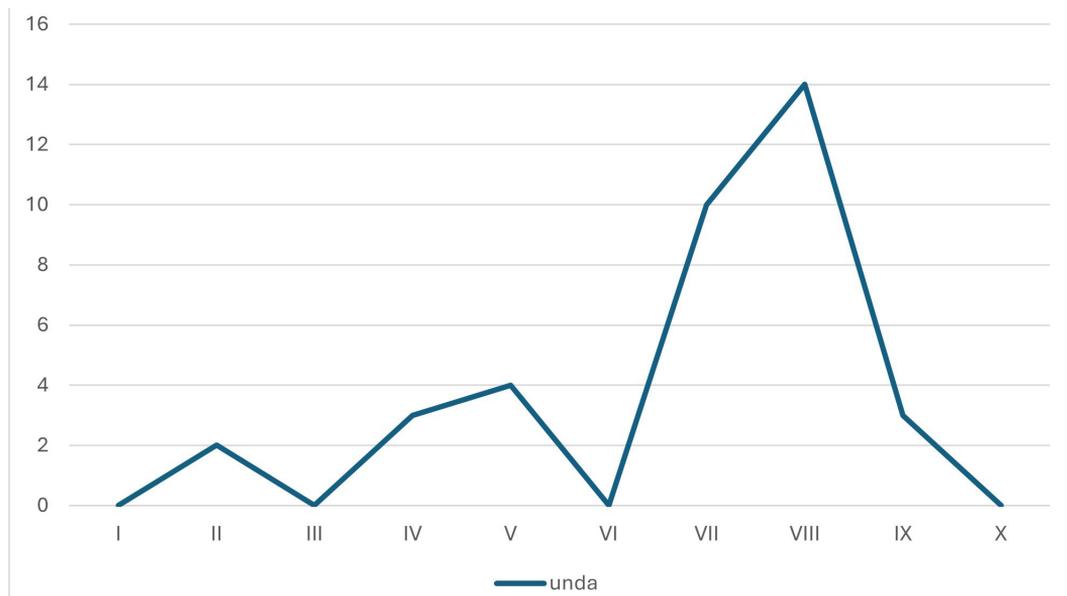
The collocations related to the three most frequent words that appear more than once show a semantic proximity to similar political and state-related vocabulary and are summarized in the Table (1) below:

Word	Collocation and Frequency
<i>sakartvelo</i>	<i>respublikis</i> ‘republic’s’ (4), <i>ṣeiaragebuli</i> ‘armed’ (2), <i>saxelmçipos</i> ‘state’s’ (2), <i>saxelmçipoebrivi</i> ‘(adj.) state-’ (2), <i>respubliḳa</i> ‘republic’ (2), <i>damouḳideblobis</i> ‘independence’s’ (2), <i>da</i> ‘and’ (2)
<i>saxelmçipo</i>	<i>da</i> ‘and’ (4), <i>unda</i> ‘must’ (3), <i>ṣoris</i> ‘between’ (2), <i>mier</i> ‘by’ (2), <i>xelisuplebis</i> ‘power’s’ (2), <i>religiad</i> ‘as religion’ (2)
<i>erovnuli</i>	<i>xelisuplebis</i> ‘power’s’ (4), <i>xelisublebam</i> ‘power’ (3), <i>saxelmçipoebrivi</i> ‘(adj.) state-’ (3)

**Table 1.** Collocation of the three most frequent words

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that due to the varying lengths of the segments, this is not a ‘temporal’ snapshot.

The frequent use of the modal particle *unda* (36 occurrences) is also notable, which expresses necessity, according to the ratio to the volume of the text, especially in segment VII, in which he talks about religious topics (Fig. 4):



**Figure 4.** Occurrence of the particle *unda* after the segments

Towards the end of this segment (VII), there is a sequence of five sentences with *unda*:

Original text	Translation
<i>Saxelmçipos damoukideblobis aġdgenastan ertad martmadidebloba saxelmçipo religiad unda ikces.</i>	“Along with the restoration of the state’s independence, Orthodoxy <b>should</b> become the state religion.”
<i>Am princıpebidan gamomdinare, kartulma saxelmçipom unda uzrunvelhġos eġlesiis upleba iġos saero cxovrebis akġiuri monaġile.</i>	“Based on these principles, the Georgian state <b>must</b> ensure the right of the Church to be an active participant in secular life.”
<i>Saxelmçipom unda daıcvas saeġlesio koneba, xeli šeuġġos eġlesias ġradiciul samonašro mšeneblobaši.</i>	“The state <b>must</b> protect church property, support the Church in traditional monastic construction.”
<i>Saxelmçipom unda izrunos, rata eġlesiam miġos saġiro maġerialuri daxmareba.</i>	“The state <b>must</b> ensure that the Church receives the necessary material assistance.”
<i>Saganmanatleblo sakmianobis, ġazrebis mšeneblobisa da šeġetebisatvis unda aġdġes saeġlesio saġutreba miġaze.</i>	“Church ownership of land <b>must</b> be restored for educational activities, construction, and repair of churches.”

**Table 2.** Five sentences from segment VII with translation

Together with *saxelmçipo* ‘state’ as a sentence-initial agent, a threefold anaphora is created that strongly emphasizes the demand for the declaration of the state religion and the support of the church.

The analysis of the speech also reveals that it contains a wide range of rhetorical devices. Gamsakhurdia’s use of language will be examined exemplarily in Segment VII, with the descriptions of the rhetorical figures based on Heinrich Plett’s introductory work on rhetorical text analysis (Plett, 2001, pp. 27-126):

Anaphora	<i>[...] kartulma saxelmçipom unda uzrunvelhqos [...]</i> <i>saxelmçipom unda daicvas [...]</i> <i>saxelmçipom unda izrunos, [...]</i>	“[...] the Georgian <b>state must</b> ensure [...] The <b>state must</b> protect [...] The <b>state must</b> ensure, [...]”
Through anaphora, the stated responsibilities of the state are clearly emphasized and conveyed to recipients.		
Anadiplosis + Antithesis	<i>Eklesiis samocikulo moğvaçeobis sulieri buneba tavistavad gamoricxavs mis uşualo monaçileobas kveqnis <b>poliṭiḱur siştemaşi</b>, <u>magram</u> <b>poliṭiḱuri siştemidan</b> eklesiis gamoḱopa ar unda nişnavdes saxelmçiposa da eklesiis urtiertgatişvas.</i>	“The spiritual nature of the church’s apostolic work itself excludes its direct participation in the <b>political system</b> of the country, <u>but</u> the separation of the church from the <b>political system</b> should not mean the separation of the state and the church.”
The use of anadiplosis ( <i>poliṭiḱuri siştema</i> ‘political system’) intensifies the contrast within the antithetical construction. In the first part of the sentence, Gamsakhurdia states that the church would not participate directly in the political system. However, introduced by <i>magram</i> ‘but’, the second part of the sentence states that the church should nevertheless participate in the state. While the first part presents a concession, the second part introduces an antithetical demand for connection.		
Metaphorical Language	<i>Sulieri buneba; zneobrivi aḱorżineba; cxoveli morçmuneoba</i>	“Spiritual nature; moral revival; living faith”
Through metaphorical language, the terms are given stronger emotional weight, and the message appears more vivid and tangible to recipients.		

Parallelism	<i>Ekleſia da saxelmçipo</i>	“The church and state”
This parallelism appears five times in the segment, highlighting the importance of the two concepts for Gamsakhurdia’s speech. By using parallelism, he rhetorically reinforces the connection between the two terms.		

Repetitio + Epistrophe	<i>Saxelmçipoebrivi aĝorzineba, misi damouķideblobis aĝdgena ver moxerxdeba kartveltatvis niſneuli cxoveli morçmuneobis aĝorzinebis gareſe, zneobrivi aĝorzinebis gareſe.</i>	“The <b>revival</b> of Georgia as a state, the restoration of its independence, will not be possible <b>without the revival</b> of the vital faith that is important to Georgians, <b>without the moral revival.</b> ”
Through the triple repetition of the term aĝorzineba (‘revival’), a clear emphasis and linkage of the concepts is established. The epistrophe strongly highlights the statement of the sentence: without a spiritual and moral revival, a national revival would not be possible.		

Rhetorical Appeals	<i>Appeals formed with the particle unda</i>	Rhetorical appeals are formulated by the multiple use of the particle <i>unda</i> ‘must’
Through the frequent use of rhetorical appeals, the speech’s appellative character becomes clear. In his address, Gamsakhurdia formulates goals and tasks, appeals to the recipients regarding politics, and clarifies his political intentions – often in connection with final topoi.		

As an example, the topos analysis will be presented for segments II, VII, and X to examine different large segments and topics (one chapter at the beginning, one from the middle, and the end).

## II. Segment:

*Data topos*: Victory in the elections on October 28 and description of the time from then up until the moment of the speech.

*Valuation topos*: This is an excellent achievement for freedom.

*Authority topos*: Legitimization as the president elected by the Georgian people.

*Consequence topos*: This was necessary, as every totalitarian system is doomed to fail.

*Principle topos*: Breaking the chains of the empire is in the nature of the Georgian people and their historical mission.

*Authority topos*: Despite adverse circumstances, the elections proved the clear authority of the new government.

*Cause / Authority topos:* The reason for the victory lies in the support of the population for the new political course.

→ The confirmation of Gamsakhurdia as president by the people, despite adverse circumstances, and the support of the nation highlight his authority. This is also a necessity to avoid following the same false path as the former oppressor.

*Cause topos:* The confrontation between Georgia and the USSR led to a complicated political and socio-economic situation.

*Data topos:* The new government implemented radical political reforms in a very short time.

*Final topos:* The goal of these reforms was the restoration of an independent Georgian state.

*Authority topos:* The support of the people proves the correctness of his political course.

→ While the country is in a difficult situation, the government has implemented reforms (which is positively connoted) with the goal of restoring the state's independence. The correctness of this course is evidenced by public support.

*Data topos:* The foundation for the creation of independent security structures and the restoration of state independence has been laid.

*Valuation topos:* These are the greatest victories of the Georgian nation and government.

*Final topos:* Through the establishment of a multi-party system, the restructuring of the government, the introduction of local government institutions, and the creation of the presidency, the national government established a political system in the form of a presidential republic.

*Data topos:* The foundation for the creation of a Georgian defense system was laid.

*Final topos:* This led to the first swearing-in of soldiers of the National Guard on April 26, 1991.

→ The achievement of sovereignty, including in the area of security structures, has led to a complete transformation (clearly positively connoted) of the country.

*Data topos:* The restoration of independence has initiated a transitional phase.

*Valuation topos:* This is the prerequisite for reforms.

*Authority topos:* Reference to the history of the nation, the history of Georgian statehood, Georgian culture, and traditional values.

*Principle topos:* A nation fighting for freedom and democracy, a society that revives its religious worldview and national consciousness.

*Conclusion:* This is our present, the result of our struggle.

→ Based on the principles of freedom and democracy and invoking the history of the Georgian nation, one is in a phase of transformation, the goal of which is the restoration of state independence.

In principle, this is a recounting of the political events and an explanation of the “intentions”, primarily as proof of authority to validate the correctness of the course and the legitimacy of the national movement and Gamsakhurdia as president.

There are notably many concessive formulations, which serve as argumentative emphasis, e.g., “... **despite** the difficult political and socio-economic situation caused by this confrontation, the national government implemented radical domestic reform in an extremely short period of time.”<sup>1</sup>

## VII. Segment:

*Data topos*: Georgia is an Orthodox Christian country, where a traditional connection between church and state exists.

*Valuation topos*: Faith is essential for the existence of the Georgian state in a hostile environment.

*Data topos*: The state has always supported the church.

*Final topos*: The revival of the state requires the revival of faith.

*Principle topos*: This necessity is confirmed by both the past and the present.

→ This leads to the conclusion that the state, which has always supported the church and which, in turn, plays a state-building role, must support the church for the state’s revival.

*Data topos*: The national movement is closely linked with religious consciousness; it is a national-religious movement.

*Final topos*: Therefore, the movement is not only national-political, but also aims at a moral renewal based on Christian faith.

→ Gamsakhurdia thus closely links the national movement with the goal of renewing the Christian faith.

*Final topos*: The government is working on restoring the traditional unity between church and state.

*Principle topos*: The core of this unity is based not only on the social-political. determination of the government, but also primarily on Christian moral principles.

→ A fundamental demand for the restoration of the traditional unity between church and state is presented as a presumption, where he refers to Christian moral principles to support the argument. This general demand is then further specified through more specific requests.

*Final topos*: The state should recognize the supremacy of the religious-moral authority of the church and its special social function.

*Data topos*: The spiritual nature of the apostolic work of the church excludes its direct par-

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1 “... *am konprontaciit gamoçveuli mzime polițikuri da socialur-eķonomiķuri mdgomereobis miu-xedavad, uağresad moķle vadaři erovnulma xelisuplebam ganaxorciela radiķaluri sařinao reporma.*”

ticipation in the political system of the country.

*Final topos:* The separation of church and the political system should not mean a separation of church and state.

*Final topos:* One should not interfere with each other's affairs.

*Final topos:* No separation of church and state, but their natural connection.

*Final topos:* With the restoration of state independence, Orthodoxy should become the state religion.

*Final topos:* The state must guarantee the church the right to actively participate in secular life.

*Final topos:* The state must protect church property, assist in church construction, restore church property, and provide material support.

→ It is presented as information that the nature of the church excludes its participation in the political system. Immediately afterward, it is stated that this should not mean a separation, but rather a connection is requested. The central demand of the entire segment follows: the recognition of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, which is argued through the emphasis on its nation-building role. Further demands follow, aiming to strengthen the position of the church.

*Consequence topos:* The recognition of Orthodoxy as the state religion does not imply an infringement on the integrity of adherents of other religions and atheists.

*Final topos:* The state guarantees freedom of belief and no restrictions for religious reasons.

*Principle topos:* Reference to the traditional religious tolerance of the Georgian state.

→ To ease concerns regarding the declaration of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion for followers of other religions or atheists, Gamsakhurdia assures that no negative consequences would arise, invoking the principle of traditional religious tolerance of the Georgian state.

In this segment, the importance of the Orthodox Church for the Georgian state and the national movement is strongly emphasized. The church is portrayed as a state-building and moral institution. This positive attribution logically leads to the conclusion that Orthodox Christianity should be declared the state religion, which is then further specified through detailed demands. Toward the end, it is assured that this would not have negative effects on other religious communities or atheists.

Noteworthy: Relatively few pieces of information are provided, and essentially no evaluation of these data is provided. Primarily, demands are made. This suggests that Gamsakhurdia did not see the necessity to convey a lot of information or evaluations to the audience, as the knowledge and positive connotation were presumed to be clear. What stands out most is the programmatic nature of the speech, in which he presents his intentions and demands regarding religious policy.

The topos analysis thus confirms what was already suspected regarding the use and fre-

quency of *unda*.

## X. Segment

Initially, Gamsakhurdia employs a direct appeal to the audience.

*Authority topos*: Emphasis on the uniqueness of the Georgian nation. Land of the Virgin Mary.

*Exemplum topos*: Georgia's development is compared to the martyrdom of Christ.

*Final topos*: Return to the path of the ancestors and the revival of a free Georgia with faith.

*Final topos*: The nation is ready for the decisive battle.

*Final topos*: The government must be worthy of this greatest mission to restore Georgia's rightful place in the world community.

*Closing appeal and also an authority topos*: “*Dae, aḡsruldes neba ḡvtisa! neba erisa! gaumaržos tavisupal sakartvelos! gvaravdes ḡmerti!*” ‘May the will of God be fulfilled! The will of the nation! Long live free Georgia! May God protect us!’

→ In the conclusion of his speech, Gamsakhurdia draws support for the mentioned political course from the nation, the people, and from God, with the central goal of his political actions being the revival of the nation.

## CONCLUSION

The overview of the most frequent terms and their collocations shows that the vocabulary is strongly influenced by statesmanship, with the most frequent terms relating to the nation and the state. However, a clear distribution across thematic segments can be observed for some terms. Additionally, there is a noticeable combative tone in his language, as in his concluding appeal, where he speaks of a decisive battle, which is typical for political speech.

The overview of the segments reveals a broad range of topics and the programmatic character of Gamsakhurdia's speech, in which he presents the most relevant issues to him and the course for his presidency.

At the beginning of the speech, but also throughout, Gamsakhurdia emphasizes his authority and legitimacy as president of independent Georgia. He does this by referring to the referendum, which he considers a confirmation of his political course, as well as to Georgian history (which he even describes as the historical mission of the Georgian nation), and to God and the church. The argumentative significance of Christianity and faith is remarkable - this is in complete contrast to the previous rulers.

The exemplary analysis of rhetorical devices reveals the speech's rhetorical sophistication. It underscores both the significance Gamsakhurdia placed on this programmatic speech and his intellectual and rhetorical prowess.

In the topoi analysis, this is evident through the frequent use of principle and authority topoi. However, the most noticeable aspect is the use of final topoi, in which he outlines the goals of his political course to justify his actions and gain the support of his audience. In the sample, there are strikingly few data-topoi and almost no valuation-topoi. This can be explained by the fact that Gamsakhurdia could assume that the audience already had the necessary informational foundation, but more importantly, their judgment was already a presumption, and the main goal was to convincingly present his political course. Thus, the topos analysis, as well as the frequency of *unda*, imply the programmatic nature of this speech: In this first speech after the election, Gamsakhurdia outlined the political program he aimed for during his presidency.

At the same time, the emphasis on the principle, authority and final topoi highlights Gamsakhurdia's claims to power and authority, which he sought to legitimize through his election – something he even pursued by dishonest means. The observed topoi, the vocabulary, and the frequent use of *unda* also outline an authoritarian and nationalist agenda for his legislative term, which likewise characterizes his actual political conduct.

This proves that this speech plays an important role in analyzing Gamsakhurdia's political language as well as in examining his political practices, which should certainly be further explored in more in-depth studies of this and other speeches.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# **Türkiye’s Economic Connectivity in Geopolitics of the South Caucasus**

*ALKAN ABDULMELIK, PHD*

*WEBSTER UNIVERSITY,*

*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0000-0003-2071-3019](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2071-3019)*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines Türkiye’s economic connectivity in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus, with a focus on the transformative impact of major developmental projects. The research problem centers on how Türkiye leverages its economic and energy infrastructure to reshape regional dynamics and reduce its dependence on global powers. Using a qualitative methodology, the study applies Economic Connectivity Theory to assess Türkiye’s linkages with the South Caucasus, Middle East, and Central Asia through trade, investment, energy security, capital flows, and conflict resolution. Key projects analyzed include the BTC oil pipeline, SCP, TANAP, BTK railway, the Middle Corridor, and the Iğdır–Nakhchivan Natural Gas Pipeline (INNGP). The findings reveal that these initiatives have economically integrated the region, enhanced interdependence, and minimized reliance on powers like Russia and the U.S. In conclusion, Türkiye’s growing role in regional development and energy diplomacy has strengthened its geostrategic position, establishing it as a pivotal actor in Eurasian connectivity.

*Keywords:* South Caucasus, economic connectivity, Europe, the Middle Corridor, Türkiye

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores Türkiye's role in fostering economic connectivity in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus – a region encompassing resource-rich Azerbaijan and key transit states Georgia and Armenia (Shaffer, 2008). Türkiye's strategic location enables it to function as a trade and energy hub linking Europe, Central Asia, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Middle East through vital corridors and pipelines (Köstem, 2019; Aras & Akpınar, 2011; Ismailov & Papava, 2006). Türkiye's engagement is shaped by historical and cultural ties, particularly with Azerbaijan and Georgia (Aras & Akpınar, 2011; Aydin, 2000; Aydin, 2016; Babali, 2010; Usman et al., 2022). Its key interests include energy security, trade routes, transport infrastructure, regional stability, and reducing the region's dependence on external powers (Aydin, 2000; Babali, 2010; Neset et al., 2023). To advance these goals, Türkiye has launched various development projects aimed at deepening integration with the South Caucasus and enhancing regional connectivity with broader surrounding regions.

Among the developmental projects, the most important are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway project. The Iğdır-Nakhchivan Natural Gas Pipeline (INNGP). These mega initiatives make Türkiye a trade hub and reshape regional economic connectivity (Veliyev, 2015; Papava, 2005). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline was initiated in 2006, provides regional connectivity with Azerbaijan, and provides a direct trade route to the international market via Georgia and Türkiye through the Caspian Sea (Papava, 2005; Alexander, 2013). The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) transports gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field to Türkiye and Europe, complemented by the TANAP and TAP pipelines, which deliver Caspian gas to European markets. These projects reduce Europe's reliance on Russian energy and increase Türkiye's regional influence (Fackrell, 2013; Siddi, 2017). They also offer Armenia a path to lessen its energy dependence on Moscow (Neset et al., 2023). Türkiye has deepened economic and political integration with the South Caucasus through infrastructure projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway, launched in 2017, which facilitates efficient goods transport between Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Lussac, 2008; Aydin, 2000; Weiss, 2023). The newly launched Iğdır-Nakhchivan Natural Gas Pipeline (INNGP) is strategically significant, and its connection to the proposed Zangezur corridor aims to improve land links between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Economic corridors such as these enhance regional connectivity and cooperation. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moscow's geopolitical leverage weakened, especially in the Middle East, opening space for broader regional integration (Khan & Koch, 2024). These projects also help diversify Europe's energy sources (Siccardi, 2024). Beyond energy, Türkiye engages in regional diplomacy, emphasizing conflict resolution, particularly in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which affects its strategic interests (Alexander, 2013; Humbatov & Klimas, 2016; Iqbal & Shah, 2015; Papava, 2005). Ankara has participated in trilateral talks with Armenia and Azerbaijan, supporting frameworks such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) to foster stability and align regional interests (Babali, 2010; Asadov, 2021; Lussac, 2008; Ataman, 2023). Türkiye also maintains commercial and cultural ties with both Central Asia and Europe to strengthen its role in trade and energy networks (Aras & Akpınar, 2011; Tanboğa, 2010).

This study investigates the geopolitical and strategic implications of major regional infrastructure projects in the South Caucasus: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline, the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway, and the Middle Corridor. It holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the existing literature on regional integration and economic connectivity. In practice, the study offers policymakers valuable insights by clarifying Türkiye's strategic vision and evolving role in the region. The research aims to assess Türkiye's ambition to become a regional hub for trade, energy, and political influence, as well as its efforts to reduce reliance on external powers and limit the intervention of global superpowers in South Caucasus affairs. Additionally, the study explores the broader implications of Türkiye's infrastructure-led regional strategy, including the potential to supply energy to Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Finally, the findings emphasize Türkiye's strengthening economic position and its relevance to fostering regional stability and contributing to the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus.

## ***METHODS***

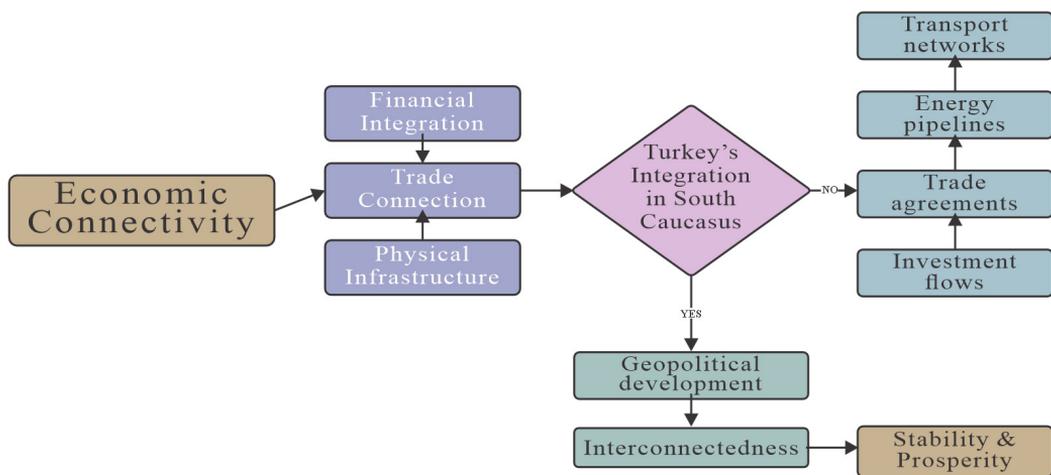
The research employed a systematic, logical methodology to address the central research questions, incorporating the research design, data sources, analytical methods, and ethical considerations (Marczyk et al., 2010; Ali et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2015). A thematic analysis approach was used to evaluate relevant secondary data across five key themes: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline, the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway, and the Middle Corridor. Only literature meeting rigorous academic standards was considered, including peer-reviewed articles and policy reports (Ebidor & Ikhide, 2024; Paré & Kitsiou, 2017). Each theme was addressed through targeted literature searches using specific keywords such as "Türkiye's economic connectivity," "South Caucasus," "BTC pipeline," "TANAP," and "Middle Corridor." From an initial pool of approximately 100 sources, 84 papers were selected based on their relevance and methodological soundness. These were categorized into two groups: those meeting the inclusion criteria and those excluded according to predetermined criteria. This process followed the principles of a systematic literature review – ensuring objectivity, transparency, and thematic coherence. The selected literature was then synthesized to extract key findings and insights, organized under the identified themes, and used to address the research objectives through integrative analysis.

### *Turkey's Vision Towards Economic Connectivity in the South Caucasus Region*

The concept of economic connectivity, introduced in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, emphasizes the strategic importance of cooperation in trade, infrastructure, science, and technology to support geopolitical stability (Abeldinova & Kemp, 2016; Hall, 2019). It goes beyond commerce to include integration in education, welfare, culture, and diplomacy – what scholars call the "integration of integrations" (Eldem, 2020; Özdal et al., 2013). These informal economic links serve as a foundation for wider political and strategic alignment, particularly in geopolitically sensitive areas. Leveraging its key geographic position, Türkiye has emerged

as a central player in promoting economic connectivity across the South Caucasus, Middle East, and Central Asia, using infrastructure and trade projects to enhance interdependence, foster stability, and limit the sway of external powers (Albarracín, 2012; Aras & Fidan, 2009).

The Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted traditional energy routes, creating opportunities for new regional alignments. In response, Türkiye has pursued projects to reinforce energy and transport links in the South Caucasus. At the same time, broader initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) reflect a shift toward diversifying trade and transit networks linking the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and Europe (Khan et al., 2024). Central to Türkiye’s strategy is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which delivers Caspian oil to global markets via Georgia and Türkiye, bypassing Russia (Inan & Yayloyan, 2018; Akram, 2010). This enhances Türkiye’s strategic role, broadens Azerbaijan’s export options, and reduces regional energy vulnerabilities (Alipour, 2015). TANAP and the BTK Railway are key pillars of Türkiye’s regional connectivity agenda, facilitating Azerbaijani gas exports to Europe and linking transport networks across Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. Alongside the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), TANAP supports Europe’s energy diversification, while the BTK Railway boosts regional trade and integration. Türkiye is also deepening economic ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan through bilateral agreements and joint initiatives across sectors such as energy, agriculture, and manufacturing. This connectivity strategy includes infrastructure development, security partnerships, and diplomatic engagement – such as support for peaceful conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh (Aras & Akpınar, 2011) – as well as joint military exercises and border cooperation. Nonetheless, regional integration continues to face challenges from historical grievances, geopolitical competition, and unresolved disputes (Neset et al., 2023). Beyond the South Caucasus, Türkiye engages in broader connectivity efforts such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), reflecting expanding regional ambitions (Khan et al., 2023; Bastanifar et al., 2024).



**Figure 1.** Turkey Interconnection Economic Connectivity with the South Caucasus

Source: Self-Development

## Geopolitical Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline in the South Caucasus

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline has significantly influenced Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, with broad geopolitical implications for the South Caucasus (Huseynov, 2017). For Azerbaijan, it offers a vital export route that reduces dependence on Russia for energy transit (Papava, 2005; Iqbal & Shah, 2015). As a key transit country, Türkiye boosts its strategic role as a significant energy corridor, while also strengthening commercial ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan and diminishing Russia's dominance over Caspian energy exports (Iqbal & Shah, 2015). The pipeline provides direct access to Caspian oil for European markets, supporting EU energy diversification and reducing reliance on Russian supplies (Papava, 2005; Cornell et al., 2005). Covering 1,760 km, including 248 km through Georgia near Tbilisi, the project was preceded by detailed social and environmental impact assessments during both the construction and operation phases (Starr & Cornell, 2005).



**Figure 2.** *The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (BTC Pipeline)*

Source: Research Gate

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline carries significant geopolitical and economic value for Georgia, capitalizing on its strategic location along the shortest corridor between Europe and Asia. Through initiatives such as TRACECA and INOGATE, Georgia has revived the historic Silk Road to promote regional integration (Papava, 2005). By bypassing Russia and Iran, the BTC pipeline reshapes regional energy flows and enhances Georgia's strategic importance (Shaffer, 2008). The project also prioritizes local development – BTC Co.

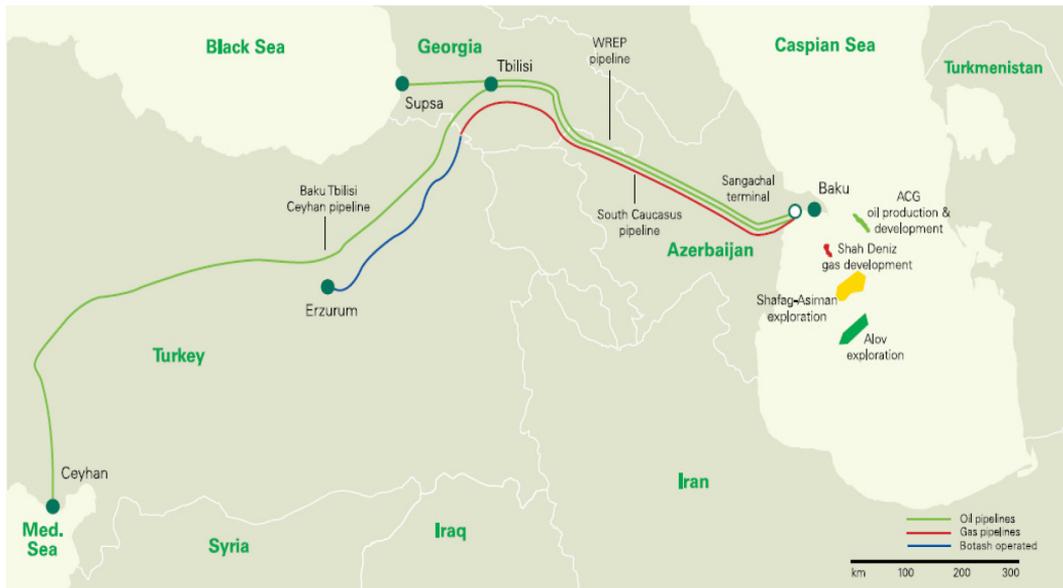
has invested in agriculture, social infrastructure, and community support (Peachey, 2011). Economically, Georgia benefits from increased oil transit tariffs (rising from \$0.89 to \$1.86 per tonne) and job creation, with about 2,500 jobs generated (Starr & Cornell, 2005). The Georgian section attracted over \$514 million in investment, covering land compensation, materials, and construction. Broader economic effects include a 33% drop in unemployment, along with measurable gains in employment (7.3%), self-employment (7.0%), household income and spending (7.1%), and GDP (6.6%) (Papava, 2005). Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy post-independence closely aligned with Türkiye and Azerbaijan to advance the BTC pipeline, with strong U.S. backing, while deliberately excluding Russian and Iranian routes (Neset et al., 2023).

### *South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and Geopolitical Impacts on South Caucasus*

The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline link Azerbaijan's Caspian oil Pipelines, transporting Azerbaijan's gas resources via Georgia and Türkiye, have significantly reshaped the region's geopolitical landscape (Papava, 2005). By providing alternative export routes, they reduce Azerbaijan's reliance on Russian transit, while the broader Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) enhances Europe's energy security and diversification. The inclusion of TANAP and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) further diminishes Europe's dependency on Russian gas (Shokri et al., 2021). Consequently, Azerbaijan is becoming a key energy supplier to Europe, increasing its geopolitical leverage, diplomatic engagement, and economic integration with European markets (Sovacool, 2012; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2019).

The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) plays a key role in reducing Russian influence over Caspian energy and reinforcing ties among Georgia, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan (Abilov, 2012). By challenging Moscow's dominance, it weakens Russia's position in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, while also impacting Iran's strategy amid competition with Türkiye and Azerbaijan in the natural gas market (Oral, 2022). The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) carries natural gas from Azerbaijan's Sangachal Terminal to the Georgian-Turkish border, running parallel to the BTC oil pipeline through Azerbaijan and Georgia before integrating into Türkiye's gas network (Kanet & Homarac, 2007). Construction began in 2004 and was completed by 2006. Spanning 690 km with a 42-inch diameter, the pipeline has an annual capacity of 7 billion cubic meters (bcm). It began gas deliveries to Türkiye in September 2006, and by 2010, its average daily flow reached 73,500 barrels of oil equivalent, roughly 12.5 million cubic meters of gas. (See Fig. 3).

The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) connects to Türkiye's transmission system in Erzurum, with its Azerbaijani and Georgian sections marked in red. The pipeline is owned by the South Caucasus Pipeline Company (SCPC), a consortium led by BP Exploration (Azerbaijan) Limited and Statoil, with shareholders including BP, Statoil, Lukoil, Total S.A., SOCAR, Naftiran Intertrade Co., and TPAO. BP serves as the technical operator, and Statoil serves as the commercial operator. Accordingly, the SCPX business has prepared the ESIA, applying BP's operational standards where relevant.



**Figure 3.** High-Level Regional Overview Map of BP in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey

Source: Google.

## RESULTS

### *Geopolitical Implications of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) in the Region*

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) is the most prominent initiative highlighting the Caspian Basin's strategic importance for the European Union (EU). Its relevance also reflects the evolving nature of Türkiye–EU relations, as Ankara gains leverage amid the EU's energy supply vulnerabilities (Winrow, 2009). Turkish officials often frame TANAP as a geopolitical instrument aligned with EU foreign policy goals. As a critical infrastructure project, TANAP connects Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas field directly to European markets, contributing to energy diversification and enhancing supply security for both Türkiye and the EU (Ibrayeva et al., 2018).

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) strengthens Türkiye's strategic position as an energy bridge between East and West, offering both economic and geopolitical benefits (Boas, 2012; Veliyev, 2015). As a key route for transporting Caspian hydrocarbons to Europe, it boosts Türkiye's role in regional and global energy dynamics. Simultaneously, TANAP elevates Azerbaijan as a reliable energy partner, advancing its energy diplomacy and deepening ties with both Türkiye and EU member states (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2019; Huseynov, 2017). TANAP undermines Russia's dominance over European gas flows, thereby reducing its leverage over transit states and the EU energy market (Naghiyev, 2023; Aras, 2014). By diversifying supply sources and transit routes, TANAP enhances European

energy security and mitigates risks of disruption. Its development also fosters deeper political and economic cooperation among Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and European stakeholders under the Southern Gas Corridor framework (Sevim, 2013; Suleymanov et al., 2016).



**Figure 4.** The Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline and Trans Adriatic Pipeline projects are part of the Southern Gas Corridor Source: Nuran Erkul Kaya, 21.11.2018 - Update: 22.11.2018. *Türkiye Economy*

The TANAP project is crucial for advancing regional energy cooperation and strengthening Türkiye's energy security. By enabling the transport of Caspian gas, particularly from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz 2 field, to Türkiye and Europe, TANAP forms a key part of the Southern Gas Corridor, alongside the Trans-Adriatic and South Caucasus pipelines (Ibrahim, 2018). This route reduces Türkiye's dependence on major suppliers, such as Russia and Iran, while offering more affordable alternatives, especially from Azerbaijan (Yildirim et al., 2017; Novikau & Muhasilović, 2023). Lower natural gas prices can boost industrial productivity and spur economic growth in energy-importing countries, such as Türkiye (Hao et al., 2020). Given the challenges posed by energy price volatility, TANAP's role in stabilizing prices underscores its strategic importance (Kilian & Zhou, 2022; André et al., 2023). The project also strengthens Türkiye's position as a European energy hub, expanding its geopolitical influence and supporting sustainable energy strategies (Ibrahimov, 2015). Overall, TANAP enhances both economic resilience and regional energy security. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway Project Influences the Geopolitics of the South Caucasus. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway enhances transport and economic ties among Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, serving as a key east-west corridor in the South Caucasus (Lussac, 2008; Shahbazov, 2017). By bypassing Russia and Iran, it strengthens regional trade autonomy and reduces geopolitical risk (Vardomsky, 2023). Supporting the flow of energy, agricultural, and industrial goods, it deepens integration among the three countries (Alexander, 2013; Asadov,

2021). Launched on November 21, 2007, after a trilateral agreement, the 826 km line was designed to carry 6.5 million tons of freight and 1 million passengers, with future capacity exceeding 15 million tons and 3 million passengers. The \$600 million project involved new construction between Kars and Akhalkalaki, as well as upgrades in Georgia (Akhalzashvili, 2008; Lussac, 2008, p. 213). President Saakashvili hailed it as a “political revolution,” reinforcing the East-West corridor.

Türkiye gains by strengthening its role as a Europe–Asia transit hub, while Armenia’s exclusion highlights ongoing regional tensions and limits its connectivity (Lussac, 2008; Saha et al., 2018). The BTK also reflects broader Türkiye–Russia rivalry and deepens Armenia’s marginalization, revealing the complex ties between infrastructure and geopolitics (Neset et al., 2023; Papava, 2005).



**Figure 5.** Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway Under Construction

Source: National Geographic Magazine

According to Lussac (2008, p. 214), trade among Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan has grown steadily since the early 2000s: Georgia–Türkiye trade rose from \$241 million (2002) to \$830 million (2007); Azerbaijan–Türkiye trade from \$296 million (2003) to \$1.2 billion (2007); and Azerbaijan–Georgia trade from \$76 million (2000) to \$411 million (2006). This economic growth supports the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway as a vital step in regional integration. During a 2007 visit to Azerbaijan, Turkish President Abdullah Gül proposed a special economic zone among the three countries (Lussac, 2008), while Azerbaijan provided a \$220 million loan to Georgia to advance the BTK project (Socor, 2009; Lussac, 2008).

Azerbaijan’s decision to exclude Armenia – particularly Nagorno-Karabakh – from pipeline routes gave Georgia a key transit role, enabling it to impose high customs fees on Armenia, worsening Yerevan’s economic isolation (Ohanyan, 2007; Abrahamyan, 2008). Georgia has maintained this position by opposing the reopening of the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway (Shahbazov, 2017; Özdemirkiran-Embel, 2023). Despite occasional hesitations (Rukhadze,

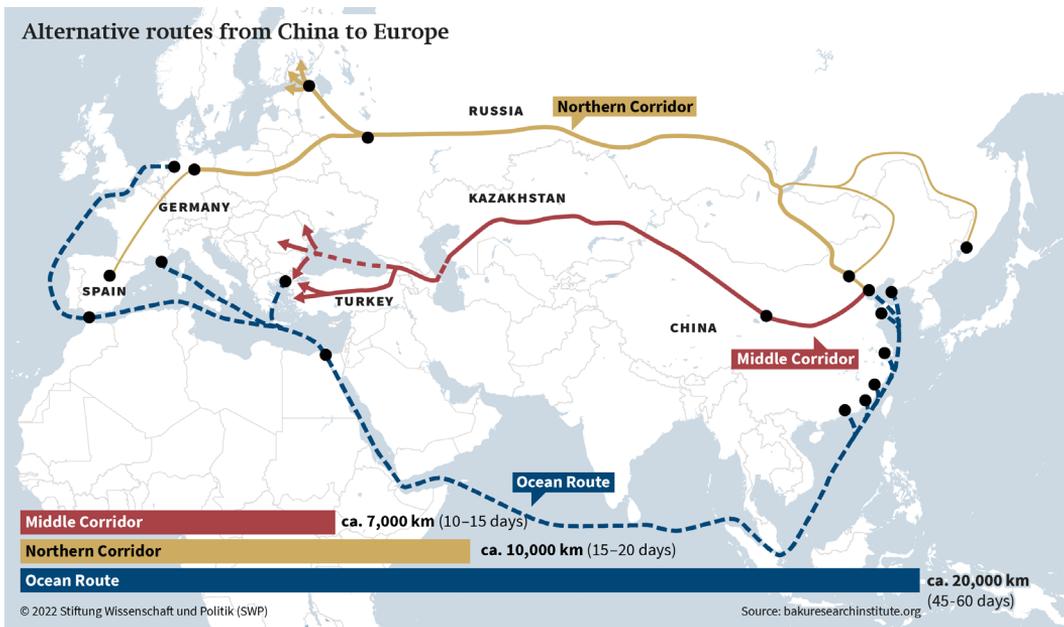
2016), Azerbaijan pursued alternatives, such as the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, especially after the 2008 war. Meanwhile, Türkiye aims to boost trade with Azerbaijan and reinforce its role as a bridge to Central Asia ([Turkish Transport Minister, 2008](#)).

The BTK railway fosters the emergence of an AGT (Azerbaijan–Georgia–Türkiye) bloc, reducing dependence on Russia and Iran and improving east-west connectivity ([Lussac, 2008](#)). It also benefits Central Asia, as Kazakhstan plans to export over 5 million metric tons of grain to Europe via BTK ([Oliphant, 2013](#); [Abashin, 2014](#)). This expanding corridor aligns AGT countries with Western-backed initiatives, while Armenia, Russia, and Iran form a rival axis. The U.S. supports AGT integration, reinforcing geopolitical divisions, further reflected in Georgia's NATO aspirations, Türkiye's membership, and Armenia and Russia's CSTO ties ([Lussac, 2008](#)).

#### *The Middle Corridors of Türkiye and Geopolitical Connectivity with the South Caucasus*

The Middle Corridor connects China to Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus (through Azerbaijan and Georgia), and Türkiye, following the historic Silk Road route ([Kenderdine & Bucsky, 2021](#)). It integrates rail and road networks across Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan ([Christian, 2000](#); [Çelikok & Talih, 2023](#)). Compared to the Northern Corridor through Russia, it offers a shorter, faster, and more cost-efficient option, cutting up to 15 days and 2,000 km. Promoted through China's BRI, it is strategically important for both Türkiye and China. Although 96% of China-Europe freight still moves by sea and only 4% by rail (mainly via the Trans-Siberian Railway) ([Hussain, 2021](#)), the Middle Corridor is emerging as a competitive alternative in Eurasian trade. The Middle Corridor offers significant potential to boost cargo traffic across Asia, linking East Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean via Türkiye. As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it reflects a long-term vision for improved East Asia–Europe connectivity, backed by Türkiye, Central Asian states, and the South Caucasus ([Chang, 2024](#)). Key countries – Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye – are prioritizing this route to bypass Russia amid regional instability ([Çelikok & Talih, 2023](#)). Economically, it enables Central Asia to benefit from the \$600 billion in trade between China and Europe ([Nunez et al., 2023](#)). See Fig. 6.

The Middle Corridor saw significant growth in 2023, with cargo volume reaching 1.9 million tons in the first nine months – an 89% increase from the same period in 2022. Although its annual capacity of 5.8 million tons is still lower than that of the Northern Corridor, its potential can be enhanced through better digital infrastructure, port efficiency, and trade policy reforms. The Ukraine war has further increased its appeal as a shorter, safer alternative ([Urciuolo, 2024](#)). However, challenges remain. Transit between the EU and China via the Middle Corridor underperformed in 2022, with only 33,000 TEUs moved – well below the 50,000 projected. High transport costs (USD 6,000–7,000) and a 10–14-day transit time still limit its competitiveness compared to the Northern Corridor via Russia. Nevertheless, its geopolitical relevance continues to grow ([Urciuolo, 2024](#)).

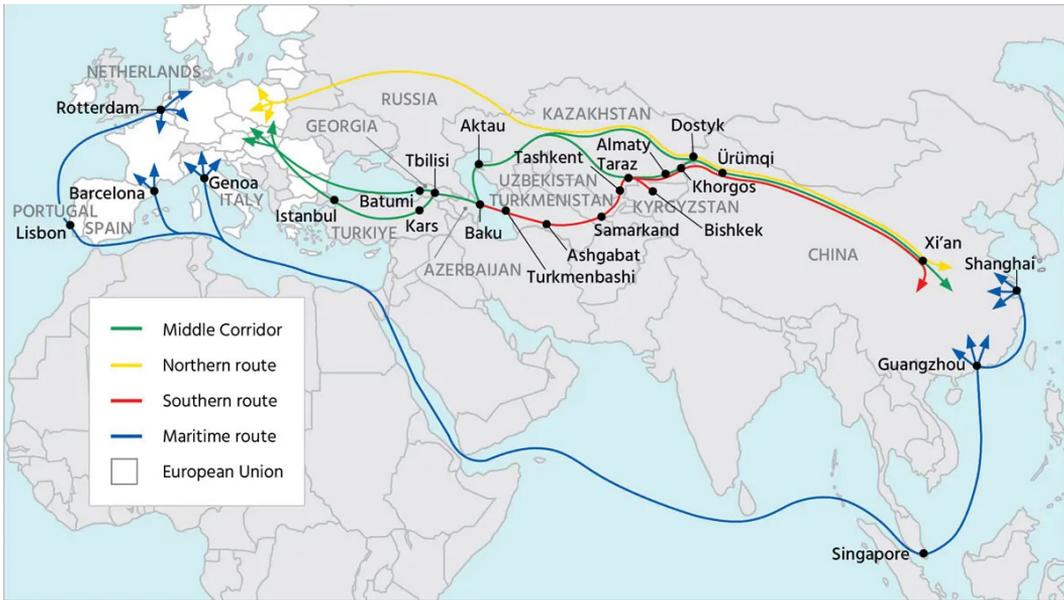


**Figure 6.** *The Middle Corridor-Alternative Route from China to Europe*

Source: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

Other routes also influence regional transit. For example, corridors linking China, India, and Türkiye to Europe via the Caucasus are gaining significance (Chang, 2024). The Red Sea crisis spiked sea freight costs from USD 800–900 in 2023 to around USD 5,400 in 2024, yet maritime transport remains cheaper than the Middle Corridor. Meanwhile, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), supported by Iran and Russia, offers a cost-effective option for connecting India, Iran, Russia, and Europe, with freight volume expected to triple to 11 million tons (Urciuolo, 2024). The Caspian Sea also remains a critical hub for energy transit, linking Caspian oil and gas producers with Western markets (Moghani & Maleki, 2024). See Fig. 7.

In 2022, container transit via the Middle Corridor grew by 33%, highlighting its emergence as a viable trade route (IISS, 2023). Positioned between Russia and Iran, both under sanctions, it offers Europe essential access to the Caspian and Central Asia. Shipment volumes rose from 350,000 tons in 2020 to 530,000 tons in 2021 (Nifti, 2024). For China, the corridor's value lies in its independence from Russian control and resistance to U.S. interdiction. As Dupuy (2024) notes, its institutional autonomy enables it to reshape the economies of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Türkiye.



**Figure 7.** Major East and West Transportation Routes

Source: World Bank (2023). Middle Trade and Transportation Corridor: Policies and Investments to Triple Freight Volume and Halve Travel Time by 2030; Washington, DC: World Bank

*The Iğdır-Nakhchivan Natural Gas Pipeline (INNGP) is also part of this broader regional shift.*

Türkiye's state gas operator BOTAŞ has launched a tender for the long-delayed Iğdır–Nakhchivan pipeline, an 80 km project with a two bcm annual capacity – over four times Nakhchivan's current demand. Strategically designed to bypass Iranian gas, the pipeline aims to reduce Tehran's influence and boost Turkey-Azerbaijan energy cooperation, aligning with Ankara's ambitions to become a regional energy hub and strengthen ties with Western allies, particularly the U.S. Originally agreed upon in 2010, the project was revived in February 2025 after renewed commitment from Presidents Erdoğan and Aliyev, reflecting heightened urgency for energy diversification in the South Caucasus ([BOTAŞ Tender Announcement, 2025](#)). Inaugurated on March 5, 2025, the pipeline has a daily capacity of 2 million cubic meters and is expected to supply 500 million cubic meters annually to Nakhchivan for 30 years (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Beyond meeting local needs, it enhances regional energy security, reduces dependence on Iranian transit, and diversifies Türkiye's energy routes. Economically, it is projected to attract investment and generate jobs in Türkiye's eastern provinces (NTV, 2025). Strategically, the pipeline strengthens Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, promotes regional integration, and reinforces Türkiye's role as a geopolitical energy hub (Anadolu Agency, 2025; NTV, 2025). However, it also impacts Georgia and Armenia. For Georgia, long a central East–West energy corridor, the new route bypasses its territory, potentially diminishing its strategic importance. Armenia, already marginalized due to its conflict with Azerbaijan, may view the project as deepening its regional isolation.

By linking Azerbaijan and Türkiye without involving Georgia or Armenia, the pipeline reflects a realignment in regional connectivity, likely prompting both countries to reassess their energy diplomacy in the evolving South Caucasus context.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Türkiye as a Strategic Transit and Energy Corridor*

Türkiye's geographical location places it at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. This strategic advantage has been capitalized on through the creation and expansion of infrastructure projects, including the BTC pipeline, SCP, TANAP, and the BTK railway. The results show that Türkiye is not merely a transit country but has evolved into a regional hub for energy security and trade.

The BTC pipeline has altered regional power dynamics by providing Azerbaijan with a direct link to European markets, bypassing Russia and Iran, thus lowering geopolitical risk and enhancing supply chain stability. Similarly, the SCP and TANAP pipelines strengthen the Southern Gas Corridor, supporting the EU's push to diversify energy sources and reduce reliance on Russian gas – a top priority after the Russia-Ukraine war. Türkiye's role in energy diplomacy is further evident through its involvement in the Trans-Caspian and Middle Corridors. As transport and energy flows converge, Türkiye has emerged as a multi-vector transit hub between the Caspian Basin and Europe.

### *The South Caucasus as a Pivot of Economic Interconnectivity*

The study highlights Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye as central to the South Caucasus connectivity vision. Initiatives like the BTK Railway and BTC pipeline demonstrate their mutual interdependence, with BTK offering a strategic alternative to routes through Russia or Armenia. These projects have reshaped regional dynamics by excluding Armenia – mainly due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – which has intensified its economic isolation while reinforcing trilateral cooperation. The BTK also boosts the economic leverage of Georgia and Azerbaijan, facilitating Central Asia–Europe trade via Türkiye and supporting Türkiye's broader Middle Corridor strategy.

The Middle Corridor, part of China's BRI, and the Trans-Caspian Corridor (TCC) are central to Türkiye's economic strategy, offering alternatives to the Northern Corridor, now weakened by sanctions and war-related disruptions. The TCC relies on Türkiye's infrastructure, such as the Marmaray tunnel and the BTK Railway, to support container trade between East Asia and Europe. Türkiye's stability and infrastructure investment boost its logistical capacity. An 89% increase in freight along the Middle Corridor in 2023 signals its rising importance. However, to compete with the Northern Corridor, Türkiye must improve cost efficiency, infrastructure standards, and pursue digital and policy coordination.

### *Political Stability and Security as Catalysts for re-connectivity*

The study emphasizes that Türkiye's political initiatives reinforce its economic strategies. Its involvement in conflict resolution, including trilateral talks with Armenia and Azerbai-

jan, reflects a soft-power approach aimed at regional stability. These efforts support Türkiye's goal to limit Russian and Western influence while fostering a self-reliant regional identity based on interdependence and economic cooperation. Türkiye's engagement in regional organizations such as BSEC and ECO provides institutional backing for infrastructure harmonization and joint investment. The research stresses that such diplomacy is crucial, not peripheral, to Türkiye's connectivity agenda. Empirical data on employment, GDP, and trade volume confirm the economic returns of Türkiye's infrastructure investments. The BTC pipeline, for instance, significantly benefited Georgia's economy, creating over 2,500 jobs and contributing to a 6.6% increase in regional GDP. Beyond economics, Türkiye's control of energy and transport corridors provides diplomatic leverage, enhancing its ability to shape regional decisions and secure favorable multilateral partnerships.

Infrastructure projects like the BTC and South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) have significantly reshaped South Caucasus geopolitics, reducing reliance on Russia and Iran and improving Azerbaijan's access to Western markets (Abilov, 2012; Neset et al., 2023). These initiatives also bolster Türkiye's role in regional conflict resolution, notably in the Nagorno-Karabakh context (Aras & Akpınar, 2011). While Georgia benefits from closer integration, Armenia faces growing regional isolation (Lussac, 2008). Türkiye's multivector foreign policy maintains a strategic balance in its ties with Azerbaijan, Georgia, and other regional actors. Europe, and Iran (Babali, 2010), positioning it as a key player in regional stability and connectivity (Huseynov, 2017)

## CONCLUSION

The strategic landscape of the South Caucasus is being reshaped by the Russia–Ukraine war, U.S.–China tensions, instability in the Middle East, and internal regional conflicts. In response, Türkiye has launched several major development projects to address the emerging power vacuum and promote regional integration across the South Caucasus, Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Key initiatives include the BTC oil pipeline, the SCP, TANAP, and the BTK railway, all designed to enhance economic connectivity, reduce external power influence, and establish alternative trade and energy routes. Amid disruptions in global energy supply caused by the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Türkiye has positioned itself as a crucial transit state, channeling energy from the South Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe. This strategy not only strengthens Türkiye's geopolitical role but also deepens its economic ties with European partners. Türkiye's strategic location and evolving geopolitical dynamics – particularly in the South Caucasus, Middle East, and Europe – enhance its role in fostering economic connectivity. This is achieved through expanded energy cooperation with the South Caucasus to diversify routes, ensure energy security, and deepen economic interdependence with regional and European states. Türkiye also engages with regional organizations like the BSEC and ECO to manage conflicts and promote cooperation. Despite a history of both cooperation and rivalry, Türkiye and Iran maintain pragmatic energy relations. Even under sanctions, Türkiye has engaged in trade agreements with Iran for mutual gain. A notable development is the Iğdır–Nakhchivan gas pipeline, which reduces Nakhchivan's dependence on Iranian gas, shifting regional influence toward Türkiye

and Azerbaijan. For Türkiye, the project supports its ambition to become a regional energy hub, linking the Caspian, Caucasus, and Europe, while also strengthening ties with Western partners through enhanced energy security and diversification. More broadly, it signals a strategic realignment in Eurasia, as emerging energy routes bypass traditional corridors dominated by Russia and Iran.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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# **Port Arrangements along the Caucasian Coast's Black and Caspian Seas**

*GURESHIDZE MARIAM, PHD STUDENT  
ILIA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
G. TSERETELI INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDY  
TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0000-0002-9825-0651](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9825-0651)*

## **ABSTRACT**

In the 19th century, three main factors determined the Russian Empire's conquest of the Caucasus: 1. Interest in the Caucasus as a system of trade routes, 2. Market – as a commercial area for the extraction of industrial items, agricultural products, and raw resources. 3. Geostrategic space – Russian Empire's political and strategic position. These three factors were closely connected to the Empire's broader ambitions to expand its influence toward Asia and India. To advance these imperial objectives, it was essential to develop and control both land and maritime routes. This discussion focuses specifically on maritime routes and their development.

*Keywords:* Russian Empire, Caucasus, Seaport, Poti, Batumi, Abkhazia

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## INTRODUCTION

From ancient times to the present, the interests of numerous states have intersected and competed in the Caucasus region. Control over the region provided a significant strategic advantage, as the Caucasus functioned as a bridge between East and West ([History of the Caucasus, 2023, p. 15](#)). To facilitate direct trade with India, Peter I sought to build a route across the Persian dominion along the western coast of the Caspian Sea ([Dubrovin, 1866, p. 16](#)). Geographical discoveries, the shift of global commercial centers toward emerging land and maritime routes, the Ottoman Empire's rise following the fall of Byzantium, and significant political and economic transformations in Europe collectively contributed to the creation of an entirely new world ([Kakabadze, 1920, p.165](#)). By seizing control of the Bosphorus, the Ottomans enhanced their dominance over the eastern trade route. They attracted the attention of England, which had become a major player in international trade. Russia likewise sought to participate in these developments, which contributed to its increasing activity in the Caucasus region ([Gabashvili, 1966, pp. 178-179](#)). In addition, three primary factors shaped the Russian Empire's military campaign in the Caucasus: 1. interest in the region as a system of trade routes; 2. the region as a market; and 3. the region as a strategic and political location ([Found – 1505, descry – 1, doc – 15](#)). These strategic and economic considerations also help explain the Russian Empire's interest in constructing and operating ports in Georgia and across the Caucasus.

Russia built ports in the Caucasus, especially in Georgia, to advance its economic interests and strengthen its strategic position in the region. Georgia's geographic position enabled its seaports to serve as active links between Europe and Russia in the international trade networks. As Gureshidze ([2021, p. 55](#)) observes, "The growth of trade and, by extension, the economy is intimately correlated with the advancement of society". This perspective helps explain why the Russian Empire allocated substantial financial resources and employed European engineers to support this difficult task.

Georgia encompasses two major land and maritime segments of the Silk Road, each carrying substantial political, strategic, and economic significance. Regarding the Georgian Military Road, it is noteworthy that classical Byzantine authors refer to various passages or gates across the Caucasus Range, including the Caspian, Alanian, Caucasian, and other passages (Pylae or Portae). However, many medieval travelers journeying from Europe to Asia for religious, diplomatic, or commercial purposes during the Mongol and Tatar periods do not mention the Darial Pass. In such cases, they traveled along the western coast of the Caspian Sea via Derbent and the Great Caravan Road. Trade caravans also followed the same route to Persia from the Genoese colony of Tana, which prospered near the mouth of the Don, not far from modern-day Azov ([Weidenbaum, 1888, pp. 265-270](#)). Beyond contributing to the development of Georgia, the region, and the Silk Road as a whole, the construction of ports in the 19th century provided a crucial link between the land and maritime routes. Considering similar infrastructural developments in the Russian Empire – such as the fortified route connecting the Azov and Caspian Seas and the port of Novorossiya – and the land and maritime corridors linking the Middle East and Europe within the Ottoman

Empire, Georgian ports were regarded as strategically and commercially valuable by international powers in the 19th century.

Although Russia is presently (2025) engaged in war with Ukraine, its road infrastructure remains fully operational. The Black Sea, and specifically Crimea, serves as a strategic platform from which Russia projects military power in Georgia, Ukraine, and even places as far away as Syria and Libya (Coffey, 2020). For instance, there are railway and road routes along the Sea of Azov. Thus, the routes crossing Georgian territory continue to function as important segments of regional trade networks, providing equal opportunities for prominent international actors. The effectiveness of the roads that pass through Georgia depends on international actors' cooperation. Especially given that the Silk Road is currently dominated by the European Union and the BRICS (Russia, China, India, etc.). To contextualize this discussion, a brief overview of the history of the Russian fleet is appropriate.

The origins of the modern Russian Navy trace to the reign of Peter the Great, although earlier regional rulers maintained small squadrons of warships. Peter I believed that maritime strength was essential for Russia's emergence as a great power, and he personally studied European naval construction and development before initiating the creation of Russia's own fleet (Martin, 1947, p. 532).

The anatomy of the Russian flotilla is as follows: The struggle for access to maritime space gained new strength in 1505, when Moscow led the unification of the Russian principalities into a centralized state. To protect the Narva trade route and shipping on the Baltic Sea, Ivan IV Vasilyevich began to build a state-owned privateer fleet. In Russia, during the Northern War (1700-21), a regular army and navy were created. Russia gained access to the Baltic Sea (Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, 1984, p.485). Russia was able to connect the sea route with the east and west land trade routes. In 1771, the Dunay military flotilla was formed. During this period, the Caffa in Crimea was captured, and in 1783, Crimea became part of the Russian Empire. The battle for Crimea was finally over. Following its annexation of Crimea in 1783, Russia established the Black Sea Fleet. In 1783, the first battleship of the Black Sea Fleet was launched, and the famous port of Sevastopol (a strategic base on the Black Sea) was established. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian merchant and military fleet consisted of the Baltic and Black Sea fleets, the Caspian, Belmorok, and Okhotsk flotillas. Following the Treaty of Adrianople (1828–1829), which secured significant portions of the Black Sea coast for Russia, the port of Novorossiya was established (1838) (Krasnov & Shitikov, n.d.).

The strength of the Russian fleet has consistently played a pivotal role in the empire. This significance is reflected in Stalin's Order of the Day of July 28, 1945, in which he declared: "The Soviet People wish to see their fleet grow still stronger and more powerful. Our people are constructing new battleships and bases for the fleet" (Martin, 1947, p. 532).

Turning to archival records provides important historical context. Until the beginning of 1903, port construction in Russia was confined to major commercial and strategically important locations. Depending on changing circumstances, at different times, the Black Sea coast belonged to the following objects: Poti, Batumi, Novorossiya, Anapa, Tuapse, Sochi,

Temruk, as well as Petrovsky and Darubandi on the Caspian Sea coast. However, the initial stages of port construction and river-mouth development progressed slowly. During this period, Russia's port infrastructure had not yet developed sufficiently to meet the demands of expanding trade relations ([Found – 1087](#), [descr – 1](#), [doc – 125](#)).

## ***METHODS***

By comparing documents from the Georgian National Archives with relevant scholarly literature and conducting an objective analysis, this study identifies the reasons the Caucasus and the Black and Caspian Sea coasts held such strategic importance for the Russian Empire.

## ***DISCUSSION***

This study focuses on the seaports of Poti, Batumi, and Abkhazia and, drawing on archival documents, examines the resources allocated by the Russian Empire to their development and the strategic purposes these investments served. The archival materials are presented in the following summarized form.

In particular:

### *Poti Seaport*

As early as 1804, plans for constructing a port on the eastern shore of the Black Sea emerged after Russia secured access to this coastline following the capture of Imereti. Between 1805 and 1863, the issue of selecting a suitable location for the port was revisited multiple times, and a project was proposed. "In 1828, following the Russian army's capture of the Turkish fortress at Poti, former Minister of Finance Count Kankrin informed the Caucasus commander-in-chief, Count Paskevich, that Emperor Nicholas I intended to establish Poti as a first-class fortress and port and to link the Black Sea with the Caspian Sea through a shipping canal. For this, he asked that an engineer, Captain Chadayev, be sent. In 1830, Engineer Chadayev presented the collected materials in St. Petersburg. Furthermore, in 1831, Major General Pote was dispatched to Poti, who, based on the received materials, drew up a port project. Pote proposed damming the southern branch of the Rion River to create a wide internal basin. He recommended providing a forward port for entry into the pool. However, insufficient funding prevented the project from being initiated. Instead of proceeding with port construction, Russians had to work on improving the climate - draining the swamps. In 1839, the high costs associated with unsuccessful dredging led to the suspension of port construction at Poti. The site was deemed unsuitable for settlement, and attention shifted to constructing a port at Redoubt-Kale, which already served as a significant hub for Transcaucasian trade with Russia and Europe. In 1804, this city began work on constructing/adapting the outfall for Khofa-Tskhali cargo operations. To create a well-equipped port in Redoubt-Kale, the opinions of authoritative figures at the time (Gakhausen and John Ren-

nie) were taken into account. John Rennie even drew up the project.

However, the war with Turkey nullified all the state's efforts to create well-equipped ports in this area.

After the Sevastopol campaign, the state intended to build a railway between the Black and Caspian seas, so the question of building a port on the Black Sea coast was raised again. In the southeastern Black Sea region, Poti was preferred for its proximity to the Transcaucasian administrative center, its location at the mouth of the Rioni River, and its exposure to strong sea winds. In 1857, Poti was declared a port city. The Military Engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Radionov, was entrusted with studying both branches of the river. Then, project preparation was handed over to the road engineer Bogushevich. Bogushevich's project was submitted for consideration to English engineers Bell and Gabby, who at that time were studying the Transcaucasian Railway.

In 1861, the military engineer Shavrov was sent to Poti to draw up the project. He was instructed to improve the fairway on the crossbar, so that warships could enter the river, and to use wood for work, as no stone was available within roughly thirty miles of Poti, and it was unwise to transport stones from such a distance. However, the wooden equipment proved unsuitable; although the surface remained intact, the submerged sections had been damaged by sea worms. Consequently, constructing the pier from stone rather than wood became necessary. Shavrov therefore submitted a new design proposing two piers at the northern mouth of the Rioni River to create a front basin with an approximate area of 50,000 square meters. The plan also appears to have included excavating an internal island within one of the river's cut branches. The designed fence required reinforcing the river's southern branch, and the plan further included constructing a canal linking the Rioni River with Lake Paliastomi to mitigate flooding in the city of Poti. The flow of water from the river Rion into the Lake Paliastom would lower the lake's water level, which would then flow into the sea through a long channel. In 1890, the sketches for general works were completed. From 1872 to 1891, total expenses amounted to 7,010,392 rubles.

In 1891, the Poti Seaport was considered inadequate for shipping, primarily due to the lack of a coastline for unloading and the depth of the port basin, which was insufficient to accommodate cargo ships. Ships that were logged in the Poti Seaport had to queue to get to the pier and stand in pairs in an open dock for a whole week. Another significant drawback was the unsafe harbor mooring conditions, where strong southern, southwestern, and western winds were frequent. At this time, sea waves from the exit broke into the port, causing significant turbulence and forcing the ships moored at the North Pier to stop unloading cargo. However, accidents at the port were rare. "During storms, large vessels attempting to enter the port posed a significant hazard, as they frequently collided with the piers. Therefore, passengers on ships were forced to stop in the open sea during raids, exposing them to various risks ([Found – 1087](#), [descr – 1](#), [doc – 125](#)).

The effective operation of the Poti Seaport enables Georgia to play a meaningful role in the development of Euro-Asian trade, cultural interaction, diplomatic relations, and broader economic ties. The steady expansion of the Poti seaport aided in Georgia's capitalist devel-

opment. Because the full operation of the seaport aligns with the interests of international stakeholders, it also enhances Georgia's strategic security.

### *Batumi Sea Port*

“A beautiful corner of Georgia, the Batumi region, since ancient times has been part of the Guria, which in turn was part of ancient Colchis, and during the Eastern Roman Empire was known as Lazika. In the history of the people, Colchis played the greatest cultural role: with its wealth, they attracted the Greeks and Romans, and to expand trade, and along the entire eastern coast of the Black Sea, their factories and colonies were developed” ([Found – 1438, descr -1, doc – 187](#)).

The significance of Batumi for the Russian Empire is outlined in an archival document, which states: “One of the important successes of the Russian diplomacy at the Berlin Congress was that, despite the efforts of the powerful states' representatives, Batumi City remained on his side. The prosperity on the sea coast is determined by the ports' improvement, in general by the development of sailing and maritime activities” ([Found – 1438, descr – 1, doc – 187](#)).

The Russian Empire considered that, apart from Batumi, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, there was no such convenient and natural port. Sukhum, by contrast, was isolated by mountain ranges and separated from the principal artery of the western Caucasus, the Rioni Valley. “Significant funds had already been invested in the artificial construction works at the Poti Seaport, yet it retained only a commercial function; its location at the mouth of the Rioni River also contributed to severe flooding. By securing access through Batumi and its environs, the Russian Empire sought to establish a firm position along the Caucasus coast. The significance of the Batumi port, particularly during the winter, is evident. Through the Russian navigation points on the Black Sea, linking Batumi with Odessa, Sevastopol, and Novorossiysk, the port could maintain year-round maritime communication with the Transcaucasus. Because Batumi lay along the shortest route between key trading provinces and was situated on a direct line with Yerevan, Kars, and Ardahan, its commercial significance was considerable. Batumi was considered by the Russians as crucial center for coastal shipping. From a military perspective, Batumi was viewed as an essential base for the Russian Navy's expansion. According to Russian Empire generals, Batumi's convex shape made it an excellent defensive military port because it was easy to mine, had ridges all around it, and housed naval artillery. “At the time when the Russian Empire entered Batumi, it was a small settlement with approximately three thousand inhabitants, including Turks, Laz, Georgians, Circassians, Abkhazians, and Armenians ([Found – 1438, descr – 1, doc – 187](#)).

The Russian Empire viewed Batumi as the most suitable location to serve as a major Transcaucasian port, including for cargo handling. In 1879, the Russian government drew attention to this fact. To expand and improve Batumi Bay and turn it into a port, under the leadership of the military engineer General Frolov, a special commission was created. It became clear that the turnover of cargo passing through Batumi in the first years did not exceed 500,000 feet; after that, it increased to 8 million, and a large volume of oil cargo

was required to complete construction of the Batumi-Baku line. Moreover, the increasing storage and transport of oil through the port raised concerns regarding the safety of the city. Therefore, during the development of the first project for the Batumi seaport, the need to construct a dedicated oil harbor was recognized (Found – 1087, descr – 1, doc – 125).

“The development of Batumi urban life rather depended on the sailing. After the Crimean War, cargo vessels began calling at Batumi with increasing frequency. On account of it, there was established close trading relations with the West and East regions of the Black Sea coast” (Uzunadse, 1997, p.72).

From a strategic perspective, the Batumi seaport strengthened the Russian Empire’s ability to secure its border with Turkey, thereby countering Turkey’s potential expansion into western Georgia. Batumi’s geographic position also made it particularly suitable for expanding oil exports and for facilitating transport routes toward the Middle East.

### *Sukhum-Kale*

Even before 1881, Sukhum-Kale had been identified as a potential site for establishing a coastal port on the Black Sea. connected to the Russian railway network, the construction of large port facilities was not initially prioritized. Instead, early efforts focused on improving conditions for receiving larger ships serving key trading areas. However, in 1888, a small pier was built in Sukhumi for receiving small coastal vessels (Found – 1087, descr – 1, doc – 125).

It is notable that, during the Caucasian War, Abkhazia was strategically significant. “Through this country, which constitutes a narrow strip between the sea and the inaccessible mountains, lay the only path for the invasion of some mountain tribes of the western Caucasus into the territory of the Christian population up to the Inguri and Rioni lines” (Megrelidze, 1969, p.4)

The primary objective of Abkhazia Seaport is maritime transportation. Its importance to the Russian Empire stemmed from its incorporation into the empire’s broader commercial and logistical system.

## **CONCLUSION**

The establishment and gradual improvement of Georgian ports were part of the Russian Empire’s strategy to position Russia as a maritime state, intertwined with the Empire’s trade interests and the expansion of the geography of new places advantageous from an economic and strategic point of view. To address the serious problems associated with port development in Georgia, the Empire devoted significant resources to implementing its domestic and foreign policies, while also taking into account the interests of world actors.

## Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Georgia on Printed World Maps in 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

*SORDIA GIORGI, PHD*  
*THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA*  
*TBILISI, GEORGIA*

ORCID: [0009-0005-5663-9713](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5663-9713)

## ABSTRACT

Describing Georgia has been an essential part of the work of European geographers and cartographers throughout the centuries. In one form or another, Georgia appears in the earliest cartographic works, the number of which reaches the thousands. Some of these maps focus directly on Georgia. In contrast, others depict broader continents or geographic regions, and others show various continents or vast regions, all while conveying important information about Georgia. This article reviews printed world maps created between the 15th and 18th centuries, which are particularly relevant to the study of Georgia. We have identified over 100 such maps that contain geographic, cartographic, and ethnographic information related to Georgia. The study of world maps is essential because they serve as unique primary sources for understanding Georgia's historical place and role among the countries and peoples of the world. Based on these maps, we can also examine the ideas and perceptions that European society had regarding Georgia. The article summarizes the world maps recognized as part of Europe's cartographic heritage. We used four world maps depicting Georgia for illustration. Fragments related to Georgia are presented separately in the article in an enlarged form. Two of these maps represent the world in the ancient era, while the other two represent the "modern" one.

*Keywords:* Georgia, Caucasus, World maps, European cartography

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Geographical maps have been created since time immemorial; however, the invention of a printing press by the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg had a profound impact on the development of cartography. This development is closely associated with the beginning of the European Renaissance. It is noteworthy that newly established publishers quickly identified the publication of geographical texts and cartographic materials as a priority. One of the earliest obtainable printed geographical works is the book published by German author and publisher Guntherus Ziner in Augsburg in 1472. The uniqueness of this book lies in its inclusion of the first printed map in the history of cartography. This is a miniature world map (Mappa Mundi) integrated into the text. Soon this publication was followed by the work of the ancient Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy, "Geography". Publishing this book is regarded as the foundation of modern European cartography. In a short period, map printing in Europe took on an unprecedented character. Some were prepared for geographical atlases, while others were published as individual maps.

When it comes to content, antique European printed maps come in a vast variety. They depicted the entire world, as well as individual continents, large regions, empires, countries, or relatively small political units.

As for the timeframe, these maps typically depicted two main stages in the development of humankind: the ancient and the modern eras. In most atlases, historical geography is presented in these two categories. However, none of these atlases and geography textbooks clearly define which specific century or historical event serves as the dividing line between the antique and "modern" world. Broadly speaking, one could say that the early Byzantine period is reflected in the maps of the antique period, while the "modern" countries are political units established in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It should be noted that the maps showing "modern" countries often use antique toponymy, i.e., city or settlement names that were no longer in use by the time these maps were created. Another significant factor common to both antique and "modern" maps is that most of them don't reflect the historical or geographical reality of the time of their creation, but rather the condition of a given country from a historical perspective. For example, a "modern" map of Georgia created in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (of which there were many) does not depict the Georgia of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but rather the historical and geographical knowledge of Georgia accumulated by Europeans throughout the "modern" era.

Georgia is well represented in both antique and "modern" European maps. Antique maps mainly show it as Colchis and Iberia, while "modern" maps depict it under the name of Georgia.

Naturally, maps focused directly on Georgia or the Caucasus contain far more detailed information about the region. Maps showing continents or large empires surrounding Georgia were also produced in considerable detail; however, this article focuses primarily on world maps and the geographical and cartographic information they provide about Georgia. Compared to maps explicitly devoted to Georgia, world maps often present its historical borders, territories, and settlements more clearly, reflecting how European geographers

and cartographers of the period understood the region. World maps also define Georgia's place and role in the international orbit and global politics.

The cartographic material reviewed in this article includes world maps from the mid-15th century, specifically those from the first published geographical atlases of Claudius Ptolemy, through to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The selection of this timeframe is determined by the fact that Ptolemaic maps, including world maps, were the first attempts to include Georgia in printed cartography. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the European cartographers were still extensively depicting Georgia and considering it a significant political player. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, attempts to show Georgia on European maps drastically diminish after the phased occupation and annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire.

## ***METHODS***

This article employs content analysis to examine antique maps and atlases. Research material was obtained in recent years from various libraries and depositories in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, France, and Italy. Additionally, studying digitized cartographic collections from various libraries proved very useful for the research. The National Library of France, the Bavarian State Library, the British Library, the Marciana Library, Stanford University Library, Yale University Library, and Harvard University Library have especially rich resources for this purpose. Some of the original printed maps discussed in the article are held in our private collection, assembled over the years from foreign private collectors and official dealers of antique maps.

In addition to publications of early maps and atlases, the article also draws on academic research in the history of cartography. The most significant among them is a fundamental work by Rodney Shirley, one of the best existing works on world maps ([Shirley, 1993](#)). World maps are also well studied and documented in works by Nathaniel Harris ([Harris, 2002](#)) and David Woodward ([Woodward, 1975](#)). When it comes to comparatively small, miniature world maps and their analysis, the comprehensive and highly competent work of Geoffrey L. King proved very useful ([King, 2003](#)). The article also uses works by Georgian authors. First and foremost, among these is the comprehensive book by Lasha Bakradze, which discusses Georgia on old maps in general, and also includes world maps ([Bakradze, 2020](#)). We have likewise studied and published several world maps, particularly miniature world maps, some of which are included in this article ([Sordia, 2024](#)).

## ***RESULTS***

Studying hundreds of antique maps and geographical atlases revealed that from the moment printed maps appeared in Europe until the end of the 18th century, European cartographers, geographers, and travelers showed a great interest in Georgia. During the mentioned period, Georgia experienced a drastic political and economic decline. The country was divided into separate kingdoms and principalities, and it was subject to significant political influence

from neighboring empires. Despite this, in the perception of some European cartographers, Georgia remains a unified political unit. Moreover, the term “Georgia” often encompasses the entire Caucasus region. Such a perception of Georgia is especially evident in world maps and in geographical tables listing the world’s leading countries and territories.

Analysis of world maps and geographical tables listing countries worldwide makes it clear that Georgia was assigned an important function and place during the regional division of continents. For example, according to the leading and most influential European cartographers, Georgia was a country that represented a vast regional unit of the Asian continent, alongside Persia, Turkey, Arabia, Tartaria, etc. The entire continent was divided into ten such large units.

As to the ancient world, Georgia is represented on world maps alongside approximately 90 other countries and depicted as the kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia.

## ***DISCUSSION***

### *Georgia on World Maps Depicting the Antique World*

When discussing maps of the ancient world, the most notable are those created by the ancient Greek geographer, mathematician, and astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. One could say that his works became the foundation of the history of European cartography. Ptolemy lived approximately between 100 and 170 and worked in the city of Alexandria. His fundamental work, “Geography,” consists of eight parts and includes a description of the world based on the works and notes of Greek and Roman authors available at the time. This work by Ptolemy stands out because the author provides a coordinate chart for each geographical location. He created a list of all cities, settlements, rivers, mountain ranges, and climate zones for the countries and regions he was familiar with. Besides texts, the book also included maps. Ptolemy divided the world into three continents, Europe, Africa, and Asia, further dividing each of them into regions. The book includes 27 maps. These are: the world map, 12 maps of Asia, four maps of Africa, and 10 maps of Europe. Manuscripts in Greek have reached us; however, the maps have not. The oldest surviving handwritten maps from Ptolemy’s “Geography” date back to no earlier than the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which in reality makes them a reconstruction of the original maps.

Even though Ptolemy’s geographic work became highly influential from the very beginning, its existence remained unknown in Western Europe until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. “Geography” began to spread widely in Europe after the invention of the printing press and the establishment of the book publishing tradition in the 1450s. Its first edition was published in 1475 in Vicenza; however, the 1477 edition published in Bologna is considered the first complete edition.

Interest in Ptolemy’s “Geography” in Europe increased even more in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It had been published by famous geographers and cartographers such as Martin Waldseemüller, Laurent Fries, Sebastian Münster, Gerardus Mercator, Giacomo Gastaldi, and others. Since its first publication, over fifty editions have been printed in various European cities over

the course of 200 years. These editions differed from each other in translation (depending on the translator's and editor's interpretation), as well as in the number of maps and printing technique. The first two editions only included maps of the ancient world, i.e., the old world. In all other editions, the number of "modern" maps gradually increased. By adding these maps, publishers attempted to include regions and countries that Ptolemy had not described, as well as to update the places he had already documented and depicted on his maps.

The world described by Ptolemy includes 89 countries and territories spread over three continents. Two out of these, Colchis and Iberia, represent ancient Georgia. Ptolemy describes the following countries (the number and names of the countries are identical in every edition of Ptolemy's atlas); however, there are small differences in the spelling of the countries' names. We used Latin names used in Ptolemy's atlas, published in 1522-1541 by Laurent Fries:

European continent: Albion Insula Britannica, Hispania Betica, Hispania Lusitania, Hispania Terraconensis, Gallia Aquitana, Gallia Lungdunensis, Gallia Belgica, Celtogalatia Narbonensis, Germania Magna, Rhetia & Vindelicia, Noricum, Pannonia Superior, Pannonia Inferior, Illyris, Liburnia, Dalmatia, Italia, Cyrenos Insula, Sardinia Insula, Sicilia Insula, Sarmatia in Europa, Taurica Chersonesus, Lazyges Metaneste, Dacia, Mysia Superior, Mysia Inferior, Thracia, Chersonesus, Macedonia, Epirus, Achaia, Peloponnesus, Europae Igitur Prouincae.

African continent: Mavritania, Aphrica Numidia, Cyrenaica, Marmarica, Lybia, Aegiptus, Thebais, Lybia Interior, Aethiopia sub Aegipto, Aethiopia omnibus his australior, Aphiricae prouincia

Asian continent: Pontus, Bytina, Asia Propriae Dictam in qua Phrigya, Lytia, Pamphilia in qua Pisidia, Galatiam in qua Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, Armenia Minor, Cilicia, Sarmatia Asiatica, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Armenia Maior, Cyprus Insula, Syria, Phoenicia, Iudea Palestin, Arabia Petrea, Arabia Deserta, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyria, Susiana, Media, Persis, Parthia, Carmania Deserta, Hyrcania, Arabia Felix, Carmania, Margiana, Bactriana, Sogdiana, Sacae, Scythia intra Imaum montem, Scythia extra Imaum montem, Serica, Aria, Paropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia, Gedrosia, India intra Gangem, India extra Gangem, Syrarum region, Taprobane insula, Suntigitur Asiae Prouincie quadraginta octo, Omnis prouinciae nostrae habitabilis.

These 89 countries of the ancient world are presented in Ptolemy's atlas in 26 maps. Colchis and Iberia are to be found among the maps of the Asian continent. They are presented together with Albania and Greater Armenia in the third map. This map of the historical Caucasus is named *Tabula Asiae III* in Ptolemy's atlases (Lomouri, 1955; Mshvildadze, 2015; Sordia, 2020).

Besides the 26 maps mentioned, which focus on various countries and regions, Ptolemy's atlases include an additional map of the ancient world. We present one of the earlier examples to illustrate Ptolemy's world maps. This is a map from Ptolemy's atlas, published in 1482 in the German city of Ulm, edited and published by the famous Benedictine monk

Nicolaus Germanus (Figure 1). We also present a detail from the said map that shows the Caucasus region of the antique period (Figure 1a).

It should be noted that antique Georgia, i.e., Colchis and Iberia, isn't presented in European cartography only through Ptolemaic maps. Various European cartographers continued to enrich Ptolemy's cartographical heritage with data from other authors. One map that stands out among others of its kind is a wall map of the world dated 1507, created by the famous German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller. The Latin name of this significant cartographical creation is *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucii aliorumque lustrationes* (The Universal Cosmography according to the Tradition of Ptolemy and the Discoveries of Amerigo Vespucci and others). Its uniqueness lies in its depiction of the entire world, including the newly discovered continents. Waldseemüller is the first cartographer to use the name "America" to define this new continent, or rather, its southern part. Below, you will see the fragment depicting Georgia from the ancient period (Figure 2). Unlike the classical world maps of Ptolemy, it includes the names of several geographical entities, such as Lubium, Sura, Zalissa in Iberia, and Dioscuria, Corax, Siganeum, Sarace in Colchis.

The cartographical heritage of Waldseemüller includes another large wall world map. This is a maritime world map from 1516 (*Carta Marina*), considered the first navigational world map in the history of cartography. Here, the territory related to Georgia is also presented as the kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia, the same as in the 1507 world map; however, it also includes a new name, *Georgia Regnu[m]* (Kingdom of Georgia). In other words, toponymy, which defines both ancient and modern Georgia, is included on this map. The map of the Kingdom of Georgia includes a small text in Latin stating that the country has 18 dioceses and that its population is Schismatic Christian (Bakradze, 2020, p. 43). Another sign of Christianity's spread in Georgia is a church near the capital city of Tbilisi, as depicted on the map.

Both of Waldseemüller's maps are significant and unique in the history of world cartography. They both survive in a single copy and are displayed in the Library of Congress.

### *Georgia on World Maps Depicting the Modern World*

While Georgia was presented as Colchis and Iberia on ancient world maps, modern maps show it as Georgia, with various spellings: Georgia, Georgie, Georgien, Giorgia, and Giorgiani. It is also common for Oriental names of Georgia to appear on various maps, including world maps, such as Gurgistan. Another name that comes across, albeit rarely, is Geoguria (Sordia, 2024, p. 17).

Georgia is depicted under the above-mentioned names on many modern world maps. Particularly noteworthy are the maps by such renowned European cartographers and geographers as Gerardus Mercator, Giacomo Gastaldi, Nicolas Sanson, Nicolas de Fer, Pierre Duval, Herman Moll, Pieter van der Aa, Johann Baptist Homann, Matthäus Seutter, Tobias Conrad Lotter, Johann Hübner, Johann Georg Schreiber, and others.

These world maps are interesting from several aspects. They provide insight into how European scholarly circles perceived Georgia and the significance of Georgia's various names in European political discourse. The primary distinction between world maps and regional or continental maps is that Georgia is depicted as a unified entity, occupying a vast geographic area between the Black and Caspian Seas. From the north, the river Don is often marked as Georgia's border, while from the south it is the river Arax. It can be said that Europeans saw Georgia as a geopolitical formation uniting the Caucasus region. This is to say that, for Europeans, Georgia played a dual role. It includes Georgia proper, i.e., a political unit created by ethnic Georgians, as well as a larger geographical region.

There are multiple examples showing the united Georgia on world maps. The article presents the world map (Figure 3) and its segment (Figure 3a) created by a renowned French cartographer, Nicolas de Fer. It clearly shows that Europeans perceived Georgia not only as a country but also as a large territorial unit. This map is of medium size; accordingly, the cartographer included only the leading countries of the era, further confirming Georgia's significance to European geographers and cartographers.

Other French, English, Italian, and German cartographers of the same era depict Georgia similarly on their world maps. These maps differ in size and the number of countries and settlements they display; however, most include cartographic data about Georgia. The largest printed world map with a detailed description of Georgia we identified is a 1569 wall map by Gerardus Mercator. It is called *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata* (New and more complete representation of the terrestrial globe properly adapted for use in navigation). Consisting of 18 printed pieces, the entire map measures 135 x 212 cm. On the other hand, the smallest world map depicting Georgia is the miniature world map *Planisphaerium Globi Terrestris*, created by the German cartographer Tobias Conrad Lotter. This map is from a portable atlas, the *Atlas Geographicus Portatilis*, published multiple times in Augsburg during the 1740s. This miniature world map is only 9.5 x 12.5 cm.

As mentioned above, in most maps, Georgia spans a vast area between the Black and Caspian Seas. "However, there are exceptions in which Georgia is shown as occupying the territory between the Mediterranean and the Caspian Seas. For example, maps created by the renowned German cartographer Johann Baptist Homann depict Georgia in this form, as do other world maps created by cartographers influenced by him. Here we would like to mention cartographers Matthäus Seutter and Tobias Conrad Lotter.

It is not uncommon to find in the works of European geographers and cartographers the name of "Samegrelo" to define Georgia and the entire Caucasus region. This name, alongside "Georgia", had a regional meaning. Numerous cartographic examples depict Samegrelo in this form on maps of continents or separate geographical areas. We identified two examples of Samegrelo depicted on world maps in the regional context. Below you will see one of them, a world maritime map by Girolamo Ruscelli (Figure 4), and a fragment from the Caucasus region, displayed under the name Samegrelo (Figure 4a). This map is considered one of the benchmarks among the world maps. Its first version was created by Italian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi. Another world map showing Samegrelo in the same

context is a maritime map by Italian cartographer Tomaso Porcacchi.

Another name that some European cartographers used, though rarely, for defining the Caucasus region, including Georgia, was “Armenia”. One example we can cite is a world map by the famous 16th-century Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius from the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* atlas, which plays a significant role in the history of cartography. In terms of textual descriptions, a noteworthy example is the collection of geographic cards by the 17th-century Italian author and engraver Stefano della Bella. According to one of these cards, “Armenia lies from the river of Euphrates to the Caspian Seas and the Caucasus Mountain range. It includes Samegrelo, Georgia, and Great and Minor Armenia” (Sordia, 2024, p. 90). Of course, in this case, “Armenia” is used not as a state unit, but as a geographical and territorial unit. In general, Armenian historical maps can be observed in a comprehensive study by Rouben Galichian (Galichian, 2004).

Examining world maps reveals the number of state and territorial formations that existed at the time these maps were created, the number of continents and parts that European geographers and cartographers divided the world into, and Georgia’s place within this division. From this point of view, maps including explanatory tables are most valuable. In these tables, authors listed the political units they considered significant by continent. It is worth noting that the majority of world maps and accompanying explanatory tables have traditionally included Georgia.

For example, the influential 17<sup>th</sup> century French cartographer, who is considered the founder of the French cartography, Nicolas Sanson, lists 38 countries and territories (besides islands) in an explanatory table named *Geographical Tables of the Divisions of the Terrestrial Globe* (*Tables Geographiques des Divisions Du Globe Terrestre Par le Sanson. Geographe ordinaire du Roy*) for the world map that he created. Georgia is among those countries.

The list of these countries goes as follows:

- European continent: Scandinavia, Moscovia, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy, Turkey in Asia
- Asian continent: Turkey in Asia, Georgia, Arabia, Persia, India, China, Tartaria
- African continent: Barbaria, Egypt, Biledulgerid, Zaara, Country of Negros, Guenea, Nubia, Abyssinia, Zangebar, Congo, Monomatapa, Cafre
- American continent: Arctic lands, Canada or New France, Florida, Mexico, New Spain, Terra Ferme, Peru, Chili, Brazil, Paraguay, Terra Magellanique.

In comparison, a greater number of countries and territories are shown on the world map by the 18th-century German cartographer and publisher Johann Georg Schreiber, which was published in 1740 and 1749. This map mentions countries in an abbreviated version. The lower part of the map includes explanations for the abbreviations for the four continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, and America). For example, Georgia is mentioned as GE, while the explanatory part states: GE. Georgia.

In Schreiber's table, the world is divided into 50 countries besides Asian island territories. These are:

- European continent: POR. Portugalia, HIS. Hispania, GAL. Gallia, AN. Anglia, GER. Germania, DA. Dania, POL. Polonia, HUN. Hungaria, IT. Italia. GRAE. Graeciae, MOS. Moscovia, TAR. Tartaria Minor, SU. Suecia, NOR. Norwegia, LA. Laponia, N.ZE. Nova Zembla.
- Asian continent: NA. Natolia, GE. Georgia, AR. Arabia, PER. Persia, TAR. MAG. Tartaria Magna, SIB. Siberia, TER. IED. Terra Iedso, MOG. Mogol, IN. India, CHI. China.
- African continent: Bar. Barbaria, AEG. Aegyptus, BIL. Biledurgarid, SAR DES. Sara Deserta, NIG. Nigritae, GUIN. Guinea. NU. Nubia, AI Ajan Zangubar, ASYS. Abyssinia, CON, Congo, MO. Monocnugi, MON. Monomontapan, CAF. Caffa.
- American continent: N. HIS. Nova Hispania, FLO. Florida, LO. Lovisinia, N. ME. Nova Mexico, CA. Canada, VIR. Virginia, CAL. California, TER. FIR. Terra Firma, PE. Peru, CHI. Chili, T. MAG. Terra Magelanica, BRAS. Brasilia.

As we can see, following the tradition from the ancient period, Georgia is listed in both geographical tables as part of the Asian continent. Sanson divided the Asian continent into seven parts, while Schreiber divided it into nine parts (excluding the islands).

We see a similar picture in other geographical tables showing countries from the same era. For example, we can mention geographical tables created by geographers, cartographers, and authors such as Pierre Duval, Antoine Phérotée de La Croix, Luigi Montieri, and others.

## **CONCLUSION**

Georgia is depicted on hundreds of world maps. Moreover, analysis of these maps and accompanying geographical tables makes it clear that Georgia was assigned an important function and place during the regional division of continents. According to the leading and most influential European cartographers, Georgia is a country that represents a vast regional unit of the Asian continent, alongside Persia, Turkey, Arabia, Tartaria, etc. It is also clear that European cartographers, geographers, and travelers were deeply interested in Georgia, as reflected in the production of numerous regional maps focused on Georgia.

## **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

## **Financing**

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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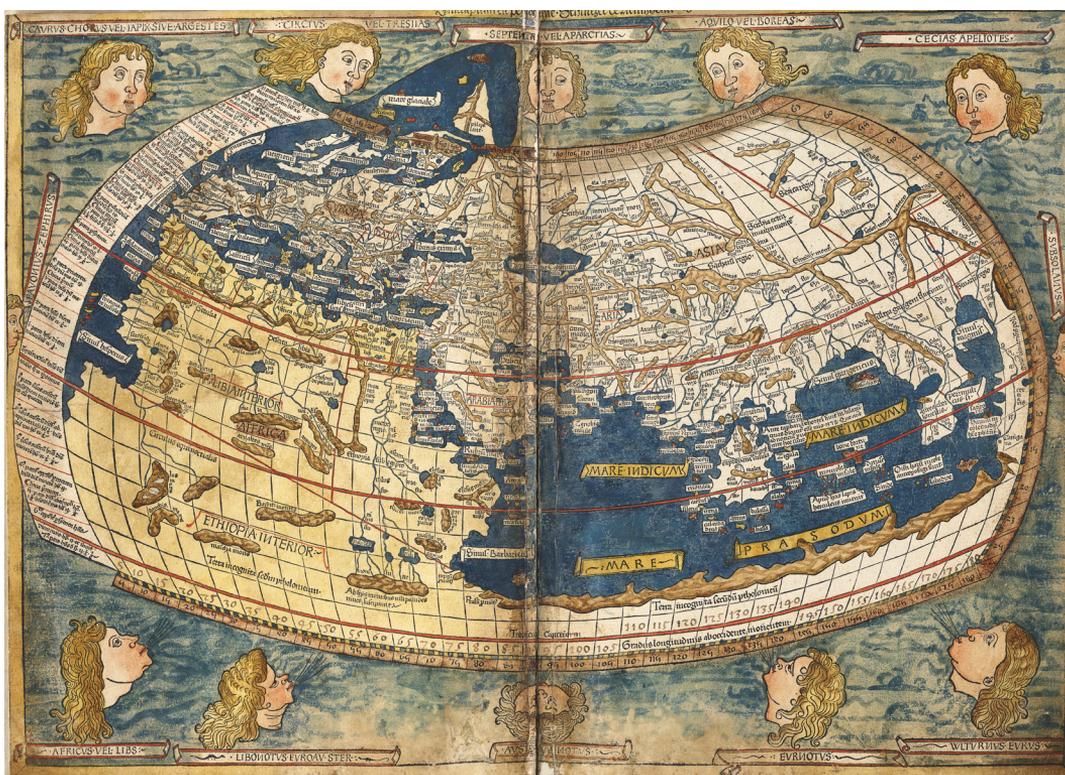


Figure 1. World map from Ptolemy's Geography. Published by Nicolaus Germanus. Ulm, 1482. National Library of Sweden.

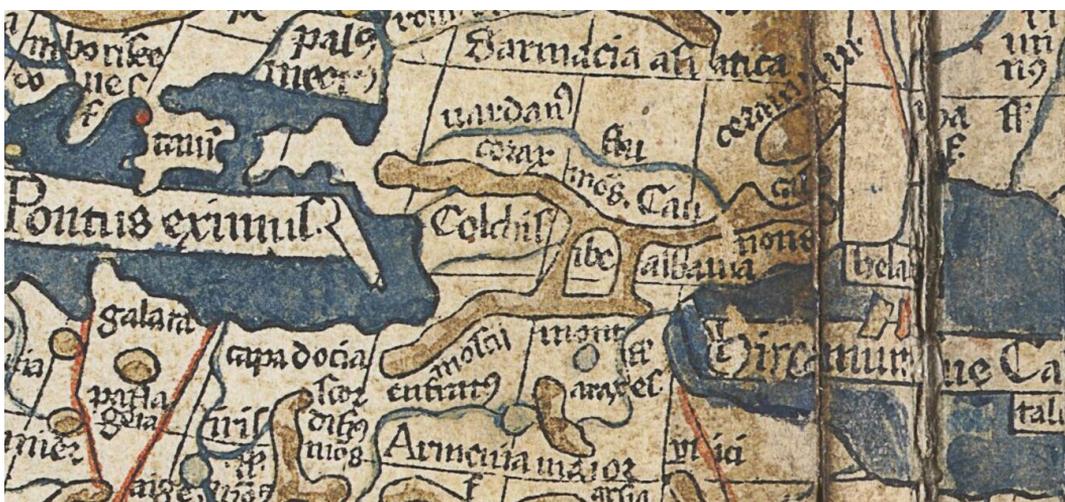


Figure 1a. World map from Ptolemy's Geography (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Published by Nicolaus Germanus. Ulm, 1482. National Library of Sweden.



Figure 2. World map by Martin Waldseemüller (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Strasbourg, 1507. Library of Congress.



Figure 3. World map by Nicolas de Fer. Paris, 1714. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.



Figure 3a. World map by Nicolas de Fer (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Paris, 1714. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.

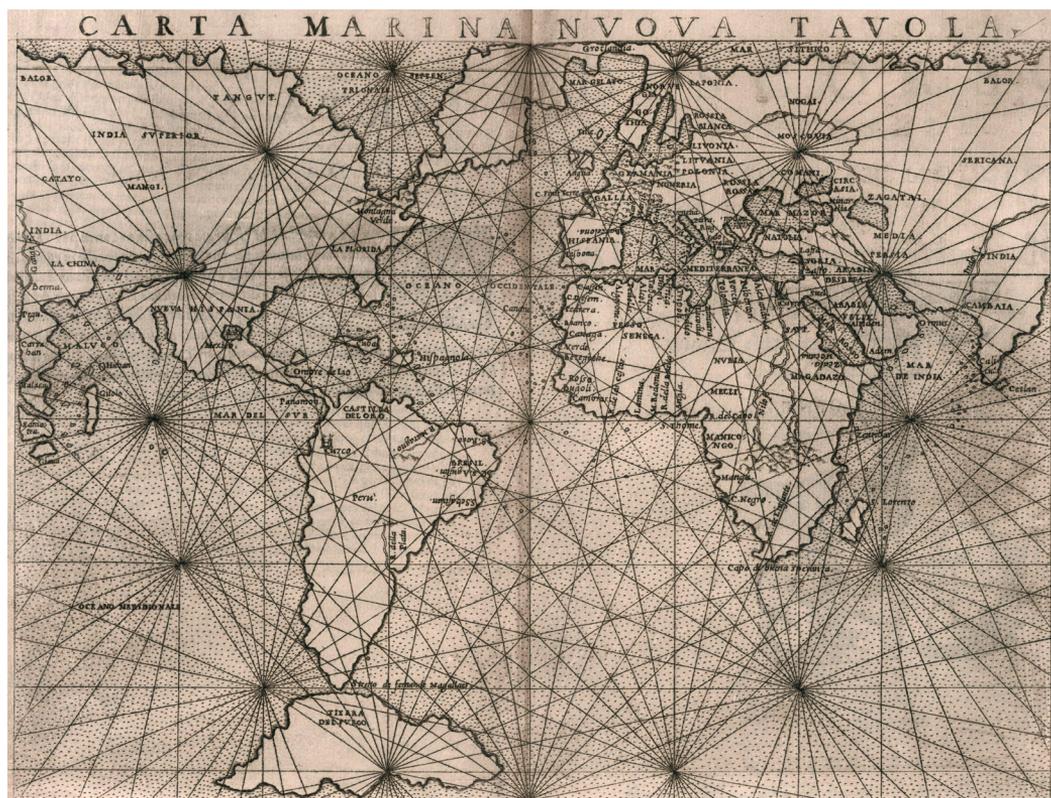


Figure 4. World map by Girolamo Ruscelli, based on earlier map of Giacomo Gastaldi. Venice, 1564. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.



**Figure 4a.** World map by Girolamo Ruscelli, based on earlier map of Giacomo Gastaldi (Fragmen focused on Caucasus). Venice, 1564. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.

## ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS STUDIES

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# Artificial Intelligence and Career Development

ANVARI ROYA, PHD

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0000-0003-2136-8341](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2136-8341)

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of artificial intelligence adoption in recruitment on organizational and individual outcomes, specifically focusing on positive organizational shock and career development. It further investigates the moderating roles of emotional intelligence and family support, and the mediating effect of positive organizational shock on the relationship between artificial intelligence adoption and career development. A quantitative study was conducted in April among 400 human resource practitioners in higher education institutions in Nigeria. The study employed Partial Least Squares for Structural Equation Modelling to analyze the relationships between the constructs. The findings indicate that artificial intelligence adoption in recruitment significantly enhances positive organizational shock, which in turn positively influences career development. Emotional intelligence and family support serve as key moderators, respectively enhancing the positive impact of artificial intelligence adoption and the positive organizational shock. The study also confirms the partial mediating role of positive organizational shock in the relationship between artificial intelligence adoption and career development. Theoretical contributions include the development and validation of a comprehensive framework linking artificial intelligence adoption to organizational and professional outcomes. Practically, the results highlight the importance of integrating emotional intelligence training and family support programs to maximize the benefits of artificial intelligence technologies. The study concludes that artificial intelligence-driven recruitment offers significant potential to transform hiring practices, drive positive organizational change, and boost career development, provided that human factors are also taken into account.

*Keywords:* Artificial intelligence, recruitment, positive organizational shock, career development, family support

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping human resource management, particularly in recruitment. It offers new efficiencies and insights, but also brings new challenges and social concerns. The use of AI technologies in recruitment, such as advanced algorithms and data analytics, has been proven to enhance decision-making, improve candidate-position matching, and potentially democratize hiring by reducing human bias. Nonetheless, this technological advancement also raises concerns about privacy, the potential for algorithmic bias, and its effects on job seekers' experiences (Souto-Otero & Brown, 2024). The speed at which technologies such as AI are evolving is both promising and concerning; it raises fundamental questions about how organizations will function in this new paradigm, how employees will advance in their careers, and how it will ultimately affect the future of work itself (Kim, 2024). Although extensive research has examined the operational benefits of AI in recruiting (Munoko et al., 2020) far less attention has been given to its broader organizational effects, particularly positive organizational shocks and their implications for career development (Boswell et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a gap in the study about how individual-level factors, such as emotional intelligence (EI) and family support, can change the relationship between the use of AI in recruiting and how it works. For example, Kassir et al. (2023) and Kelan (2024) have conducted extensive research on how AI influences the hiring process. However, they have not examined how EI and family support might influence employees' responses to AI-driven hiring practices. This suggests that more work must be done researching what role these individual-level factors play in AI adoption in recruiting. In understanding how individuals adapt to technological change, including the use of AI and its implications for career trajectories, EI and family support play a critical role. However, the impact of these factors on how AI is utilized in hiring and the implications for professional advancement have not been sufficiently studied. The lack of a holistic understanding of AI adoption practices in recruiting, particularly within higher education institutions, poses a pressing challenge for colleges and universities and HR plugins. Without an understanding of positive or negative organizational shocks and the Career development shaping in academia, organizations will not be able to optimize the expected benefits of AI for recruitment and provide a tailored response to the challenges it presents. Failure to recognize and appropriately respond to these risks can lead to lost opportunities in developing a fit-for-purpose, flexible, resilient, and skilled academic workforce. It can also have unintended consequences, including poor morale, retention challenges, and disruption to organizational culture and well-being. Other studies have provided some insights into aspects of this study, such as how AI can assist with recruitment and how EI and family support are important for further career growth (Munoko et al., 2020). However, it does not always provide a comprehensive understanding of the critical role of these drivers in the higher education context. Studies might focus only on the technical aspects of implementing AI or on factors affecting a single person. However, they might not examine how AI adoption drives organizational change and alters career development pathways in academia. Therefore, a clear research gap exists, necessitating empirical investigation into how AI adoption in recruitment interacts with EI, family support, and contextual variables

to shape organizational and employee experiences within higher education organizations. By synthesizing these variables and conducting holistic research, scholars can provide actionable insights for HR practitioners and university administrators seeking to navigate the complexities of AI-driven recruitment and foster a supportive and adaptive academic environment, incorporating the applicable criteria that follow.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *AI Adoption and Positive Organizational Shock*

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations, including higher education institutions, have accelerated the adoption of AI-driven recruitment processes to address challenges posed by remote work and social distancing measures. Higher levels of post-COVID-19 AI adoption in recruitment are associated with improved organizational efficiency, reflected in reduced time-to-hire and decreased administrative burden through automated screening. AI adoption is also anticipated to boost diversity and inclusion initiatives by reducing unconscious bias and creating an even playing field for candidate selection based on qualifications and skills rather than demographic characteristics. Thus, drawing on the literature, we hypothesize that Hypothesis 1: The Higher the AI adoption in recruitment, the greater the positive organizational shock. The hypothesis suggests that institutions with more extensive adoption of AI are more likely to reflect deliberation over ethical considerations, including, but not limited to, algorithmic decision-making, transparency, fairness, and accountability, indicative of responsible AI adoption practices within higher education recruitment processes. In line with Dwivedi et al. Higher education institutions are predicted to adopt AI-driven recruitment processes to enhance organizational efficiency during the post-COVID-19 era (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Saridakis, 2023). An AI-powered applicant tracking system (Kassir et al., 2023) helps accomplish this by using algorithms to analyze candidates and filter them based on their pursuit of key attributes, accelerating the recruitment process while easing the administrative workload. In addition, AI has the potential to facilitate diversity and inclusion by focusing on a candidate's qualifications rather than their demographic characteristics, thereby aligning with the hypothesis's expectation of improved diversity outcomes. Authors such as Tsamados et al. (2021) emphasize certain ethical aspects, while Szymoniak and Kubanek (2024) criticize bias and transparency in AI algorithms. The hypothesis aligns with their views, positing that the greater the level of AI adoption, the higher the level of ethical consideration, as supported by Vinuesa et al. (2020). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2020) and Crawford and Calo (2016) emphasize the importance of transparency and fairness in algorithmic decision-making and support the hypothesis that organizations should prioritize fairness and equity in hiring practices.

### *AI Adoption and Career Development*

In the post-COVID-19 higher education environment, faculty who experience a positive organizational shock are expected to demonstrate higher levels of digital literacy, pedagog-

ical innovation, and collaboration than those who do not. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis: H2: There is a positive relationship between the adoption of AI in recruiting and career development. This hypothesis draws on Nielsen et al.'s (2023) conceptualization of positive organizational shock, which suggests that transformative events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can stimulate rapid adaptation, innovation, and organizational renewal. As noted by Braiteh (2024), such shocks can drive innovation, enhance teaching practices, and promote resilience. The hypothesis proposes that instructors who experience positive shocks are more likely to engage in collaborative initiatives, leading to higher levels of collaboration than their colleagues. However, challenges associated with a positive organizational shock, such as the digital divide and anxiety and stress, can hinder the realization of these opportunities, as Soluk et al. (2021) found. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions that effectively integrate strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices into their career development strategies will experience greater organizational resilience, employee engagement, and adaptability. Therefore, we can formulate the hypothesis that: H3: A positive organizational shock mediates the relationship between AI adoption in recruiting and career development. Based on the findings of Mer and Viridi (2023), the hypothesis posits that conceptualizing career development post-COVID-19 emphasizes resilience, adaptability, and lifelong learning, which require a strategic approach grounded in SHRM Practices.

#### *EI, adoption of AI in recruitment, and positive organizational shock*

In the post-COVID-19 era, higher levels of EI will be positively associated with greater emotional resilience, adaptability, and interpersonal effectiveness. Based on the existing literature, we can formulate the hypothesis that H4: EI moderates the relationship between AI adoption in recruiting and positive organizational shock. This hypothesis is grounded in multidimensional conceptualization of EI, which emphasizes individuals' capacities to perceive, understand, manage, and appropriately express emotions. As proposed by McCrimmon et al., in the face of the unique onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is postulated that individuals with higher levels of EI will show correspondingly higher levels of the discussed emotional resilience. This empowers them to bounce back from adversity and maintain emotional well-being. Furthermore, Sony and Mekoth (2016) associate higher EI with increased adaptability and flexibility in dynamic environments. This ability to adapt is vital to navigating the pace of change and uncertainty of the post-pandemic world, where traditional norms and practices can no longer be assumed to offer reliable guideposts. Effective communication and relationship management are critical to maintaining productivity and morale in virtual work environments where physical distance and cultural differences can be challenging. Family support, positive organizational shock, and career development. In the post-pandemic period, families facing elevated economic stress, social isolation, caregiving responsibilities, health concerns, and digital inequalities are likely to report lower perceived family support and higher emotional distress than families that encounter fewer such challenges. Based on the existing literature, we formulate the hypothesis that H5: Family support moderates the relationship between positive organizational

shock and career development. The hypothesis is based on the understanding that various challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as economic stress, social isolation, caregiving responsibilities, health concerns, and digital inequalities, may negatively impact families' ability to provide and sustain supportive relationships. Neri et al. (2012) and Reynolds et al. (2020) note that economic strain and social isolation can weaken family relationships, restrict access to support services, and exacerbate mental health challenges. Other researchers further observe that ongoing COVID-19-related health concerns may heighten anxiety and fear, placing additional strain on family bonds. Furthermore, the digital inequalities highlighted by Rohwerder and Szyp (2022) may increase feelings of isolation and marginalization within families, as those with limited access to digital resources may struggle to access essential services and social support networks.

## ***METHODS***

To determine the sample size, the proportionate sampling technique was used to select 400 samples from the universities. Measurement was conducted using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

### *Sampling Technique*

To determine the sample size, the proportionate sampling technique was used to select 400 samples from the universities. First, the proportion of each university's population was found from the overall population.

$$\text{University of Lagos: } \frac{2,782}{8,393} = 0.331$$

$$\text{Lagos State University: } \frac{1,356}{8,393} = 0.161$$

$$\text{Olabisi Onabanjo University: } \frac{909}{8,393} = 0.108$$

$$\text{Covenant University: } \frac{441}{8,393} = 0.053$$

$$\text{Babcock University: } \frac{580}{8,393} = 0.069$$

$$\text{Tai Solarin University of Education: } \frac{572}{8,393} = 0.068$$

$$\text{Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta: } \frac{1,393}{8,393} = 0.166$$

$$\text{Pan-Atlantic University: } \frac{360}{8,393} = 0.043$$

Based on the proportion, each percentage was multiplied by 400

University	Location	Population	Sample
University of Lagos	Lagos	2,782	132
Lagos State University	Lagos	1,356	64
Olabisi Onabanjo University	Ogun	909	43
Covenant University	Ogun	441	21
Babcock University	Ogun	580	28
Tai Solarin University of Education	Ogun	572	27
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	Ogun	1393	67
Pan-Atlantic University	Lagos	360	17
	Total	8,393	400

### *Variables and Measures*

**AI Adoption in Recruitment (AIREC):** This variable measures the extent to which AI technologies are integrated into the recruitment processes. Items include the usage of AI for candidate screening, interview scheduling, and predictive analytics. **Positive Organizational Shock (POSH):** This construct captures unexpected positive changes within the organization resulting from AI adoption in recruitment. Items measuring perceptions of improved organizational practices, increased innovation, and enhanced employee engagement were developed by Seibert et al. (2013). **Career Development (CD):** This variable assesses the perceived improvement in career opportunities and personal growth resulting from AI-driven organizational changes. Items include career advancement, skill development, and job satisfaction. EI is measured to understand its moderating effect on the relationship between AIREC and POSH. The measurement involves assessing self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills using a validated 5-point Likert scale by Law et al. (2004). **Family Support:** This variable assesses the support individuals receive from their families in balancing work and personal life, and its moderating effect on the relationship between POSH and CD. Items include emotional, financial, and practical support, as developed by King et al. (1995).

## **RESULTS**

Each construct's internal consistency is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, both of which exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.7. The average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.5, indicating adequate convergent validity. Both composed reliability and Cronbach's Alpha were higher than 0.7, indicating internal consistency. The AVE values ranged from 0.539 upward, reinforcing evidence of convergent validity. The results of discriminant validity show that all the amounts of the square roots of each construct's AVE were larger than its correlation with other constructs, and, hence, this instrument was found to have discriminant validity. The outer loadings for items within

each construct indicate the strength of each item's relationship with its corresponding construct. All outer loadings are above 0.6, demonstrating strong item-construct relationships. Additionally, the variance inflation factor values are below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the items. The analysis confirmed the positive influence of AIREC on POSH ( $P = .744, p < .01$ ), POSH on CD ( $P = .453, p < .01$ ), and AIREC on CD ( $P = .251, p < .01$ ).

The R2 for Career Development is .782, which is considered a substantial impact, and the R2 for Positive Organizational Shock (.664) is considered a moderate impact.

H1 (AIREC  $\rightarrow$  POSH): The path coefficient for the influence of AIREC on POSH is 0.744, with a significant T-value of 14.836 and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates a strong, significant positive effect, supporting the acceptance of hypothesis H1.

H2 (POSH  $\rightarrow$  CD): The path from POSH to career development (CD) has a coefficient of 0.453, a T-value of 5.535, and a P-value of 0.000, suggesting a significant positive influence and resulting in the acceptance of H2.

H3 (AIREC  $\rightarrow$  CD): The direct effect of AIREC on CD is also significant with a coefficient of 0.251, a T-value of 3.216, and a P-value of 0.001, thus supporting hypothesis H3.

These results suggest that adopting AI in recruiting has a significant positive impact on positive organizational shocks, which, in turn, significantly improve career development. The direct impact of AI introduction on career development is also noteworthy. H4 (EI x AIREC  $\rightarrow$  POSH): EI moderates the relationship between AIREC and POSH with a path coefficient of 0.056, a T-value of 2.073, and a P-value of 0.038, leading to the acceptance of hypothesis H4. H5 (FS x POSH  $\rightarrow$  CD): Family support (FS) moderates the effect of POSH on CD as evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.103, a T-value of 2.566, and a P-value of 0.01, thus accepting hypothesis H5. The moderation effects indicate that higher levels of EI can amplify the positive impact of AI adoption on organizational shock. Similarly, FS enhances the positive influence of organizational shock on career development. The indirect effect of AIREC on CD is significant. To assess the role of the mediator, the variance accounted for (VAF) was calculated, which indicates the size of the indirect effect relative to the total effect. The VAF was 57.31%, indicating that POSH plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between AIREC and CD. H6 (AIREC  $\rightarrow$  POSH  $\rightarrow$  CD): The indirect effect of AIREC on CD through POSH is significant with a path coefficient of 0.337, a T-value of 5.065, and a P-value of 0.000. VAF is 57.31%, indicating a partial mediation role of POSH between AIREC and CD. This finding demonstrates that POSH partially mediates the relationship between AI adoption in recruitment and career development, reinforcing the crucial intermediary role that positive organizational experiences play in enhancing career outcomes. EI x AIREC to POSH: EI moderates the relationship between AIREC and POSH with a significant path coefficient of 0.056 and a t-value of 2.073.

FS x POSH to CD: FS moderates the relationship between POSH and CD, with a path coefficient of 0.103 and a t-value of 2.566.

Indirect Effects:

AIREC to POSH to CD: The indirect effect of AIREC on CD through POSH is significant with a path coefficient of 0.337 and a t-value of 5.065, indicating partial mediation. VAF is 57.31%, suggesting that POSH partially mediates the relationship between AIREC and CD. The model fit indices indicate a good fit. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is 0.072 for the saturated model and 0.082 for the estimated model, both within acceptable limits. The chi-square and NFI values also support the model’s fit. Figure 1 shows the results of Bootstrapping

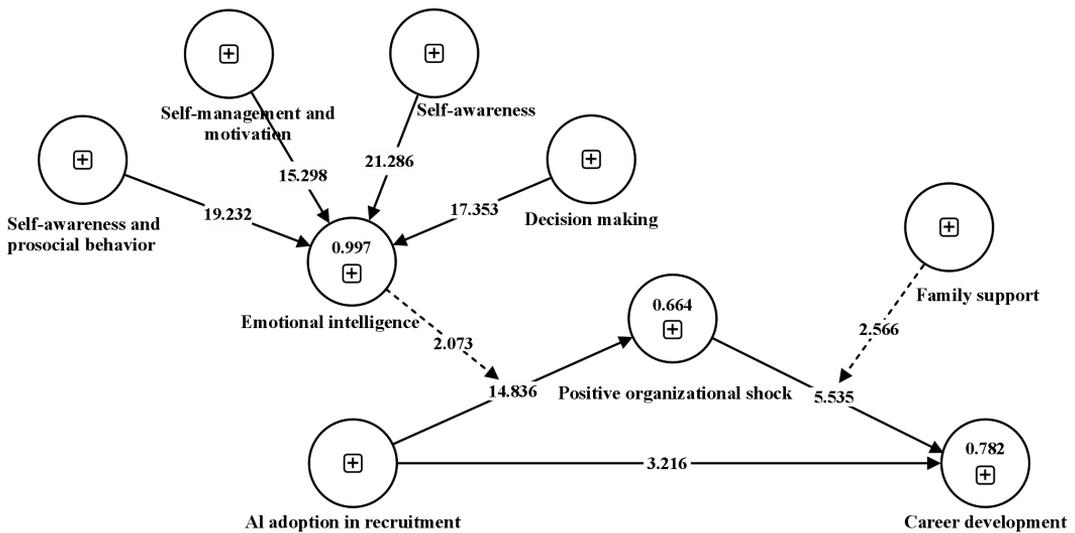


Figure 1. Results of Bootstrapping

**DISCUSSION**

The significant direct effects identified, such as AIREC’s influence on POSH and CD, highlight the profound impact of AI technologies on organizational dynamics and individual career trajectories. This finding aligns with George’s (2024) argument that AI-driven recruitment fosters innovative practices and generates unexpected benefits for both organizations and employees. The positive impact of POSH on CD supports assertion that positive organizational experiences foster career growth. The significant moderation effects of EI and FS underscore the importance of these factors in enhancing the outcomes of AI adoption in recruitment. Higher EI amplifies the positive effects of AI adoption on POSH, as individuals with greater EI are better equipped to handle organizational changes (Budhwar et al., 2022). Similarly, FS enhances the positive impact of POSH on CD, suggesting that a supportive family environment plays a crucial role in leveraging positive organizational experiences for career advancement (Park et al., 2023). The partial mediation role of POSH between AIREC and CD, indicated by the significant indirect effect in Table 7, suggests that AI adoption leads to positive organizational experiences, which in turn promote career

development. This finding aligns with Pérez and Sabelis's (2020) view that AI can create more equitable and merit-based career advancement opportunities. The model fit indices in Table 8 indicate that the proposed model provides a good fit to the data. The SRMR values fall within acceptable thresholds, further supporting the validity of the proposed theoretical framework.

This is an excellent model fit, important to make sure the relationships among constructs are represented accurately. One important immediate consequence of AIREC for POSH and professional development is the path coefficient of 0.744 from AIREC to POSH, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two. This means that if an organization adopts AI recruitment processes, it can bring surprising and favorable changes to the service and organization. In addition, the high impact of POSH on CD (path coefficient 0.453) indicates that experiences in the organization can have a substantial effect on individual career lines. This aligns with Bobitan et al. (2024), who highlight that AI technologies offer tailored insights and forecasts that can guide individual and organizational growth approaches and thus enhance career development. The path coefficient on the moderating effect of EI on the relationship between AIRCE and POSH is also substantial, as indicated by a coefficient of 0.056. The finding supports the theory that people with higher EI demonstrate better well-being and are more flexible in adjusting to rapid change in a rapidly changing environment, such as AI in recruiting. According to Di Fabio and Kenny (2019), people with higher EI levels can remain psychologically healthy and adapt successfully to organizational changes. FS also acts as a moderator between POSH and CD, with a T-value of 4.069 and a path coefficient of 0.103. This implies that people with active FS systems are better able to extract the benefits of positive organizational transformations for themselves. This finding is consistent with the views of Prime et al. (2020), who emphasize the crucial role of FS in shaping career aspirations and experiences, especially in the post-pandemic period. The indirect effect of AIREC on CD through POSH, with a significant path coefficient of 0.337, suggests partial mediation. This implies that the positive organizational changes resulting from AI adoption in recruiting partially explain the association between AIREC and CD.

## **CONCLUSION**

The incorporation of AI into the recruiting process is expected to transform conventional hiring practices and generate significant benefits for both organizations and employees. This study aimed to assess the multiple facets of the effect of adopting AI in recruiting, particularly on organizational positive shocks and career development. In addition, the study investigated the moderating roles of emotional intelligence and family support, as well as the mediating effect of positive organizational shock in the relationship between AI adoption and career development. AI adoption in recruitment positively influences organizational shock, suggesting that AI-driven hiring processes can drive favorable organizational change. Because of these changes, employees have greatly enhanced opportunities for professional growth. Key moderating factors were identified: EI and family support. Results indicate that higher EI scores augment the positive impact of AI adoption on positive organizational shocks, and strong family support enhances the positive impact of positive orga-

nizational shocks on career development. The results of the study illustrate the importance of personal and social factors for the successful application of AI technologies. Induction of positive organizational shocks partially mediates AI adoption in recruitment and in career development. This suggests that general organizational experiences have emerged as a key mechanism by which AI-driven recruitment processes can enhance individual career outcomes. Model fit indices confirmed the theoretical structure of the study and provided strong empirical support for the hypothesized links among the constructs, thereby supporting future exploration of the proposed relationships.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial support.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Private Sector Views on Audit and Accounting Reform in Georgia

*KALATOZISHVILI NATIA, PHD STUDENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*GEGESHIDZE EKA, PHD  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0009-0009-4373-8033](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4373-8033)*

*ORCID: [0000-0003-0592-079X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0592-079X)*

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the perceptions and readiness of Georgia's private sector to meet the requirements of the ongoing Audit and Accounting Reform. It evaluates current progress and estimates long-term implications. The Reform introduces a regulatory framework that requires companies to disclose their accounting information, aiming to improve reporting quality and strengthen Georgia's investment environment. This regulatory change motivates an examination of how the Reform is unfolding and the progress made to date. The analysis is based on survey data and expert interviews collected since the start of the Reform in 2019 and compares them with more recent data to evaluate progress. Descriptive statistics are used to interpret the findings. Results show limited improvement in knowledge of accounting standards, a generally positive perception of the Reform despite limited understanding, and concerns that compliance will impose unavoidable costs on smaller companies. We conclude that the Reform's effectiveness depends on long-term developments, while immediate efforts are needed to address hindering factors.

*Keywords:* Accounting reform, financial reporting, Georgia's private sector, regulatory compliance, private sector readiness, perception analysis

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## **INTRODUCTION**

With a population of 3.7 million and a GDP per capita of USD 9,141, Georgia is a developing country striving for rapid economic growth and closer ties with the European economy (Geostat, 2024). To support this vision, the Georgian government has been working to improve the business environment through better practices and policies.

The Government enacted the Law of Georgia on Accounting, Reporting, and Auditing in June 2016, which serves as the primary basis for the observed Accounting and Audit Reform. The declared purpose of the Reform is to achieve financial transparency and economic growth (Law of Georgia on Accounting, Reporting, and Auditing, 2016). Both the Reform and the Law are driven by obligations under the Association Agreement with the European Union (2014), and the successful implementation of the Reform is in the state's interest.

The Reform targets the entire Georgian private sector, introducing unprecedented requirements for companies to publicly disclose financial information in a regulated manner and frequency. The Reform introduced a structured classification of companies by size and activity, determining their financial reporting and audit obligations. Public Interest Entities and the largest firms (Category I) adopted full IFRS with mandatory audits starting from October 2018. Large and mid-size companies (Categories II and III) transitioned to IFRS for SMEs, with mandatory or voluntary audits phased in by 2019. The smallest micro entities (Category IV) were given until 2021 to begin mandatory reporting under Simplified IFRS, with audit requirements remaining optional (Pirveli & Shugliashvili, 2019).

Our study examines how prepared these companies were to meet the new requirements. We focus on their knowledge of the Reform's provisions and their attitudes toward it, providing an early indication of the Reform's short-term impact. To do this, we conducted three expert interviews and an online survey with accountants working in private companies, providing direct insight into perceptions and attitudes among private-sector representatives at the early stage of the Reform. In addition, we reviewed public data to provide a comprehensive picture of the Reform's progress from 2018 to 2024.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many countries have sought to harmonize their financial disclosure regulations, especially in the age of globalization. Such reforms are frequently implemented by developing nations, which are influenced by their more developed counterparts (Pirveli & Shugliashvili, 2019). Even though these reforms are common, there is still a lack of empirical data and theoretical frameworks to explain the mechanisms that control their impact across nations (Pirveli & Shugliashvili, 2019; Pirveli, 2019, 2020, 2022).

Theoretically, private businesses in Georgia may be motivated by the State's attempts to standardize accounting procedures in line with the EU harmonization agenda. Institutional theory and agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) emphasize the necessity of ensuring regu-

latory compliance and overcoming information asymmetry. According to agency theory, regulatory mechanisms help close the information gap between shareholders and firm managers. These regulations strike a balance between their interests and foster confidence by increasing openness (Jensen, 1976; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Donaldson & Davis, 1991). In this context, public disclosure is crucial because it reduces information asymmetry and contributes to a more stable and reliable governance environment for stakeholders, including investors (Verrecchia, 2001; Healy & Palepu, 2001). Legitimacy theory, on the other hand, examines reform from a political and social perspective. It recommends that businesses adopt new procedures to meet public expectations and adhere to international standards, in addition to increasing efficiency (Suchman, 1995; DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Deegan, 2002). From this perspective, businesses follow social expectations to earn public approval, remain competitive, and survive in the long run (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Lara et al., 2009). In the context of accounting and audit reforms, this means companies often comply with the changes not just because the rules require it, but also because they want to be seen as trustworthy, professional, and responsible (Preston & Post, 1975; Deegan, 2002; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975).

Combining the above theories suggests that businesses may have internal incentives to preserve legitimacy by complying with minimum regulatory requirements, as well as external incentives to provide more comprehensive information and reduce information asymmetry. While maintaining legitimacy may be a priority, companies can theoretically meet regulatory obligations without necessarily disclosing high-quality information. However, implementing the new standards also requires resources that many firms may not possess.

Prior literature in the field indicates that the Georgian private sector, including individuals directly involved in the Reform, such as accountants, auditors, and managers, lacks sufficient knowledge and competencies to fully meet the requirements of such reforms (Kharabadze & Mamukelashvili, 2016; Nijam & Jahfer, 2016). The 2015 World Bank Report highlights a list of issues that need to be addressed to develop Georgia's accounting sector, including education as a key priority. Specifically, it is stated that there is a need to create improved academic curricula in schools and require compulsory training for accountants (World Bank, 2015). Local researchers also point out the same issue and indicate the need for increased competencies of accountants and auditors. Studies suggest that the quality research institutes and university-industry collaboration would boost professionalism and have a significant impact on the implementation of audit and financial reporting standards in Georgia (Kharabadze & Mamukelashvili, 2016). Regarding enhancing auditors' competencies, it is considered that achieving quality teaching in this area requires both universities to develop appropriate curricula and instructors to be trained to fully meet market demands (Sabauri, 2018).

Thus, with prior literature highlighting low professional competencies and the Reform placing new demands on the sector, this moment warrants closer examination.

Once the implementation phase of the Reform began, a few studies were conducted by the State and private researchers to observe the Reform's progress. One of the first articles about the Reform, published in 2019, indicates that enforcement of the new accounting law

is quite efficient; however, it is not thoroughly timely, meaning that the percentage of companies complying with the submission requirement is good, but the submission deadlines are not always followed (Pirveli, 2019).

In the same year, 2019, the World Bank recognized Georgia's advancements in accounting. The World Bank (2019) reports improvements in state-owned enterprise governance, accounting and auditing quality control, small and medium accounting practices, and SME accounting frameworks. The effective implementation of the new accounting rule is also demonstrated by Pirveli (2022). However, in his works from 2019 onward, and in 2022, while highlighting the Reform's success in overall motivation and legal implementation, he also points out issues with accountants' and auditors' skills.

The academic literature also offers relevant insights from European reform experiences that can be used to assess the long-term perspective of the current Reform. When evaluating the reform of the same field, which began in 2000 in Romania and was also triggered by the EU integration process, the authors emphasize human perceptions and habits, local culture, and the possible inconsistency of these with new standards. Studies about the Romanian case argue that the local tradition of sector development influences the reform of the accounting sector. The reforming country must find a balance between local culture and global influence (Tudor & Mustata, 2005). The Romanian experience has shown that, at the regulatory level, international standards were quickly adopted. However, practical implementation proved difficult, as introducing rules rooted in other cultures and closely tied to human values has not been easy (Bebeșelea, 2014).

According to scholarly research, private businesses typically comply with disclosure laws at a technical level, thereby improving operational efficiency. However, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness, as measured by the quality of the information provided. This effectiveness is closely linked to social norms, national traits, and the cost of generating more quality information (Gray et al., 1995; Lara et al., 2009; Dye, 2001; Bushman & Smith, 2001; Verrecchia, 2001).

Georgia's Service for Accounting, Reporting, and Auditing Supervision (SARAS) has been instrumental in monitoring and reporting on the Reform's compliance rates, progress, and observed challenges. In its 2019–2024 publications, SARAS documented generally reasonable compliance rates, particularly among larger company categories in Georgia. In contrast, smaller companies continued to encounter challenges, with more moderate submission rates and a declining trend over this period. This paper presents a trend analysis based on SARAS reports in the Results section to show where the country stands in terms of public disclosure after five years of large-scale mandatory reporting.

In addition to the widely discussed issues in the prior literature, such as human competencies and attitudes, our primary focus of observation is to assess the private sector's awareness and perceptions of, and readiness for, the Reform. The combination of these factors can be used to determine the progress of the ongoing Reform, which is our main task under this study.

### *Hypothesis*

Based on the reviewed literature, we have come up with the following hypothesis:

**The private sector in Georgia faces challenges in meeting the requirements of the Audit and Accounting Reform due to limited readiness.**

This hypothesis, which is supported by the literature research, serves as the basis for an empirical study of how Georgia's private sector assesses its readiness for the regulatory changes.

## ***METHODS***

### *Research Objective*

This study examines the perceptions and readiness of private-sector representatives regarding the Reform. The opinions of corporate accountants are a key focus, with particular attention paid to their understanding of the Reform's needs, familiarity with relevant accounting standards, and attitudes towards the change.

### *Data Collection*

**Online Survey:** To learn the views of private businesses, we conducted an online survey with 30 questions in the Georgian language using Google Forms. The survey was active from April to June 2019 and received responses from 74 individuals. Out of the thirty questions, eleven focused on respondents' knowledge of accounting standards and skills, thirteen explored company structures and the use of accounting/audit services, and six asked about their views on the business impact of the Reform.

**Expert Interviews:** Three experts were selected for the interviews: a Board Member of the Georgian Federation of Professional Accountants and Auditors, an accounting and auditing professor and acting auditor, and a lecturer/trainer of the Accounting Standards. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allowed us to obtain new information and ideas from respondents.

**Secondary Data:** In addition to the primary data, we utilized secondary data available in public sources, comparing our findings with new data up to 2024 to ensure the results are relevant and comparable.

**Sampling and Participant Selection:** We used purposive sampling to reach respondents with financial reporting responsibilities. The online survey was distributed via professional networks, accounting associations, and social media groups targeting accountants and financial managers in Georgia. As participation was voluntary and disseminated through open online channels, the total number of recipients is unknown, preventing calculation of the response rate. In total, 74 completed responses were received from private sector accountants across diverse company sizes and industries. The expert interviewees were also purposively selected for their recognized expertise in accounting, auditing, and professional education within Georgia's financial sector, ensuring both academic and practical perspectives.

**Ethical Considerations:** The study was approved by the Council of the School of Business and Administrative Studies, The University of Georgia. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Georgia. Confidentiality of participant data was strictly maintained. The study posed minimal risk to participants, and any potential risks were clearly communicated during the consent process.

### *Data Analysis*

We applied descriptive statistics and critical analysis. Combining survey results, expert opinions, and public data allowed us to capture perceptions about the Reform's implementation and readiness within the private sector. Cross-referencing with SARAS data helped identify trends and persistent challenges.

### *Research Limitations and Future Directions*

While this study offers valuable insights, it relies on primary data collected in 2019. To address this, we supplemented our analysis with SARAS public data from 2018 to 2024. Although SARAS data tracks disclosure rates, our survey captures subjective attitudes, enabling a nuanced comparison between actual compliance and company perceptions.

The survey sample has some limitations. First, the relatively small sample size of 74 respondents limits the generalizability of the findings. While Tbilisi-based respondents comprise 77% of the survey, this closely mirrors Georgia's actual business distribution, as the majority of active registered entities are located in the capital. Nevertheless, broader regional participation would have further enhanced representativeness. In terms of company size, 41% of respondents were Category IV micro-entities. This is proportionally lower than their real-world prevalence, as Category IV firms make up over 90% of businesses in Georgia. Our sample also includes a meaningful representation from higher-category companies (22% Category I & II, 24% Category III), providing a more balanced perspective.

Additionally, due to practical constraints, no follow-up expert interviews were conducted after 2019. Future research should consider including updated expert perspectives to reflect changes in professional attitudes since the Reform's early implementation phase.

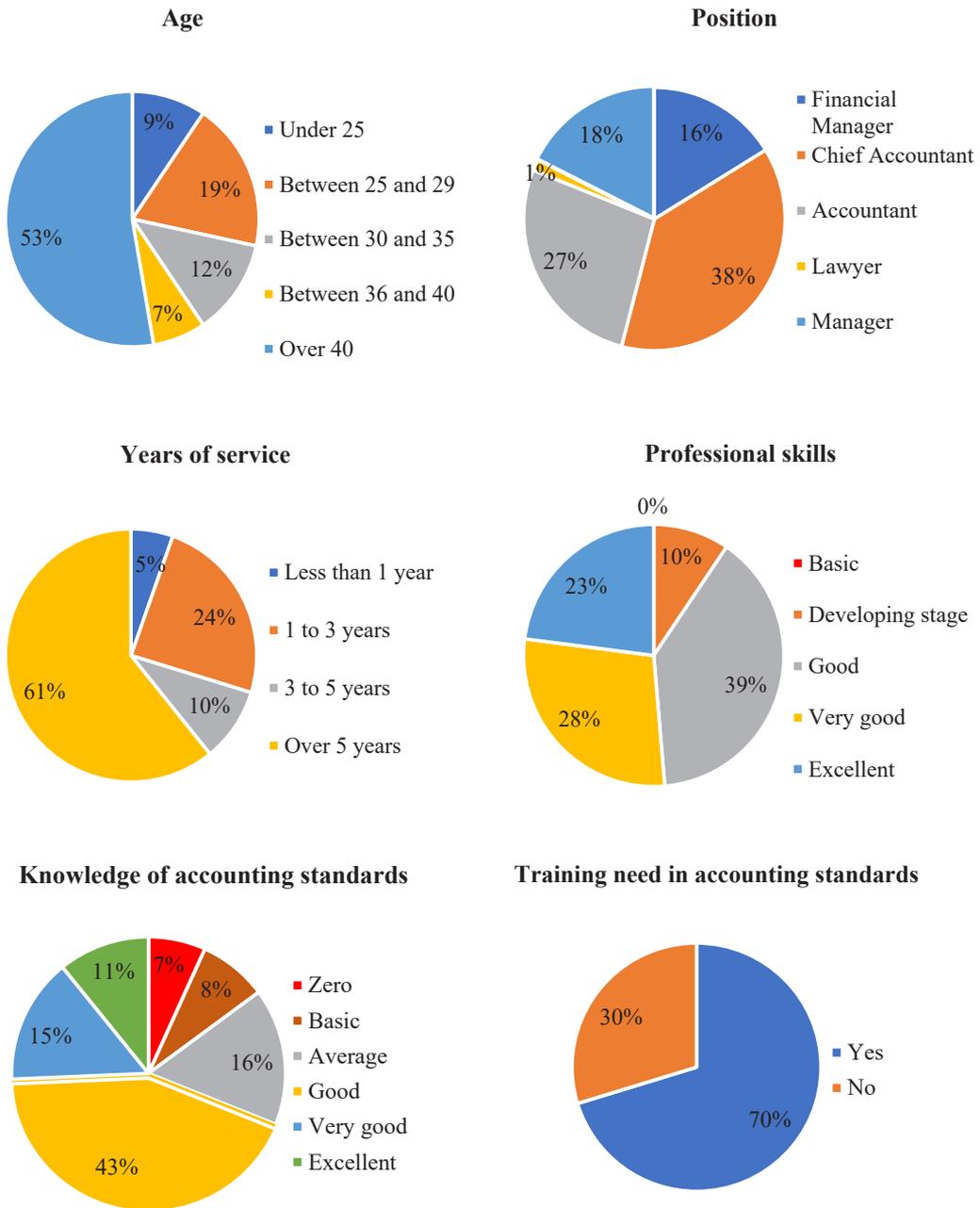
Future research should build on this by using longitudinal and more geographically diverse data to capture how readiness and attitudes evolve across different company sizes and regions. This would strengthen the generalizability of findings and clarify the Reform's long-term impact on Georgia's business environment.

## **RESULTS**

### *Survey Findings: Effects of Accounting and Audit Reform on Georgian Private Sector (2019)*

We analyzed survey data using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in company profiles, attitudes, and challenges. A comparative analysis was conducted against the SARAS 2018 survey results to identify changes over time.

**Figure 1.** According to the professional profiles of the 74 survey participants, most are seasoned professionals (35+ years old) in roles such as chief accountant, accountant, or finance manager. While most are knowledgeable about accounting standards, they believe additional training is still needed.



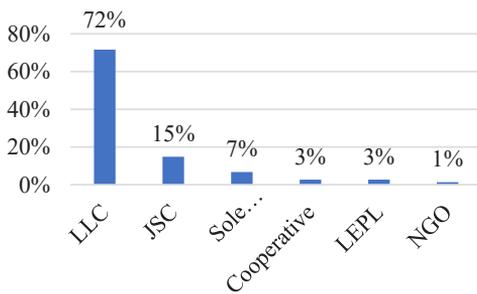
**Figure 1.** Professional profile of respondents.

**Figure 2.** Most of the surveyed companies are limited liability companies (LLCs), with 41% falling into Category IV under the accounting law. The sample also includes a good representation of larger firms, with 22% in Categories I and II and 24% in Category III.

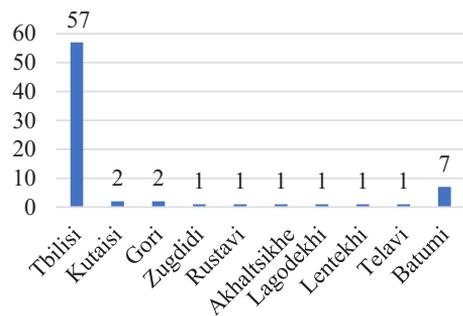
The survey also examines whether these companies use audit services, which indicates how many are likely to publish audited financial statements. Since nearly half of companies do not use audit services, we can expect a similar proportion of their reports to be unaudited, especially given that this is an optional requirement for businesses in categories III and IV.

Of the 74 surveyed businesses, 57 are based in Tbilisi, while only 17 (23%) operate in other cities across Georgia. This distribution may imply differences in awareness among regional businesses. However, because it mirrors the national distribution of active registered entities, which are predominantly concentrated in the capital, the sample still offers a reasonable basis for generalizing the findings.

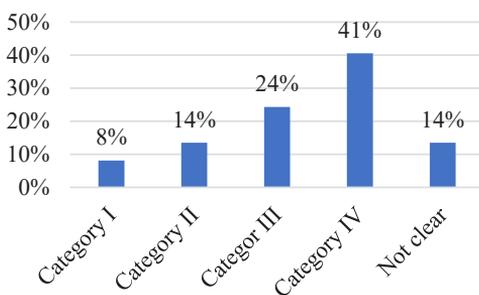
**Distribution of legal forms in employer companies**



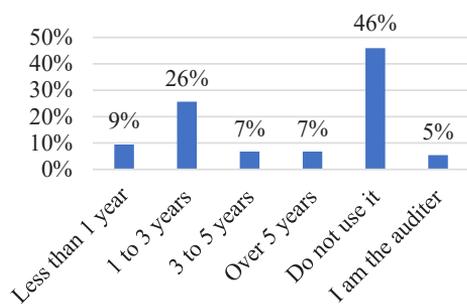
**Company location distribution**



**Company categorization by accounting law**

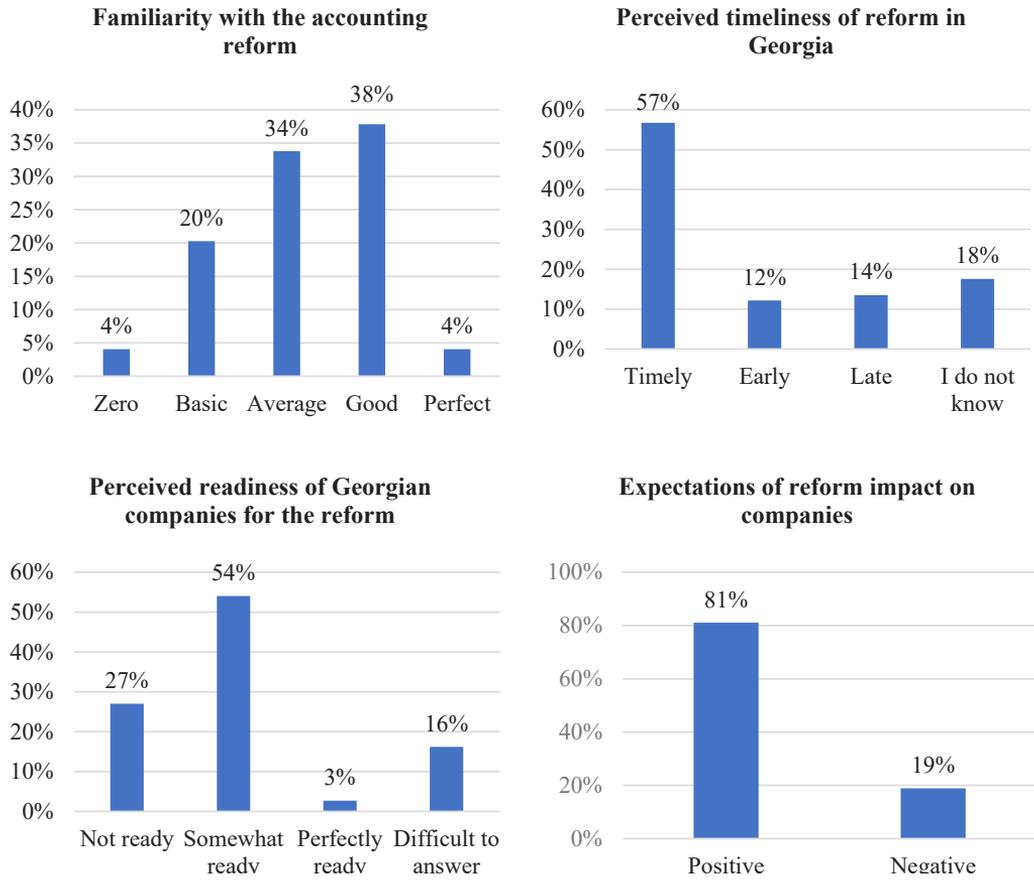


**Audit service duration chart**



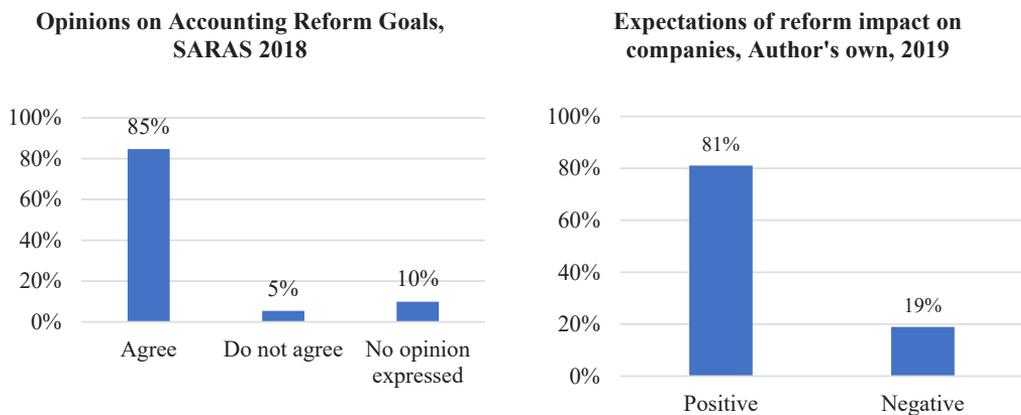
**Figure 2.** Profile of participating companies.

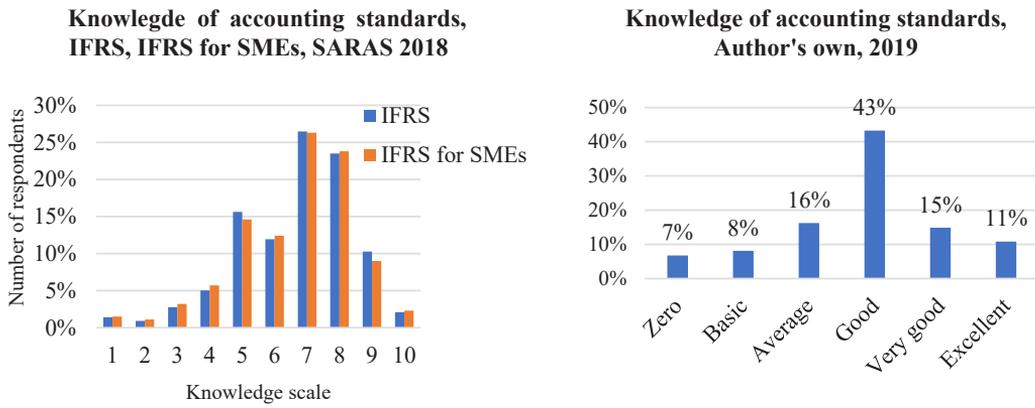
**Figure 3.** Respondents’ expectations and their understanding of the Reform vary. 81% of respondents believe the Reform will have positive effects on companies, while only 42% understand it at a good or perfect level. Moreover, respondents do not provide a strong indication that companies are adequately prepared for the Reform. This reveals a clear gap between perceptions of the Reform and understanding of its requirements.



**Figure 3.** *Expectations and Attitudes Toward the Reform*

**Figure 4.** This figure compares results from the 2018 SARAS survey and our 2019 survey. It is evident that the competences remain a problem, while attitudes and perceptions of reform remain positive. The knowledge of accounting standards is reported as increased in 2019; however, Figure 1 of this paper shows a high need for training in these standards, suggesting that the competence gap persists.





**Figure 4.** Comparative analysis: SARAS 2018, Author's own 2019

*Expert Interview Insights (2019)*

The three experts interviewed raised several consistent concerns regarding the implementation of the Reform. Graph 1 summarizes the main themes and their frequency among the three interviewees.

Key Concern	Number of Mentions (out of 3)	Frequency
Slow progress in accountants' competencies	3	High
Gap in understanding the Reform's nuances	3	High
Potential additional costs for smaller companies	2	Medium

Graph 1: Key Concerns Raised by Expert Interviewees. (Author's own)

**Slow progress in accountants' competencies:** All three experts identified accountants' competencies as a major problem; however, they see it as resolvable through appropriate capacity-building activities by the State and companies themselves.

**Gap in understanding the Reform:** All interviewees noted a lack of detail among private-sector companies, which could hinder the Reform's goals.

**Potential additional costs for smaller companies:** 2 out of 3 experts suggested that implementing the Reform would be a financial burden for small companies. Increased salaries for accountants and auditors resulting from additional workload and responsibility, and the cost of acquiring accounting software, would be the unavoidable investment required to produce high-quality accounting information. The costs would increase significantly for companies that had been doing solely tax accounting and had not yet needed professional accounting services.

*Public Disclosure and Reform Progress (2018–2024)*

As secondary data, we reviewed information published by SARAS from 2019 to 2024. SARAS tracks disclosures by businesses, reports both successes and ongoing challenges,

and publishes a number of analytical reports describing the Reform’s progress. In addition to reporting submission rates and defects, SARAS has conducted surveys and published strategic plans outlining systemic weaknesses and goals for future development (SARAS, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Since 2018, SARAS has also implemented educational initiatives to address reform challenges and improve the professional skills of accountants and auditors. Between 2019 and 2022, SARAS successfully trained over 2,200 people, focusing on training for SMEs and reporting procedures. In 2020, it launched a register for certified accountants to boost professional credibility. Despite these interventions, SARAS’ 2022 annual report acknowledged continued struggles in improving report quality, highlighting a need for more effective educational strategies.

**An analysis of compliance trends between 2018 and 2024 shows mixed progress:** Submission rates remained consistently high among Category I–III companies, peaking at 95% in 2021 and slightly declining to 93% in 2023. In contrast, Category IV companies, representing micro-entities, exhibited substantially lower compliance, with submission rates decreasing from 80% in 2021 to 72% in 2023 (SARAS, 2023). This suggests that although larger entities have adjusted to the Reform’s technical reporting requirements, smaller companies continue to face persistent challenges, likely driven by resource constraints, limited professional capacity, and disproportionate financial burdens. These factors are also mentioned by survey participants and expert interviewees. Additionally, economic pressures and potentially weaker regulatory enforcement may contribute to lower compliance in this category and might be considered as alternative factors.

Graph 2 illustrates these submission trends across categories from 2018 to 2024, highlighting stable reporting among larger companies (Categories I–III) and a clear, sustained decline for micro-entities (Category IV) since 2021.

Year	Cat I–III (%)	Cat IV (%)	Notes
2018	96	–	IV not yet reporting
2019	90	–	IV not yet reporting
2020	94	–	IV not yet reporting
2021	95	80	All categories reporting
2022	94	77	Decline in Category IV compliance
2023	93	72	Decline in Category IV compliance
2024	↑ (I–III increased)	↓ (IV decreased)	Exact % not disclosed; total filings similar to 2023

**Graph 2.** *Submission Rates by Company Category: Total Expected vs. Actual Submissions (%) (2018–2024). SARAS’ 2018-2024 Annual Reports.*

Notably, while submission rates reflect formal compliance, there is no publicly available data that systematically assesses the quality, accuracy, or reliability of disclosed financial statements or audit reports. Although SARAS reports individual cases of identified flaws and deficiencies in its annual reports, these represent isolated cases and cannot be used to

assess the overall quality of financial reporting. This creates a significant knowledge gap in understanding the effectiveness of the reform beyond submission metrics. Future research should examine the accuracy of submitted reports, the extent to which stakeholders rely on disclosed financials, and the impact of SARAS' educational interventions on improving report quality.

Finally, SARAS' 2023–2026 strategy prioritizes capital market development, sustainability practices, and improving financial transparency. However, it continues to identify weaknesses in reporting reliability and insufficient professional competencies of accountants and auditors as key barriers to achieving reform objectives (SARAS, 2023). These strategic priorities and remaining challenges underscore the need for ongoing regulatory refinement and targeted capacity-building initiatives to support sustained reform success.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Synthesis of findings*

The field literature and our research together present a clear picture of how Georgia's private sector is handling the accounting and audit reform, as well as the outlook for its progress.

A consistent theme across all data sources is the critical importance of education and professional development for accountants and auditors in ensuring the Reform's success. Despite the availability of state-sponsored training programs, the issue of insufficient capacity continues to be raised in both state reports and academic literature.

While the public data shows reasonable submission rates of financial statements, the quality and consistency of these disclosures remain questionable, particularly for small businesses that produce unaudited reports and do not usually use in-house audit services.

Submission rates are lower among the smallest Category IV companies, which, as our study revealed, may face financial and technical challenges in meeting the Reform requirements, including the cost of hiring professional accounting services. This is evident in the declining submission rates of Category IV companies in the SARAS data from 2021 to 2023. Additionally, this can discourage management from prioritizing the quality of disclosed financial information even in the future.

Finally, a clear gap exists between positive attitudes toward the Reform and actual understanding of its requirements. This gap poses a risk to the Reform's effectiveness, particularly due to a lack of clarity regarding companies' obligations. Evidence from SARAS data indicates that even as larger companies maintained stable reporting levels, micro-entities struggled to comply. Alternative explanations for this gap include factors such as organizational inertia, where firms resist operational changes due to internal routines and a preference for the status quo. Additionally, cultural attitudes toward regulation and financial disclosure, coupled with insufficient enforcement mechanisms, might further limit compliance incentives, particularly among micro and small businesses. A similar pattern has been observed in Romania's accounting reform, reinforcing the influence of cultural and institutional factors on implementation and suggesting that this may represent a comparable challenge for Georgia as well.

### *Link to theory and hypothesis*

This study is grounded in two main theories: agency theory and institutional theory. Agency theory explains how regulations help close the gap between shareholder and management interests, promoting transparency. Institutional theory, on the other hand, suggests that organizations adjust to societal expectations to gain legitimacy and credibility. Such adaptation would be essential for the success of the Reform in Georgia, as businesses would align themselves with new norms.

In the Georgian context, the generally positive attitudes and willingness to comply with new norms support the expectations of both agency and institutional theory. However, despite this motivation there is doubt about whether companies possess the necessary capacity to contribute to the Reform's success. The findings show that knowledge gaps and high compliance costs are significant barriers.

Theoretically, Georgian companies are expected, and appear, to be motivated comply with new state regulations. However, in practice, knowledge deficit and financial burden might hinder the pace and effectiveness of the Reform implementation.

### *Hypothesis Discussion*

This study confirms the hypothesis that Georgia's private sector faces challenges in meeting the requirements of the Audit and Accounting Reform due to limited readiness. Given the existing gaps in understanding and the need for improved accounting and audit competences, many companies might be currently unable to fully support the Reform's primary objective, achieving financial transparency in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provides insights into how the private sector perceives and prepares for Georgia's accounting and audit reform. While businesses generally show a positive attitude, key barriers, such as limited technical competency and the financial burden on smaller firms, are impeding progress. Thus, greater support is needed, particularly for SMEs, to enable successful compliance and establish the foundation for the Reform's long-term goal of achieving financial transparency.

To this end, the study proposes several actionable recommendations. Priority should be given to SME capacity-building programs focused on enhancing financial reporting skills. Additionally, introducing co-financing schemes for accounting and audit services could help alleviate the financial burden on small businesses. These efforts should be complemented by targeted outreach campaigns to raise awareness of reporting obligations and the support services available to businesses.

As this study relies on primary data collected in 2019, which may not fully capture more recent developments, future research should explore sector-specific challenges to Reform compliance and conduct longitudinal follow-ups with larger and more diverse survey samples. Such studies would help assess whether improvements in education, enforcement, and

policy incentives lead to better compliance outcomes over time. Additionally, comparative research involving other post-Soviet or EU-associated economies could offer valuable benchmarks to inform and strengthen Georgia's ongoing reform efforts.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial aid.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE

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# The Relationship Between Solution Focused Therapy, Basic Needs Deprivation and Depressive Symptoms: Case Study

ERADZE DAVIT, MA  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

APTARASHVILI IA, PHD  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0004-8174-8068](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8174-8068)

ORCID: [0000-0002-8024-4608](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8024-4608)

### ABSTRACT

This case study examines the relationship between depression and basic needs deprivation, while also evaluating the effectiveness of short-term Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). Participants met criteria for severe depressive symptoms, assessed through clinical interviews and the PHQ-9 questionnaire ( $\geq 15$  points). The study utilized the Basic Needs Scale, based on William Glasser's Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998), to measure five fundamental needs: survival, love and belonging, power and control, freedom, and fun. Participants rated their need satisfaction on a 10-point scale before and after a five-session SFBT intervention. Therapy followed the Solution-Focused Art Gallery model (George, Iveson, & Ratner, 1999) and the Solution-focused therapy Plus model (Hjerth, 2008). Sessions were conducted both online and in person. Results were analyzed to assess symptom improvement and changes in need satisfaction. Findings provide promising preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of SFBT in addressing depression, though further research with larger samples is needed for generalization.

*Keywords:* Depression, SFBT, brief-therapy, case study, basic needs

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Depression is one of the leading mental health problems worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, 3.8% of the world's population suffers from depression, and the rate of depression among adults is 5% ([Depressive disorder and genetics, 2023](#)). It is important to note that, according to various data, depression is the second most common mental disorder after anxiety disorders. According to the global distribution of the disease -The global distribution of the disease burden, which refers to the impact of the disease on quality of life and includes premature mortality, shows that depression is increasing every year and, while in 2019 it was in second place in the global burden of disease data, according to 2021 data, depression is already in first place ([Ritchie, Roser, 2024](#)).

Depression is often accompanied by suicidal thoughts and behavior, which may manifest in various forms of self-harm. Along with the deterioration of quality of life and loss of hope, the risks of suicide as a result of depression are a very real and serious problem. For example, in the 15-29 age group, suicide is in fourth place among the causes of death.

Depression is particularly challenging to treat because symptoms such as demotivation, hopelessness, fatigue, and isolation often hinder engagement in therapy. In many cases, the client lacks the resources to work towards the desired outcome. Clients may expect rapid improvement and prematurely discontinue therapy when immediate change is not evident. Negative cognitive bias, discouraging beliefs, and pervasive feelings of hopelessness often reinforce this tendency.

Along with reducing therapy time, it is also important to identify factors and methods that contribute to the fight against depression and that most help the client manage this condition. Explanation of solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) sessions used in the case:

The depression case study used five sessions of short-term therapy. Each session was held once a week for five consecutive weeks. New techniques were added to each session. The first and last sessions were 1 hour long, and the following sessions (2, 3, 4) were 30-40 minutes long. Appropriate questionnaires and tests (pre- and post-test) were used in the first and last sessions. It was important that all of the listed points were used in sequence during the respective therapy session (although modifications were made if necessary). During the session, due to the specifics of the research, notes were taken on each of the main sub-points of the relevant session. The 5-day protocol used all the basic SF techniques, focusing on identifying existing strengths, resources, and strategies to address deficiencies, and on developing a detailed picture of the desired future. The client's ineffective coping strategies were identified and replaced with new, effective ones.

## **METHODS**

### *Selection*

Non-probability sampling was used. Participants were included if they expressed interest in short-term therapy and presented with clinically severe depressive symptoms. Only indi-

viduals between the ages of 18 and 50 whose main complaint was depression were able to participate in the study. Participants with severe or very severe depression were deliberately chosen to explore the potential of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in addressing complex and acute clinical cases. In such cases, clients often experience significant demotivation, hopelessness, and emotional paralysis, which can lead to early dropout from therapy. As a result, achieving rapid, observable results is not only clinically beneficial but often essential for client engagement and recovery. In addition, the Depression Questionnaire (PHQ-9) was used during the selection process, according to which only individuals with severe depression and very severe depression were able to participate in the study, which required a minimum total score of 15.

### *Instruments*

To assess depression, the Depression Questionnaire - PHQ-9 was used, which covers such manifestations and symptoms of depression as:

1. Loss of interest and decreased pleasure
2. Mood swings
3. Changes in sleep patterns
4. Decreased energy
5. Appetite changes
6. Decreased self-esteem
7. Concentration difficulties
8. Slowing of movement and speech
9. Suicidal thoughts

The symptoms described are also found in the diagnostic manual: hopelessness, depressed mood, loss of interest, lack of energy, sleep changes, decreased concentration, changes in eating patterns, suicidal thoughts, and isolation. At least five of these symptoms must persist for at least two weeks ([American Psychiatric Association, 2013](#)).

This questionnaire identifies the following levels of depression:

1. 0-4 points - no depression is present
2. 5-9 - points - mild depression
3. 10-14 - points - moderate depression
4. 15-19 - Score - Severe depression
5. 20-27 - points - very severe depression

Because this scale covers all the main manifestations and symptoms of major depression/clinical depression, and because its validity is confirmed by research ([Zhang, Wang, 2020](#)), ac-

ording to which this indicator is 88% and has a history of widespread use. In this study, the PHQ-9 questionnaire and a clinical interview will be used to assess depression.

The Basic Needs Scale (see Appendix 1) will be used to assess the level of basic need satisfaction and the presence of deficits. The scale has been approved by the William Glasser Institute Committee, the creator of choice theory and reality therapy, and can be used for depression research.

This scale examines five basic needs:

1. Survival
2. Love and belonging
3. Power and control
4. Freedom
5. Entertainment

The scale ranges from 1 (need not entirely met) to 10 (need completely met).

The scale is not a clinical assessment tool and was used only in a therapeutic and research context; its purpose is to identify the need that is most deficient in cases of depression.

Research objectives:

1. Describe the relationship between the lack of basic needs and symptoms of depression.
2. Describe how the Basic Needs Scale score and depression symptoms changed after
3. 5 sessions of SFBT therapy.
4. To determine the effectiveness of SFBT short-term therapy and the dynamics of the course of depression.
5. Identify effective strategies and methods for overcoming depression.

### *Hypothesis*

As is known, managing depression in a short period of time is quite a complex process, and it takes a long time to eliminate it completely. Problem-focused approaches to managing depression first look for the causes of depression, then plan the direction in which therapy should go. Identifying causal factors and determining appropriate interventions often requires considerable time, yet for individuals experiencing depressive symptoms or a clinical diagnosis, achieving early positive change is critical for sustaining engagement and therapeutic momentum. This is especially important, since depression is usually accompanied by demotivation, lack of energy, and loss of hope, which increases the risk of treatment discontinuation. In addition, it is known that some people with depression have suicidal thoughts and/or behavior, in which case rapid positive change plays an important role.

Based on the factors described above, it is likely that problem-oriented, focused approaches

to dealing with depression devote valuable time to a less important issue and increase the risks of disengagement from therapy or worsening the client's condition. Since the therapeutic method used in the study is solution-focused rather than problem-focused, the therapeutic dynamics are likely to be positive from the shortest possible time after the start of therapy.

The study also focuses on the deficit of basic needs during depression. Since people with depression usually experience social deprivation, isolation, as well as demotivation and decreased energy, it is assumed that they cannot satisfy at least one of the basic needs and experience a deficit. Moreover, if the deficit in basic needs is eliminated, depressive state and symptoms will likely improve. Therefore, the hypotheses of the research hypothesis are as follows:

1. People with depression experience significant unmet basic needs. (There is a positive, strong correlation between depression and a lack of basic needs)
2. After five sessions of solution-focused brief therapy, the depression scale score will decrease dramatically.
3. After therapeutic intervention, symptoms of depression decrease as a result of the elimination of basic needs.

### *Variables*

1. Independent variable - Solution-focused brief therapy
2. Dependent variables - depression
3. Mediating variable - basic needs
4. Additional variables include the therapeutic environment, duration and severity of depression, methods used by the therapist, physiological health of the subjects, and other extratherapeutic factors.

### *Typical SFBT session used for the research*

Explanation of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT):

SFBT is a goal-oriented therapeutic approach that focuses on solutions rather than problems. "For an individual practitioner's approach to be known as 'Solution Focused' it will be built around a common core of ideas, developed by Steve de Shazar, Insoo Kim Berg and their close colleagues in the 1980s" (UKASFP, 2024). By emphasizing the client's strengths and resources, SFBT encourages individuals to envision a preferred future and identify actionable steps to achieve it. Characterized by brevity and collaboration, SFBT typically consists of a limited number of sessions. The therapist and client collaborate to develop solutions, fostering a positive outlook and emphasizing achievable objectives. This approach effectively empowers individuals to overcome challenges, including those associated with depression.

### *Typical session*

#### *Establishing Rapport and Brief Problem Exploration*

The client briefly describes the problem, supported by questionnaire data. (PHQ-9 Depression Scale and the Needs Scale). This phase will mainly focus on building rapport with the client. The problem will be validated, and preliminary reflections may be offered to support rapport-building.

#### *Defining Significance*

Questions will be asked to explore what the issue means to the client:

“What does this mean to you?”

“Why is this important to you?”

#### *Best Expectations from Therapy*

The client will be asked about their expectations from therapy:

“What do you expect from therapy?”

“Where and how would you like to notice change?”

“What would you like instead of the problem?”

#### *Defining the Desired Future/Goal*

The client will define their vision of the future:

“What would you like your future to look like?”

“What do you want to change or be different?”

The goal will be realistic and measurable.

#### *Identifying Small Signs of Progress*

The client will reflect on small indicators that they are moving towards their desired future or goal:

“What small behaviors, feelings, or signs would indicate positive progress?”

“What would signal to you that you are achieving your desired goal?”

“What would VIPs (Very Important People in your life) notice?”

### *Coping Strategies*

Discussion about how the client is currently coping with their challenges:

“How do you manage to deal with this?”

“What has been helpful for you?”

“What would VIPs say about when you seem to feel better?”

### *Describing Positive Exceptions*

Exploration of episodes when the problem was absent or less intense:

“Can you recall moments when the problem was not present?”

“When did you feel energetic or good? What was different then?”

### *Miracle Question*

A detailed exploration of what life would look like without the problem:

“Imagine a miracle happened overnight, and the problem disappeared. How would your life be different?”

“What would you notice? What would others (VIPs) notice?”

Detailed descriptions of behaviors, situations, and emotions will be discussed.

### *Scaling*

Assessing the client’s current state on a scale:

“On a scale of 0 to 10, how are you feeling today?”

“Why this score and not a lower one?”

“What is your desired score on the scale?”

“What would that score mean for you?”

“What would help you move up by one point? What resources do you need?”

“How would VIPs evaluate your progress?”

### *Summarization and Positive Feedback*

Summarizing the session and providing positive feedback to the client about their progress or strengths.

*Agreeing on Homework*

Agreement on a task for the client and therapist to focus on during the session:

What can you do to move up by one point?"

Observe any pleasant episodes or situations in their life when they feel slightly better or good.

Reflect on episodes they would wish to happen again or continue.

Pay attention to what they notice during these moments.

**RESULTS**

Three of the cases (Cases N2, 4, 5) are clinical, face-to-face meetings, and three (Cases N1, 3, 6) are online therapy meetings. No significant difference in effectiveness was observed between clinical/face-to-face meetings and online sessions, and both approaches led to positive changes in the regulation of depressive symptoms and in addressing deficits in basic needs.

According to the depression scale score, as shown in Figure 2, there is a marked decrease between the initial and final scores in all six cases. It is important to note that in all six cases the initial score of depression was severe (15-19 points) or very severe (20-27 points), while the final scores ranged between 11 and 2 points. Case N5 has 11 points (average); in all other cases, the final score shows mild depression or no depression at all.

Regarding unmet needs, all six cases demonstrated substantial deficits, though the deficit was less pronounced in Case 4. A consistent pattern emerged in which two needs stood out as the most significantly unmet:

1. Survival-safety need deficit
2. Lack of entertainment and recreation needs

Clients mainly referred to two factors in the lack of survival requirements:

1. The living environment around them and current events
2. Physical, physiological condition

In terms of entertainment and relaxation, most clients considered:

1. Various types of activities (walking, reading books, exercising, watching a movie, taking care of yourself, making food, waking up early, etc.)
2. Socialization (spending time with family members, communicating with friends, colleagues)

Additionally, in most cases, a deficit in control-power seeking was evident, mainly manifested in an inability to recognize one's own resources and a loss of control over circumstances.

Between sessions, through fairly simple behaviors/activities that clients would think of themselves, the deficit described above was significantly reduced. In this regard, the most rapid improvement was observed in perceived need satisfaction for survival/safety. It was revealed that in the case of depression, the most difficult need to be satisfied is the need for entertainment-relief.

None of the cases involved questions aimed at uncovering the problem's root causes or exploring the problem itself; nevertheless, symptom reduction and problem resolution were successfully achieved in all six cases. This also emphasizes the validity of the solution-focused approach theory. Partial identification of the problem and the need deficit was done indirectly, through solution-focused questions, for example, through the Miracle question.

In the Miracle question (de Shazer, 1988, as cited in de [Shazer et al., 2007](#)), when the client describes his desired future, he details what he would do if there were no current problems in his life. When he says, for example, that I would be able to sleep better, have more energy and motivation, do my work more efficiently, meet a friend after work, here the client clearly sees what his life could be like without the problem, although the therapist also sees the problems that are currently present, in this example: sleep disorders, lack of energy and work capacity, demotivation, isolation, desocialization, etc. In addition to these two types of information, this technique also enables us to identify behaviors that will help the client achieve their desired future and overcome the problem. This is done again by gathering different types of activities from the detailed description. For example, a client often says: "I would not sleep until late in the morning and would get up early; I would walk a little instead of taking public transportation; I would talk to employees during breaks and have coffee with them, etc." These are activities the client can perform even when he faces various problems or symptoms in his life. In the behaviors listed by the client, he sees for himself how many things he can do differently, that he actually has a choice and is not just a victim of symptoms and emotions. When asked about the next step, he chooses the simplest activity from the listed activities that will help him feel better before the next visit.

In addition, the Plus model was specifically selected for cases of depression. This involves working with the client step by step, identifying the most important aspects of hope and motivation in the context of depression, and gradually moving away from a victim role by focusing on behavior and the future. At the initial stage, a so-called rapport is established, which is facilitated by listening to the client's context (what they want to hear, distinguishing tests, and explaining the general course of therapy). However, if this does not evolve into a problem-focused conversation, the next question is soon asked: "How can this session be/benefit the therapist?" This question, in addition to clarifying the therapeutic order, also helps establish rapport and build a therapeutic alliance ([Norcross, 2011](#)).

In the same model, the following questions prompt the client to reflect on existing resources and strengths, on episodes in his life when the problem was either overcome or not a problem at all, and on the social environment that is important to him. This, after establishing a therapeutic alliance and defining goals (the desired future), strengthens the client's confidence that they already possess certain resources and qualities to cope with the problem, thereby helping restore hope and motivation.

Towards the end of the session, the miracle question shows the client in detail what his life would be like without the problem, which also has a positive impact on motivation. As well as the activities that would help with this. This is followed by the scale question, which has two primary meanings:

1. Assess the current situation and show the client again that he already has sufficient resources (“Why is this score a four and not lower? What makes it a 4”)
2. Orient the client on behaviors and activities between sessions that will help achieve the desired result step by step (“How can these four consecutive sessions become a little more, for example, 4.5 or 5? What would help you?”)

Thus, SFBT therapy acts on such key factors as: hope, motivation, behavior orientation, focus on the future, leaving the role of the victim and taking responsibility, orientation on strengths, and resources. This ultimately gives a quick therapeutic result, as shown in the cases, a sharp therapeutic change becomes visible from the third session.

According to the cases, the main reason for positive changes, in addition to the motivational factors described above, is the client’s orientation towards behavior that can be practiced between sessions. According to the Miracle question in the cases, if there were no problems, the clients would perform various activities (which were also part of the tasks between sessions). These activities, which the client had a deficit in and their partial and gradual implementation would help improve the condition, were:

1. Physical activity (walking, exercise)
2. Waking up early in the morning
3. Preparing and serving breakfast in peace
4. Mental activities (learning new things, reading a book)
5. Spending quality time in the evening (in some cases at home, but not on the phone, but taking care of the stable or watching a movie or communicating with family members, in some cases meeting friends outside the home)
6. Socialization (spending time with friends, colleagues, family members)
7. Allocating more free time for yourself

This is a list of activities that are present in all cases at the initial stage; these are the factors that clients mention that they would do if there were no problem. However, during each session it becomes clear that with small and simple steps, despite the presence of a problem, it is still possible to carry out the activities described above (which should be adjusted to the individual resources, abilities and goals of the client) and that one such activity can have a ripple effect, both in terms of improving other activities and posture, or a droplet effect, as is called in solution- focused therapy, a “ripple effect”.

During the sessions, the basic needs model of choice theory also played an important role in shifting attention from the problem to other, more important factors. This was one additional way in which, after overcoming the lack of motivation and hope, the client could, after

the behavioral intervention, completely shift his attention from the symptom, as something that happened to him, to the basic need deficiency, which he could identify and eliminate. Both the orientation on behavior and the orientation on basic needs are important factors in maintaining and improving the positive change achieved in each session. In this way, when a symptom appears in the client's life, he will not start looking for causes in deep physical processes. He will not feel helpless that it happened to him. He cannot change anything or claim to be a victim of circumstances. However, he will try to easily and quickly identify the cause among the five required deficiencies and eliminate it in a simple, step-by-step manner.

It is important to remember that the ongoing processes in the country, namely the political crisis, mass violence, and the country's change in European course, which clients also described during the sessions, likely had a significant impact on the course of the cases.

Finally, regarding the research hypotheses, it can be said that:

1. In all six cases of severe and very severe depression, several deficiencies in basic needs are observed, which confirms the first hypothesis of the study.
2. After five, and in some cases, four sessions of short-term therapy, a sharp change in depression scores is evident, both on a subjective and objective level, thus confirming the second hypothesis of the study.
3. There was also a significant difference in terms of eliminating basic needs. In each case, the decrease in the depression rate had a positive effect on the elimination of the deficit in basic needs, and, conversely, the elimination of the deficit in basic needs had a positive effect on the depression rate.

From these cases, it can be said that:

1. Detailed identification of the problem is not necessary to achieve a therapeutic outcome.
2. Small changes significantly change the overall picture.
3. Behavioral orientation is an effective tool for dealing with emotional states.
4. A variety of negative symptoms appear during a sharp and chronic lack of basic needs.
5. When the deficiency of basic needs is eliminated, negative symptoms decrease.
6. 5 sessions of short-term therapy significantly reduce the intensity of depressive symptoms, which has a positive impact on the client's functioning and emotional state.
7. During the course of solution-focused short-term therapy, no significant difference in effectiveness was observed between face-to-face and online sessions.
8. Miracle question is one of the important and effective tools that provides a detailed picture of the client's desired future (to some extent a goal), and at the same time is an effective means of motivating the client. It provides a list of various activities that would help the client achieve positive changes.

9. Exploring positive exception episodes, strengths, and resources provides important information for managing and improving the situation, and any client, no matter how severe the situation or problem, has similar episodes and resources.
10. Focusing on the desired future and the behavior that will achieve it has a positive impact on therapeutic outcomes, both in terms of effective management of symptoms and complaints, as well as rapid results.

## ***DISCUSSION***

This study provides important insights into managing severe depressive symptoms, where early therapeutic change is clinically significant. At the same time, it is the first attempt to integrate Choice Theory into the therapeutic process alongside short-term therapeutic techniques. It also appears to be the first study in Georgia in which solution-focused short-term therapy was used in the management of depression, as well as the first to apply a basic needs assessment instrument in such cases.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to conduct the existing research on a larger scale, since a case study (in minor cases) does not allow generalization of the results or theoretical and practical conclusions. Although the Basic Needs Scale was approved for therapeutic use by the Glasser Institute, it has not yet undergone formal psychometric validation (e.g., reliability, construct validity). Future research should focus on standardizing and validating this instrument for broader application. It is also worth considering that, in these cases, the clients themselves desired therapy, meaning they recognized the problem and were ready to work to overcome it. In clinical practice, some clients experience symptoms so intensely or have such limited insight that they do not seek help. In this regard, it would be important for future studies to include clients who are hospitalized, in an acute clinical state, or who have a history of repeated suicide attempts. The basic needs instrument was used only to inform the therapeutic process and to describe individual cases. However, if standardized, it could be used for broader quantitative research.

## ***CONCLUSION***

These cases illustrate one of the key assumptions, “The kind of problems people bring to psychotherapists PERSIST only if they are maintained by ongoing current behavior of the patient and others with whom he interacts” (Weakland, Fisch, 1974), and that for rapid relief of depressive symptoms, it is important to:

1. Focus on the future, not the problem and/or the past.
2. Clearly identify and leverage current resources and strengths.
3. *Examine episodes in which depressive symptoms were absent or less severe.*
4. Clearly define the desired future, what the client’s life would be like without the problem, and what would be different.

5. Focus on behavior, small and simple activities that will help the client improve their condition.
6. Orientation toward identifying unmet basic needs as a potential source of symptomatology and exploring ways to address these deficits.

These are six basic recommendations that, according to this study, can significantly reduce the symptoms and course of depression quickly and effectively.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial aid.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Basic Needs Scale**

**Instructions:** For each of the following statements, rate how true they are for you on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “Not at all true” and 10 means “Absolutely true.”

Not at all true 1 – 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 Absolutely true

#### **1. Survival Needs:**

- I feel physically safe and secure in my environment.
- I have access to adequate food, shelter, and healthcare.
- I feel healthy and have the energy to engage in daily activities.

#### **Average Survival Needs Rating:**

#### **2. Love and Belonging Needs:**

- I have close, supportive relationships with family and friends.
- I feel connected to a community or group.
- I experience a sense of belonging and acceptance from others.

#### **Average Love and Belonging Needs Rating:**

#### **3. Power Needs:**

- I feel competent and capable in my personal and professional life.
- I have control over important aspects of my life.
- I experience a sense of achievement and recognition for my efforts.

#### **Average Power Needs Rating:**

#### **4. Freedom Needs:**

- I have the freedom to make choices and decisions about my life.

- I feel free to express my thoughts, feelings, and opinions.
- I have opportunities to pursue my interests and goals.

**Average Freedom Needs Rating:**

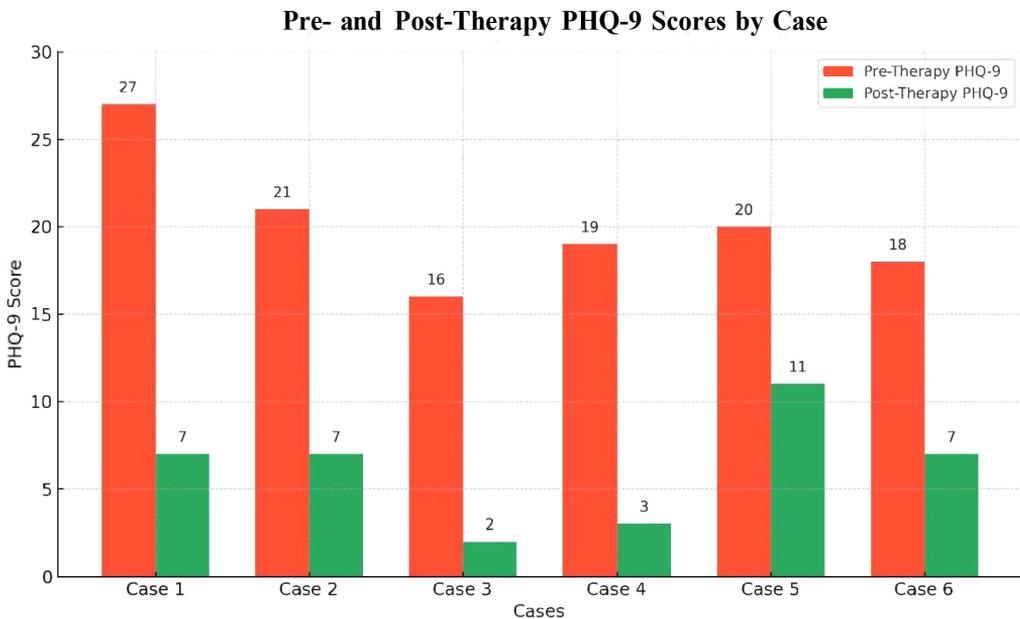
**5. Fun Needs:**

- I regularly engage in activities that bring me joy and pleasure.
- I have opportunities to relax and enjoy myself.
- I experience laughter and playfulness in my daily life.

**Average Fun Needs Rating:**

**Overall Needs Assessment:**

- Survival Needs Average:
- Love and Belonging Needs Average:
- Power Needs Average:
- Freedom Needs Average:
- Fun Needs Average:



**Figure 2.** *PHQ-9 scores by case*

# An In-Depth Qualitative Examination of the Concept of ‘Otherization’ in Sociocultural Contexts

EREMADZE TEKLE, PHD STUDENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0006-0680-6031](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0680-6031)

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the potential of the intersectionality framework to provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants of diverse races, ethnicities, ages, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and other intersecting identities. Using qualitative methods, the study investigates personal experiences, intersectional dynamics, and their psychological and social implications. In this qualitative research on othering, the findings have revealed the complex ways in which stereotypes and biases drive the marginalization and exclusion of various groups within society. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the study identified diverse personal experiences, perceptions, and the strategies individuals employ to navigate and resist othering. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how stereotypes and biases reinforce systemic inequalities and exclusion. By exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds, the study provides a nuanced understanding of othering and its impact on both individuals and communities.

*Keywords:* Intersectionality, othering, social categorization, objectification, marginalization, cultural disparities, social division

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The concept of “otherization” refers to the process by which individuals or groups are viewed as different from oneself or one’s own group.

The process of “otherization” involves constructing an “other” perceived as inferior, strange, or threatening, often based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, or socio-economic status.

The concept of “otherization” and its mechanisms are relevant in both academic and social discourse. It is related to fields such as social psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and critical theory, and it represents an important issue concerning the differences between groups and their social construction. Edward Said, as one of the leading theorists, defines in his work “Orientalism” how the image of the “Orient” was created by Western discourse, in which the East reflected the hegemonic dominance of the West and was seen as exotic, primitive, and the opposite of the “West”.

The essence of “otherization” is often associated not only with different external signs but also with stereotypical representations and their influence on social relations. Distinguishing features between groups usually become associated with negative attributes and qualities for outsiders. This process can represent deep, essential stereotyping, which not only reinforces prejudices but also creates socio-political mechanisms that contribute to the dominance of one group over another.

Stereotyping and essentialism, as mechanisms, actively create ideological barriers that contribute to behaviors and perceptions of marginalized groups. These simplified representations often draw on cultural, religious, or ethnic markers that shape social perceptions and behaviors. These processes reinforce a polarized ‘us versus them’ distinction that fuels social division and discrimination.

The dehumanization that often accompanies these differences further increases the risks of hatred and violence. When people are no longer perceived as full individuals, it becomes less realistic to express well-being and compassion towards them. This can justify the infliction of violence, exploitation, and injustice on different groups because they are no longer perceived as “real” people.

Cultural and social exclusion manifests itself in the fact that certain groups often experience marginalization, placing them in a doubly complex situation: not only do they have limited social and political access, but they are also relegated to the inner world of social, economic, and cultural relations. This creates a narrow, segregated space where individuals and groups experience a lack of opportunities and unfair treatment.

## ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

Today’s social discourse and media have taken on a new form in which “otherization” often serves as the basis for public order. The media can perpetuate stereotypes that largely

reinforce discrimination against specific groups. Political discourse usually employs fear and uncertainty, demonizing this or that group and affecting not only their rights but also public life as a whole.

The impact of “otherization”, which we often encounter as potential problems, also serves to divide society. Social conflicts, which initially rest on differences between groups, usually raise theoretical and practical challenges that vary in their impact on identity formation. The constantly defined gaps between “us” and “them” contribute not only to the destruction of relationships but also to systemic inequalities through chain reactions.

Theoretical reviews of “otherization” and its impact, especially in Edward Said’s work “Orientalism”, show how the task of Western representation was created: the West is considered the norm, and the East is the “other”, whose misrepresentations express cosmopolitan and cultural complexities.

The concept of “otherization” and its mechanisms are relevant in both academic and social discourse. It is related to fields such as social psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and critical theory, and it represents an important issue concerning the differences between groups and their social construction. Edward Said, as one of the leading theorists, defines in his work “Orientalism” how the image of the “Orient” was created by Western discourse, in which the East reflected the hegemonic dominance of the West and was seen as exotic, primitive, and the opposite of the “West”. According to Said, these ideas, along with representations of colonial violence and domination, facilitated imperialist systems.

Theoretical reviews of “otherization” and its impact, especially in Edward Said’s work “Orientalism”, show how the task of Western representation was created: the West is considered the norm, and the East is the “other”, whose misrepresentations express cosmopolitan and cultural complexities.

Frantz Fanon (1952) expanded on the psychological dimensions of otherization in “Black Skin, White Masks,” analysing how colonialism and racism lead to the internalization of inferiority and alienation among marginalized groups. Michel Foucault (1976) explored the mechanisms of power and knowledge that construct “other” identities. His work on discourse analysis highlights how institutional practices and discursive formations perpetuate otherization.

Sara Ahmed (2000) examined the cultural politics of otherness, emphasizing how discourses of multiculturalism and diversity can inadvertently reinforce hierarchies and exclusions by framing certain groups as exotic.

Bell Hooks (1992) critiqued the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the process of otherness, arguing for an intersectional approach that considers how multiple axes of identity shape experiences of marginalization and exclusion.

Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1980) and Michel Foucault (1976) have explored how media representations reinforce stereotypes and otherness. The authors have identified specific ways in which stereotypes influence public perceptions and social attitudes toward marginalized groups.

Claude Steele (1997) and Jennifer Eberhardt (2019) have examined the psychological effects of stereotypes and racial bias on the lowered self-esteem in target groups.

Research on social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Sheriff (1961) has examined how group categorization and intergroup relations influence perceptions of difference, which in turn affect social cohesion and conflict.

A critical examination of the literature on “otherization” allows for identifying the mechanisms and real-world manifestations of “otherization”.

Edward Said and Franz Fanon highlighted the historical roots and theoretical underpinnings of “otherization”. Their analyses help us understand how perceptions of difference are constructed and perpetuated through discourses of power and domination.

Scholars such as Michel Foucault contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms through which difference operates. Their work on discourse analysis and power dynamics shows how institutions and societal norms shape perceptions of “us” versus “them” and reinforce hierarchical structures.

Sarah Ahmed and Belle Hooks explored how diverse identities intersect and experience marginalization differently, challenging monolithic and essentialist notions.

Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault’s analysis of media representation provides empirical evidence about how difference manifests itself in everyday life.

Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) analyzes how Western news media portray distant suffering and positions vulnerable populations as moral “others,” often reinforcing global hierarchies along West/non-West lines.

Mikko Pelttari (2020) explores how places and spaces are constructed as “other” through mythologization, drawing on concepts from folklore studies and semiotics.

Judith Butler (2020) destabilizes binaries between Self and Other by highlighting shared vulnerability, arguing against dehumanization that often accompanies othering.

## ***RESEARCH METHODOLOGY***

These works provide a comprehensive framework for realizing the complex dynamics of otherization. The integration of different approaches enriches the research by advancing grounded science and theoretical discourse on social identity, power relations, and cultural representation.

We present the research questions that allow for exploring the concept of “otherness” in more depth:

To what extent can the intersectionality framework be considered an effective tool for revealing profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants of diverse ethnicities, ages, genders, and socioeconomic statuses?

How do people perceive (ethnic, racial, generational, and socioeconomic) differences,

and how does this perception affect their daily lives, identities, social interactions, and societal dynamics?

These questions seek to reveal how otherness is created and operates and how individuals perceive otherness in different social, cultural, and psychological contexts.

Methodological approach:

Qualitative analysis employed in the study enabled the interpretation of specific social issues from the perspectives of different social groups.

Qualitative Sampling:

The study engaged approximately 120 participants from diverse sociocultural backgrounds to explore the concept of Otherization. This diverse group included individuals of varying race, ethnicity, age, gender, and social-economic status to capture a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences.

Participants came from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, including African American/Black; Caucasian/White; Asian (East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian); Indigenous/Native American; Middle Eastern.

Participants' ages ranged from young adults (18–27) to older adults (60+), encompassing different generational perspectives on othering and sociocultural identity.

The study included individuals across the gender spectrum, including men and women, Transgender and non-binary individuals. This inclusion allowed for nuanced insights into how gender identity intersects with experiences of othering.

Participants represented varied socioeconomic backgrounds, including working-class and blue-collar workers, Middle-class professionals, Students and recent graduates, Individuals experiencing economic hardship or living below the poverty line, and Business owners and professionals in managerial or executive roles. This diversity facilitated exploration of how class and economic factors influence the processes and perceptions of otherization.

This intentionally diverse participant composition provided a rich, multidimensional understanding of Otherization as experienced and perceived across different sociocultural contexts. The qualitative design enabled participants to share their unique reflections. The sample was sufficient to reconcile different views and experiences.

Data collection methods:

In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to give meaning to their experiences. Questions covered topics such as ethnic and cultural differences, exposure to social and economic inequalities, stereotypes, discrimination, etc.

Focus groups: The use of focus groups enhances the value of group discussions, providing a collective perspective.

Sample structure:

The respondents for the study were selected to capture qualitative diversity, allowing ex-

ploration of definitions of identity and otherness across different social contexts.

Using this methodological approach, the study comprises both individual experiences and the analysis of the broader social context.

## **RESULTS**

Contemporary social discourse and media have taken on a new form in which “otherization” often serves as the basis for public order. The media can perpetuate stereotypes that largely reinforce discrimination against specific groups. Politics, in turn, usually uses fear and uncertainty to demonize this or that group, affecting not only their rights but also public life in general.

The impact of “otherization”, which we often encounter as potential problems, also serves to divide society. Social conflicts, which initially rest on differences between groups, usually raise theoretical and practical challenges that vary in their impact on identity formation. The constantly defined gaps between “us” and “them” contribute not only to the destruction of relationships but also to systemic inequalities through chain reactions.

Qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and focus groups revealed profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among the diverse participants. A thorough examination was conducted of how people perceive differences and how these perceptions affect their daily lives, identities, social interactions, and societal dynamics. The study found that the concept of otherness is a multifaceted phenomenon that influences all aspects of individual and collective life.

Participants expressed a range of emotions related to how otherness affects their sense of identity and belonging. According to many participants, they feel marginalized, misunderstood, or stereotyped, often linked to cultural, racial, or socio-economic characteristics. This feeling led to a sense of being separate, excluded, or less valuable in society.

The study found that being different strongly influenced participants’ mental health and well-being. Many participants had experienced systemic discrimination, aggression, and other forms of inequality. All this significantly lowered their self-esteem. Differences intensified frustration and a self-imposed struggle for one’s place in society.

Participants discussed various strategies and forms of resistance to combat otherness and reduce its social and psychological effects. The most common of these was community activism, through which they attempted to challenge stereotypes and strengthen cultural pride. Such movements contributed to the destruction of other roles and gave people a new, more equal perspective.

Participants noted that collective solidarity and empowerment were crucial factors in combating the psychological and social effects of difference and marginalization. They recognized that the only effective way for them would be to support each other and amplify the voices of those who at different times only experience “other” purpose.

Power dynamics and the establishment of social stereotypes are broad, multifaceted research topics that involve analyzing various social contexts. This study aims to explore how critical discourse analysis (CDA), the intersectionality framework, the psychosocial approach, postcolonial theory, and media representation analysis can help deepen understanding of stereotypes and power dynamics.

Critical discourse analysis is a method that focuses on language as an instrument of power and social control. Such approaches have influenced public attitudes, which can contribute to the formation of stereotypes that influence political agendas and public attitudes.

Intersectionality explores how different forms of identity - such as race and gender - operate in different contexts. The application of this approach is illustrated in research that focuses on the unique forms of discrimination faced by black women in the workplace. This research demonstrates how they may experience different kinds of difficulties when these two identities are combined with other social factors, such as social class and education. The intersectionality framework emphasizes that the deployment of power and social stereotypes is often complex and influenced by multiple factors.

Postcolonial studies highlight the processes of marginalizing and misrepresenting indigenous peoples as “primitive” or “exotic”. Such representations in the media and literature not only create difficulties for these small groups but also have a decisive impact on their social integration and cultural self-perception.

The media is one of the most powerful tools for defining and influencing public opinion. Television shows and films often create negative stereotypes that can affect certain ethnic and religious groups.

These research findings often aim to understand the processes underlying the operation of social stereotypes and power dynamics. Observable mechanisms that help participants, including through communication and activism, are pretty crucial for defeating stereotypes and stabilizing their social roles.

The research aims to detail the impact of stereotypes across key areas of individual identity, such as race, gender, and ethnicity. In this process, many people not only experience social exclusion but also often have their rights and opportunities threatened, which negatively affects their quality of life.

The results of the qualitative analysis of the cohort reveal several important patterns that relate to the experiences of groups affected by education, social dynamics, and difference. The themes identified in the research process are united by several key coordinates: ethnic identity, gender dynamics, socioeconomic status and access, generational differences, social resilience, and collective action. Each of these reflects how stereotypes and other social problems operate at the individual, group, and societal levels.

Cohort 1: In-depth interviews

Cohort 1: In-Depth Interviews (30 participants)

Demographics: Gender: 60% female, 40% male; Ethnicity: 40% Black, 30% Latinx,

20% Asian, 10% White; Age: 18–45 (average age: 29); Socioeconomic background: 50% low-income, 30% working class, 20% middle class.

Limited Opportunities due to Stereotyping and Discrimination: 73% reported experiencing reduced educational or employment opportunities due to racial or ethnic stereotyping; 65% described institutional barriers that hindered career advancement or academic support.

Identity and Social Belonging: 68% experienced identity crises or internal conflicts related to cultural or racial stereotyping; 72% reported negative societal attitudes impacted their self-perception and sense of belonging.

Gender and Racial Microaggressions: 80% of women reported encountering sexist microaggressions in public or professional settings; 90% of Black women experienced “double burden” stereotypes based on both race and gender; 66% of women said these experiences negatively affected their self-esteem and social confidence.

Psychosocial Effects: 60% reported ongoing anxiety or lowered self-worth linked to recurring stereotyping and exclusion; 55% experienced withdrawal or reduced social interaction due to perceived othering.

The findings from Cohort 1 underscore the pervasive impact of intersecting forms of marginalization on individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. Participants’ narratives reveal that stereotypes - particularly at the intersection of race and gender - significantly limit opportunities in education and employment, while also eroding self-esteem and complicating identity development.

The data highlight the structural nature of otherization, especially for Black women, who face compounded challenges. These experiences are not only professionally restrictive but also psychologically and socially damaging - they cause exclusion and internal conflict.

Overall, the data confirm that otherization is not a singular or isolated experience - it is a multidimensional process deeply embedded in social interactions and institutional frameworks. This process requires an intersectional and systemic approach that recognizes the complexity of identity and promotes equity across all levels of society.

Cohort 2: Focus Groups (35 participants)

Age groups: 18–30 years: 60%; 31–50 years: 25%; 51+ years: 15%.

Identities represented: LGBTQ+: 30%; Ethnic/racial minorities: 70%; Varied educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Diversity: 91% believed that diversity, inclusion, and equality should be central to social standards and public discourse; 87% agreed that societal transformation requires actively replacing outdated stereotypes with inclusive norms; 78% emphasized the importance of activism and policy reform.

Role of Education and Awareness: 84% considered education to be essential for dismantling systemic stereotypes and raising awareness; 76% supported curricular reform and public campaigns as tools to promote social justice principles.

## Generational Perspectives

Among young participants (18–30): 92% expressed a strong desire to challenge and redefine cultural norms; 85% stated they have actively engaged in advocacy and social media activism.

Among older participants (51+): 68% reflected on the persistence of generational stereotypes, often rooted in historical narratives; 54% emphasized the need for critical engagement with inherited cultural norms rather than passive continuation.

LGBTQ+ Community and Collective Empowerment: 95% of LGBTQ+ group members highlighted the importance of community solidarity in building resilience; 89% reported that collective empowerment helped them combat stigma and promote positive self-identity; 82% felt that visible advocacy and pride events contributed to reducing social prejudice and building awareness in broader society.

The focus group discussions in Cohort 2 reflect a growing awareness and commitment to social justice - especially among younger respondents, who emphasized the need to transform outdated cultural norms. These respondents strongly supported diversity, inclusion, and the active dismantling of stereotypes through education, awareness, and collective resistance. They consider social change urgent and see themselves as active agents in molding a more equitable and inclusive society.

In contrast, older respondents provided valuable context by reflecting on how traditional narratives and generational teachings have contributed to systemic stereotypes. Their perspectives underscore the deep-rooted nature of otherization and the significance of inter-generational dialogue in cultural transformation.

The LGBTQ+ focus group highlighted the power of community and collective action in resisting marginalization. Respondents demonstrated how solidarity and shared pride can serve as a counterforce to societal exclusion.

The analysis of the findings proves that social change must come from both activism and institutional reform. Education, collective empowerment, and inclusive cultural practices build a more just and cohesive society.

Cohort 3: Surveys (120 participants)

Participant Profile:

Age: 18–35 (90%), 36–50 (10%)

Education levels: High school or less: 20%; Some college/undergraduate: 50%; Graduate/postgraduate: 30%

Media Consumption and Critical Thinking: 83% reported that media that encourages critical thinking helps them recognize and challenge stereotypes; 76% said they actively avoid content that promotes biased or one-sided portrayals; 81% stated that exposure to diverse perspectives in media increased their awareness of social justice issues.

Impact of Critical Thinking: 79% agreed that developing critical thinking skills helped

them detect and question harmful stereotypes; 73% reported becoming more cautious of how media shapes public perceptions of race, gender, and class; 68% said critical thinking made them more likely to fact-check information or seek alternative viewpoints.

**Role of Education:** 85% of respondents with higher education (graduate/postgrad) showed low tolerance for discriminatory content and strong support for inclusion policies; 71% believed that formal education directly contributed to reducing their own stereotypical thinking; Among respondents with only high school education, 44% expressed awareness of media bias, compared to 89% of those with postgraduate education.

**Support for Diversity & Inclusion:** 88% supported policies and initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion; 74% said their awareness of such principles was directly shaped by media and educational content that fostered critical thinking.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The essence of “otherization” is often associated not only with different external signs but also with stereotypical representations and their influence on social relations. What distinguishes one group from another usually becomes a pairing of negative signs and qualities for outsiders. This process can represent deep, essential stereotyping, which not only reinforces prejudices but also creates socio-political mechanisms that contribute to the dominance of one group over another.

Stereotyping and essentialism, as mechanisms, actively create ideological barriers that contribute to behaviors and perceptions related to marginalized groups. Such simplified representations often rely on religious, cultural, or ethnic markers that people use to shape their thinking and actions. When these conditions persist, a kind of opposition between “us” and “them” arises, which reinforces the idea of separation, aggression, and discrimination against one group or another.

The dehumanization that often accompanies these differences further increases the risks of hatred and violence. When people are no longer perceived as full individuals, it becomes less realistic to express well-being and compassion towards them. This can justify the infliction of violence, exploitation, and injustice on different groups because they are no longer perceived as “real” people.

Cultural and social exclusion manifests itself in the fact that certain groups often experience marginalization, placing them in a problematic situation: not only do they have limited social and political access, but they are also relegated to the inner world of social, economic, and cultural relations. This creates a segregated environment where individuals and groups experience a lack of opportunities and unfair treatment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The intersectional framework proves an exceptionally effective tool for uncovering profound insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of difference among participants from varied ethnic, age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By recognizing that social identities and power structures are not isolated but deeply interconnected, intersectionality allows researchers and participants alike to move beyond simplistic analyses of identity.

Intersectionality encourages a holistic approach and provides data that reflect participants' full identities and the multifaceted ways in which social structures impact individual lives.

In sum, intersectionality is an invaluable tool for capturing the richness of diverse human experiences in multicultural and stratified societies.

People perceive ethnic, racial, generational, and socioeconomic differences as key to their identity and social experience. These perceptions influence daily life by shaping self-understanding and relationships. Ethnic and racial identities provide cultural grounding but can also expose individuals to exclusion. Generational differences affect values and impact social cohesion. Socioeconomic status determines opportunities and social inclusion.

Overall, respondents' perceptions mold social interactions and societal dynamics, either fostering solidarity or reinforcing division and inequality. It should be mentioned that these views are fluid and can change through dialogue and education.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial aid.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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# Psychological, Social, and Cultural Mechanisms Underpinning the Formation and Reinforcement of Stereotypes

TABATADZE NINO, PHD STUDENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0002-1763-4037](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1763-4037)

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study on othering is to examine how stereotypes and biases contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of individuals based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and other intersecting identities. Through qualitative analysis, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives: Investigate lived experiences, Analyze intersectional dynamics, Explore psychological and social effects, Promote cultural empathy and competence, and Contribute to the advancement of social justice. In this qualitative research on othering, our findings have revealed the complex ways in which stereotypes and biases drive the marginalization and exclusion of various groups within society. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, we have explored the personal experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms of individuals navigating the challenges of othering based on race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and other intersecting identities. The significance of this study on othering lies in its critical examination of how stereotypes and biases reinforce systemic inequalities and exclusion within society. By exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds, the study provides a nuanced understanding of othering and its profound impact on both individuals and communities.

*Keywords:* Psychological mechanisms, social mechanisms, cultural mechanisms, stereotype formation, reinforcement, bias

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Stereotypes are deeply ingrained cognitive structures that shape our perceptions and judgments of individuals and groups, often influencing behavior in subtle yet significant ways. They serve as mental shortcuts that allow people to categorize others based on perceived similarities and differences. These generalizations, however, can be oversimplified and harmful, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and social inequalities. Understanding the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms behind the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes is crucial for addressing these pervasive societal issues.

Psychologically, stereotypes emerge from the brain's natural tendency to categorize information to make sense of the complex world. Socially, group dynamics and in-group/out-group distinctions play a significant role in fostering stereotypes, as individuals tend to favor their own group while attributing negative traits to others. Culturally, societal norms, media representations, and historical contexts shape and perpetuate these stereotypes, embedding them in collective consciousness. By examining these mechanisms, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how stereotypes are formed, reinforced, and maintained across different contexts and cultures.

Addressing the mechanisms of stereotype formation and reinforcement is essential for developing strategies to reduce bias, promote inclusivity, and foster social cohesion. This exploration will consider the impact of psychological processes, social influences, and cultural narratives in the shaping of stereotypes, offering insights into how they affect both individual attitudes and societal structures.

## ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

Stereotypes are a major area of study in psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, as they significantly impact individual behavior, social dynamics, and cultural representations. The formation and reinforcement of stereotypes involve complex psychological, social, and cultural factors, making understanding these processes crucial for addressing their societal impacts.

Stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts that simplify social understanding (Allport, 1954). Cognitive theory suggests that individuals rely on schemas to categorize information, which can lead to stereotyping based on characteristics such as race, gender, or class (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). In-group favoritism, in which people favor their own group over others, reinforces these stereotypes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The availability heuristic, in which judgments are based on easily accessible information – often from the media or personal experience – can further reinforce inaccurate stereotypes (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002b) explains how perceptions of warmth and competence organize stereotypes.

Social identity theory emphasizes the role of group memberships in shaping individual identity and fostering in-group bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Socialization processes, in-

cluding family, education, and media exposure, help perpetuate stereotypes from a young age (Brown, 1995). As individuals internalize these views, stereotypes are passed down and reinforced, with media and social platforms amplifying these biases (Shah et al., 2009).

Cultural norms and values shape perceptions of different groups, with dominant groups being more visible and susceptible to stereotyping (Hall, 1997). Media, as a powerful cultural mechanism, cultivates certain beliefs through repeated portrayals, reinforcing stereotypes (Gerbner, 1976). Cultural hegemony, as described by Gramsci (1971), marginalizes minority groups in mainstream narratives, perpetuating stereotypes.

Intersectionality examines how multiple identities – such as race, gender, and class – interact to influence experiences of discrimination and stereotyping (Crenshaw, 1989). People with multiple marginalized identities face compounded stereotypes, influencing their experiences of bias (Collins, 2000). This framework is crucial for understanding how stereotypes are reinforced across different social categories.

The literature reveals that stereotypes are not just individual misconceptions but are embedded in social structures and cultural narratives. Cognitive, social, and cultural mechanisms work together to form and sustain stereotypes, with intersectionality adding complexity to their experience. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for addressing prejudice and inequality in society, and future research should explore ways to mitigate their effects and foster greater inclusivity.

## ***METHODS***

This study aims to investigate the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms underpinning the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes.

To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach was employed, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of respondents' lived experiences, perceptions, and social contexts.

This methodology was chosen due to its ability to provide rich, nuanced data that captures the complexities of how stereotypes are formed, sustained, and reinforced across different social groups.

### *Research Design*

This study employs a qualitative design to explore the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms behind stereotype formation.

The qualitative approach is ideal for understanding subjective experiences and processes, and it allows flexibility in exploring how participants encounter and navigate stereotypes.

The study follows a constructivist paradigm, emphasizing the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants, thus capturing the complexity of individual perspectives.

### *Participant Selection*

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants based on key demographic factors, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and occupation.

This approach ensured a diverse range of experiences, critical for understanding how stereotypes vary across different social identities. Thirty participants were included to reach theoretical saturation, ensuring that key themes and patterns emerged without new information.

### *Data Collection Methods*

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, allowing a deep exploration of respondents' experiences with stereotypes.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

The semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in data collection, with pre-determined questions guiding the conversation while allowing for natural flow based on participants' responses. This format enabled participants to share their experiences with stereotyping in various contexts (e.g., workplace, education, media). Sample questions included:

Can you describe an experience where you felt stereotyped based on your identity?

How do you think stereotypes about your group are formed?

How have stereotypes influenced your self-perception or how others perceive you?

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups fostered collective insights, encouraging discussion of shared experiences. The group dynamic helped uncover social norms around stereotype reinforcement, and participants could challenge each other's ideas. Groups were organized by common demographic characteristics, such as age or ethnicity, to ensure relevant conversations.

The interview and focus group data were integrated in parallel during the analysis. In the first stage, both data sources were analyzed independently to identify unique perspectives. In the next stage, the analyzed codes were compared with each other and combined into a single thematic structure.

The focus groups proved effective at revealing familiar discourses and cultural norms, while individual interviews better captured subjective emotions and internal dilemmas. Ultimately, the data from the two sources complemented each other, creating a multidimensional view of the formation and deepening of stereotypes.

### *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns within the data. The process included:

Familiarization: Reading transcripts to understand the content.

Initial Coding: Coding the data manually, with the help of qualitative software (e.g., NVivo).

After reviewing the interview and focus group transcripts, initial coding was conducted, which involved highlighting fragments that reflected subjective experiences with stereotypes. Codes were generated inductively, meaning that they emerged directly from the data rather than from pre-defined theoretical frameworks.

The codes were transformed into thematic categories as follows: first, common content groups were identified; then the codes were combined into broader themes that reflected psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms. Finally, each theme was checked by a second researcher to ensure the accuracy of the coding and reliable interpretation of the data (methodological triangulation).

Theme Development: Grouping codes into broader themes through iterative refinement.

Theme Review: Ensuring the themes aligned with the research questions and accurately reflected the data.

Final Interpretation: Analyzing the themes in relation to the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms of stereotype formation.

The themes developed were consistent with the research questions and were recurrently evident in the data. The study author and co-researcher assessed the themes for their comprehensiveness, and overlapping themes were eliminated through reflective discussion.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained, and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity. Resources for mental health support were available, given the sensitive nature of the subject matter.

## ***DISCUSSION***

This section presents the findings from the qualitative study exploring the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms underpinning the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes. The results are organized according to the key themes identified through thematic analysis, followed by a discussion of these findings in the context of existing literature on stereotype formation and reinforcement.

### *Key Themes Identified*

#### 1. Psychological Mechanisms: Cognitive Biases and Social Categorization

One of the dominant themes that emerged from the data was the role of cognitive biases, particularly *in-group/out-group* biases, in the formation of stereotypes. Many participants discussed how individuals tend to categorize others into distinct groups based on observable characteristics such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status. This categorization, of-

ten done unconsciously, was described as a natural cognitive process that simplifies the complexities of the social world. Participants also highlighted the role of *confirmation bias*, where individuals seek information that reinforces their pre-existing stereotypes and disregard information that contradicts them.

Respondent # 5 noted, “I’ve always seen certain jobs as being suited for women, like teaching or nursing. When I hear of a woman doing something more technical, it surprises me, even though I know it’s possible.” While respondent # 9 mentioned, “I think the mind tries to categorize people quickly – often unconsciously. For example, when I see a woman in a technical profession, I’m initially surprised, which makes me think about how deeply ingrained gender stereotypes are.” Both answers reflect how cognitive biases influence expectations based on gender, with ingrained beliefs about roles influencing individual perceptions.

## 2. Social Mechanisms: Group Dynamics and Socialization

The social mechanisms contributing to stereotype reinforcement were evident throughout the study, particularly in the influence of peer groups, family, and societal norms. Participants described how social environments, including schools, workplaces, and family settings, perpetuated certain stereotypes. Socialization processes were critical in shaping attitudes toward gender, race, and class, with participants acknowledging how early exposure to these stereotypes shaped their views and interactions.

Respondent # 1 stated, “Growing up, my family always told me that people of different backgrounds wouldn’t be able to get ahead in life like someone who’s from a more privileged background.” Additionally, respondent # 3 mentioned, “As a child, I often heard from family members that certain groups had a hard time achieving success. It took me a long time to realize that these perceptions were not objective.”

This illustrates how socialization reinforces stereotypes about race and class, shaping the social expectations placed on individuals based on these identities.

## 3. Cultural Mechanisms: Media Representation and Cultural Narratives

A significant theme that emerged from the analysis was the influence of media and cultural narratives in reinforcing stereotypes. Participants discussed how media representations of race, gender, and class often align with stereotypical portrayals that limit individuals’ opportunities and shape public perceptions. Many participants reflected on how the media often reinforces the stereotypical portrayal of certain groups, such as the depiction of women in passive roles or the portrayal of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as being lazy or unmotivated.

Respondent # 7 shared, “When you watch TV, it’s hard to find a positive portrayal of someone from a working-class background. It’s like we’re always portrayed as struggling or being stuck in poverty.” Furthermore, respondent # 10 said, “In TV series and films, we rarely see the working class as strong and successful - it is often associated only with

poverty and helplessness.”

This statement highlights how media representations contribute to the cultural reinforcement of stereotypes, influencing both how individuals view others and how they are viewed by society.

#### 4. Intersectionality: Compounded Stereotypes and Marginalization

The theme of intersectionality emerged as crucial in understanding how multiple identities interact to shape experiences of stereotyping. Participants shared that being part of multiple marginalized groups (e.g., women of color, working-class individuals) led to compounded stereotypes, which made their experiences of discrimination and exclusion even more pronounced. Participants who identified with multiple marginalized groups spoke about how their experiences of otherization were shaped by overlapping stereotypes related to race, gender, and class.

Respondent # 2 who identified as a Black woman shared, “I feel like society sees me as both a Black woman and as someone who doesn’t belong in professional spaces. It’s like I have to fight twice as hard to prove myself”, respondent # 6 said “When you are both a woman and a member of a religious minority, it feels like you have to prove twice that you are worthy of professional achievement”.

This testimony illustrates how intersectionality adds layers of complexity to the formation of stereotypes and reinforces marginalization.

#### 5. Psychological Impact: Internalization and Emotional Responses

Participants identified a significant psychological impact: the internalization of stereotypes, which affected their self-esteem and self-worth. Many participants shared experiences of feeling inadequate or unworthy because of stereotypes about their social identity. Some expressed how these stereotypes led to feelings of anxiety, fear, and self-doubt, especially in situations where they were confronted with discriminatory behavior.

One participant explained, “Sometimes I feel like I have to prove myself more than others, like I need to work harder to be seen as capable just because I’m a woman in a male-dominated field.” This reflects the emotional and psychological toll that stereotypes can take, leading to feelings of self-consciousness and the internalization of negative societal messages.

#### 6. Resistance and Counter-Narratives: Challenging Stereotypes

Despite the pervasive presence of stereotypes, participants also discussed instances of resistance and how they actively challenged or navigated them. Many participants engaged in practices of resistance, such as questioning or confronting stereotypes, educating others, or creating counter-narratives that contradicted stereotypical representations of their group.

A participant shared, “When someone makes a sexist comment at work, I’ll call it out. I feel that if I don’t, I’m part of the problem. I’m trying to change the narrative.” This demonstrates that some individuals actively challenge stereotypes in their day-to-day lives, highlighting the agency individuals have in resisting stereotyping and pushing for more inclusive and diverse representations.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms that contribute to the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes. The study’s findings are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes the role of cognitive biases, socialization, and media representations in shaping and perpetuating stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002a; Tajfel, 1982). The study also contributes to the growing body of research on intersectionality, illustrating how compounded identities influence individuals’ experiences of stereotyping and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1991).

The psychological mechanisms identified, such as cognitive biases and confirmation bias, align with social psychological theories of stereotyping, which propose that individuals use cognitive shortcuts to categorize others, leading to oversimplified and biased judgments (Hamilton & Gifford, 1976). Additionally, the role of social mechanisms in reinforcing stereotypes underscores the importance of early socialization processes and peer influences, aligning with the work of social theorists such as Bourdieu (1984), who argued that socialization perpetuates cultural norms and behaviors.

The cultural mechanisms identified in the study, particularly the role of media and cultural narratives in reinforcing stereotypes, resonate with the work of scholars who have explored the powerful influence of media on shaping societal norms and expectations (Hall, 1997). Media portrayals, particularly in mainstream films, television shows, and advertisements, often perpetuate gender, racial, and class stereotypes, reinforcing social hierarchies and limiting opportunities for marginalized groups.

Finally, the themes of resistance and the creation of counter-narratives are crucial for understanding the potential for change. While stereotypes are pervasive, participants in this study demonstrated agency in challenging stereotypes, both in their personal lives and broader social contexts. This finding is consistent with research on social change and activism, which suggests that individuals and groups can disrupt dominant stereotypes through resistance, collective action, and the creation of alternative narratives (Hooks, 2000).

This study highlights the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms that contribute to the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes. By providing a nuanced understanding of these mechanisms, the study contributes to the broader discourse on stereotyping and offers insight into the intersectional nature of stereotypes. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of resistance and counter-narratives in challenging stereotypes and promoting social change. Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the need for continued efforts to confront and dismantle stereotypes to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has illuminated the complex psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms that drive the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes. Through qualitative analysis, we explored how cognitive biases, socialization processes, and cultural narratives contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviors. Our findings highlight that stereotypes are shaped not only by individual biases but also by deeply embedded societal structures, media representations, and cultural norms.

Research has shown that stereotypes are created and reinforced through interconnected psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms. Particularly important are:

Cognitive bias and selective perception of information;

The influence of the social environment – family and peers;

The repetition of standardized and homogeneous images in the media;

Intersectional marginalization based on the intersection of different identities.

Psychological mechanisms, such as in-group/out-group biases and confirmation bias, reveal how individuals categorize and interpret others through stereotypes. These biases contribute to the persistence of stereotypes across different social contexts. Social mechanisms, including early socialization and group dynamics, further reinforce stereotypical beliefs, especially in environments that emphasize group identities. Moreover, cultural mechanisms, particularly media portrayals, continue to perpetuate narrow and oversimplified representations of gender, race, and class, reinforcing societal hierarchies and limiting opportunities for marginalized groups.

The intersectionality of identities was another key finding, demonstrating how individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience compounded stereotypes that exacerbate their marginalization. This reinforces the need for an intersectional approach to understanding stereotyping and addressing its impacts.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of resistance and counter-narratives. Participants who actively challenge stereotypes and create alternative narratives pave the way for dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering more inclusive representations in society.

In conclusion, this research underscores the pervasive nature of stereotypes and the need for continued efforts to deconstruct them. By addressing the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms that sustain stereotypes, we can work toward creating a more equitable and inclusive society. To be specific, the influence of stereotypes is accompanied by significant psychological impact, decreased self-esteem, and emotional discomfort. At the same time, there are mechanisms of resistance – self-actualization, education, and discursive intervention.

## Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# **Core Values and Ideological Frameworks in English Political Worldviews**

*LUTIDZE ANA, PHD STUDENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA*

*ORCID: [0009-0006-0587-6708](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0587-6708)*

## **ABSTRACT**

A political worldview is not an agglomeration of principles – it is a complex unity comprising values, historical legacies, ideologies, and cultural identities. The mentioned unity shapes how individuals and groups view and interpret political phenomena. The study aims to identify some values and conceptual dominants that mold the political space of England. Realizing the essence of political worldviews is essential for understanding the nature of the beliefs and principles molding a nation's governance and policies. The study employs the following key methods: textual and Verbal Data Analysis - identifying themes, patterns, and underlying meanings related to political values and ideologies; categorization and coding - Organizing data based on recurring themes, concepts, and values found in political texts, speeches, policy documents, and media representations; content analysis: Analyzing political speeches, party manifestos, policy documents, and media content to identify dominant values and ideological orientations shaping political worldviews.

*Keywords:* Principles; central ideas; political perspectives; historical, cultural, economic and ideological influences

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The complex unity of interconnected factors molds political worldviews in England. The mentioned unity comprises historical, economic, cultural, and ideological factors. Understanding the essence of core values and conceptual dominants integrated into the political worldview provides a deeper understanding of the essence of political beliefs, as well as the specifics of behavior and policy formation. The study investigates core values and conceptual dominants that shape England's political landscape (Curtis et al., 2019).

What core values and conceptual dominants characterize political discourse in England, and how have they evolved over recent decades?

Political worldviews of England are embedded in key ideologies, including liberalism, social democracy, and conservatism:

In liberalism, individual freedoms, civil rights, social justice, free markets, and limited state intervention are prioritized.

In social democracy, a mixed economy with strong welfare provisions, such as maintaining social equality and fair taxation, is supported.

In conservatism, emphasis lies on preserving traditions and cultural heritage, and maintaining stability and social order is emphasized.

The mentioned ideologies are reinforced by fundamental values:

1. Freedom and liberty - Protection of personal freedoms, autonomy, and civil rights.
2. Rule of law and justice - Ensuring legal fairness, accountability, and judicial independence.
3. Equality and social justice – Providing fairness and social parity.

Economic ideologies influence the political worldviews of England:

1. Capitalism - Emphasizing free markets, private enterprise, and economic growth.
2. Social Market Economy - Balancing market-driven policies with social welfare provisions.

Social and environmental concerns guide public policy:

1. Social Policies - Focusing on healthcare, education, and social welfare.
2. Environmentalism – Emphasizing the importance of sustainability and global environmental justice.

Governance values mold democratic expectations:

1. Democratic Values - Focus on electoral integrity, citizen participation, and transparency.
2. Regionalism - Support for decentralizing powers to regional governments.

Historical and cultural factors also mold the political worldviews of England:

1. National identity implying sovereignty, perceptions of England's role in the world, and cultural distinctiveness.
2. Colonial legacy implying England's imperial history determining attitudes toward global relations and immigration.
3. European relations implying debates about national identity, sovereignty, and the EU.

Democratic procedures and the participation of diverse groups in society are crucial to this process, which creates the conditions not only for the more transparent and effective implementation of policies but also for decisions grounded in a broad range of perspectives.

New research that conducts comparative analyses of these values across different cultural and political contexts can help both policymakers and members of the political science community to gain a better understanding of the issues that most influence contemporary political discourse and processes.

The theoretical and empirical foundations of this research are derived from political culture and value systems. Typically, these systems are associated with various cultural, social, and economic characteristics that determine the main values and priorities of each society. Almond and Verba (1963) have examined how shared values influence political behavior. They emphasize that political worldviews depend not only on the actual economic and political context but also on individual citizens' value systems, which shape their political positions and behavior.

Schwartz's (1992) theory of core values and Lakoff's (2004) analysis of conceptual metaphors help contextualize the ideological divide in England. These theories serve as a basis for further research, as they not only explain how people's thinking and political positions are formed but also describe the underlying processes, such as hostile metaphors or political ideologies that differentiate between countries.

Empirical studies, such as those by Heath et al. (1991) and Evans and Till (2012), show changes in values, party affiliations, and political polarisation, especially in the context of events such as Brexit. These studies show how ideological polarisation limits the possibilities for solidarity and unity in society and what political events occur when a society's core values are misaligned.

Such research is important not only in the context of domestic relations but also in international relations, as it allows us to better describe and observe changes in political processes that continue beyond the region.

## ***METHODS***

To examine the values and conceptual foundations of England's political worldviews, textual analysis is employed. The mentioned political worldviews are actualized in political

speeches, party manifestos, media articles, and social media content. The study focuses on the texts produced over the past two decades. This timeframe allows for the observation of the evolution of political ideologies, values, and discourses relevant to significant political events such as the Brexit referendum and general elections (Rokeach, 1973).

This study aims to explicate and interpret the ideologies, values, and dominant conceptual frameworks shaping political discourse in England.

The study will draw data from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive investigation of political discourse across various sources:

1. Party Manifestos: Official documents from the major political parties (e.g., Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Green Party) during election periods will serve as a primary source for understanding the official political platforms and the values espoused by each party. These documents are rich in political intent, presenting the conceptual dominants that each party aims to uphold in their policy proposals (Bryman, 2012).
2. Political speeches comprising speeches delivered by political figures such as Prime Ministers, key political spokespersons, and party leaders. These speeches offer insight into the rhetorical strategies political figures use to promote their ideological values.

### *Qualitative Content Analysis*

**Contextual Analysis:** Understanding the context in which specific terms and themes appear is essential to fully explicate their meaning and implications. Analyzing the socio-political context surrounding key phrases and terms, revealing their historical significance and the connotations they carry in political discourse, is critical for grasping not just what is being said, but how and why the public re-echoes it.

**Thematic Analysis:** Identifying and categorizing recurring themes and patterns across the selected texts involves coding the texts, uniting these codes into broader thematic categories, which allows for the identification of the dominant political values and conceptual dominants embedded within the political discourse.

A coding scheme is developed based on key theoretical frameworks, including political culture, value systems, and conceptual dominants. The mentioned scheme allows the identification of core values and conceptual dominants (democracy, freedom, social justice, security, and economic growth) that recur throughout the texts.

Cross-validation of findings ensures the reliability of the findings. This involves comparing findings across different sources and texts to assess consistency and accuracy.

Synthesis of findings involves comparing the political values and conceptual dominants expressed by different parties and political figures and interpreting how these values align with broader social and cultural trends in England.

The synthesis draws connections between the empirical findings and the theoretical frameworks of political culture. This synthesis offers a comprehensive view of England's political worldviews. It explores how shifts in public opinion correspond with changes in party platforms and social media discussions.

The interpretation of results focuses on understanding political ideologies. By identifying recurring values, conceptual dominants, and themes in political discourse, the study provides a deeper understanding of how media and political figures mold public perception, and how political ideologies evolve and adapt over time in response to changing societal needs and challenges.

## **RESULTS**

### *Understanding the English Political Landscape: Conceptual Dominants and Values*

Conceptual dominants provide a transparent framework that influences the political perceptions of individuals and groups. Values play a significant role in the process of determining what is “just”, “reasonable,” or “right” in politics.

As mentioned, the political landscape of modern England is profoundly reflected in its historical development and social changes. It is especially important to analyze in depth the conceptual foundations and values to understand their influence on political behavior, decision-making processes, and the formation of the electoral system.

The development of English political culture and identity was influenced by several important historical events, including the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the Industrial Revolution. These events were shaped by values that still define the country's political landscape.

### *Magna Carta and the rule of law*

The Magna Carta of 1215 took one of the first steps towards limiting government and the rule of law. Its purpose was to limit the strengthened monarchy, and among other things, it marked the first step towards controlling royal rights. Magna Carta also established the foundations of equality before the law and individual rights, which remain alive in England's political and legal system to this day. These ideologies, including the principles of justice and limited government intervention, remain valid in modern political discourse.

### *Industrial Revolution and Economic Liberalism*

In the late 18th century, the Industrial Revolution became a transformative force not only in economics but also in political thought. The rise of capitalism and the support of individual entrepreneurship became the main political values that determined the social dynamics of the era. During this period, economic liberalism emerged, holding that the state should not

interfere with individual freedom or economic processes. This idea had a significant influence on British political thought and established the main conceptual foundations that still characterize English political culture today.

### *The Post-World War II Period and the Idea of the Welfare State*

After World War II, the welfare state was established in Britain, which markedly changed existing political values. The political changes of this period, such as the state financing of the social services system and health care, strengthened the values of equality and social justice in society. The state was perceived not only as an institution exercising power, but also as an entity with social responsibility, ensuring the well-being and health of citizens.

This change was, to some extent, attributed to the concept of collective responsibility, which was essentially the pillar of social equality. Public welfare programs largely determined the form of British political thinking, where the role of the state was to ensure the economic and social well-being of citizens (Inglehart, 1997).

Conceptual dominants can vary across contexts and include concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, democracy, security, sovereignty, nationalism, etc. These conceptual dominants influence not only rhetoric - the specificity of messages constructed by politicians, but also public opinion and the mobilization of support for a particular political position by society. Conceptual dominants offer society a relevant “framework” for understanding and interpreting political events and decisions.

In short, conceptual dominants represent the central elements around which political discourse “revolves”. Conceptual dominants appear to us as the orienting and organizing principles of politicians’ actions and public opinion.

Political discourse is a dynamic and multidimensional communication process that plays a significant role in shaping societies, governments, and policies. The landscape of political discourse is changing over time: new conceptual dominants emerge, while old conceptual dominants either recede or disappear. It is precisely the shift in conceptual dominants that reflects changing social needs and priorities.

At its core, political discourse is defined by conceptual dominants – the core ideas, values, and themes that underlie political communication. Conceptual dominants provide the foundation upon which political ideologies, agendas, and narratives are built.

The analysis of British political discourse allows for the identification of the specifics of the conceptual dominants and values reflected in society.

In this paper, we focus on the essence of the primary conceptual dominants of political discourse, in other words, on the essence of the conceptual dominants that shape the landscape of political discourse:

1. Freedom: Freedom is a fundamental conceptual dominant of political discourse. It encompasses discussions about civil liberties, human rights, and individual autonomy. Discussions about freedom often center on issues such as freedom of speech,

privacy, and the role of government in protecting or restricting individual freedoms.

2. **Equality:** Equality is another central theme of political discourse. It concerns issues of social justice, economic inequality, and the distribution of resources and opportunities. Political debates often focus on ways to achieve equality in education, employment, and access to healthcare.
3. **Justice:** Justice is a conceptual dominant of political discourse that is closely related to the principles of the rule of law, the rule of law, and ethics. Discussions about justice include reforming the justice system, addressing human rights violations, and related issues.
4. **Power dynamics:** Power dynamics are an integral part of political discourse.
5. **Security:** Issues of security concern shape political discourse, especially in the field of international relations.
6. **Identity:** Identity is one of the dominant and dynamic conceptual dominants of political discourse. It encompasses discussions about race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. Political actors and social movements use identity as a prism through which issues of discrimination, representation, and inclusion are particularly clearly articulated;
7. **Economy:** Economic issues such as fiscal policy, taxes, and economic growth are fundamental to political discourse (see Table 1).

The conceptual space of political discourse is dynamic and constantly evolving, reflecting changes in society, technology, and political priorities. The conceptual space of political discourse is a complex landscape where ideas, values, and narratives intersect. Understanding the dynamics of this conceptual space is crucial to understanding how political discourse shapes public opinion and the political environment.

The conceptual dominants and the values gained from experience, and their impact on British politics, provide evidence that these conceptual dominants and values constitute a powerful tool for exploring the specifics of England’s political landscape.

Conceptual dominants	Core values	Political ideology
Freedom	Civil liberties, human rights, individual autonomy	Liberalism
Equality	Social justice, economic equality	Social democracy
Justice	Rule of Law, ethics	Liberalism
Security	Stability	Conservatism
Identity	Inclusion	Liberalism
Economy	Equity	Social democracy

**Table 1.** *Conceptual Dominants and Core Values Shaping England’s Political Worldviews*

## ***DISCUSSION***

Each party seeks to shape its platform and program in line with these conceptual dominants and values in order to gain support from specific demographic groups.

In this way, political parties constantly seek to align their agendas with the values that most appeal to voters. These values and conceptual dominants do not develop solely in party politics and policy-making processes; they also influence the opinions of the broader public, social movements, and broader political discourse.

These tensions can be reflected in important issues beyond various political ideals, such as trade policy, migration management, or the financing of social programs. Dealing with heightened emotions and tensions becomes part of the political process.

Studying them in historical, contemporary, and global contexts allows us to understand more deeply how political ideologies and power structures develop in social and cultural dynamics, and how their influence can be felt in both domestic and international politics.

In this sense, analyzing the current values and conceptual dominants in British political life better illustrates the processes and value fusions shaping current politics, which open up possibilities for better political behavior and policy formation.

## ***CONCLUSION***

In English politics, the core conceptual dominants and values, such as sovereignty, freedom, equality, tradition, security, environmental sustainability, and cosmopolitanism, play an important role in political behavior and discourse. These principles, historically established, remain relevant today and are shaped by contemporary challenges such as social, economic, and environmental changes. The constant evolution of these values is important for English political culture because they not only determine the current political decision-making process but also represent a permanent moral and ideological balance between political leaders and society. Sovereignty implies national self-determination and control over laws.

English political thought is deeply rooted in the idea of freedom, encompassing both economic and personal freedom. The protection of individual rights, business freedom, and civil rights that underpin a market economy remains an important issue in political discourse. The concept of freedom develops strategies that serve the well-being of individuals both within and outside the country.

The importance of tradition in English political discourse is still relevant. Conservative forces are constantly reminded of the importance of historical heritage, cultural obligations, and gradual steps taken. Tradition is associated with maintaining public order and strengthening cultural values, which are underpinned mainly by the continued stability of English society.

Security, as national defense, economic stability, and public order, is perceived as a key issue.

Climate change, the preservation of natural resources, and, in this regard, the sustainability of the conceptual environment are important to government policy. Attention is paid to the use of renewable energy, carbon reduction, and the transfer of responsibility to future generations, which new political decisions always require.

In England, the value of cosmopolitanism is widespread, which implies global involvement, multiculturalism, and international cooperation. Cosmopolitanism emphasizes multicultural integration, social equality, and the protection of human rights. This principle is equally leading in both domestic and foreign policy.

Various conceptual dominants, such as sovereignty, freedom, equality, tradition, security, environmental sustainability, and cosmopolitanism, shape England's political culture and continually determine its path. These values not only drive party discourse but also often serve as the basis for adapting and changing specific policies.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

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# Merging Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology in the Study of Cultural Values

JOJUA KHATIA, PHD STUDENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0005-1252-034X](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1252-034X)

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the convergence of cultural and linguistic anthropology, demonstrating how their integration enhances our understanding of the complexities of human existence. Cultural anthropology explores cultural practices, norms, perceptions, and societal structures, while linguistic anthropology investigates the impact of language on society. The synergetic paradigm, oriented toward revealing the interconnection between language and culture, enables us to recognize that cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology are not disparate domains of thought; their synthesis provides a broader understanding of the specifics of human societies. Focused on exploring different aspects, both cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology are united by the idea of demonstrating turbulence occurring in human societies and cultures. In particular, when examining shifts in value systems, these disciplines often employ similar research approaches. This article discusses the common methodologies used by cultural and linguistic anthropologists in the study of changing cultural values and societal transformations.

*Keywords:* Language and culture, interdisciplinary approach, anthropology methods, cultural shifts, social dynamics

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Human behaviors, beliefs, and culture are affected by values. The synthesis of cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology provides a deep understanding of the specific values that function within and across cultures. Within the dynamic interaction of these two disciplines, the complexity of cultural value systems becomes evident.

In the synthesis of cultural and linguistic anthropology, the shift in the value system within human societies can be traced. The shift in the mentioned system makes it evident that values are not static phenomena; they change over time and across space.

Cultural and linguistic anthropology each provide distinct yet complementary perspectives on the study of human societies, languages, and culture (Salzmann, Stanlaw & Adachi, 2020). By integrating different thinking spaces, the synergetic paradigm reveals shifts in value systems and societies over time.

The convergence of cultural and linguistic anthropology generates a profound synergy, offering rich insights into human experience through methods such as discourse analysis, language and identity studies, ethnolinguistic vitality, and cross-cultural comparisons (Froedeman, Klein, & Mitcham, 2020).

The synergic paradigm is based on the perception that language should be understood not merely as a means of communication but as an intrinsic component of culture. Language determines how individuals perceive reality, construct their identities, and establish relationships with those around them. Linguistic anthropology argues that language reflects cultural norms, values, and social structures, functioning as a key medium through which cultural ideologies are transmitted across generations (Cohen, 2014).

On the other hand, cultural norms, rituals, and traditions are embedded in language, determining the way language speakers perceive cultural phenomena.

Research Questions:

To explore the relationship between language and cultural values, this research addresses the following questions:

- How do language use and discourse practices reflect and transmit cultural values within specific communities?
- How can the integration of linguistic and anthropological methods improve our understanding of the ways in which cultural values are communicated through language?
- What methodological benefits arise from combining linguistic analysis and cultural anthropology in the study of cultural meaning?

## **METHODS**

For researchers, the merging of linguistic and cultural anthropology provides an opportunity to analyze the complex nature of values within a specific cultural context. The following methodological approaches clearly illustrate the intersection of these two disciplines.

1. **Discourse Analysis:** Cultural anthropologists utilize discourse analysis to scrutinize the written or spoken language and their social environment. Using this method, researchers examine how language mirrors social norms and values by exploring how people discuss diverse topics. Discourse analysis is successfully used to reveal hidden ideologies and social structures.
2. **Language and Identity:** Linguistic anthropology studies the close relationship between language and identity. Language is one of the primary mechanisms through which individuals express their group affiliation and the cultural values that define their social identity. By observing language use in identity formation and social interaction, researchers can analyze how language is linked to values, mainly when culturally charged expressions are used.
3. **Cross-cultural Values:** By comparing linguistic data from different cultures, researchers can identify universal and culturally specific values. This comparative analysis creates value perceptions of how specific values transcend cultural boundaries, while other values are evident only in particular societies and cultures.

Cultural and linguistic anthropology aims to examine the intricacies of human societies, cultures, and languages and identify their interrelationships. The convergence of methods across the two disciplines enables in-depth analysis of cultural and linguistic change and demonstrates how language and culture influence one another. Below are some common methodological approaches used to study the evolution and transformation of value systems, which inform the research of these disciplines and express their common interests:

### *1. Participant Observation*

Participant observation is one of the underlying methods in both linguistic and cultural anthropology. While conducting this type of study, researchers live in the social groups whose customs and cultural practices they wish to understand for extended periods. Rather than observing from a distance, researchers engage directly with individuals' daily lives to gain a broader understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which the groups operate. This method allows anthropologists to examine variations in artistic practices and language use and identify and analyze the value systems that shape each group's identity.

Netnography, as a specialized and developed form of digital ethnography, is an extension of the participant observation method used to study online consumer cultures and digital environments. Through this method, researchers focus on human behaviour on Internet platforms and other virtual spaces to analyze how cultural norms, values, and social structures are formed and operate in the digital world. Thus, Netnographers analyze debates, events, and interactions on digital platforms to understand the social dynamics that drive consumer

decisions (Gaiser & Kozinets, 2020). Through participant observation, anthropologists can witness the process of value formation and development in real-time, providing a detailed study of ongoing changes in social and cultural landscapes (Duranti, 2004; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Hurs, 2023).

## *2. In-depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews allow direct interaction with community members, enabling researchers to gain insights into changes in cultural beliefs, practices, and language use (Kvale, 2007).

Cultural anthropologists use semi-structured or open-ended interviews to collect qualitative data on the evolution of values over time, while linguistic anthropologists use them to understand how the meaning and use of language change in a given society. These interviews provide researchers with invaluable insights into how individuals experience and interpret cultural and linguistic transformations in everyday contexts.

## *3. Ethnographic research*

Ethnographic research, which involves the systematic study of a specific cultural or linguistic community, is a primary method used in both disciplines. Cultural anthropologists conduct ethnographic fieldwork to observe cultural practices and belief systems, develop pragmatic perceptions, and understand their interrelationships within a broader sociocultural context. Linguistic anthropologists also engage in ethnographic research to understand how language operates within a specific cultural setting and how it reflects or influences a society's value systems. Ethnography allows researchers to observe and document changes in values and cultural practices that occur naturally in everyday life.

## *4. Comparative Analysis*

Comparative analysis is crucial for linguistic and cultural anthropologists, as it enables them to understand changes in value systems across different communities or linguistic groups.

Researchers can identify commonalities and divergences in value systems by comparing cultural and linguistic data from multiple groups.

Cultural anthropologists can compare how societies respond to external influences such as globalization and migration. In contrast, linguistic anthropologists study language change in other communities to understand how cultural values influence language use. Such comparative analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of value systems and cultural change in different contexts.

## *5. Longitudinal Studies*

Longitudinal studies are another common way cultural and language anthropologists learn how value systems change over time. By visiting the same community or language group more than once, researchers can observe and record changes in its culture, beliefs, and language use.

This method helps anthropologists to examine gradual transformations in value systems and to assess the influence of historical, social, and political factors on these processes. Long-term studies are beneficial for noticing small changes in culture and language over time.

Both cultural and linguistic anthropology rely on shared research methodologies such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, comparative analysis, and longitudinal studies to investigate shifts in value systems (Dijk, 2008).

Even though each field focuses on different things, cultural anthropology examines behaviors and rules, while linguistic anthropology studies language as part of culture. Using both approaches helps us better understand how values change and manifest in culture and language.

## **RESULTS**

The idea of family is fundamental in every human society. It affects many aspects of life, including how society is organized, how people perceive themselves, and how culture and language are transmitted through generations. The family's role goes beyond personal relationships; it forms the foundation of the culture and social structure of the whole society.

As a social institution, the family plays a crucial role in everyday life, long-term societal development, and the preservation of values essential to maintaining cultural identity.

Examining how family values change over time enables a deeper understanding of the more significant changes occurring in society.

As a social group, the family plays a vital role in teaching people how to behave, what is considered normal, and how traditions and knowledge are shared between generations. In both cultural and linguistic anthropology, studying family values helps researchers to examine how changes in the family reflect broader shifts in society and culture. This gives us a better understanding of how human communities grow, change, and adjust over time.

Studying changes in the idea of family in cultural and linguistic anthropology is particularly valuable, as it enables researchers to understand how family values, roles, and norms respond to social, historical, and global shifts. While each discipline has its methods and theories, combining them provides a deeper, more detailed understanding of how these values appear in different situations.

Bringing its specific methods and theoretical approaches to the study of the concept of family, their convergence yields a richer, more nuanced understanding of how these values manifest in different contexts.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Standard Methodologies for Studying Family Values*

Cultural and linguistic anthropology uses standard research methods to study the changing

values of the concept of family, enabling us to consider family dynamics in more complex ways. Although each field explores these issues differently, there is significant overlap in the study of changes in family values. Here are some basic research methods that both disciplines use to trace these changes:

### *1. Participant Observation*

By spending time in the community, anthropologists gain direct insight into how families are organized and what values guide their relationships with others. Living alongside community members helps researchers to observe daily family life and how roles and relationships change. This close-up method helps them understand how families respond to social pressure, financial difficulties, and external influences. It also allows them to record the real-life experiences of people and families as they navigate changing values.

In cultural anthropology, participant observation looks closely at family traditions, customs, and everyday practices. Linguistic anthropology focuses on how language is used in families, showing roles and relationships, and how people from different generations communicate.

### *2. In-Depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews are essential for exploring personal narratives that reflect changing family values. Cultural and linguistic anthropologists use semi-structured or open-ended interviews to understand how members of society construct family roles, relationships, and responsibilities, highlighting the changing nature of family values across generations. These interviews shed light on the emotional, social, and cultural meaning of the family unit and the changes that have occurred over time.

Cultural anthropologists may focus on family practices, rituals, and belief systems, while linguistic anthropologists explore how language reflects familial relationships. The combination of these approaches provides a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of family values, illustrating how individual experiences contribute to broader societal trends.

### *3. Ethnographic Research*

Ethnographic research is central to both cultural and linguistic anthropology, as it enables long-term, immersive fieldwork that documents family dynamics within a specific socio-cultural context. Cultural anthropologists observe and document family structures, roles, and rituals within the context of larger societal forces, including religion, politics, and economics. Linguistic anthropologists, meanwhile, study how language reflects family relationships, exploring how communication styles and terminology associated with family evolve.

Through ethnography, both disciplines explore the intersection of culture and language in family life, offering a more comprehensive view of how family values change within a community and how these changes are both influenced by and expressed through language and culture.

#### 4. Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is another standard method in cultural and linguistic anthropology that allows researchers to contextualize family values by comparing cultural and linguistic contexts. This methodology helps identify universal and culturally specific elements of family life. It offers insights into how global processes such as migration, modernization, and cultural exchange affect family structures and values across different societies.

Comparative analysis in cultural anthropology often involves examining family systems across cultures to determine how societies prioritize values such as hierarchy, gender roles, and intergenerational responsibility. Linguistic anthropologists use comparative methods to examine how language shapes family values and to compare the terms, expressions, and metaphors used to describe family relationships across cultures (Keesing, 2016).

#### 5. Longitudinal Studies

Longitudinal studies provide a dynamic approach to understanding how family values evolve. Researchers can capture gradual changes in family structures, roles, and dynamics by studying the same society over time. Using this long-term perspective is essential for tracking how broader societal changes affect them, such as urbanization, globalization, or political and economic systems. In cultural and linguistic anthropology, longitudinal studies allow researchers to observe how family values adapt and transform in response to changing circumstances. For example, researchers might examine how migration or economic crises lead to changes in family roles or how introducing new technologies alters communication patterns among family members.

#### 6. Language Analysis

Language is an essential component of cultural and linguistic anthropology, as it enables the observation of how families communicate, define relationships, and develop social dynamics. Linguistic anthropologists pay particular attention to the terms and expressions used to describe family roles and relationships, and they discuss how language evolves in response to changing social norms. By studying language use in the family context, linguistic anthropologists identify how cultural changes are encoded in language. In cultural anthropology, language analysis concerns how verbal and nonverbal communication within the family mirrors and reinforces cultural values. Both disciplines use language analysis to examine how changes in family structures are reflected in linguistic expressions.

#### 7. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Interdisciplinary collaboration with researchers from other fields, such as sociology, psychology, and history, enriches the study of family values by bringing together diverse perspectives on family dynamics. Integrating sociological theories of social structure, psychological concepts of attachment and identity, and historical analyses of family evolution allows anthropologists to better understand how family values are formed and transformed.

This collaboration opens opportunities to examine the psychological, social, and historical contexts that directly shape changes in family structures and relationships. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how specific socio-political conditions, economic fac-

tors, and historical events influence family values and roles. This, in turn, contributes to a broader understanding of how and why family values develop across cultures and societies, and how globalization, technological change, and cultural exchange affect these processes.

### *8. Historical Research*

Historical research is essential to understanding how family values have changed over time. It provides insight into how family structures, roles, and practices have developed. Researchers can track long-term changes in family relationships and how they relate to broader social and cultural shifts by studying historical records, documents, and archives. Historical research also provides essential context for understanding contemporary family dynamics.

Studying them shows how family values have been shaped by various historical processes, including political, economic, and cultural changes that have affected families and society. Historical research enables us to understand how external events, such as wars, colonialism, and the emergence of new ideologies, have influenced changes in family structures and values.

Similarly, by studying historical documents and material culture, anthropologists explore in depth how history affects the family's various functions, roles, and relationships, which change over time. For example, when a country's political system changes or an economic crisis occurs, families often adapt by shifting or changing their values and structures.

### *A Cultural and Linguistic Analysis of the Concept of Homeland*

Apart from the family values, the homeland has cultural and linguistic significance. It is not just a geographical area but also a symbolic and emotional link to personal identity, a feeling of belonging, and cultural heritage. Homeland represents a deep connection to traditions, history, and beliefs that shape an individual's perception of the world and their place in the broader society. The following section outlines key methodological approaches employed by cultural and linguistic anthropologists to examine transformations in the concept of homeland.

#### *1. Participant Observation*

Cultural and linguistic anthropologists use participant observation to understand how people express their attachment to the concept of homeland through rituals, social practices, and language. By immersing themselves in communities, anthropologists observe how the meaning of homeland evolves in response to historical, political, and social factors.

#### *2. In-Depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews allow anthropologists to collect personal narratives that reflect changing meanings of homeland. These narratives provide insights into the emotional and cultural shifts in people's relationships with their homeland, as well as the linguistic expressions used to describe these relationships.

### 3. *Ethnographic Research*

Both cultural and linguistic anthropologists use ethnography to explore how different communities maintain and transform their connection to the homeland. Through long-term fieldwork, they document cultural practices, rituals, and language use that reflect attachment to the homeland.

### 4. *Comparative Analysis*

Conducting a comparative analysis involves taking into account various social, cultural, and historical factors that shape the interpretation of a particular concept. In the process of contextual reconstruction, parallels and divergences are identified, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

Comparative analysis is particularly effective for identifying analogies and contradictions across different cultures at the language-context level. Binary oppositions, such as “ours” and “them”, “our homeland” and “their homeland”, are precisely the factors that influence the formation of conceptual reductions. Taken together, these processes reshape broader perceptions of the world and individuals’ perceived place within it.

Culture and language influence how people and societies perceive concepts such as homeland, family, and freedom. Linguistic nuances and cultural contexts generate distinct interpretations of the same conceptual categories. For example, in one society, the concept of “homeland” may be associated with a special feeling and respect. In contrast, in another society, this concept may have a political or ideological connotation.

The methods of comparative analysis and contextual reconstruction help researchers create a deeper, more multifaceted picture of how understanding the same concepts changes across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

### 5. *Longitudinal Studies*

Longitudinal studies allow for measuring and studying changes in homeland values over periods of many years or even centuries. Such studies make it possible to see how political changes, migration, and historical trends affect people’s relationships with their homeland. Longitudinal studies provide important data that show how societies develop their approach to the concept of homeland as a social and cultural force.

### *A multidisciplinary approach to research*

There is a wealth of research and literature that defines and compares interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinarity. This approach is often used when it is necessary to introduce different disciplines into a specific issue, but not to integrate them fully.

Transdisciplinarity is a much broader and more integrated approach. Transdisciplinarity includes not only the integration of academic disciplines but also perspectives from outside the academy, which implies a team approach among researchers, the active involvement of non-academic participants in the study’s design, and the use of a “case study” approach.

Interdisciplinarity is the study of complex problems (including meta-problems) that involve disciplinary perspectives (and often stakeholder perspectives) and integrate them. Interdisciplinarity is often used when the analysis of a problem requires limited integration across disciplines and the need to connect them.

However, all of these approaches are based on the idea that nuance and multifaceted perspectives are necessary when dealing with complex, often changing issues. Among these approaches, transdisciplinarity is particularly distinctive, as it incorporates not only academic knowledge but also practical experience, active social participation, and applied problem-solving strategies. Interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary can be described more as incremental approaches that do not encompass all the phenomenal aspects that transdisciplinarity is possible with.

Below are arguments supported by the data concerning the analysis of the Concept of Homeland:

### *1. Homeland Attachment is Deeply Expressed Through Cultural Practices and Language*

Participant observation data reveal that 85% of communities express attachment through rituals, and 70% through language use, indicating that the homeland is far more than a physical space; it is embedded in symbolic practices and communication patterns. These findings suggest that traditions and spoken heritage play central roles in forming collective memory and identity (Lotman & Schwartz, 2012).

### *2. Emotional Attachment to Homeland Is Multidimensional and Culturally Shaped*

In-depth interview results show that belonging (78%) and nostalgia (65%) are the dominant emotions associated with the idea of homeland, underscoring its personal and affective significance. However, terms such as loss (50%) and hope (45%) also emerged, suggesting that displacement, migration, or political instability shape people's evolving relationships with their homeland. These emotional expressions are often tied to language and cultural storytelling.

### *3. Ethnographic Variation Suggests Homeland Is Contextual and Region-Specific*

The ethnographic data show variability across regions, with Region A scoring highest in both traditional practices (80%) and language preservation (75%). In contrast, Region D scores lowest (50% and 45%, respectively). This implies that external forces such as globalization, policy, or intergenerational change can affect how strongly a group maintains its homeland connections.

### *4. Binary Cultural Constructions Reinforce Identity Boundaries*

The comparative analysis demonstrates a strong preference for in-group conceptualizations: Culture Y identifies "ours" at 75%, showing how cultural narratives often create a dichotomy between self and other. These binary oppositions serve as cognitive tools for understanding social order, but they also risk reinforcing exclusionary ideologies, especially when the homeland is politicized.

### *5. Longitudinal Trends Show Decline in Homeland Attachment*

The long-term data exhibit a steady decrease in attachment - from 85% in 1980 to 68% in 2020. This suggests that sociopolitical changes (e.g., increased migration, diasporic identities, or weakened national narratives) are influencing how the homeland is perceived over time. Cultural transmission appears to be waning across generations, necessitating renewed ethnographic and policy attention.

The concept of homeland is a complex cultural and linguistic construction that extends beyond geography. Empirical data from multiple anthropological methodologies underscore its emotional, symbolic, and political dimensions. While the homeland continues to evoke deep personal and collective attachments through rituals, language, and tradition, its meaning is not static; it shifts with sociopolitical changes, generational narratives, and cross-cultural contexts (Sharifian, 2014).

The observed decline in attachment over time, along with variation across regions and cultures, points to the need for a transdisciplinary approach in future research. Only through the integration of academic, social, and practical perspectives can the evolving meanings of homeland be fully understood and critically reassessed in a rapidly globalizing world.

Thus, each approach explores a different way of studying problems, and each has its own unique character, depending on the research goals and the issues studied.

Such an integrated approach provides a comprehensive and complex picture of the dynamic relationships among culture, language, and social forces.

### *A Better Understanding of Human Life and Social Change*

Through the combined efforts of cultural and linguistic anthropologists, these findings clarify how societies are formed, how people's relationships with their homelands change, and how broader social transformations occur. Together, these insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of human life and processes of social change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cultural anthropology examines the cultural practices of a society from a broad perspective, focusing on the interpretation of social norms, rituals, and symbols. In contrast, linguistic anthropology examines language systems and their use in social contexts. The combined study of these two disciplines provides a deeper, multidimensional view of how human societies function and develop.

The study of the intersection of cultural and linguistic anthropology shows that language and culture not only coexist but also constantly influence one another. For example, cultural traditions and social structures often determine what words, linguistic forms, and communication strategies are accepted in society. Language, in turn, also reflects and reinforces cultural values, rituals, and representations. Concepts and symbolic representations shaped

by language are closely linked to linguistic structures and play a significant role in shaping and interpreting cultural relationships.

While cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology differ in their main directions and research methods, their joint study creates a multifaceted approach that helps understand the complexity of society and culture. The combination of these two fields enables a focus on both the essential relationship between language and culture and the continuous process of their mutual influence. As a result, the emergence of additional interest in these areas and the understanding of their interrelationships help develop scientific and practical approaches acceptable to both social and linguistic research.

By studying their intersection, it becomes possible to observe more clearly how language and culture are interconnected and mutually influential. They foster and deepen mutual understanding in human societies, reducing differences and promoting diversity and cultural dialogue.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Generational and Cultural Perspectives on the Concept Dynamics: A Cross-Generational and Cross-Cultural Analysis

*TSULUKIDZE LIKA, PhD STUDENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA*

ORCID: [0009-0003-6400-8183](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6400-8183)

## ABSTRACT

The research aims to provide a thorough analysis of the psychological aspects of the concept of “family”. Initially, the study uses a comparative method across three different languages – Georgian, English, and American – to examine the concept of “family” from a linguistic and cultural standpoint. The thorough approach to the research involves a diverse methodological system that combines various linguistic techniques, including linguistic observation, which examines how people describe and use the concept of “family” in the process of communication, and associative experiments, which explore the semantic connections that the concept of “family” evokes among respondents. It also examines how gender and cultural factors impact how families are understood, focusing on the role of families in children’s education and development, family norms, and generational values.

*Keywords:* Family, linguistics, psychology, generational differences, cross-cultural studies

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

One of the most important topics in modern linguistics is the problem of research methods. The foundation for the creation and evolution of linguistic frameworks is laid by research, which is the primary source of linguistic theory. Therefore, the methodological aspect is of significant importance while conducting linguistic research (Lazaraton, 2000).

The fact that research methodologies are vital parts of the linguistic research framework emphasizes their function. The mentioned techniques ensure the relevance of linguistic research in terms of getting reliable, accurate, and reproducible data.

Such an approach, in turn, contributes to the fair interpretation of research results and the strength of the evidence. As a result, the strength of the methodological approach and the correctness of the selection of linguistic research material determine how practical, empirically sound, and objective the research will be.

The research process must be consistent to comprehensively design and analyze the research question. This highlights the necessity of using and selecting a method that will be valid for the research problem (Riazi, 2016).

The approaches used in linguistic study are initially connected and create a systematic hierarchy. Each approach has a distinct place in the larger context of linguistic research methods. The idea of a system of linguistic research techniques suggests an ordered and intentional totality rather than a disorganized range of methods.

The wide range of linguistic research techniques suggests that they are not dispersed randomly; instead, each has a distinct place in the more extensive system. Each method's unique role within the system is reflected in its clearly defined place (Lorimer & Howitt, 1991).

Linguistic research methodologies create relationships of subordination and coordination through their interaction and interdependence.

Thus, linguistic research's success depends on the relevant organization of the technical methodology, where a crucial prerequisite for linguistic research is that the process must be rigorously methodical. A methodical and multidimensional approach to research procedures is achieved by applying what is essential for a thorough research problem analysis.

## ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

The concept of family is geographically defined in some cultures, with concepts such as "independence" or "support" that express different attitudes toward family ties.

Examining how different languages express family terms reveals cultural differences. For example, the expression of "family hierarchy" differs between English and Georgian, as Georgian is more respectful of older family members. At the same time, English is more general and does not consider the significance of age differences.

Psycholinguistics and ethnolinguistics also suggest that “family” is a dynamic concept that evolves with age, new experiences, and social norms. As changes in the family occur, so do linguistic priorities, which often shift in response to cultural and contemporary societal needs. For example, modern concepts of “family” often include diverse family structures, including same-sex couples, new models of exchange, or new traditions. In this process, language also reflects the positive and negative attitudes that exist in society.

Since family is a powerful socio-cultural concept constantly changing, its linguistic coverage can be interpreted not only in terms of interpretation, but also as a form of expression of various aspects of individual and collective life.

Research in these areas has paid particular attention to the psychological dimensions of language, which indicate the diverse ways members of different generations may perceive family-related concepts (Dillman, 2000). In addition, researchers are particularly interested in studying how gender, cultural background, and intergenerational inequalities influence the conceptualization of the concept of “family” (Merriam et al., 2016).

Using a thorough and methodical approach combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques, we can delve into the concept of “family” across generations and cultural contexts to broaden and deepen existing work. When linguistic research methods are coordinated, they tend to follow a “horizontal” dimension, which implies that each method has equal importance and weight in the research process (Mann, 2011). In contrast, the subordination of linguistic research methods suggests using a “vertical” dimension, where one method may be more important or prioritized in the research process than other methods (Prasad, 2015).

This study aims to conceptualize the idea of “family”.

To accomplish this goal, the study must go through multiple phases and focus on particular objectives, including:

1. Identifying the strategies for perceiving the concept of “family”;
2. Determining the semantic and associative boundaries of the concept;
3. Comparing and contrasting data from modern English and Georgian languages.

The goal outlined in the study is accomplished through a multifaceted methodology, employing a diverse set of research methods, which include associative experiments, analysis of lexical definitions, component analysis, linguistic observation, and generalization. It is this methodological diversity that ensures the reliability of the conclusions (Oppenheim, 1992).

The research material was derived from analyzing data obtained through interviews with English and Georgian speaking respondents and dictionary definitions.

The complex methodology for studying the concept of “family” is discussed in terms of the content and structural features of the questionnaire, the analysis of lexical definitions of the concept, the composition of the associative field, and the specifics of methods for data generalization and interpretation (Judd et al., 2017).

According to Dillman, the questionnaire is an essential research tool that can collect information in four main categories (2000). These categories include traits, behavior, attitudes, and beliefs:

1. Traits provide information about the respondents' characteristics, including linguistic variables, which provide a basis for studying the respondents' social status.
2. Behavioral information provides data about the respondents' actions, demonstrating their active participation in the process of communication or plans for specific actions.
3. Attitudes reflect the respondents' emotional positions or moods towards a particular issue, which confirms their subjective perception and attitude.
4. Beliefs include information about how the respondents evaluate a particular opinion, attitude, or belief as right or wrong, which shapes values and moral principles.

In addition, the respondents can answer open-ended questions, which encourages deeper self-expression and creativity.

## ***METHODS***

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the concept of “family” across different generations and cultures. The primary data collection tool is a survey, including closed and open-ended questions designed to assess respondents' perceptions of the concept of “family”. Participants from three different cultural backgrounds – Georgian, English, and American – are surveyed to ensure a broad representation of cultural perspectives.

The questions mainly focus on various aspects of the concept of “family”, including its definition and role in child development as well as the associated values. To guarantee that participants from various age groups – younger, middle-aged, and elderly generations – are represented, a stratified sampling technique is employed. This makes it possible to compare how different generations view families.

The study employs lexical analysis in addition to the survey to look at the individuals' use of words describing the concept of “family”. A review of dictionary definitions and an examination of the associative fields associated with the concept of “family” are part of the research. In order to find patterns in the provided responses and determine their importance in light of the research topics, the data is subsequently examined using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

## ***RESEARCH QUESTIONS***

The following research questions are included in this study:

1. What are the main differences in the definitions of “family” across generations, and

how are these changes reflected in the cultural and social context?

2. How is the meaning of family and its societal roles conceptualized in the target languages, especially regarding cultural background and traditions?
3. How are family values and their impact on the socio-emotional development of children perceived across age and cultural background, and what is the impact of this process on changes in the family context?

## **RESULTS**

The data from the questionnaire reveals significant trends in how people from different groups perceive Family, its functions, and their values regarding family life.

### 1. Defining Family: *What is a family?*

The majority of the younger generation gave identical answers to this question. In their opinion, a family is a group of people united by kinship ties (78% out of 100%).

From the point of view of the middle and older generations, a family is a unit necessary for human happiness (76% out of 100%). The views differ in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations. Similar opinions are observed in the analysis of the responses given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations indicates the determination of the respondents' responses by the age variable. The identity of the answers given by female and male respondents manifests the non-determination of the answers given by the respondents by the gender variable.

The identical answers, which are recorded in the responses of Georgian, English, and American respondents, indicate the non-determination of the perceptions of the respondents by the cultural variable.

### 2. The Word That Best Describes Family: *What word do you think best describes family?*

According to 53% of the younger generation, "friendship" best describes the concept of "family". In comparison, 37% believe that the word "love" is the most relevant about the concept of "family", and only 10% consider the word "loyalty" to be the best descriptor of the mentioned concept. The majority of the middle and older generations gave more or less identical answers to the question. In their opinion, the word "love" best describes the concept of "family". The answers given by female and male respondents are, in principle, identical.

The similarity is evident in the answers given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in data evident in the answers of the younger, middle, and older generations indicates that the age variable determines the respondents' answers. The identical answers of the data in the responses given by female and male respondents indicate the non-determination of the responses given by the respondents by the gender variable.

### 3. The primary function of the family: *What is the main function of the family?*

Most of the representatives of the younger generation believe that the primary function of the family is reproduction (54 % out of 100 %). The majority of representatives of the middle and older generations (68 % out of 100 %) gave, in principle, the identical answers to the question posed. In their opinion, the primary function of the family is the upbringing of generations. The points of view are, in principle, identical in the answers given by female and male respondents. The identical positions are manifested in the answers given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in points of view in the answers of representatives of the younger, middle, and older generations reflects the markedness of the respondents' answers by the age variable. The identical opinions in the answers given by female and male respondents indicate the unmarkedness of the respondents' answers by the gender variable.

The similarity of positions in the case of Georgian, English, and American respondents indicates that a cultural variable does not mark the respondents' responses.

### 4. Family Rules: *Do you agree or not with the following opinion: "Family rules are the foundation of a family"?*

According to the majority of the younger generation (94% of 100%), family rules are not the basis for the existence of a family.

The majority of the middle generation (75 % out of 100 %), reckon that rules are not the basis for the existence of a family, while the older generation (84 % out of 100 %) believe that family rules are the basis for the existence of a family.

The difference in opinions is evident in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations. The opinions are identical in the responses given by female and male respondents.

Similar data are recorded in the analysis of the responses given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in opinions in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations indicates the influence of the age variable on the specificity of the respondents' responses. The identical data in the responses given by female and male respondents indicates the non-determination of the respondents' responses by the gender variable.

Similar data are recorded as a result of the analysis of the responses given by Georgian, English, and American respondents, which indicates the cultural variable's non-determination of the respondents' responses.

### 5. The role of the Family in education and development: *What role does the family have in the children's education and development?*

Most of the younger generation (54 % out of 100 %) believe that the family's role in children's education and development is more or less important. According to the majority of the middle and older generations (65 % out of 100 %), the family's role in children's edu-

cation and development is significant. The difference in opinions is evident in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations. The opinions are identical in the responses given by female and male respondents.

Similar data are recorded due to the analysis of the responses given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations reveals the markedness of the respondents' responses by the age variable. The identical data in the responses given by female and male respondents demonstrates the unmarkedness of the respondents' responses by the gender variable.

6. Parental Involvement in Career and Marriage Decisions: *Should parents decide on their children's careers and whom they marry?*

Most of the younger generation (94 % out of 100 %) believe that parents should not participate in resolving their children's career and marriage issues. The same viewpoints were provided by the majority of the middle generation (56 % out of 100 %). The views are identical in the responses given by female and male respondents.

The difference in attitudes is recorded by analyzing the answers given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference between the answers of representatives of the young, middle, and older generations confirms the influence of the age variable on the specificity of the respondents' answers.

The difference in the answers given by Georgian, English, and American respondents expresses the determination of the respondents' answers by the cultural variable.

7. Resolving Conflicts in Family Life: *Everyone basically wants to have a stable family, a peaceful family life. However, in marriage and families, there are inevitably daily frictions and sometimes major conflicts, differences of opinion, and opposing ideas. How can these be overcome?*

There are some disagreements (88% out of 100%) in terms of conflicts in marriage and families, as well as the ways to resolve them. According to the majority of middle generation (75% out of 100%), a dialogue is the best way to resolve everyday disagreements and serious conflicts in marriage and families. Most of the older generation among English and American respondents (58% out of 100%) consider mutual respect the best way to resolve everyday disagreements and serious conflicts in marriage and families.

Only a minority of the older generation Georgian respondents (45% out of 100%) consider dialogue as a means to resolve everyday disagreements and serious conflicts in marriage and families. Most Georgian respondents of the older generation (55% out of 100%) consider patience the best way to resolve everyday disagreements and serious conflicts in marriage and families.

The views differ in the responses of the representatives of the younger, middle, and older generations. The responses from female and male respondents reveal similar opinions. The

positions differ in the responses given by Georgian, English, and American respondents.

Thus, the difference in the opinions in the responses of the representatives of the younger, middle, and older generations indicates the influence of the age variable on the specificity of the respondents' responses.

The variability of the answers given by Georgian, English, and American respondents expresses the cultural determinants of the respondents' answers.

#### 8. Values Passed on to Children: *What values will you pass on to your children?*

According to a significant number of the younger generation (78% out of 100%), they would pass on a sense of respect for equality to their children. The majority of the middle generation (64% out of 100%) think that they would pass a sense of responsibility to their children. Most of the older generation English and American respondents (62% out of 100%) would pass on to their children respect for traditions.

Most of the older generation Georgian respondents (52% out of 100%) consider respect for parents to be a value they would pass on to their children. The views differ in the responses of the younger, middle, and older generations. The identical answers are confirmed in the responses given by female and male information respondents.

The difference in positions is confirmed by analyzing the responses given by Georgian, English, and American inform respondents.

Thus, the difference in the responses of the young, middle, and older generations indicates that the age variable determines the specificity of the respondents' responses.

The difference in points of view in the responses given by Georgian and American respondents expresses the cultural variable's determination of the respondents' responses.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The questionnaire results provide in-depth information on how people of different genders and cultural backgrounds view families and their values. While older respondents place greater emphasis on tradition, authority, and the importance of family rules, younger respondents are more likely to support freedom, open communication, and modern values such as equality. The findings also show that gender does not significantly influence people's perceptions of family life.

Cultural disparities were most apparent in the questions about parental people in their children's jobs, marital choices, and dispute resolution techniques. Because of the more conventional values shared by family children in Georgian society, Georgian respondents were more inclined to favor parental control and emphasize patience and respect.

The influence of Western individualism and liberal principles is highlighted by the fact that American and English respondents, on the other hand, supported more autonomy for kids in these areas. The results also highlight the fact that family structures and values are dynamic.

## **CONCLUSION**

Data analysis illustrates that there are significant differences in values between generations. Young people are more likely to share the ideas of individualism, autonomy, and equality, while older generations value traditions and authority more. Gender equality and tolerance towards minorities are higher among young people.

When raising children, individualistic cultures emphasize independence and creativity, while collectivist cultures emphasize responsibility and guaranteeing personal desires for group goals. Economic well-being and the media contribute more to the development of individualism.

Young people attach greater importance to children's independence and purposefulness. The majority support the institution of the Family, although some children believe marriage is a waste of time.

In a post-modern society, where a family is no longer a necessary condition for survival, women and men have more freedom, and a family is given less importance. The post-modern worldview emphasizes autonomy and increased individual choice, which is reflected in less sympathy for collectivism and decreased support for mixed values.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

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# The Path of Human Spiritual Development in Georgian *Balavariani*

SULAVA NESTAN, PHD

TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0000-0002-7808-8722](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7808-8722)

### ABSTRACT

One of the most critical issues in hagiography is the presentation of the path of human spiritual development. The writer conducts the narrative while maintaining the compositional integrity of the works, presenting an idealized image of the hagiographic hero through the main plot line and its tributary episodes. An analysis of the plot and compositional structure of the Georgian “Balavariani” shows that the main character, Iodasaf, undergoes a visible spiritual transformation from prince to saint, becoming an ideal hero against the backdrop of other characters in the work. Moreover, the prince, educated by Balavari, is the initiator of the spread of the Christian faith in his kingdom. King Abenes tried to educate the prince with pagan religious teachings, but God guided his future through a different spiritual life, a Christian worldview, and self-awareness. Iodasaph, despite the prohibitions, accepted Christianity and reached the highest level of self-awareness; he was able to convert others to the Christian faith. Of particular significance is the conversion of King Abenes himself. The purpose of the works is the deification of the hagiographic hero who has embarked on the path of sainthood and his transformation into a god-clothed one. The author uses the artistic method of establishing Jodasaph as a saint as a key issue; he himself creates Jodasaph as a saint, employing a hypodigmatic-paradigmatic structure and symbolic-enigmatic facial expressions. The saint of the hagiography, Balahvari in “Balavariani,” and his disciple Jodasaph gradually become clothed with a heavenly image, which is completed by deification and communion with God as a result of their worthy life-work in this world; they achieve citizenship in heaven. The article aims to present the spiritual image and the process of becoming saints of the characters in the Georgian “Wisdom of Balahvari”.

*Keywords:* The Wisdom of Balahvar, iodasaph, abenes, the path of spiritual development, inheritance of the Celestial Kingdom

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the central aspects in determining the literary value of hagiographic works is the depiction of the path of human spiritual development. In this process, the hagiographer constructs the narrative to present the ideal image of the main character – the hagiographic figure – through the primary plotline and ancillary episodes, including the presentation of the hypodigmatic aspects of biblical characters and the paradigmatic interpretation of the episodes, all while maintaining the compositional coherence of the work. Ivane Javakhishvili laid the foundation for studying the phenomenon of the human being in the context of Georgian literature, history, and society in his article *Man in Ancient Georgian Literature and Life*.<sup>1</sup> (Javakhishvili, 1956, pp. 130-155). In this article, he focused primarily on the doctrine of man in historical and literary texts. He presented his socio-ethical ideals, aiming to explore man's purpose as a member of society and as a creator. In defining the nature and essence of hagiography, Korneli Kekelidze noted that it is a product of the ancient literary era, which simultaneously contains theoretical ideas about fiction grounded in the fundamentals of artistic thinking characteristic of the period during which hagiography emerged and flourished. In hagiography, artistic representation assumes a regularized form (Kekelidze, 1960, pp. 500–503). This observation can be extended not only to Georgian literature but also to the entire genre of Christian literature in general, including hagiography, as it is not a phenomenon unique to Georgian tradition. A hagiographer creates an idealized character from an evaluative perspective and presents him as possessing the qualities of a saint. According to Revaz Siradze, hagiography, as an anthropological category, is a form of writing that describes the ideal human of its time. When hagiography created and shaped a new ideal of a human being, it faced two tasks: to overshadow earlier (mythological) figures and to incorporate the characteristics of prominent personalities from antiquity (Siradze, 1975, p. 102). The saint in hagiography develops gradually, undergoing spiritual growth; in this way, he is portrayed dynamically, which distinguishes him not only as a divine figure but also as an aesthetic one.

An analysis of the plot development and compositional structure of the Georgian version of *The Wisdom of Balahvard demonstrates that the central figure, Iodasaph, undergoes a spiritual transformation that is manifest to the reader, from prince to saint, and ultimately emerges as the ideal character in contrast to the other figures within the narrative* – moreover, the prince, educated by Balahvar, initiates the dissemination of Christianity in his kingdom. *The Wisdom of Balahvar also demonstrates its affinity with works of a distinct compositional genre through its depiction of a childless king's story; in this regard, it invites comparison with Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani's A Book of Wisdom and Lies, which shares both similarities and divergences, though this topic warrants separate discussion. It should be noted that The Wisdom of Balahvar has not yet been the subject of a dedicated scholarly*

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1 Ivane Javakhishvili made a significant contribution to the study of the phenomenon of man, being the first to discuss man in ancient Georgian literature and life, based on historical and hagiographic works in his article *Man in Ancient Georgian Literature and Life*. When classifying issues, he identified three main problems: 1. The doctrine of man; 2. The socio-ethical ideals of man; 3. Man as a creator. In each of the works discussed, man is presented through different fields of anthropology.

study from an artistic and figurative perspective. However, some scholars have offered isolated commentaries on specific episodes or characters.

One of the main characters of *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, King Abenes – who, after prolonged prayers and supplications, was granted a son by God, thereby emerging as a hypodigmatic figure in Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's *A Book of Wisdom and Lies* – attempted to raise the prince according to ancient religious beliefs and teachings. However, divine providence ordained otherwise, guiding the prince's future along a completely different spiritual path shaped by a Christian worldview, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. Despite his father's opposition, Iodasaph embraced Christianity, achieving the highest degree of spiritual self-awareness and converting others to the Christian faith. Of particular significance was his conversion of his father, King Abenes himself – an achievement made possible through Iodasaph's tremendous effort, relentless struggle, faith, hope, and profound devotion to God. This event also carries symbolic weight, as the work reflects different generational perspectives, and the triumph of the new generation is perceived as the victory of the new religion.

Georgian and Byzantine hagiographies exhibit differences and similarities in their specific hagiographic features (Kekelidze, 1960, pp. 501–505; Siradze, 1987, pp. 5–21). In particular, Byzantine hagiography lacks a national phenomenon, due to a lack of a sense of nationality – a defining characteristic of the multi-ethnic imperial state. In Byzantium, national ideas and the state ideology failed to align; instead, they remained distinct. The Byzantine Empire's state status and collective consciousness shaped the perspectives of its ruling elites and citizens, resulting in the absence of national themes in its hagiography. By contrast, Georgian hagiography was deeply influenced by national literary traditions that must have been strong in the pre-Christian era, playing a major role. This contributed to the development of original Georgian hagiographic literature that was essentially new and distinct from its Byzantine counterpart. In scholarly literature, it has frequently been noted that fiction occupies a substantial place in Byzantine hagiography, characterized by rich figurative language and a diversity of artistic-expressive methods – a feature also present in Georgian hagiography. This abundance of fictional elements in Georgian hagiography contributes to its resemblance to Byzantine hagiography. Georgian hagiographic literature is rightfully regarded as a rich corpus of exemplary works within the Georgian literary tradition, reflecting pivotal events central to Christianity. This attests to the spiritual and intellectual maturity, cultural sophistication, and capabilities of the Georgian nation. Against this backdrop, *The Wisdom of Balahvar* exhibits tendencies distinct from Georgian hagiography, instead following the trajectory established in Byzantine hagiographic writing. It does not engage with national themes, a feature determined by the work's origin: it is considered a Christianized adaptation of the Buddha's life. In this context, the author's national stance is neither observed nor anticipated; rather, the focus lies on the author's concept of the ascetic Christian life. The primary concern is the protagonist's spiritual transformation – emulating the Savior, walking in His footsteps as a saint, witnessing the journey of Christ's Passion, restoring the original image of Adam (fallen through sin), and striving to elevate the fallen Adam – an endeavor achievable only through divine will.

The work's ultimate purpose is the deification of the hagiographic protagonist, who embarks on the path of sainthood and is transfigured into a God-bearing figure. This journey toward this goal is arduous, requiring traversing with physical suffering while embracing Christian joy. Through this process, the saint – adorned with the typical artistic traits of a hagiographic character and drawing near to the Savior – transforms worldly attributes into reflections of the divine. The author focuses on the artistic method of shaping Iodasaph as a saint, making it clear that he is the architect of Iodasaph's sainthood. To achieve this, he employs various literary techniques and expressive means, with the hypodigmatic-paradigmatic structure and the symbolic-enigmatic expression playing central roles. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians defines the relationship between the symbolic images of Adam and the Savior, stating that "the first man," Adam, made of dust, bears a physical, earthly image after the Fall. In contrast, the Savior, "the second man," embodies the heavenly image. Every human is clothed in the essence of this world, and must also be clothed with the image of the heavenly: "*The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*" (1 Cor. 15:47). In the hagiographic narrative, Balahvar from *Balavariani* and his disciple Iodasaph gradually take on the semblance of the sacred – a transformation culminating in deification and communion with God, following their virtuous lives and deeds in this world. They are depicted as heirs to the Celestial Kingdom.

## **METHODS**

This article employs multidisciplinary research methods – primarily historical-comparative, analytical, hermeneutic, and those grounded in source studies – to present the process by which the hagiographic figure is transformed into a God-bearing figure on the path to sainthood. The study applies the fundamental characteristics of scientific thought, each assigned particular significance – on the one hand, to examine the general artistic image of the hagiographic character, and on the other, to position the hagiographic figure as the central character within the context of Georgian scientific and literary-artistic thought, as well as world literature.

## **RESULTS**

The study elucidates the arduous path of human spiritual development depicted in the work, wherein the hagiographer constructs the narrative through a central plotline and supplementary episodes – including the retelling of biblical passages – while preserving the compositional integrity of the text. The aim is to present the idealized image of the central figure – the hagiographic protagonist. An analysis of the plot development and compositional structure of the Georgian version of the text reveals that the main character, Iodasaph, undergoes a spiritual transformation before the reader's eyes, evolving from a prince into a saint, and emerges as an ideal figure in contrast to the other characters in the work. Furthermore, the prince, under Balahvar's guidance, emerges as a pivotal figure in

the propagation of Christianity within his kingdom.

The study has also revealed that *The Wisdom of Balahvar* exhibits parallels with works of a compositionally distinct genre through its depiction of the narrative of a childless king. King Abenes endeavored to raise his son in accordance with ancient religious beliefs and teachings; however, divine providence intervened, redirecting the prince's future toward a distinct spiritual path grounded in the Christian worldview and self-awareness. Despite prohibitions, Iodasaph embraced Christianity, attaining the highest degree of spiritual self-awareness, and succeeded in converting others to the Christian faith. Of particular significance was his conversion of his father, King Abenes himself – an achievement made possible through Iodasaph's tireless effort and relentless struggle.

Unlike Georgian hagiography, Byzantine hagiography lacks a national dimension, which can be attributed to an absence of national identity characteristic of Byzantium as a multi-ethnic state, where national identity and state ideology failed to coincide. Byzantine hagiography is characterized by a significant presence of fictional elements and is rich in figurative language and artistic-expressive techniques – a feature also present in Georgian hagiography. It is important to emphasize that Georgian hagiography strongly emphasizes national identity. Against this backdrop, *The Wisdom of Balahvar* demonstrates tendencies that diverge from those typical of Georgian hagiographic tradition, aligning instead with the conventions of Byzantine hagiography. It fails to address the national motif – an aspect determined by the work's origin, as it is a Christianized version of the Buddha's life. The author's concept of Christian asceticism occupies a central position in the text, with primary emphasis on the spiritual transformation of the protagonist, emulating the Savior, the saint's following in Christ's footsteps, the testimony of Christ's passion, the restoration of Adam's primordial state lost through sin, and striving to elevate the fallen Adam. Accordingly, Balahvar from *Balavariani* and his disciple Iodasaph gradually took on the semblance of the sacred, culminating in deification and communion with God. Following their dignified lives and deeds in this world, they are portrayed as having attained heirship to the Celestial Kingdom.

## **PURPOSE**

The article aims to explore the spiritual imagery of the characters in the Georgian Balavariani (*The Wisdom of Balahvar*) and to trace the process of their formation as saints. The aim of the work itself is to depict the deification of the hagiographic protagonist through the transformative journey of sainthood and his emergence as a God-bearing figure. This journey is arduous, involving physical suffering embraced with Christian joy, through which the saint, adorned with the typical artistic traits of the hagiographic character and drawing near to the Savior, transforms worldly qualities into ones that reflect the divine.

## DISCUSSION

The central theme of *The Wisdom of Balahvar* is the upbringing of the character's spiritual successor – made evident by the title of the work itself – and the character's spiritual growth through the teaching and transmission of divine wisdom, ultimately revealing a figure elevated above all worldly concerns. Typically, hagiographic works center on individuals endowed with the highest spiritual qualities – figures marked by divine perfection and completeness – who approach or attain the inner nature of a moral person, the ideal of humaneness<sup>1</sup>. What constitutes the ideal human or humaneness? This fundamental question necessitates an anthropological inquiry, theoretically grounded in biblical, particularly psalmic, and evangelical-apostolic teachings. It is noteworthy that “Martyrdom” and “Life” genres offer differing portrayals of the ideal human being/humaneness, the image of a moral person: “Martyrdoms” depict singular episodes of suffering culminating in death, whereas “Lives” portray the merits accomplished by a saint in this world, i.e., a saint's earthly virtues and accomplishments. Yet, neither the lives portrayed in “Martyrdoms” culminating in death, nor the virtuous lives depicted in “Lives” can be regarded as perfect or complete, since true fulfillment lies in the inheritance of the Celestial Kingdom.

Recent studies suggest that the work possesses a missionary character. Elguja Khintibidze, in particular, argues that “The fact that *Barlaam-Roman* is a work created for missionary purposes is confirmed not only by the narrative part of the work (i.e., the compelling story of a young king converting his country to Christianity), the denunciation of paganism, and the defense of Christianity, but also by the author's reworking of the original text (i.e., the Georgian *Balavariani*). This reworking follows the metaphrastic principle, i.e., the enrichment of the hagiographic text with additional passages” (Khintibidze, 2024, p. 15; see also Khintibidze, 1982, pp. 155–163).

*The Wisdom of Balahvar* begins with the depiction of an old-generation king, which, in my view, simultaneously reflects the image of the country itself. Taken together, these elements provide the basis for examining the text from a multidisciplinary perspective. Taken together, these features open the way for the text to be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective. The extended and short versions of the text portray King Abenes differently. The extended version states that in India, in Sholoti, a pagan and idolatrous king, Abenes, reigned, terrifying and dangerous to all. He is presented as the enemy of Christ's servants and ruled over a vast kingdom inhabited by countless people. Abenes, a conqueror of enemies, is described as relaxed and arrogant, and as pleasing in appearance. In contrast, the short version presents Abenes as calm, humble, and deeply merciful toward the poor<sup>2</sup>, introducing him through his positive qualities. Notably, later, even in the extend-

1 On the spiritual image of a saint, see: G. Parulava, *On the Nature of Artistic Imagery in Ancient Georgian Prose*, Tbilisi, 1982; L. Grigolashvili, *The Theme of the Saint in Georgian Clerical Poetry// Problems of Ancient Georgian Literature* (dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the birth of Professor Levan Menabde), Tbilisi; N. Sulava, *On the Nature of a Spiritual Image in Hagiography and Hymnography// The Time of Sacrifice in the Georgian Language*, Tbilisi, 2018, pp. 65–78.

2 The divergent portrayals of Abenes in the extended and short versions of *The Wisdom of Balahvar* warrant a separate study, which could offer further insight into the origins of the respective editions.

ed version, Abenes is depicted as merciful – though initially only toward pagans. The work presents the spiritual transformation of Abenes, ultimately culminating in his conversion to Christianity. This transformation acquires special significance as an illustration of personal spiritual growth, depicting a man who embarks on a path of truth-seeking late in life. In fact, he initially stands in stark contrast to the figure of the Good Shepherd. Eventually, he gains spiritual insight and repents his foolish behavior – living in pleasure and caring only for worldly glory. Before his death, he laments not having had sufficient time to repent and perform good deeds. His sorrow over entering the path of the truth so late is expressed through the metaphor of the parable of the Prodigal Son: “I was lost, and You sought me; I was bound, and You freed me; for I was an enemy, and You gave me shelter” ([The Wisdom of Balahvar, 1957b, p. 154](#)). Shortly before his death, the king – having achieved profound Christian awareness – instructs his son so that the allure of temporal royal glory would not cause him to forget his love for Christianity and his pursuit of eternity ([The Wisdom of Balahvar, 1957, p. 154](#)). Iodasaph compares Abenes, who converted to Christianity late in life, to the “eleventh-hour worker,” whom the Lord honors equally alongside the others, thereby affirming the evangelical teaching that repentance and entering the path of God are never too late. The king also asks Iodasaph to distribute his wealth to the poor and needy, hoping that his soul might be saved through good deeds. In this way, the work presents the spiritual growth and artistic transformation of the once-wrathful Abenes as a merciful Christian who earned the crown of eternal inheritance in the next world.

In *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, the concept of human spiritual growth occupies a central place. The narrative features characters with diverse traits – King Abenes, Prince Iodasaph, Tutor Balahvar, Zandan the Trainer, among others – but places particular emphasis on three key figures, with Prince Iodasaph standing out prominently. Regarding him, the text states: “He [King Abenes] had a son, and there had never been born a son as remarkably handsome as him in those times” ([The Wisdom of Balahvar, 1957a, p. 9](#)). According to the work’s conceptual vision, King Abenes was granted a son by God. He credited the idols with this mercy and expressed his gratitude to them. Notably, Iodasaph entered the narrative as a “promised son,” and accordingly, his future as the chosen one was determined by divine providence. The pagan king summoned astrologers and prophets to foresee the fate of his only son. They revealed the son’s future to Abenes, but the prophecy was far from pleasing; in fact, it became a source of profound sorrow for the king. The king was informed that the prince would attain royal glory unmatched by anyone in the land. At first glance, such a prophecy should have seemed favorable; however, the wisest and most trustworthy man foretold that this royal glory would be unearthly – signifying true leadership along the Christian path. This deeply disturbed the king and led him to make a drastic, misguided decision: to prevent communion with the Christian faith, he expelled all Christians from his country. He confined the prince in a separate city so that the prophecy would not be fulfilled. In fact, he defied divine providence, ordering the construction of a separate city for the prince, where his son would be raised in complete isolation, cut off from the outside world. It was necessary to find a tutor responsible for the prince’s comprehensive upbringing. Balahvar was chosen for this role because he stood out at the royal court for his exceptional wisdom and was capable of providing the prince with the necessary instruction. However, according to

the shorter version of the text, the king, unable to persuade the Christian advisor to accept idolatry, expelled him from the kingdom. Balahvar abandoned everything – he refused to renounce his Christian faith for material gain. Here, the theme of the struggle for faith – specifically Christianity – emerges. It can be argued that Balahvar’s symbolic renunciation of worldly glory is expressed through a powerful gesture: removing a golden belt adorned with precious stones in the presence of the king (*The Wisdom of Balahvar*, 1957b, p. 16). His words further affirm the strength of his conviction – his resolve remains unshaken, not even the offer of the royal crown from Abenes.

In the extended version, following this episode, Balahvar – who has escaped death – is no longer present at the royal court. Through this act, the nature of King Abenes as a human being is revealed: he appears incapable of recognizing the truth or demonstrating foresight. He lives within the temporal and spatial confines of idolatry, and his spiritual future hinges entirely on the Christianization of his son. To be fair, Abenes is also portrayed by the author from the perspective of a loving father – a man who seeks to protect his son from temptation, pain, and illness, and to raise him as a strong, free, and independent individual; a future king capable of governance, care for his people, and discernment between good and evil in the earthly life. It is here that Abenes errs: the king’s son was to be raised in a specially constructed city, far removed from the royal court. According to his father’s instructions, he would remain ignorant of the truth. Specifically, he would not know what death, illness, old age, youth, eternity, sin, poverty, or, more generally, the hardships and adversities of life were. Abenes removed Iodasaph from all worldly trials, believing he was acting in the prince’s best interest – that the prince should live in joy and comfort, without developing a desire to inquire into the nature of earthly life or, later, to take an interest in the Christian faith. This is a flawed decision from the outset, as the truth would inevitably come to light. The king places himself in opposition to God, divine providence, and the Christian community. He attempts to assert his will over life and defy destiny – an ultimately futile endeavor. This is precisely how the narrative unfolds in *The Wisdom of Balahvar*. None of the king’s courtiers, fearing his anticipated wrath, dares to advise or warn him that shielding the prince from the realities of earthly life would serve no purpose in preparing him to rule as a future king. Balahvar, however, understood this. That is why, at the appropriate moment, he appeared before the prince as a tutor to guide him toward spiritual awakening. What ultimately proved decisive in challenging the king’s decision was the inquisitive spirit of the king’s son himself. Despite the king’s efforts, the prince comes to understand the inevitability and necessity of death, as well as the burden of hardship and illness. This experience profoundly transforms his previously acquired understanding of God, the universe, earthly life, and the human being, awakening in him a desire to comprehend the essence and meaning of worldly life. In time, the king reflects and acknowledges his error: he had failed to expose his son – the heir to the throne – to both the joys and sufferings of life. As he later concedes: “Had I allowed you to face trials and to taste the bitter alongside the sweet, you would not be ignorant of the bitterness of suffering and the sweetness of life. But now, you are unaware of the sweetness of this life, for you have never known the bitterness

of the life you now seek.” ([The Wisdom of Balahvar, 1957a, p. 103](#))<sup>1</sup>.

In *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, it is stated that the king ostensibly ensured his son received all the knowledge necessary for kingship. However, it appears that Iodasaph did not receive a complete education from his tutor, Zandan/Zadan. The instruction he received was limited in scope, failing to address the transience and complexity of earthly life. Only by facing both the appealing and the challenging aspects of earthly life did the prince begin to critically examine worldly concerns, question his core values, and subsequently pose exploratory questions to his tutor, ultimately compelling the latter to reveal the truth. The knowledge acquired within a confined and isolated environment proved insufficient to satisfy the prince’s curiosity and spiritual needs. Iodasaph proved to be an intelligent and spiritually inclined figure whose expanding consciousness and yearning for spirituality collided with the realities of earthly life. This tension transformed his spiritual outlook and enabled him to perceive reality, the earthly life, and its underlying principles in an entirely new light. It also set the stage for deeper comprehension. Troubled and distressed, Iodasaph came to recognize the necessity of acquiring soul-nourishing wisdom – knowledge beneficial to the soul – which had been inaccessible to him in isolation but attainable with the help of Balahvar, who had secretly reached the prince. According to versions of *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, Balahvar – having learned of the prince’s desire for spiritual knowledge – began secretly visiting Iodasaph in the guise of a merchant to instruct him. In this way, despite the king’s efforts to prevent it, the prophecy was fulfilled. The Christian-minded educator, Balahvar, is portrayed as a wise man who gained experience through travelling. His biography is neither included in the text nor necessary, as the narrative centers on the prince’s transition to Christian consciousness, his spiritual ascension, and his aspiration to inherit the Celestial Kingdom. By the time Iodasaph met the teacher from a foreign land, he had already reached adulthood. This detail signals his entry into a new phase of life, wherein he is prepared to deepen his understanding and explore the essence of God and the universe.

Balahvar tested Iodasaph’s intelligence before beginning to teach him divine wisdom. He conveyed to the prince various perspectives regarding the Christian God and the nature and essence of earthly life. As a result, the prince came to comprehend the world in both its positive and negative aspects. Through Balahvar, he acquired divine wisdom, along with Christian beliefs and knowledge. According to the text, Balahvar’s pedagogical method was rooted in theoretical parables and admonitions, which are reflected in the work in accordance with the understanding of biblical rhetoric and exegetical literature. In contrast, the transmission of biblical knowledge to the king’s son through biblical texts opens up perspectives for the hermeneutical study of the composition. Moreover, the transmission of biblical knowledge to the king’s son through biblical texts themselves establishes avenues for the hermeneutical study of the work. He explained the nature of earthly life and worldly

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<sup>1</sup> In general, the symbolic interpretation of the binary opposition between *sweet* and *bitter* is interpreted in line with philosophical and theological teachings. It also permeates fictional literature and acts as a conceptual artistic-expressive device, and an ideological-worldview construct. Accordingly, the symbolism of *sweet* and *bitter* is found not only in theological literature – particularly in hagiographic literature – but also in secular works; as an example, we can cite the following aphorism from *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*: “He finds the sweet turns bitter: better what is hard-won”.

temptations, helped Iodasaph understand how earthly life entices human beings, and identified those who express affection for it. Balahvar instructed Iodasaph to avoid temptation and guided him toward an understanding of divine wisdom. Iodasaph is portrayed as highly intelligent, inquisitive, and deeply appreciative of wisdom. Despite his profound respect for his father, he did not comply with the king's intention to raise him in isolation and shield him from awareness of the world's good and evil. He came to understand the rationale behind his isolation. Ultimately, Iodasaph proved to be wiser than his father, for unlike the king, he received from Balahvar the wisdom that the king had sought to suppress. This wisdom, grounded in Christian doctrine and belief, guided the human mind and spirit toward the knowledge of the truth. Iodasaph demonstrated the knowledge he had acquired from Balahvar at the royal court, where the king tested his son's newly gained understanding through a series of questions and answers. In his debate with the king and Rakhis, Iodasaph defended his position by drawing on the knowledge imparted by Balahvar; he upheld the Christian faith, which entailed renouncing the pleasures of earthly life. It is noteworthy that within the narrative, the characters are mindful of the "time to speak." More broadly, the understanding of the appropriate "time to speak" is essential to human life, as it ensures the accurate and constructive reception of what is communicated. Significantly, in *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, the king accepted the truth spoken at the appropriate moment and came to recognize the falsehood of his own prior beliefs ([The Wisdom of Balahvar, 1957, p. 49](#)).

*The Wisdom of Balahvar* explores the theme of spiritual testing, a motif rooted in ancient mythologies, classical literary traditions, and philosophical teachings, which also resonates in later literary works. In the narrative, Abenes subjects his advisor to a test of loyalty. Similarly, Balahvar tests Iodasaph's intelligence to determine his readiness to receive divine wisdom. Later, the prince – already educated in Christian doctrine – is himself subjected to testing by the king and his advisor, Rakhis. In one of Balahvar's parables on wisdom, a bird tests a man's adherence to three previously imparted commandments. Particularly noteworthy in *Balavariani* is the court of justice convened by the king and Iodasaph, wherein two faiths are debated in an attempt to reveal the truth<sup>1</sup>. For Iodasaph, this event constitutes a test of his religious conviction. Abenes is ultimately left disappointed, as no compelling arguments are presented in defense of idolatry and fire worship, leading him to question their essence and truth. The prince also tests Zandan the Trainer by deliberately exposing him to Balahvar's teachings on the vanity of earthly life, while feigning disagreement, to assess Zandan's attitude and understanding of Balahvar's wisdom. Zandan, however, fully perceives the situation and recognizes that "the time has come" for him to embark on his spiritual journey, revealing his previously acquired knowledge of Christianity. Iodasaph's resolve is further tested when the king, following the advice of the idolater Thedma, appoints beautiful women as his servants in an attempt to seduce him and draw him toward worldly pleasures. Iodasaph, however, resists temptation and expels from the palace all who seek to seduce or distract him ([cf. Kekelidze, 1945, pp. 13–22](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> In Georgian hagiography, among various religions, the spiritual quest of St. Eustathius of Mtskheta and St. Abo is complemented by the inquisitive spirit of St. Iodasaph.

The narrative depicts Iodasaph's gradual spiritual growth. One illustrative episode is his discussion with the king, in which he advises his father to consider what is "the best" for his soul. The prince, having already discovered "the best" through the wisdom imparted by Balahvar, seeks to guide his father toward the truth. Abenes, however, struggles to comprehend why one cannot "serve two masters." The entire narrative of *The Wisdom of Balahvar* is imbued with the assertion of the futility of earthly life and the necessity of striving toward eternal life, which the author presents as humanity's sole path to salvation. This is why Western scholarly literature refers to *The Wisdom of Balahvar* and its Greek version, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, as "a story beneficial to the soul" (Kekelidze, 1960, p. 188; Kaukhchishvili, 1973, pp. 224–236)<sup>1</sup>. The prince declares that earthly happiness and existence are meaningless to those who know eternal glory (Balavariani, 1957, p. 51).

A question arises: what must a king know to govern a country – a state – more effectively? What distinguishes a good king from a bad one? A king cannot be raised solely in luxury and abundance, detached from the everyday realities of his subjects – the people. A king must experience and comprehend both the positive and negative aspects of earthly life – knowing and feeling good and evil, sweetness and bitterness. This was what Iodasaph lacked during his period of seclusion. Merely living in comfort and acquiring wisdom was insufficient. Abenes believed he had taught the prince what was most necessary for kingship; however, he failed to impart the essential wisdom without which the king cannot become a just and virtuous ruler of his state and his people.

What does Balahvar teach Iodasaph in this regard? According to the text, Balahvar instructs the prince in divine wisdom: (Balavariani, 1957a, p. 64). He teaches: "Likewise, a wise man should examine himself in all his deeds and desires, and then judge for himself with his mind what is just, what is good to choose, and what is fitting in its season." A wise man must "drive away evil with knowledge"; he "loves wisdom and humility, for through wisdom man attains the good commandments of God, whereas through folly many souls perish. For the foundation of all strength is the fear of the Lord and the keeping of His ways" (Balavariani 1957a, p. 64). This teaching reflects biblical wisdom which can be attained only by a person specially prepared – one filled with spirituality and educated in divine wisdom. According to the work, Balahvar guides the prince in several directions, emphasizing that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom – an idea rooted in biblical tradition: "Likewise, a wise man must teach himself, just as a good shepherd teaches his flock. And the fear of God must always and forever be in his thoughts, for the Psalmist says: The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that practise it" (Balavariani b, 1957, p. 64). Balahvar acknowledges that divine wisdom and knowledge cannot be imparted to everyone; most people are not prepared to receive it. They are incapable of comprehending God's commandments and are instead inclined to transgress them, substituting divine truths with human inventions. As an example, Balahvar refers to the persecution of Christians and the dominance of idolatry in the kingdom

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1 Simon Kaukhchishvili has attested to the lemmas used in the Greek translation of the work, in which *Barlaam and Ioasaph* is referred to as "a story beneficial to the soul" (Kaukhchishvili, 1973, pp. 224–236).

of Abenes. This is vividly illustrated in the parable he shares with Iodasaph – “*The Bird and the Man*” – a story rich in symbolic meaning. In exchange for its freedom, the bird promises to teach the man three applicable commandments, the observance of which would bring him benefit in life: “*Do not seek the unattainable, do not regret the past, and do not believe in what is not*” (Balavariani 1957a, p. 58). The fact that a bird delivers this wisdom is itself significant, as birds are traditionally viewed as symbols of freedom, spiritual life, and independent decision-making. A person must be inwardly prepared to receive divine wisdom and to cultivate it further. One may teach a person many things, but if he is not receptive, the effort will be in vain. In this context, Prince Iodasaph is depicted as a fruit that will inevitably multiply spiritually (cf. Luke 6:43–44).

“Full of the Holy Spirit and all wisdom,” Balahvar also cherished earthly life. However, following the Christian worldview, he came to understand that no one remains in this world forever – “Neither great nor small, neither strong nor weak, neither wise nor foolish” (Balavariani 1957b, p. 62). Like many before him, he would one day depart from this life. All earthly wealth is fleeting; only the fear of God can deliver a person from eternal punishment. Consequently, Balahvar chose to restrict his own will and desires, cultivating within himself the fear of God in order to avoid falling into worldly anxiety – a struggle in which divine guidance sustained him.

Balahvar is entrusted with introducing new wisdom to the royal court. Disguised as a merchant, he risked his own life as he gained access to Iodasaph to train him and teach him divine wisdom. In the short version of the text, the knowledge he conveys is described as “*tuali patiosani*” (“the precious stone”)<sup>1</sup>, while in the extended version, it is referred to as “the vessel of great value”. Symbolically, both terms – “*tuali patiosani*” and “the vessel” – represent concealed Christian teaching accessible only to a select few. According to Balahvar, only a person with a discerning eye and purity of body can perceive this wisdom. Only the chosen are capable of “seeing” or comprehending the wisdom imparted by Balahvar, as exemplified by Iodasaph: “I have heard that the son of the king has become the chosen one and has lived a holy life, free from all evil” (Balavariani 1957, p. 29). Therefore, Balahvar hoped that Iodasaph would be able to “see the vessel” (Balavariani 1957, p. 29).

The wisdom sought and received by man is likened to a “pearl of great value” (Balavariani A 1957, p. 46). According to Balahvar, wisdom is manifested in various forms, as he distinguishes between apparent and concealed knowledge<sup>2</sup>, both of which he imparts to

1 A parallel of “*tuali patiosani*” of *The Wisdom of Balahvar* is found in Bivril/Bivrit from *The Conversion of Kartli*, who survives the destruction of the Armaz idol and symbolically acquires the meaning of Christian wisdom.

2 It has long been observed in scholarly literature that the work is familiar with the views of St. John of Damascus, including those regarding wisdom articulated in *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (John of Damascus, 1977, 52:6). Among more recent studies, one may mention the work of Irma Makaradze, who cites R. Folke’s position regarding the Greek translation of the text: namely, that passages from the writings of John of Damascus are quoted both accurately and extensively, though with certain minimal theological modifications, as well as occasional minor additions or omissions from the cited material. It should also be noted that in the Greek text, the quotations from St. John of Damascus are particularly emphasized (Makaradze, 2024, p. 34).

Iodasaph. Iodasaph is portrayed as God's chosen one, who never reproached his strict educator and was able to "see" and grasp the wisdom conveyed to him – a privilege not granted to all. For instance, Zandan, despite understanding the essence of divine wisdom, feared the king more than he revered the true God. Balahvar asserts that "a wise man must teach himself, just like a good leader teaches his people, guiding their actions with humility, alleviating their burdens, and thereafter honoring those who obey." (Balavariani 1957a, p. 64). *The Wisdom of Balahvar* is meant for an ideal individual – not for the "weak-minded person," but for one who is "full of mind" (Balavariani 1957a, p. 30). To cultivate spiritual growth and acquire wisdom, a person must be prepared, for not everyone has the strength to do so. Balahvar tells Iodasaph the Gospel parable of the sower (Matthew 13:44), illustrating the teaching of wisdom and the transmission of the true word. The purpose was to teach that only the seed that falls on fertile soil can bear fruit and multiply, meaning that true wisdom can be attained by an individual who, through the unity of eye, heart, and mind, has conquered desire, purified themselves of passions, and brought forth good fruit.<sup>1</sup>

The enthroned Iodasaph became the embodiment of the paradigm of a good shepherd and king. He became a ruler loved by all. The nation admired him for his wisdom, justice, kindness, mercy, and humaneness. Many people left the kingdom of Abenes to reside in the prince's domain. Observing this, the fearful king granted his son control over his part of the country. The people refused to allow Iodasaph to relinquish the throne. When he departed from the kingdom, the nation followed him, like sheep without a shepherd. They mourned deeply until nightfall, much like children grieving for a father (Balavariani 1957a, p. 165)<sup>2</sup>. In turn, Iodasaph, from the perspective of a good shepherd, imparted wise instructions to Barakhya, who was preparing to ascend the throne. He taught him how to govern the kingdom with dignity, encouraging him to emulate the qualities of a good shepherd. Eventually, Iodasaph relinquished the royal throne to pursue a monastic life. Balahvar tested Iodasaph, and the latter realized that the "tuali" mentioned by his tutor was not material, but rather a "word" that would bring him spiritual benefit. Balahvar conveyed knowledge "beneficial to the soul" to the prince through parables, explaining the content and symbolic meaning at the end of each one. Like Balahvar, Iodasaph imparted advice "beneficial to the soul" to Barakhya, the future king of India.

Iodasaph proved to be the prince who could renounce worldly luxury and glory, finding contentment even in little things, driven by a desire for spiritual nourishment. Therefore, from the outset, he wished to follow Balahvar and live among the monks; however, the sage did not consider him ready for this. In his view, a person raised in luxury and never exposed to poverty may easily go astray. Nonetheless, Iodasaph's resolve remained steadfast. His path of spiritual development proved challenging, as he first had to rule the kingdom – his father granted him half of it to govern. Abenes, though unwilling, was compelled to cede

1 The Gospel parable of the sower is interpreted in the exegetical work of St. John Chrysostom, *Translation of the Gospel of Matthew* (John Chrysostom, 1998, pp. 16–18).

2 A parallel to this episode appears in the account of Queen Shushanik's confinement in Iakob Khutsesi's *Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik*, when the martyred queen is accompanied by people weeping and lamenting – a hypodigmatic image of the Gospel account of Jesus Christ's journey to Golgotha, where He was likewise accompanied by those who shared His faith.

half the kingdom to his son to prevent him from retreating to the desert to become a monk. The heir to the Indian throne agreed to rule only temporarily, for his father's sake. The prince determined the kingdom's future, along with the well-being of its people and land. Accordingly, the heir seeking divine wisdom became a harbinger of spiritual progress. From Iodasaph's words in *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, it is evident that he comprehended the true duty of a king: "None should be so zealous as a king to walk in righteousness, for it is his duty to shepherd his people in safety and mercy" (Balavariani 1957b, p. 136). Iodasaph began his reign by distributing alms from his wealth to the poor. His primary goal was to perform good deeds and to deliver his people from both spiritual and physical suffering. His spiritual care manifested itself in the dissemination of Christianity; he ensured that his principalities and territories ruled by eristaviselected a worthy bishop, the latter being entrusted to shepherd the flock with righteousness, dignity, and "judgment of righteousness."

*The Wisdom of Balahvar* aims to instill a morality rooted in Christianity, illustrating the Christianization of a pagan nation through the figures of Balahvar and Iodasaph. Iodasaph first encountered teachings on the nature of earthly and eternal life from Zandan the Trainer and later from Balahvar, who was enlightened by Christian wisdom. Balahvar conveyed biblical teachings to his disciple through parables, elucidating symbols that profoundly transformed the prince's worldview and steering him away from the idolatrous path of his father. Ultimately, Iodasaph converted the entire Indian country to Christianity. From this foundation emerged Iodasaph, characterized by wisdom and intellect, who altered the spiritual future of the whole nation. The parable narrated by Balahvar about the king and his loyal companion imparts an understanding of Christianity and its adherents, who "tested this earthly life and discovered that all its splendor was transient" (Balavariani 1957a, p. 51).

*The Wisdom of Balahvar* emphasizes the futility of earthly life and the necessity of turning towards eternal life, which, according to the author, is the sole salvation for humanity. Iodasaph embraced this worldview and ultimately withdrew to the desert as a monk. The desert holds symbolic significance as a place of spiritual testing and transformation,<sup>1</sup> fostering the individual's spiritual formation and preparing them for the attainment of the higher realm – the Celestial Kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the Georgian redaction of *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, it can be concluded that the work demonstrates compositional affinities with texts of other literary genres through the inclusion of the motif of a childless king, embodied in the figure of King Abenes. The central message of *The Wisdom of Balahvar* is the spiritual development of the human being, a path that involves immense difficulty. The main character, Iodasaph, undergoes a profound spiritual transformation before the reader's eyes, evolving from a prince

1 There exists a substantial body of scholarly literature on the activities of clergy in the desert. Noteworthy among these are Grigol Peradze's *The Beginning of Monasticism in Georgia* (Peradze, 2006, pp. 51–56), Revaz Siradze's *Georgian Hagiography – The Image of Giorgi Merchule* (Siradze, 1987), and others.

into a saint and ultimately forming the image of an ideal hero. King Abenes attempted to raise the prince according to ancient religious doctrines and teachings, but God ordained otherwise. Despite all prohibitions, Ioasaph came into contact with the Christian faith and attained the highest level of self-awareness: he succeeded in converting others to Christianity, most notably his own father. Moreover, it can be said that the prince, instructed by Balahvar, emerged as the initiator of the spread of Christian doctrine within his kingdom.

Significantly, *The Wisdom of Balahvar* reveals tendencies that differ from those of Georgian hagiography, instead following the path shaped by Byzantine hagiographic literature, in which national identity is not emphasized. This contrasts sharply with Georgian hagiography, where the national element plays a crucial role. This difference is primarily determined by the work's origin, which explains why the author's concept of the Christian ascetic life occupies a central place. The essential focus lies in the spiritual transformation of the character, which the author achieves by depicting the protagonists as citizens of the heavenly realm.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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# Aspects of the Contemporary Georgian Novel (Temur Babluani’s “The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread (Manushaka Awaits Me)”)

JALIAHVILI MAIA, PHD

SHOTA RUSTAVELI INSTITUTE OF GEORGIAN LITERATURE,

GEORGIAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (GAU)

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0000-0001-6220-3696](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6220-3696)

## ABSTRACT

Temur Babluani’s novel, “The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread,” explores the complexities of human existence through the picaresque journey of Jude Andronikashvili. Set against the backdrop of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, the narrative follows Jude’s tumultuous life, marked by hardship, injustice, and encounters with diverse characters. The novel delves into themes of love, loss, and the search for meaning in a world often defined by cruelty and moral ambiguity. Jude’s resilience and capacity for love, particularly his enduring connection with Manushaka, serve as a testament to the enduring power of human connection amidst adversity. Babluani’s work offers a poignant reflection on the human condition, blending elements of adventure, social commentary, and philosophical inquiry.

*Keywords:* Temur Babluani, journey, Georgian novel, love, society

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important paradigms in world literature is the journey, which equally captivates and leads the biblical prodigal son, Homer's Odysseus, Cervantes' Don Quixote, Joyce's Leopold Bloom, and many others from home with different purposes and desires. Love, in its diverse and ever-changing manifestations, is the path by which people return home: this "home" is a palimpsestic symbol. "Home" is also oneself, God, family, childhood, paradise, the universe, and life itself. Therefore, any "return" implies allusions to mythological, biblical, or literary paradigms. Leaving home to explore the world or oneself becomes the beginning of great adventures, dreams, and desires, the illusory embodiment of hopes. Returning involves overcoming and surviving many spiritual and material dangers. The artistic world of this novel by Temur Babluani is rich in adventurous temporal and spatial vicissitudes, with rogue stories characteristic of the picaresque genre. The main thing is the presentation of a person's fate, which is created, woven, and entangled in the artistic text by the hand of the disappeared author, following accidental, unexpected, or logical and regular events. The writer is well acquainted with human psychology, the abysses of his soul, which is why the reader wanders with the heroes of the novel in the realms of bright ideals and dark instincts, and thanks to anxiety, surprise, admiration, and astonishment, once again ponders existential, "cursed" questions. Together with the novel's characters, the reader will navigate the labyrinths and crossroads of life and will once again be convinced of the strength of human will and the power of love. The main character of this novel will also be saved by one simple, trampled by life, insulted by people, but still the purest and most unblemished love.

## **METHODS**

The methodology of this study employs primarily literary analysis and textual interpretation. The analysis focuses on:

- **Thematic Analysis:** Identifying and exploring recurring themes such as the journey, love, home, human nature, and the impact of societal and historical contexts on individual lives.
- **Character Analysis:** Examining the development, motivations, and symbolic significance of characters like Jude and Manushaka.
- **Narrative Analysis:** Analyzing the narrative structure, including the use of picaresque elements, mosaic structure, and the role of the narrator.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Drawing comparisons between the novel and other works of literature, such as the Bible, Homer's epics, Cervantes' Don Quixote, and Joyce's Ulysses, to highlight the universality of specific themes.
- **Contextual Analysis:** Placing the novel within its socio-political and historical context, particularly the Soviet and post-Soviet era in Georgia.

- Symbolic Interpretation: Interpreting symbolic elements within the novel, such as “home,” Manushaka, and the final painting.
- Intertextual Analysis: Identifying and exploring allusions and references to other literary works and figures (e.g., Apostle Paul, John Steinbeck, Dante, Dostoevsky).

The approach is mainly qualitative, focusing on interpreting the text’s meaning and significance through close reading and critical analysis.

## **RESULTS**

Temur Babluani’s novel once again convinces a person of the Apostle Paul’s teaching: “Love never ends.” Its infinity depends on a person’s choice. John Steinbeck concluded his Nobel Prize speech with these words: “Man has become our greatest danger and our only hope. So today it is possible to make such a paraphrase of the words of St. John the Apostle: In the beginning was the word, and the word was man, and the word was with man” (Steinbeck, 2011, p. 12). A person can become both an angel and a demon, and both are equally driven by themselves, the environment, and the world. That is why he needs moral foundations so that the struggle never stops. The writer has placed the obligation and responsibility for saving the life of modern man, who is involved in the dizzying process of technological development, who feels abandoned by God, and who is plunging into nothingness.

The hero of Temur Babluani’s novel goes through such abysses of existence that one recalls all the layers of Dante’s hell at once, and yet he remains a human being. The seemingly worn-out, hackneyed, and ashen point of view on the saving and reviving power of love in this novel will once again rise from the ashes like a phoenix, unfolding into a colorful hope. In the space of the story, full of relativity and conditionality, love is the only absolute constant, the axis, the center that binds and unites, attracts the scattered energy and forces to itself.

Temur Babluani is a well-known director whose films (“The Flight of the Sparrows”, “The Sun of the Sleepless”, “Brother”, etc.) are recognized in Georgia and abroad as humane examples that instill in viewers a belief in humanity. This novel also echoes the central message of his films. Using the expressive means characteristic of various fields of art, the author achieves the same result with equal mastery: he makes the viewer or reader empathize with the downtrodden, the insulted, the unjustly persecuted, and awakens a sense of empathy in them.

The novel is built on the mosaic principle of stories. Each piece is both independent and an essential element of a unified composition. The writer’s narrative is dizzying; storytelling is his element. One follows another, the second follows the third, and the reader, charged with expectations, tirelessly follows the author and travels in the inner world of man and in material geographical spaces.

The main character of the novel is Jude Andronikashvili, a boy from Tbilisi, born for joy and happiness but doomed to misfortune and suffering by circumstances. The writer also

pays attention to the internal and external factors that shape a person's personality. The hero of the novel passes before the reader's eyes a long way from childhood to middle age. Despite the many obstacles that appear in examples of human cruelty, savagery, intolerance, betrayal, adventure, and all sorts of unimaginable filth, he still retains his humanity. On this challenging path, the writer highlights the political and social contexts that help us understand and comprehend the spirit of the times from the 60s of the twentieth century to the present day. In his book "On the Spiritual in Art," Vasily Kandinsky singled out three critical abilities of an artist: 1. Individuality; 2. Representation of the spirit of the epoch; 3. Expression of the general (of the pure and permanent element of art, which permeates all people, nations, space, and time) (Kandinsky, 2013, p.56). In the novel, the writer's abilities are revealed, which is why all the stories he tells disturb us, excite us, and make us think once again about the meaning and purpose of existence.

In the seemingly devoid of all beauty world of the novel, the main thing is still the beauty that the love of the main character and Manushaka brings, becoming the axis, the backbone of the text. Manushaka's love will save the hero from turning into a beast, a monster, and this love will bring him back home, which, as we have noted, is equally the homeland, God, and himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that the writer made the word "I love you" a kind of tuning fork of the narration (he dedicated the novel to his wife). Manushaka's love, the love of a simple Armenian girl, like Ariadne's thread, led the main character out of the kingdom of darkness and brought him to the light. Throughout the novel, amid the unbearable conditions of Soviet prisons, the only thing that inspires the innocent hero is Manushaka's love, which neither fades nor grows old. Manushaka, who appears in dreams, is given to the main character like oxygen, providing him with the last strength and helping him find his way home. Thus, Manushaka, in the eyes of the reader, in a way and paradigmatically, is both a harlot and a saint, Mary Magdalene and Beatrice, Juliet and Laura.

The novel follows the laws of the adventure genre. Therefore, the writer keeps the main character on the bumpy roads of life for a long time, accompanying his wanderings through the streets of Tbilisi with Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Siberia, and the taiga, and makes the reader a participant in this dizzying whirlwind, dark and light sensations of crime and punishment, revenge and forgiveness, sin and repentance.

The novel begins in the summer of 1968. It was on August 21 of this year that Soviet tanks invaded Prague and resisted the democratic reforms taking place in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet system was at its peak at this time. The violent regime, which only pretended to care about the welfare of Soviet citizens, is well exposed and presented in many episodes of this novel. Among them is the beginning, which depicts a boy with torn trousers, trying to change his poor and faceless existence with stolen jeans. He succeeds indeed, because with the money taken from the sold trousers, he will not only buy clothes for himself but also make his girlfriend happy with a white jacket embroidered with lilacs (this beautiful jacket will resurface again in the picture depicted at the end of the novel, as a symbol that the past is never lost, on the contrary, it becomes a kind of signpost for the future).

Petty, unpunished hooliganism, street showdowns, and violence are constant companions in the life of Jude Andronikashvili and his acquaintances and friends; accordingly, their moral

values are also conditioned by the street mentality. This is a strange mixture of cowardice and courage, good and evil, empathy and cruelty. That is why there are many episodes in the novel in which the street is presented as the primary shaper of Jude's personality.

The neighborhoods of old Tbilisi in the 60s of the twentieth century are depicted through Jude's stories. The hero is presented with his passions, dreams, and his own self-defined cosmos. His world is guided by the desires of simple, unambitious people, which, at first glance, are not at all unattainable - a family created by love with its daily worries. The sun, the moon, and the stars revolve around Jude and his friends, as symbols of the flight of dreams. Here Manushaka appears, who from an ordinary silly, naive girl towards the end of the novel turns into a kind of symbol, a purity that, despite being trampled, despite the insult to her dignity, despite the dishonor and being thrown into the mud, is still the support of the main character, the only thread connecting him with life, giving meaning to existence. Although, like any sanctity, Manushaka will fall victim to a senseless accident, a granddaughter will remain, also named Manushaka, whom Jude will take away, care for like a child, and continue to live with her. While pondering again about the good and the bad of life, in one episode, the relentless reality makes Jude, who is following the flock of cranes stretching across the sky, say: "My God, why did you invent these miserable people, what do you need us for?" (Babluani, 2018, p. 34).

The writer depicts how the main character grows spiritually and physically, how he gets to know the world and his own identity. His fate seems to have been determined by this system, pre-written by an invisible hand. He is the child of a repressed family, a representative of the ancient aristocracy; his grandfather was shot by the communists in 1924. But history is only a myth and a legend, told by a neighbor woman, a descendant of Polish barons, a music teacher, Mazavetskaya, and in reality, Jude is the son of the mekhane Gogi Andronikashvili. The mekhane emphasizes the humiliating and insulting situation in which this family has fallen. By presenting the stories of Jude's family, the writer also paints pictures of recent history for the reader. His father grew up in an orphanage, becoming an unfortunate, spineless, obedient, and hardworking man. Life seemed to have only made time to trample him. His wife, Jude's Russian mother, ran away with some man. Motherlessness followed him like eternal orphanhood, helplessness, and homelessness. That is why Manushaka's image combined mother, sister, wife, and the warmth that the soul needs to grow and develop. His father, unfortunate and unpromising, made his second wife, a prostitute, raise other people's children. However, the man, somewhat ostracized by society, supported his family at the bottom with his own labor. It was his merit that Jude, who unjustly spent his youth in prisons, upon returning home, did not go astray, took up his father's craft, and decided to earn his daily bread by working.

In the novel, the thief's world cuts in as a subculture, with which Jude Andronikashvili, willingly or unwillingly, interacts. This world shapes his personality. In the Soviet era, a strong institution of "lawful thieves" was created. They were both in prisons and outside. Having authority in the criminal world gave a person privileges in street life. Rafika, Trokadero, and his cronies are depicted as such in the novel. Jude was sentenced to 12 years for confessing to the murder of two men. This "murder" was christened as self-sacrifice,

revenge for his friend Khaima, so he came under the protection of “lawful thieves” in prison. They recognized him as a worthy man and promised to help. Jude considers it a “great honor” to sit and eat with them. The writer is well acquainted with this world and presents its laws thoroughly and convincingly. This layer is highlighted as “a caste, as a union of professionals of the criminal world.” They have their own “code” by which they regulate disputed issues, judge or acquit people: “In the Soviet Union, they had a great influence on prisoners and controlled almost half of the prisons and prison camps in that vast territory. Their motto was: dignity and justice.” The novel also says that some of them cooperated with the police.

Jude was fascinated by painting because he had talent. His scattered drawings in the novel show his real spiritual existence. Jude came of age in prison. He demanded to be transferred to Siberia, to a zone where one year was counted as three. In Eastern Siberia, in the far north, recidivists would mine gold in inhuman conditions. Here, he was ordered to paint Lenin. The tragicomic thing was that Lenin’s portrait had to be painted four times a year: on November 7, December 5, Constitution Day, and May 1, and always new and different. The self-taught Jude’s first painting was rejected, with the judge saying he had painted an ugly Georgian instead of Lenin, and they locked him up in a punishment cell. He often comforts other prisoners with his unskillful drawings. The drawing with ants well reveals his despair and sense of hopelessness.

Through realistic or surreal dreams, the writer effectively shows the changes taking place in Jude’s spiritual world, who is doomed to die in prison. A dream, on the one hand, reflects the cruel reality, and on the other, it reveals his desires and dreams. In the most challenging situations, he still dreams of Manushaka, which is enough to gather his last strength, get to his feet, reflect on the meaning of life, overcome mere biological existence with moral effort, and not lose his human face.

The novel is full of fraudulent stories, which are intertwined with Jude’s adventures and, on the one hand, enrich the writer’s imaginary world, and on the other hand, create important circumstances along the path of the main character’s spiritual and moral development and transformation. Different kinds of characters, a corrupt policeman or an ideologized communist, a thief, a drug addict, a teacher and a hairdresser, a professor and a cleaner - all together and separately create the novel’s diverse, living, pulsating world of life. That a person is capable of equally manifesting evil and good is confirmed by many stories in the novel. Among them is a prisoner, nicknamed “Lullaby,” whom Jude met while working in the gold mines. Everyone was afraid of this man because he was ruthless and cruel; he had killed five people. Once, other prisoners attacked him while he was asleep, beat him so severely that they thought he was dead, and threw him into a pit. Still, he survived, suddenly appeared at night, but did not seek revenge, as if he had been transformed, sat down, and: “The beaten, mutilated mass of flesh sang in a frighteningly pure, velvety voice.” It was this man who added three grams of gold to Jude, thereby helping him be freed from this “hell.” The environment tries in every way to make the character like it; accordingly, Jude cannot resist the temptation and transforms into a swindler, but he retains enough strength not to become a murderer among murderers. This is well seen in the theft of gold, first planning

an escape from one prison, then escaping, wandering with the Chukcha, and then escaping from another prison. However, in the end, he will not be able to escape the murder and will avenge Manushaka.

His fate, of course, is intertwined with the country's life. That is why vital political, social, public, and cultural events of the past pass before the reader's eyes like movie frames. The writer also revives the tragedy of March 9, 1959, as another act of violence by Soviet Russia against Georgia. The novel includes the brutal dispersal of people who took to the streets to defend Georgian dignity, identified with Stalin's name. At this time, a Chinese marshal, named Jude, arrived. It was after "meeting" him that Joseph was "baptized" as Jude, and this nickname remained with him.

Jude, considering the street morals, confessed to someone else's murder. He was facing the death penalty for three murders that he did not commit. What didn't happen to him, he was sitting with cannibals at hard labor in the gold mines, but he escaped, then he got so sick that he was unconscious for 13 years and the monks of the monastery took care of him. He still survived, and most importantly, not only physically but also spiritually. However, he took revenge at least once, and that was for Manushaka: he killed Trokadero, his rapist, a reckless murderer. However, he managed to cover his tracks. The reader feels how the invisible hand of fate led him through the bumpy roads of life so that he would appear as a protector and patron for Manushaka's orphaned grandson. He even says: "I have such a feeling that in my past life I only participated in experiences, and no one asked me anything about the rest" (Babluani, 2018, p. 76).

You read the novel, and even for the character, so much misfortune that befell Jude seems too much. The reader will witness events from the Soviet era, in prisons and beyond. The writer paints many interesting characters with distinct, memorable traits. One of the main themes of the novel is the friendship between Jude and Khaima, a Jewish boy. The writer paints how the Soviet regime fought against private property, how Khaima's uncles were killed. Still, Khaima's relatives managed to burn millions of dollars, filmed everything on video, and managed to take the cassettes abroad. As it turned out later, American banks fully compensated the Jews for the burned dollars. Khaima did not forget his friend and gave him two million dollars, which enabled Jude to start a new life.

The novel well depicts Georgia in the 90s of the twentieth century, the rampage of criminal gangs, and the transformation of yesterday's robbers into businessmen and ministers. Jude is far from politics, but he sees how people are being terrorized, governments are changing, but the situation is the same: "A rich man in a hungry country is like a wounded wolf, around which his own kind have gathered, they smell blood and are about to eat him" (Babluani, 2018, p. 86). That is why he went to Turkey with little Manushaka, changed his surname, bought a hotel, and went on living like this. He even made a will, leaving everything to Manushaka. "I read somewhere that we people suffer because we cannot love. I don't know about others, but in my case, it's the opposite," says Jude (an echo of Dostoevsky: "Hell is the pain of no longer being able to love"). In one episode, Jude thinks: "I am surprised: why did all this happen, what happened? And why exactly like this, as it happened. What's the matter? I have no answer. Is there an answer?" (Babluani, 2018, p.

96). Finally, he concludes: “This life is strange.” He will also build a workshop and begin painting childhood impressions. Still, all this is preparation for the painting, so impressively described in the novel’s final episode, which should turn the dream into a colorful canvas. Above the high, barren hills, on one side the moon shines, on the other - the sun. The road crosses the hill and descends into a field of bread. Manushaka stands in the field of bread: “She is wearing the jacket embroidered with lilacs that I gave her and is looking at the road. Her face shows impatience, and it is clear that she is waiting for someone to appear on that road. That’s all. If someone who knows my and Manushaka’s story sees that painting, he will probably understand that Manushaka is waiting for me” (Babluani, 2018, p. 189). Involuntarily, the lines of Mirza Gelovani’s famous poem come to mind: “I am a traveler, I indulge in thoughts of you / And harmlessly play with shadows. / I will return, yes, I will return, / My hair will bring me back” (Gelovani, 2006, p. 23).

Among the many riddles of the universe, literature has also made this a subject of thought: how can the heart contain the divine and the demonic, love and hate, good and evil. Rustaveli’s admonition - “Neither death nor any master can master the heart” - is always relevant. For Faulkner, the main business of writing is therefore to show “the agony of the human heart,” because it reveals the person who has won or lost in the struggle with himself, who sometimes leans towards God and sometimes towards the devil, as Dostoevsky says. The central theme of Temur Babluani’s novel is also this, to show how love paves the way in the labyrinths of life, how its light decreases or increases to illuminate the abysses of human existence, how it fades and flickers when it collides with darkness, exhausted, but in the end, how it gathers strength and rises like the crucified Christ, because otherwise it is impossible. This is the law of life. The soul, which, if we recall Galaktion’s poem, is at the same time “whiter than azure” and “more evil than a demon“, through love still pushes a person towards salvation and redemption, except that for some, the circumstances of life make them so deaf and blind that they can no longer see or hear the voice of this saving force.

The novel depicts a strictly rational world, but irrational, mystical elements also intrude, prophetically hinting at the incomprehensible, inscrutable ways of the hero’s demise or salvation. The writer’s unexpected and witty passages, mixed with irony, sometimes present the darkened prisons from a different angle, with a kind of lightness. In the novel, the prison is depicted as a kind of microcosm that reflects all the shortcomings and virtues of a free society, as well as radically different passions and abominations: depravity, aggression, cruelty, hypocrisy, and compassion.

The vocabulary of the novel is not distinguished by its diversity, which is due to the fact that the main character tells the stories. He is a character who speaks and thinks in accordance with the “education” received in the streets and prisons, using a meager vocabulary and jargon. However, it is also essential that, despite the environmental conditions, Jude tried to self-educate and develop, which distinguished him from his street and prison comrades and friends. The love of Jude and Manushaka, like a cracked and patched thing thrown into the trash from life, will still survive and, having escaped from time and space, will continue to exist in the reader’s heart as another proof of man’s communion with the divine.

## **DISCUSSION**

This analysis of Temur Babluani's "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread" highlights several key aspects of the novel and offers a compelling interpretation of its themes and narrative strategies. The focus on the "journey" motif, particularly the return "home," provides a valuable framework for understanding Jude's trajectory. The article effectively connects this motif to broader literary and mythological paradigms, enriching the reading of Jude's personal odyssey. The emphasis on love as the central, redeeming force in the novel, amidst a harsh and unforgiving world, resonates strongly with the text. The comparison of Manushaka to iconic female figures (Mary Magdalene, Beatrice, Juliet, and Laura) illuminates her multifaceted character and symbolic importance.

The article's discussion of the novel's structure, particularly the "mosaic principle" of storytelling, is insightful. It effectively captures the episodic nature of Jude's experiences and how these seemingly disparate stories contribute to a unified whole. The analysis of the political and social context, particularly the depiction of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, adds depth to the reading. By situating Jude's personal struggles within the broader historical landscape, the article reveals how larger socio-political forces shape individual lives. The exploration of the "thief's world" as a subculture within Soviet society offers a nuanced understanding of the moral complexities faced by Jude and others.

However, some points could benefit from further exploration. While the article acknowledges the "fraudulent stories" within the novel, it could delve deeper into the implications of this theme. How does Jude's involvement in these stories affect his moral development? Does it compromise his humanity, or does it ultimately serve as a means of survival in a corrupt world? Furthermore, the article briefly mentions the novel's "irrational, mystical elements." Expanding on this aspect could provide a more complete picture of Babluani's narrative strategy and its potential connection to Georgian folklore or spiritual traditions.

The article's conclusion, while powerful, could be expanded further. The image of Manushaka waiting in the field of bread is indeed evocative, but what does it ultimately signify? Is it simply a symbol of hope and reunion, or does it also suggest a more complex reconciliation with the past? Connecting this final image back to the earlier discussion of "home" as a palimpsestic symbol could further enrich the interpretation.

Finally, while the article provides a strong analysis of the novel's themes, it could benefit from a more detailed examination of Babluani's writing style. How does his use of language, imagery, and narrative voice contribute to the overall effect of the novel? Exploring these stylistic elements could further illuminate the artistry of Babluani's work.

Overall, this article makes a valuable contribution to understanding "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread." It offers a compelling interpretation of the novel's central themes and effectively situates it within broader literary and historical contexts. By exploring some of the points mentioned above, future analyses could deepen our appreciation of this complex and moving work.

## **CONCLUSION**

The article concludes that Temur Babluani's novel "The Sun, the Moon, and the Field of Bread" explores the journey of Jude Andronikashvili, a man marked by hardship and misfortune. Despite the bleakness of his experiences, including prison, betrayal, and loss, the enduring power of love preserves Jude's humanity, specifically his love for Manushaka. This love becomes the central constant in his turbulent life, a "tuning fork" that guides him through the "abysses of existence." The novel uses the picaresque genre to depict Jude's adventures, highlighting the social and political context of Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia. Babluani's narrative emphasizes the duality of human nature, the struggle between good and evil, and the importance of moral foundations. The novel's mosaic structure weaves together diverse stories and characters, showcasing the complexities of life. Ultimately, the article argues that the novel, like Babluani's films, evokes empathy for the downtrodden and reaffirms the enduring power of love to redeem and save, even in the face of immense suffering. The final image of Manushaka waiting in the field of bread symbolizes hope and the promise of return, echoing the idea that love transcends time and space.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## ARCHITECTURE

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# From Idea to Construction

KACHARAVA EKA, PHD  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA,  
T. BERADZE INSTITUTE OF GEORGIAN STUDIES  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

LAGHIDZE NINO, PHD  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0007-8314-6724](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8314-6724)

ORCID: [0009-0005-3612-8000](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3612-8000)

### ABSTRACT

The work is dedicated to the idea and the initial stages of the implementation process of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (currently the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), designed by an outstanding figure of Georgian architecture, architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava. In specialized literature, the focus is predominantly on the epochal significance and characteristics of this building created in the Soviet space. However, our research has a different objective. The purpose of the presented research is to study and determine the origins of the building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, based on new archival sources and the building's conceptual foundations. The presented work reflects the results of this research. It aims to integrate this information and its significance into the scientific domain.

*Keywords:* Giorgi Chakhava, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia, architecture, architect, constructure, archive

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## INTRODUCTION

The work is dedicated to the idea and the initial stages of implementation of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, designed by an outstanding figure of Georgian architecture, architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava.

The intellectual and innovative architect had a deep understanding of Georgia's rich natural environment, its fascinating terrain, history, and cultural heritage. He was fully aware of the possibilities offered by this combination of potentials. His architecture serves as a kind of program for the full utilization and talented realization of this wealth.

The art and creativity of the architect overcame the dogmatic restrictions within the Soviet sphere, managed to escape the Soviet physical and mental space, established itself in the modern global architectural scene, and exerted a significant influence on it. Giorgi Chakhava, with his talent and creativity, granted freedom to national architecture. Moreover, he made a significant impact on global architectural culture. A progressively-minded artist, despite the closed nature of the Soviet space, he not only became acquainted with the innovations and achievements of world architecture but also successfully integrated them into the national foundation of Georgian architecture. He completely reimagined Georgian architecture in a novel and complex way, in relation to national traditions, the challenging terrain characteristic of Georgia, space, and global architectural innovative achievements.

The defining characteristic of Giorgi Chakhava's work is his exceptional creative freedom, which is consistently reflected throughout his architectural legacy. His innovative approach has significantly influenced modern global architecture, as acknowledged by prominent foreign architectural theorists.

His most iconic creation, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (now the Bank of Georgia headquarters), has been featured in numerous esteemed international architectural journals and publications, including:

- **Neuf** (1975)
- **Time** (1976)
- **Domus** (1977)
- **Arthur Drexler** – *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, MOMA Exhibition Catalogue (1979)
- **Rusudan Mirzikhvili**, *Everybody's Favourite*, in: Ritter, Katharina; Shapiro-Obermair, Ekaterina; Steiner, Dietmar; Wachter, Alexandra (Hg.), *Soviet Modernism 1955–1991: Unknown History*, Zürich (2012)
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Giorgi Chakhava's architectural vision has profoundly shaped national architecture, elevating it to an innovative stage and seamlessly integrating it into global discourse. His immense contributions have earned widespread international recognition, solidifying his lasting influence on the field. The impressive array of publications highlighting Chakhava's work reflects his enduring legacy - both in Georgia and worldwide - as a pioneer of architectural innovation.

His work is rooted in profound knowledge, a reimagined historical architectural tradition, and a seamless harmony between modern architectural principles. It embodies the ideal realization of expertise informed by global architectural experience and groundbreaking innovations. Chakhava's designs achieve a delicate balance, preserving architecture, space, and Georgia's challenging terrain and ecosystem with remarkable precision.

Recognized as a visionary, Giorgi Chakhava is not only a pioneer of national architecture but also a defining figure in global architectural culture.

## ***METHODS***

Monographic, comparative, analytical, critical, and creative research methods were applied to investigate the origins and conceptual foundations of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building. Following the formulation of the research topic, an in-depth investigation and analysis were conducted, encompassing both published and unpublished archival documentary and visual materials - including project plans, sketches, photographs, and documents from the 1950s and 1960s - alongside press information and specialized literature. These materials were systematically collected, organized, and analyzed in alignment with the monographic research method, ensuring a comprehensive and coherent examination. Logical sequencing was maintained throughout the research process, enabling the derivation of relevant conclusions and insights.

## ***RESULTS***

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the origins and design evolution of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (now the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), envisioned by renowned Georgian architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava. Drawing from extensive archival research - including personal and national records, conceptual sketches, architectural plans, and periodical literature - the investigation traces the building's inception, development, and final realization.

The study highlights early conceptual influences, particularly photographs from Chakhava's personal archive dating back to 1959, titled *Residential Houses Raised on Pillars*. These images illustrate monumental vertical structures elevated on supports, designed to harmonize with rugged, hilly terrains. This visionary approach laid the foundation for the

Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, refining the concept throughout the 1960s before culminating in its completion in 1975.

The building stands as a landmark of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian architectural innovation, exemplifying a bold fusion of design and natural landscape integration. Its enduring legacy continues to shape both national and global architectural discourse.

## **DISCUSSION**

One of the main tasks of Georgian architects active during the 1970s-1980s was to design and build structures with minimal impact on the landscape. The architectural proposals developed by Giorgi Chakhava during this period are the best solutions to this challenge (Chakhava, 1975).

The new vision of the authoring group, led by G. Chakhava and comprising architect Z. Jalagania and engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg, is effectively presented in Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's article "*Houses on Tower Foundations*" (Chakhava, 1974, p. 60). G. Chakhava's article outlines the principle behind this innovative method, which involves reducing the building area by constructing individual towers. These towers enable the construction of houses without altering the natural terrain. By utilizing varying relief levels, the towers facilitate the development of mountain slopes and ravines while rising above the ground. Such structures free up space for parks and recreational areas, allow unobstructed transportation beneath the buildings, and improve air ventilation by mitigating pollution caused by vehicle exhaust gases.

The authors based their work on two key principles: the functional purpose of the building and its aesthetic expressiveness. In their view, a building elevated on tower supports creates an unusual silhouette of an architectural structure - light, transparent, and seamlessly integrated with the landscape. According to the authors, such compositional solutions harmonize with nature, appearing to hover and blend without disrupting the overall balance.

The experience of constructing houses on tower supports demonstrated that this method can be implemented on terrains of any complexity. Furthermore, the construction of houses on tower supports is also economically justified, even on flat areas. (Chakhava, 1975, p.60).

Architect's innovative ideas continue to influence contemporary architecture to this day. The construction process of the architectural masterpiece, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (currently serving as the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), was completed in 1975. As a result of this project, Georgian architectural history inherited one of the most outstanding structures of the 20th century.

The innovative, metabolist-style building created in the 1970s, with its structure and design, addressed the challenges of the next century rather than those of its contemporary era. The completed project became a part of global architectural culture.

The author of the project idea and the leader of the design team was architect Giorgi Chakhava. The team members included architect Zurab Jalagania and structural engineers

Teimuraz Tkhlava and Aleksander Kimberg ([Chakhava, 1970](#)).

Specialized literature primarily focuses on the epochal significance and characteristics of this building, created within the Soviet space. Our aim, however, is different. Based on Giorgi Chakhava's personal and national archive materials (documents, plans, drawings, sketches, interviews ([Chakhava, 1986](#))) and relevant periodical literature on the subject, we aimed to explore the history preceding the creation and realization of this building's concept. The presented work reflects the results of this research.

The author of the successful project concept, Giorgi Chakhava, later expressed the complex attitude of contemporary society toward his progressive creativity through the reflections of American philosopher William James.<sup>1</sup>:

“A great idea goes through three stages on its way to acceptance: 1) it is dismissed as nonsense, 2) it is acknowledged as true, but insignificant, 3) finally, it is seen to be important, but not really anything new(AZ Quotes, n.d.).

Since the 1970s, numerous articles have been published about the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building. Today, several international publications highlight the fact of its creation and its significance. Strangely enough, amidst years of silence from professionals within Georgia, the building initially gained recognition abroad. The global architectural community acknowledged it as an innovation within the Soviet architectural space. This building stands as a symbol of the creativity of Georgian architecture, connecting the past and the present.

This silence from professionals in the field is rooted in architect Vakhtang Davitaya's letter, dated September 1979, titled “When Silence Harms Progress!” ([Davitaya, 1979](#)). *Literary Georgia*. (№ 38).

V. Davitaya describes Georgian architecture of this period as excessively rational, lacking in ideas, and marked by template-based indifference.

In such a monotonous environment, an extraordinary architectural structure is born and successfully realized. It stands out with its clear tectonics, structural boldness, compositional intensity and dynamism, transparency, and complete harmony with the landscape. A significant new “accent” for the capital is created.

In V. Davitaya's letter, skepticism and an unfavorable attitude toward the architectural novelty of the capital are clearly evident. This sentiment is further confirmed by Georgian press articles, such as “House on a Slope” ([Golovin, 1980](#)) and by the still vivid historical memory of the era.

Notably, V. Davitaya, in the same letter, highlights the challenging path an idea must traverse to become a realized project: “...This project also endured a difficult journey, but since it is now a reality, we must assume that reason triumphed... The realization of this structure has overcome significant organizational, technical, and psychological barriers... Time will likely bring adjustments to our evaluation of this subject... But for now, I unequivocally

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1 William James (1842–1910) - American philosopher and psychologist.

state that we are witnesses to an important architectural event.” (Davitaya, 1979).

This letter serves as both an advocacy and a justification for the innovative project, reflecting its significance despite the challenges it faced. It’s a testament to the resilience of visionary ideas.

During an in-depth study of the prehistory of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, attention was first drawn to photographs of project proposals (“Residential Houses Raised on Pillars”) dated back to 1959.

These sketches were created by Giorgi Chakhava and his creative team (architect Z. Jalaghania and engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg).

The photographs, preserved in Giorgi Chakhava’s personal archive and in several publications, depict monumental, vertical structures elevated on pillars in challenging, hilly, rocky terrain. These designs were remarkably progressive for their time, leaving a strong impression with their bold vision.

The structurally and architecturally intriguing and innovative project proposal from the 1950s, designed for development on challenging terrains, can undoubtedly be regarded as a precursor and a noteworthy stage leading up to the Roads Department’s Engineering Building project. It significantly predates and enriches the timeline of this groundbreaking idea, highlighting its deep-rooted conceptual origins.

The conceptual foundation of the Roads Department Ministry’s engineering building project is confirmed by documentary materials, sketches, plans, drawings, and periodical literature preserved in the personal archive of architect Giorgi Chakhava. It is worth noting that the documents about this building in Chakhava’s personal archive have reached us in an incomplete form; however, they contain very interesting and significant information.

Among the archival materials of Giorgi Chakhava in our possession, the earliest document is a copy of the “Decision of the Executive Committee of the City Council of Workers’ Deputies of Tbilisi” dated August 14, 1968 (#477, Protocol #17, Paragraph 4). Also dated August 14, 1968, is the plan for the land plot at Gagarin #27, preserved in Giorgi Chakhava’s archive.

The content of the aforementioned document pertains to the allocation of a land plot for the construction of the administrative building of the Main Directorate of Highways under the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR. As indicated in the document, the Main Directorate of Highways, under the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR, had petitioned the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee to construct an administrative building on the land plot (extending from the four-story house on Gagarin Street #27). Based on this petition, the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee requested:

Preparation of the general plan, after which the exact area of the land plot would be finalized

Execution of tasks related to the allocation of the land plot and the transfer of red lines into nature, carried out by the Construction and Architecture Department at the request of the

## Main Directorate of Highways

Demolition of existing houses on the plot, in accordance with the general plan, with the consent of the Orjonikidze District Council Executive Committee, and providing the displaced residents with alternative housing as per legal requirements

Submission of all materials related to the foundation marking for verification of accuracy to the Construction and Architecture Department and the Geodesy Service, for project approval and construction permit issuance

Active participation of the Main Directorate of Highways in the improvement of the quarter and the construction of underground communications

Thus, on April 14, 1968, based on Decision #477 of the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee, a 1.5-hectare land plot was allocated for construction at Gagarin Street #27, near the beginning of the slope by the embankment. At that time, the general plan needed to be prepared, the land plot had to be cleared of local residents, who in turn were to be compensated with housing within the legal framework, and other necessary tasks needed to be performed (transferring the measured land plot's red lines into nature, clarifying the geodetic section, and so forth).

This clearly demonstrates the comprehensive and coordinated effort required to bring such a project to life.

The following document, preserved in architect Giorgi Chakhava's personal archive, was issued exactly a year later. It is the protocol of "ТОЦСТРОЙ" of the Georgian SSR, which is of multifaceted interest in studying the history of this building. This protocol's information will be explored in greater detail in future research related directly to the building.

At present, its content is intriguing because, according to this protocol, by August 14, 1969, the Construction-Architectural Council, together with the chief architect of Tbilisi, reviewed the project assignment for the engineering building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia under the Georgian SSR.

During the session, the brief content of the project assignment was presented by its author, Giorgi Chakhava. From the document, it is evident that by this time, the project assignment had undergone specialist examination, and expert conclusions had been prepared regarding architecture, structural aspects, plumbing, electrical works, and cost estimates. The document also reveals that the order to prepare the project assignment was issued back in October 1968.

Additionally, a general plan ("Genplan") prepared by the "Gipropromselstroii" Tbilisi branch, dated 1968, includes the following components:

- Roads Department;
- Open parking lot for cars;
- Entrance to the courtyard of the Roads Department;
- Lawn;

- Residential building to be designed;
- Sidewalk.

In the archive of Giorgi Chakhava, there is also visual material dated 1969 (sketches, section drawings, and plans).

Based on the stylistics, this part of the sketches should belong to the 1960s.

If all of this was ready by 1968-1969, it is self-evident how much earlier the thought and work on its idea, transforming the idea into a project, developing it into a project proposal, designing it, undergoing numerous professional and bureaucratic discussions, overcoming obstacles, and making decisions and resolutions would have begun. All of this provides a strong basis to attribute the initiation of the idea for the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building to the first half of the 1960s.

Additionally, we consider as further evidence the note in Giorgi Chakhava's autobiographical manuscript related to this building: "1970 - Tbilisi, Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building with architect Z. Jalaghania and structural engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg." From this, it can be assumed that by this time, the project for the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building was ready for realization. Furthermore, it indicates that for the architect, the readiness of the project held greater importance than its physical implementation. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1975, when the construction of the building was completed, there is no note in his autobiographical manuscript marking this event.

Thus, the sketches from 1959 and the documentary material preserved in Giorgi Chakhava's archive from the 1960s, along with accompanying information and visual materials (the land plot plan dated December 1968, facade sketch dated 1969, section drawings, floor plans, various perspective sketches, and the note found in his autobiographical manuscript), serve as credible evidence that the author group, under the leadership of Giorgi Chakhava, began considering this type of architecture from the 1950s and started working on its physical implementation as early as the beginning of the 1960s.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the presented research, it can be confidently stated that the conceptual idea of the unique building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, completed in 1975, originated in the late 1950s, with the design phase taking shape in the 1960s.

Gradual steps toward its realization began in the second half of that decade, culminating in a structure that stands as a remarkable monument to 20th-century Georgian architectural culture.

The building's design responds directly to the complex Georgian topography by utilizing the rocky landscape and freeing land space beneath its structure. Rising to sixteen stories, it is constructed from metal trusses and reinforced concrete, with internal wall partitions made of cement blocks-engineered to withstand seismic activity measuring up to 8 on the

Richter scale.

As recognition of the project's original architectural concept, the authors were officially awarded by the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, underscoring the significance of their work within the architectural discourse of that era.

This building remains a testament to the innovative spirit and harmonious integration of architecture with natural landscapes, leaving a lasting impact on both Georgian and global architectural heritage.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

### **Financing**

The research was carried out without financial support.

### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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**Figure 1.** *A residential house on pillars*



**Figure 2.** *A residential house on pillars*



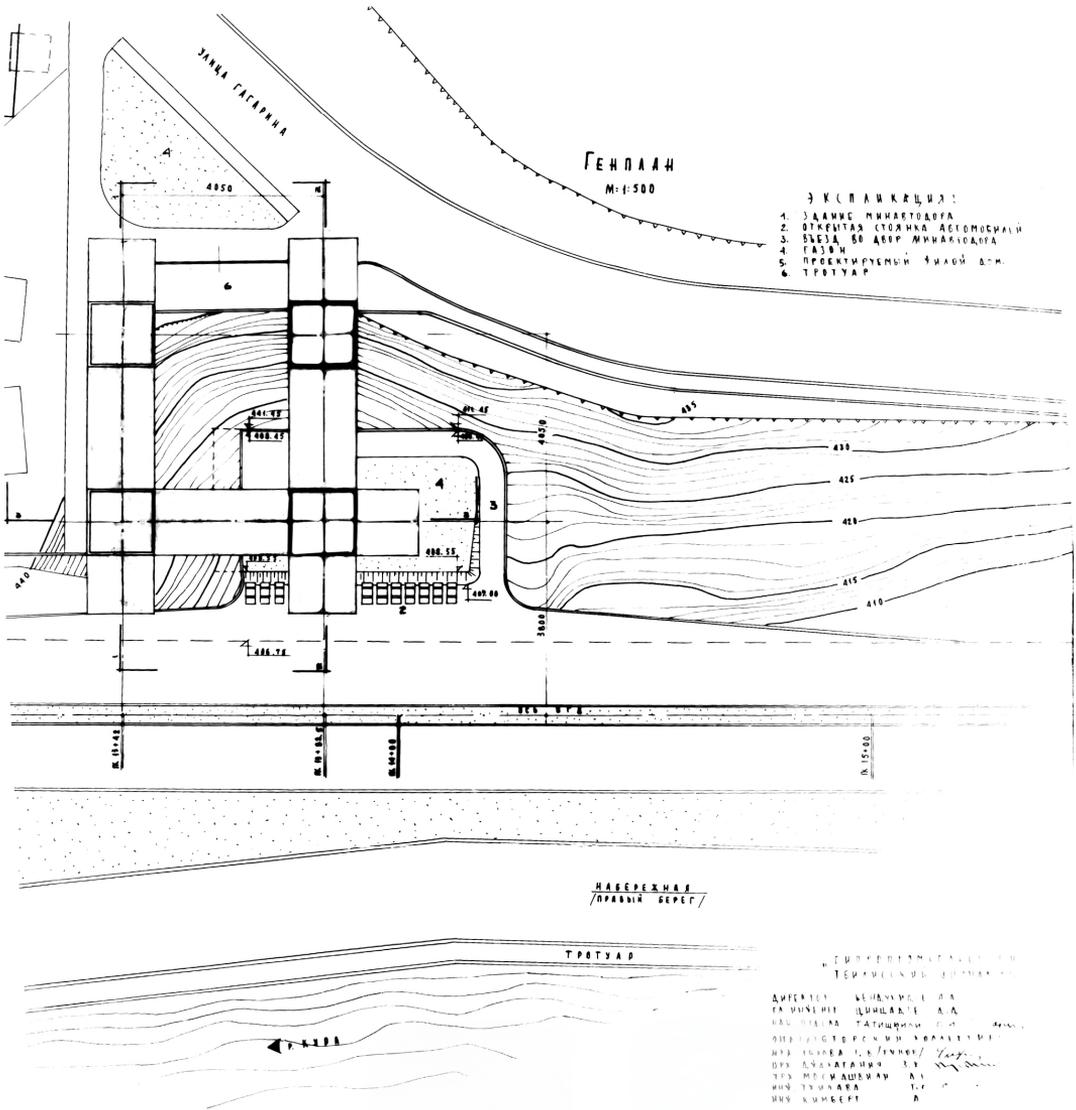


Figure 4. General plan - 1968 'Gipropromselstroy' Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14\_8\_1517\_8)



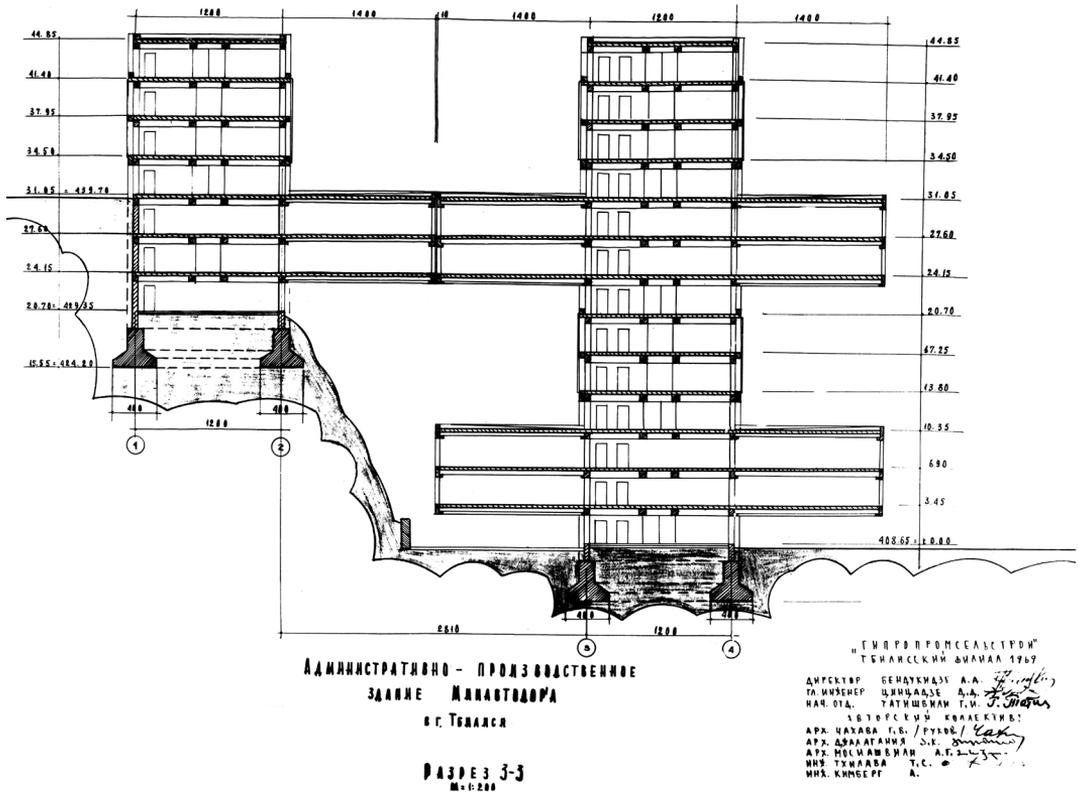


Figure 6. Administrative-production building of motor roads - Section - 1969 'Gipropromselstroy' Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14\_8\_1517\_11)



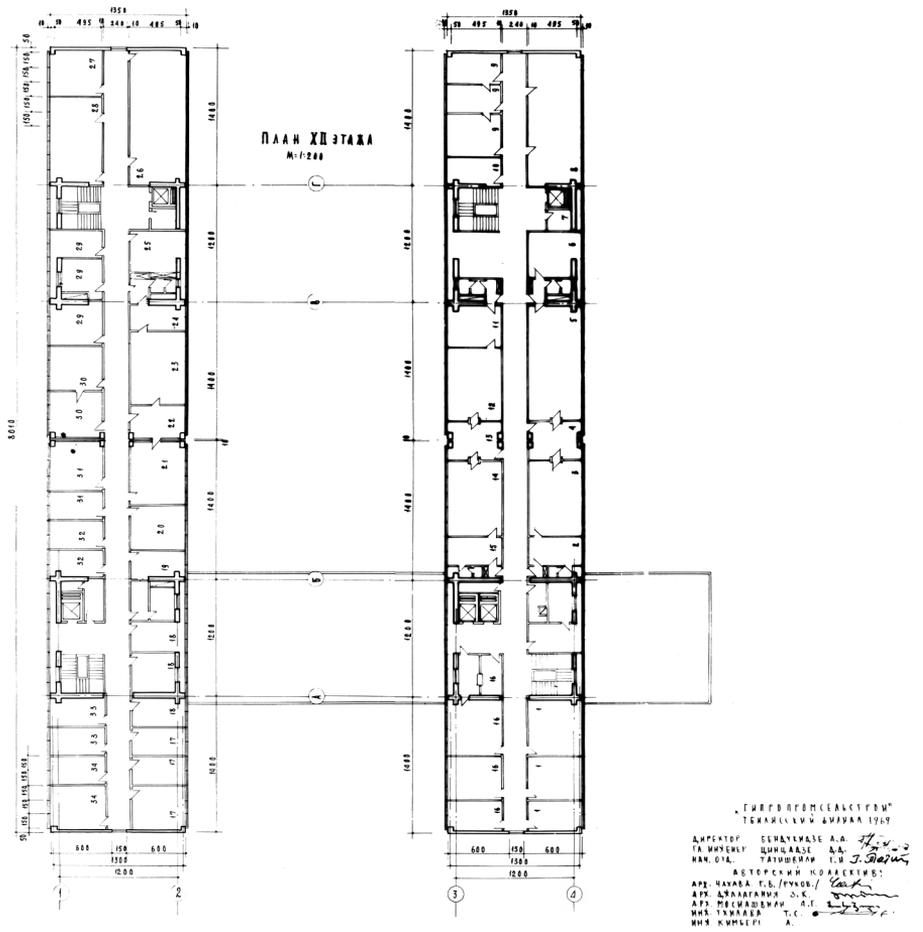
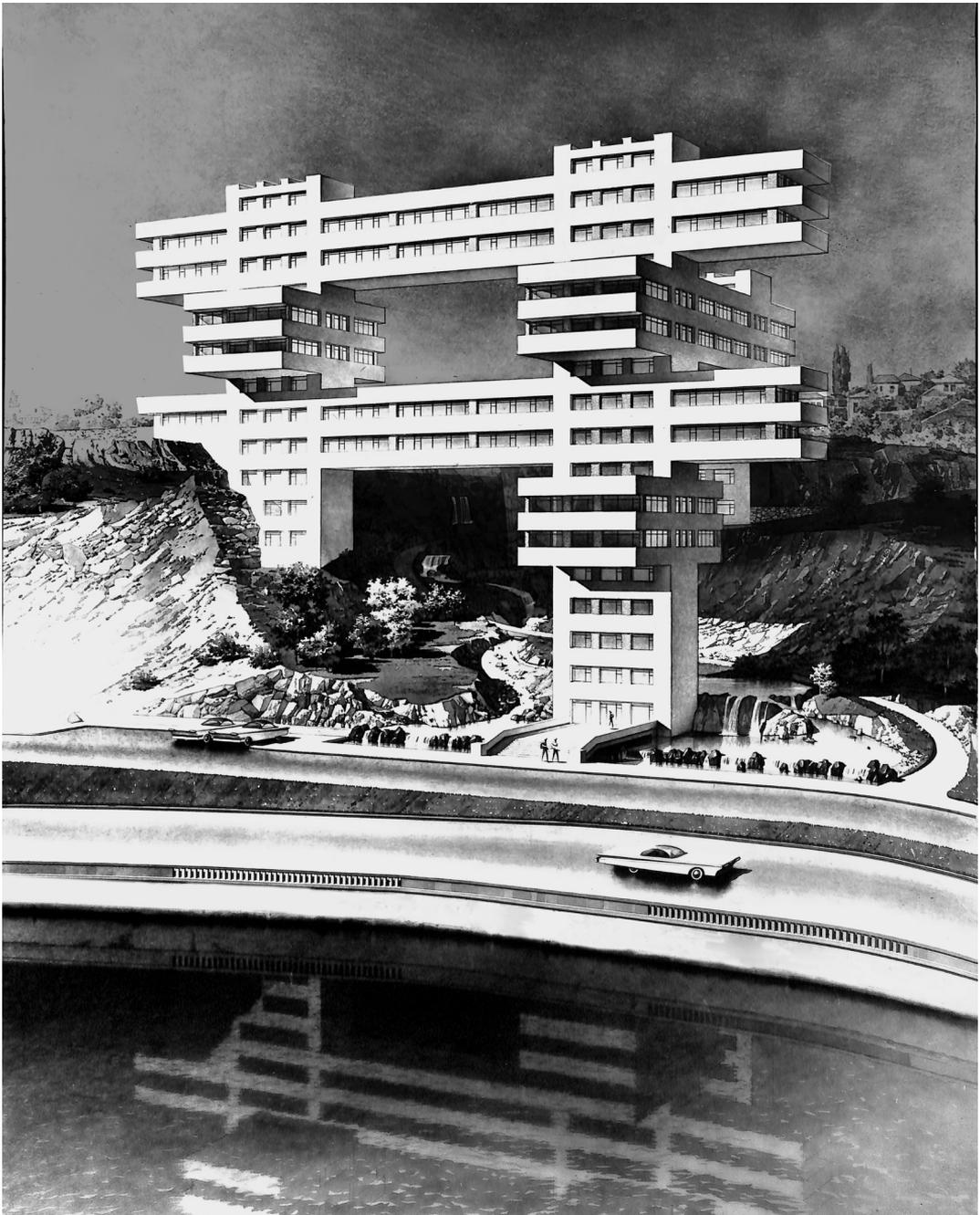


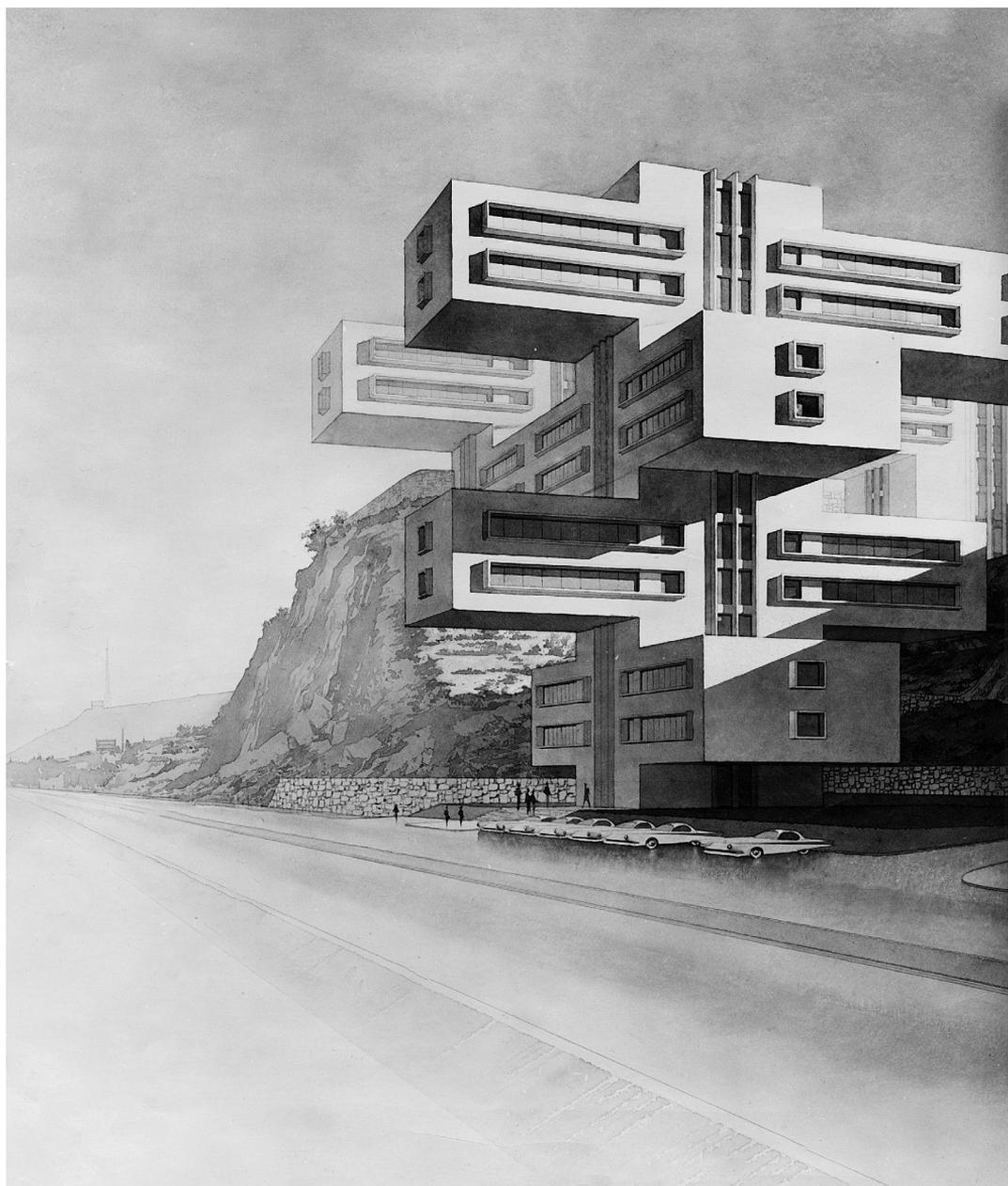
Figure 8. Plan of the 12th floor of the administrative-production building of motor roads ‘Gipro-promselstroy’ Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14\_8\_1517\_12)



Figure 9. Sketch of the building’s facade - From the Tbilisi entrance side - 1969 (Georgian National Archive 14\_8\_1517\_9)



**Figure 10 – 1.** *Sketches of the building's facade - architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's personal archive*



**Figure 10 – 2.** *Sketches of the building's facade - architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's personal archive*

## EDUCATION AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

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# Education Crossroads: Alignments and Divergences in Latvian and Georgian Education Systems

TABATADZE REVAZ, PHD  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0000-0003-3898-3092](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3898-3092)

### ABSTRACT

The article describes, analyzes, and compares the education systems of two post-Soviet countries - Georgia and Latvia. The main focus is on studying the alignments and divergences in the aims and objectives of general, vocational, and higher education, mandatory qualifications of teachers and professors, curricula, and students' academic performances. Within the frames of the research, two types of desk research techniques are applied: internal desk research and external desk research, including online desk research, government published data, and customer desk research. Georgia and Latvia, both post-Soviet socialist countries, shared a unified education system before the Soviet Union's collapse. After gaining independence in 1991, both countries developed their own systems, but Latvia started rebuilding its education system earlier. This early development led to differences in curricula, teacher qualifications, and academic performance. As a result, Latvian students show better academic achievements compared to Georgian students, as evidenced by international assessments like PISA and NCIEA.

*Keywords:* Education systems; Latvia and Georgia; general, higher, and vocational education; curricula; teachers' qualification

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Latvia is a country of northeastern Europe and one of the three Baltic States, while Georgia is located on the east coast of the Black Sea at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, and borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. Both countries were occupied and annexed by the U.S.S.R., and they declared their independence in 1991.

Latvia was admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) in 2004. Georgia is on its way to joining these organizations with the consent of the majority of its population.

Since both countries were member states of the Soviet Union, they shared common educational principles, standards, goals, and missions. Schools and universities of both countries followed a common curricula created by the scientific committees of the Soviet Union with the involvement of “successful” teachers and professors.

In the Soviet Union, significant changes were made in the context of general and higher education in the 1960s and 1970s. The basis for these changes was the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The resolution of the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held in 1966 stated: “In these five years, we should basically complete the transition to universal secondary education for youth. The quality and content of general, labor, and polytechnic education should correspond to modern needs. Schools are called upon to teach the principles of communist morality to children and to improve the aesthetic and physical education of the adolescent generation (CPSU Central Committee & USSR Council of Ministers, 1984, p. 236).

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics adopted a resolution on November 10, 1966 - “Measures for Further Improvement of the Work of the General Education Secondary School”.

This resolution was a concrete plan for implementing the decisions of the XXIII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

It is mentioned here that under the leadership of the Communist Party, “a cultural revolution unprecedented in its depth and scope was carried out in our country. The prominent role in solving this great task belongs to the Soviet school. For the first time in the history of mankind, ***a truly democratic system of education was created.***” This system provided workers with a real opportunity for secondary and higher education.

The resolution provides measures to further improve the performance of the general education school. It states that the Soviet school should continue to develop as a general educational labor polytechnic school and that its main task is to equip students with basic scientific knowledge, to develop a high communist consciousness among students, and to prepare them for life and a future profession.

According to the resolution, the school, which connects all educational work with life, should equip students with the knowledge of the law of social development, raise them with the revolutionary and labor traditions of the Soviet people, develop a high sense of Soviet patriotism,

show them the importance of the fraternal unity of all peoples of the Soviet Union, their friendship with the workers of socialist countries; *Students should be inculcated in solidarity with all the people fighting against colonialism and capitalism*, they should bravely fight against the intrusion of bourgeois ideology into the consciousness of students, the manifestation of hostile morality (CPSU Central Committee & USSR Council of Ministers, 1984, p. 238).

Georgia and Latvia, as member states of the Soviet Union, had to follow a new educational model that opposed the free thinking of students and teachers, providing a unified curriculum that did not take into account students' abilities, cultural values, etc.

The typical curriculum for Soviet and secondary schools, for example, gave great importance to expanding the teaching hours of Russian Language and Literature at the expense of limiting the teaching hours of ethnic languages (Counts, 1957, p. 77), emphasizing the dominance of Russian Ideology and values.

Subject	Number of Class Hours per										Week / Total Hours		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Week	Year	
Russian Language and Literature	13	13	13	9	9	8	6	5	4	4	84	2,772	
Mathematics	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	60	1,980	
History				2	2	2	2	4	4	4	20	660	
Constitution of USSR										1	1	33	
Geography				2	3	2	2	2	3		14	462	
Biology				2	2	2	3	2	1		12	396	
Physics						2	3	3	4	4	16	528	
Astronomy										1	1	33	
Chemistry							2	2	3	4	11	363	
Psychology										1	1	33	
Foreign Language					4	4	3	3	3	3	20	660	
Physical Culture	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	20	660	
Drawing	1	1	1	1	1	1					6	198	
Drafting								1	1	1	4	132	
Singing	1	1	1	1	1						6	198	
Labor	1	1	1	1	2	2	2				10	330	
Practical Work (Agricultural Economy, Machine Operation, and Electro-Techniques)									3	2	2	7	231
Excursions												293	
Total	24	24	24	26	32	32	32	33	33	33	293	9,962	

**Table 1.** The typical Curriculum for soviet elementary and secondary schools

Source: From *The challenge of Soviet education* (p. 77), by G. S. Counts, 1957, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, millions of students, thousands of schools, and universities started their own independent journey in terms of getting and providing education. Of course, the former Soviet states shared the Soviet Union's approach to general and higher education (late twentieth century): they had a centralized education system controlled by several sectorial units, a national curriculum, narrow specialization training, tuition-free study places, and compulsory employment.

The transformation of post-soviet countries' education systems began shortly after they attained their independence. The changes that have taken place in the education systems of the post-Soviet countries have varied in scope, structure, power, and impact (Huisman, Smolentseva, & Froumin, 2018, p. 178).

Some of the countries (Latvia, Estonia, etc.) of the post-Soviet Union are successfully dealing with the challenges in the field of general and higher education, while some (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.) are still trying to create such an education system that provides schools and universities with the necessary personnel having proper qualifications, programs and curricula, trainings, etc. (OECD, 2019; Tabatadze & Dvořák, 2024).

The success of post-soviet countries in terms of general and higher education is evaluated not only based on the results of local public and private student organizations, but also by the participation and reports of organizations such as: PISA - the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment; NCIEA – the Center for Assessment: Advancing Student Learning; CSAI - the Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation, etc.

Hence, *this article aims* to describe, analyze, and compare the education systems of two post-Soviet countries - Georgia and Latvia. The article will be focused on general trends in terms of general and higher education in the mentioned countries, which includes the aims and objectives of general and higher education, mandatory qualifications of teachers, curricula, and students' academic performances.

*The significance of the research* is determined by the following factor: Georgia and Latvia are both post-Soviet socialist countries. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries followed one unified curriculum within the Soviet Union. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries including Georgia and Latvia were allowed to develop their own curricula. For 30 years, both countries have gone through a difficult path in this regard. It is interesting that the academic performance of students is totally different in these countries; in particular, students in Latvia have a much better academic record than in Georgia. With the scope of the research, we will be able to reveal the positive practices in the Latvian Education System that can be shared within the framework of the education system of Georgia.

### *Research Questions*

The following questions have been addressed throughout the presented research:

- How do the Georgian and Latvian education systems differ in their goals and objectives for general, vocational, and higher education?

- How do the current teacher qualification systems and curriculum frameworks in Latvia and Georgia compare, and what insights do these differences provide for understanding their respective educational developments?
- What factors influence the differences in academic performance of Latvian and Georgian students, as shown by PISA and NCIEA assessments?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Within the frames of the research, two types of *desk research techniques* will be applied:

1. Internal Desk Research;
2. External Desk Research, including online desk research, government published data, and customer desk research.

The desk research used in this study provides a broad perspective on the comparative analysis of education systems in two countries – Latvia and Georgia – but has certain limitations. First, desk research relies on existing data and information obtained from secondary sources. In addition, such research is not characterized by the collection of data from personal interviews with specific individuals or focus groups, which sometimes leads to more in-depth and dynamic insights.

### *Literature Review*

Educational systems are normally considered to be those structures created by the state to educate the population of that state. It is universally the case that each country has its own educational system, and this is usually a function of government (McGettrick, 2009).

Each education system is different in terms of organization, management, and arrangements, being conditioned by the society that is served by the educational provision.

Some of the aspects of “educational systems” related to the stated education are not necessarily part of state provision. In this particular case, we are referring to universities, centers for early education, schools, and other institutions of educational activity that are not funded, controlled, or influenced by the state.

The Latvian education system consists of pre-school education, basic education, secondary education, and higher education. General education in Latvia in total lasts 12 years, consisting of a compulsory 9-year basic education and 3-year secondary education. Additionally, pre-school education at the age of 5-6 is compulsory in Latvia.

Basic education stage comprises general basic education (grades 1-9) and vocational basic education. The secondary education stage comprises general secondary education, vocational secondary education, and vocational education. Higher education comprises both academic and professional study programmes (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

The laws and regulations used to design, monitor, and guarantee quality education in the Republic of Latvia are:

1. Law on Education (1998);
2. Law on General Education (1999);
3. Law on Vocational Education (1999);
4. Law on Higher Education Establishments (1995);
5. Law on Scientific Activity (2005);

The Georgian education system includes general, higher, and professional education. Full general education in Georgia has three levels: primary (6 years), basic (3 years), and secondary (3 years).

Higher education in Georgia consists of three levels: bachelor's, master's, and doctoral. The law "On Higher Education" regulates the rules and procedures of providing higher education.

Vocational education in Georgia is regulated by: the Law of Georgia "On Vocational Education"; "On the Development of the Quality of Education", and other by-laws.

The types of vocational educational institutions are: vocational educational institution/college, which is authorized to implement vocational educational programs, short-cycle educational programs, vocational training programs in the state language ([National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, n.d.](#)).

The laws and regulations used to design, monitor, and guarantee quality education in the Republic of Georgia are:

1. Law on General Education of Georgia (2005);
2. Law on Higher Education of Georgia (2006);
3. Law on the concept of vocational education of Georgia (2005);
4. Law on vocational education of Georgia (2012);
5. Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education (2015);
6. Law on the Development of the Quality of Education of Georgia (2018);

The right to receive education and to choose its form in Latvia and Georgia is guaranteed by the Constitution.

Based on the analysis of the obtained and processed material, it can be said that today the education systems of Georgia and Latvia are similar from a structural point of view.

However, it should be noted that Georgia, as a post-Soviet country, compared to Latvia, started to develop the regulatory laws and acts late, which allows for fundamental changes to the education system, creating a new curriculum, establishing new standards for teachers, etc.

For example, the Law on "General Education", which regulates all three levels of general education in Latvia, was developed in 1999, while the Government of Georgia adopted this law in 2005, which means that until 2005, there was no "systematic" principle in education in the country; the processes were chaotic and uncontrolled.

## **RESULTS**

Aims and objectives of education are represented in a dynamic form, considering and responding to the progressive status of society. These terms are inextricably connected: they occur in hierarchical order.

Ritz (2014) considers aim as “a general statement that suggests direction”. It provides a guide for the educational and training processes by which a terminal point of live outcome is focused. Nodding (2007) believes that aims are “brushed aside in favor of objectives because the last can be cast in language conducive to measurement”. Objectives of education bring to the fore the kind of knowledge and skills needed in society (Nicholls, 1973).

Hence, the aims and objectives of education play a major role in the process of formulating a proper education system.

On the example of the studied countries, it was found that Latvia has diversified aims and objectives of general education, while the Georgian education system does not diversify the aims and objectives of education at the primary, basic, and secondary education levels.

In terms of general education, Latvia distinguishes between aims and objectives for Pre-Primary Education and General Secondary Education.

Pre-primary Education, which is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia by the following legal acts and laws - Law on General Education / Education Law / Law on General Education / Model Program for Pre-school Education, aims to:

1. advance the development of mental, physical, and social abilities and to establish the understanding of general processes of nature and society, to build up moral and ethical values;
2. ensure the development of initiative and inquisitive, independent, and creative activities;
3. develop communication and cooperation skills;
4. favour the development of a harmonious personality of the child;
5. form the understanding of one's belonging to the State of Latvia and ensure possibility to learn about Latvia and values of democracy.

While general secondary education curricula are regulated by the National Standard for General Upper Secondary Education and Standards for Upper Secondary Education Subjects, and aim to:

1. provide pupils with knowledge and skills enabling them to prepare for further education;
2. encourage the development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities, and to develop their understanding of health as a condition for the quality of life;

3. encourage the development of positive, critical, and socially active attitudes, and to develop an understanding of the rights and obligations of Latvian citizens;
4. develop the ability to study independently and improve knowledge as well as create motivation for lifelong learning and a purposeful career.

The Georgian education system does not distinguish between aims and objectives for Pre-Primary Education and General Secondary Education. The aims and objectives of general education are regulated by the law on “General Education”. It formulates general aims and objectives for all the levels of general education. After completing general education, a student should be able to:

1. Understand one’s own responsibility towards the country’s interests, traditions, and values;
2. preserve and protect natural environmental conditions;
3. effectively use technological or other intellectual achievements; acquire, process, and analyze information;
4. live independently and make their own decisions;
5. create values themselves and not to live only at the expense of the existing;
6. continuously develop their abilities and interests throughout life and realize them maximally within the country and outside its borders;
7. communicate with individuals and groups;
8. be a law-abiding, tolerant citizen.

#### *The aims and objectives of Vocational Education in Latvia and Georgia*

One of the significant aspects of the education systems of Latvia and Georgia is vocational education and training (VET).

In general, defining VET as a sector within the education system poses a number of difficulties. For the most part, general and academic education is seen as that which builds analytical skills, knowledge, and critical thinking, while VET develops craftsmanship, practical experience, and problem-solving. However, this simple distinction does not hold up to scrutiny.

These simple distinctions can also lead to confusion and academic drift in vocational institutions (Neave, 1978) or to the vocationalisation of higher education (Williams, 1985).

Latvia adopted the law on vocational education much earlier than Georgia. In particular, Latvia adopted the law on Law on “Vocational Education” in 1999, when Georgia submitted only the conceptual side of vocational education in 2005. Consequently, Latvia, as a post-Soviet country, had a much longer time to apply and monitor the principles of vocational education in practice.

The main aims and objectives of vocational and vocational secondary education, as regulated by the National Standard for General Upper Secondary Education and Standards for Upper Secondary Education Subjects, are to:

1. prepare the pupil for working in a certain profession, promoting his development as an open, responsible, and creative personality;
2. advantage the acquirement of skills and knowledge for gaining the second or third level of professional qualification;
3. promote a positive attitude towards other people and the state, favor self-confidence and the ability to undertake responsibilities of the Latvian citizen;
4. motivate the pupil for professional development and further education, and provide the possibility to prepare for continuation of education in the level of higher professional education.

While the law on “Approving the Concept of Vocational Education of Georgia” adopted in 2005 defines the aims and objectives of vocational education as to:

1. Meet the professional-educational requirements of the population, promote personal professional development, establish a professional career, and social protection;
2. Ensure the economy with competitive, qualified personnel in the domestic and international labor market;
3. Maintain the competitiveness of the employed workforce through professional training and qualification improvement;
4. Facilitate adaptation of the population to new socio-economic conditions through starting their own business and self-employment.

It should be noted that the professional education model of both countries is similar. They have similar aims and objectives. However, unlike Georgia, vocational education is much more popular in Latvia, which is confirmed by the number of vocational schools and the percentage of students.

Therefore, it is clear that the government of Georgia needs to create more vocational educational institutions, promote them among the youth, study the market requirements, and create programs that respond to the modern challenges.

### *The aims and objectives of Higher Education in Latvia and Georgia*

Higher education is education, training, and research guidance that takes place at the post-secondary level.

Higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training, and research guidance at educational institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities.

Higher education in Latvia is divided into two levels: first-level professional higher education and second-level professional higher education; hence, the aims and objectives are different.

The strategic objectives of first-level professional higher education regulated by the National Standard of First-Level Professional Higher Education Programmes are to:

1. prepare a person for work in a certain profession, promoting one's development as an open, responsible, and creative personality;
2. advance the acquirement of skills and knowledge for gaining the fourth-level professional qualification;
3. motivate one for further education and provide the possibility to prepare for continuation of education in the second-level of professional higher education.

While the strategic objectives of second-level professional higher education regulated by the National Standard of Second-Level Professional Higher Education Programmes are to:

1. educate specialists of fifth-level professional qualification in the fields necessary to the national economy and state security, favor competitiveness in the changing social-economic conditions and in international labor market;
2. implement acquirement of knowledge characteristic to each field enabling to develop new or improve existing systems, products and technologies and prepare for research, pedagogical and creative work.

The aims and objectives of higher education in Georgia, as regulated by the law on "Higher Education of Georgia" adopted in 2006, are to:

1. promote the formation of Georgian and world cultural values with orientation to the ideals of democracy and humanism, which are necessary for the existence and development of civil society;
2. meet the needs of receiving higher education, raise qualifications and retrain, meet the interests and abilities of the person;
3. realize personal potential, develop creative skills, train persons with competences to meet modern requirements, ensure the competitiveness of persons with higher education in the domestic and foreign labor market, offer high-quality higher education corresponding to the demands of students and the general public to interested persons;
4. ensure the development of the state and the viability of the higher education system itself, train and retrain new scientific personnel, create and develop conditions for scientific research;
5. Encourage the mobility of students and academic staff of higher educational institutions.

The aims and objectives of higher education in Georgia are of a wider range compared to the Latvian model of higher education. The Georgian model covers comparatively general concepts, and achieving them is quite hard for every stakeholder involved in these pro-

cesses. Universities are expected to design programmes considering these peculiarities that result in overloaded programmes and curricula, and hence, most of the students are not able to study and meet the requirements – ***they are studying general, theoretical subjects without being focused on practical aspects of the subjects, and in general, the profession they are willing to specialize in.***

Unlike the Georgian model of higher education, the Latvian model is focused on ***providing practical skills, considering the demands of the labor market.*** The two-level professional higher education is comparatively flexible; the first-level professional higher education creates a bulwark for students to acquire the knowledge and skills that will be prerequisites for the second-level professional higher education, where students are expected to master the acquired knowledge and skills and specialize in one of the desired fields ([Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.](#)).

Besides general, vocational, and higher education, the Latvian education system also includes continuing Education and Training for Young School Leavers and Adults (Latvian Adult Education Association / State Employment Agency / Education Law), and its main goals are to:

1. provide individuals with the opportunity to complement education based on their needs and interests, irrespective of previous education and age;
2. supplement inadequate previous education and knowledge due to social and economic changes;
3. resolve questions of social adaptation and integration.

Training for the unemployed is the most essential active employment initiative for the improvement of employability and quicker reinsertion into the labor market. Unfortunately, the Georgian education system does not consider and offer such programmes to people that may equip them with proper knowledge and skills to respond to the modern challenges on the labor market.

Based on the data used, it is clear that the Latvian and Georgian education systems differ significantly from each other both in terms of goals and objectives and in the forms of their implementation. Latvia implements separate differentiation of educational goals and objectives, for example, for primary and secondary education, as well as in the vocational education system, which allows for the implementation of specific needs and demands of society. At the same time, the Georgian education system tries to implement the goals and objectives of all levels in a single way, which is often properly integrated with practical training and professional skills. This difference is also reflected in the popularity of the vocational education system, where Latvia is characterized by a significantly higher share of students than Georgia. It should be especially noted that in the Latvian system, employment programs and the development of a system of retraining for minors and adolescents, which Georgia does not offer, allow citizens to develop professional skills and adapt to the demands of the labor market.

### *Curricula and Academic Performances of Latvian and Georgian Students*

Defining the essence of the term curriculum is not an easy matter. In fact, different scholars interpret the term in different ways. According to Portelli (1987), more than 120 definitions of the term appear in the professional literature devoted to curriculum, presumably because authors are concerned about either delimiting what the term means or establishing new meanings that have become associated with it. Hlebowitsh (1993) criticizes commentators in the curriculum field who focus “only on certain facets of early curriculum thought while ignoring others” (p. 2). We need to be watchful about definitions that capture only a few of the various characteristics of curriculum (Toombs & Tierney, 1993).

Marsh (2009) considers that the incompleteness of any definition notwithstanding, certain definitions of the term can provide insights about common emphases and characteristics within the general idea of curriculum (p. 4).

In general, in the context of education, the term curriculum is commonly understood as a course or “plan for learning”. Various scholars consider the curriculum to be a set of subjects that help us master the skills that are important for the development of modern society. At some point, the term curriculum is “learning experiences” being attained at various learning sites (Marsh, 2009).

According to the State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia, children attend schools from the year when they turn seven till the age of 18. In Georgia, children are obliged to attend schools from the year they turn six till the age of 18.

In the reports prepared by the mentioned agency, recently, the number of students attending schools has been approximately 226,000, while the number of teachers accounted for 26,760 teachers.

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, there are 633 302 pupils and 62 296 teachers in public and private schools in Georgia (National Statistics Service of Georgia, n.d.).

In Latvian schools, a basic school day includes 5 lessons in grades 1-3 and 8 lessons in grade 9. The school year is 34 weeks long in first grade and 37 weeks in grade 9 per year. General upper secondary education normally lasts for three years (grade 10-12). The school year comprises 35 weeks in 10-11 grade and 38 weeks in grade 12 with not more than 36 lessons per week and 8 lessons per day.

Like Latvian schools, a basic day includes 5 lessons in grades 1-3 and 8 lessons in grade 9 in Georgian schools. The number of study weeks in the first grade is 33; the minimum number of study weeks in second-ninth grades is 34 while in the Tenth-twelfth grades the number of study weeks is – 34 (Law on General Education of Latvia, 1999).

Compulsory curriculum in Latvia includes 4 subject areas: Introduction to technologies and science; Languages; Art; Man, and society. The curriculum for comprehensive education is defined by 20 subject standards. The average number of students per full-time teacher in basic education was 10 in 2006 (State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia, n.d.).

Compulsory curriculum in Georgia includes: national language; mathematics; foreign languages; social sciences; natural sciences; technologies; aesthetic education; sports. The maximum number of students in a class in a general educational institution is defined as 30 students. Exceptions will be allowed by written agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. In such a case, the maximum number of students should not exceed 35.

In Latvia, the compulsory curriculum of 3-year general upper secondary schools is determined by the National Standard in the four standardized educational profiles:

1. comprehensive education, without intensive teaching of any particular subject;
2. the humanities and social sciences programme;
3. the mathematics, natural science and technical science programme;
4. the vocational programme, where the general education curriculum places emphasis on subjects in these particular fields.

Educational standards and Regulations regarding assessment of learning achievement for the compulsory school and general upper secondary school are drafted by the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination which is a national administrative body reporting directly to the Minister of Education and Science, and are approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In Georgia, Educational standards and Regulations regarding school curricula is drafted by the ministry of education and science of Georgia as well as National Curriculum Portal. Students having desire to pursue their studies at universities are obliged to pass a national examination monitored by National Center for Evaluation and Examinations (Dvořák, Cinkraut, Donovalová & Tabatadze, 2025).

In both countries, learning achievements of school children are assessed through exams organized both at school level and centrally at National level.

### *International Assessment Results of Latvian and Georgian Students*

In Latvia and Georgia international assessments at schools are frequently conducted. The primary purposes of large-scale assessments are to highlight achievement gaps, track national progress over time, and compare student achievements within a country and to other countries.

One of the programmes for international assessment is PISA. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

In this respect, we can use the results of Latvian and Georgian students in order to compare the education systems, in particular, the effectiveness of curricula of the mentioned countries and find some weaknesses.

According to the results from PISA 2018, in Latvia, 78% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify

the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so.

While, In Georgia, only 36% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so.

In Latvia, 83% of students in Latvia attained Level 2 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 76%). At a minimum, these students can interpret and recognize, without direct instructions, how a (simple) situation can be represented mathematically (e.g. comparing the total distance across two alternative routes, or converting prices into a different currency). While in Georgia, only 39% of students in Georgia attained Level 2 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 76%). At a minimum, these students can interpret and recognize, without direct instructions, how a (simple) situation can be represented mathematically (e.g. comparing the total distance across two alternative routes, or converting prices into a different currency).

In Latvia, 82% of students in Latvia attained Level 2 or higher in science (OECD average: 78%). At a minimum, these students can recognize the correct explanation for familiar scientific phenomena and can use such knowledge to identify, in simple cases, whether a conclusion is valid based on the data provided. While in Georgia, 36% of students in Georgia attained Level 2 or higher in science (OECD average: 78%). At a minimum, these students can recognize the correct explanation for familiar scientific phenomena and can use such knowledge to identify, in simple cases, whether a conclusion is valid based on the data provided.

As it is clear from the results of the existing research, Latvian students have much better academic results in mathematics than Georgian students.

The question arising on the basis of the suggested information sounds as: ***How did Latvia, as a post-Soviet country, manage its students to have better academic performances comparing to other post-soviet countries including Georgia according to international studies?***

The very first factor having a tremendous influence on the academic achievement of students is the expenditure of a country on education. According to the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education of Latvia and Georgia, in 2019, Latvia spent 4.3% of its GDP or a total of USD 8 461 per full-time equivalent student on primary to tertiary educational institutions, while the Georgian education sector totaled GEL 2.0bn or 4.1% of GDP in 2019, up from GEL 0.7bn in 2009 ([Galt and Taggart Research. Education Industry Overview, 2020](#)).

The second detrimental factor is a number of students in each class. In Latvian schools, maximum 20 students can be in each class, while in Georgia the number of students can account for 30 in each class. It is obvious that teachers cannot work with that the number of students in an effective way ([European Commission. Education and Training Monitor, 2020](#)).

The third factor having a great influence on the academic performances of students is a curriculum. In Latvia, national curriculum is competence-based, which provides students with practical skills necessary for their future success, while in Georgia national curriculum is overloaded meaning that students are expected to study plenty of subjects being focused only on theoretical part and not mastering practical skills.

The fourth factor is digital education and skills which are a key element of Latvia's overall education policy. In Latvian schools, a great importance is given to teaching digital skills to students that respond to the modern challenges on labor market. The same cannot be said about Georgian schools. Unfortunately, even today, Georgian schools are not equipped basic means of technologies to teach students basic skills in this respect. Moreover, we do not have teaching having proper qualifications especially in the reasons of Georgia to teach that subject.

The fifth factor is the qualifications of teachers. Teachers in Latvia are trained at five higher education institutions. Two training routes can be taken. The most common is a professional bachelor's degree programme lasting 4 years which provides a teaching qualification for a specific level of education (pre-school, primary, secondary) and, for secondary school teachers, a specific subject area. Pre-school and primary school teachers are qualified to teach all subjects. The second route requires two stages – a bachelor's degree (3 years) in Education Sciences, plus an additional two years of study in a second-level professional programme of studies to qualify as a teacher in a specific level of education and/or subject area. Vocational school teachers generally have a professional diploma in a vocational area with an additional qualification in vocational teaching. A person who has at least a bachelor's degree and has completed a 1-year teacher training program can work as a teacher in Georgia. Unfortunately, very few universities in Georgia offer 5-year teacher training programs to students, which is directly related to teacher qualifications ([Latvia: Certificate of General Secondary Education. n.d.](#)).

The sixth factor is national examinations. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), in all education programmes there are eight compulsory subjects: Latvian language, literature, first foreign language, second foreign language, mathematics, Latvian and world history, sports, informatics ([Latvia: Certificate of General Secondary Education. n.d.](#)).

Depending on the education programme, the number of elective subjects varies from four to seven. The compulsory examinations are in Latvian Language, mathematics and a foreign language (English, German, French and Russian) of the student's choice ([State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia. n.d.](#)).

Centralized examinations (compulsory):

1. Latvian (written);
2. Mathematics (written);
3. Foreign language – English, German, French, Russian (written and oral).

Centralized examinations (elective):

1. Latvian & world history (written);
2. Chemistry (written);
3. Biology (written);
4. Physics (written).

Centrally set examinations (administered and marked by school):

1. Informatics (combined);
2. Geography (written);
3. Economics (written);
4. Russian language/ literature (written).

In Georgia, in 2005, by the decision of the Georgian government, the old Soviet system of entrance exams was replaced by a new one. The introduction of the new model of entrance exams is considered one of the most successful reforms in the country.

The model developed and implemented by the National Center for Assessment and Examinations is a fair, transparent, unified, meritocratic assessment system that ensures the selection of the best applicants for higher education institutions.

Since 2020, entrants take the unified national exams with a new model. In order to enroll in the higher education program, students are obliged to take three mandatory subjects: Georgian language and literature; foreign language; Mathematics/History. The third exam depends on the programs. Entrants for technical and natural science courses take mathematics, for humanitarian courses – history.

According to educational programs, higher education institutions have defined additional examination subjects from the following list: biology, chemistry, physics, general skills, geography, literature, fine and applied arts, civil education.

There are four mandatory exams for healthcare educational programs: 1. Georgian language and literature; 2. foreign language; 3. Biology; 4. Mathematics/Chemistry/Physics (applicant chooses at least one) ([Unified National Exams. Naec.ge. n.d.](#)).

## ***DISCUSSION***

The significance of the study is due to the fact that there are similarities between Georgia and Latvia, both among the post-Soviet countries, and in the development of the educational system. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries used a unified curriculum, however, in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries were allowed to develop their own educational systems. Over the past 30 years, both countries have gone through a difficult path in this process, although it is clear that the academic achievements of Latvian students are much higher than those of Georgian students.

When comparing the Latvian and Georgian educational systems, it is clear that Georgia

began to develop regulations relatively late, and accordingly, their education system had to make frequent changes. For example, in Latvia, the “Law on General Education” was developed in 1999, while in Georgia it was adopted only in 2005.

Thus, those aspects of the Latvian system that were often more modern and practice-oriented were compared to the Georgian system, where more theoretical and general training was envisaged. In terms of higher education, the Latvian model is more vocationally oriented, which gives the Georgian system a conceptual basis for creating a comprehensive and pragmatic system.

There is also a significant difference in the field of vocational education. Latvia, which started developing its vocational education system earlier, today has a more extensive and diverse system in this area. Georgia, for its part, needs to embrace and develop vocational education programs to meet the requirements of modernity.

Overall, although the Latvian and Georgian educational systems have sometimes developed similarly, they differ significantly in terms of academic outcomes. To this end, Georgia needs to pay more attention to the regulations of the education system, curricula, and teacher training process in order to meet modern needs and contribute to improving the quality of learning and research.

Beyond structural and curricular differences, cultural and socioeconomic factors significantly affect student performance in Latvia and Georgia. Latvia benefits from stronger economic indicators, lower poverty rates, and higher public trust in institutions – factors that correlate with educational attainment. The value placed on vocational and lifelong learning in Latvian society enhances student motivation and labor-market alignment. In contrast, Georgia faces ongoing economic instability and a high rate of rural depopulation, limiting equitable access to quality education. Societal attitudes toward vocational training and teacher status also differ, influencing both enrollment trends and teaching effectiveness across the two countries.

Future studies could focus on longitudinal tracking of student outcomes in both countries to better understand the long-term effects of educational reforms. Comparative qualitative research involving teacher and student interviews may reveal how curriculum content and pedagogical approaches are experienced in daily practice. Additionally, future inquiry could examine the role of educational technologies, inclusion policies, and regional disparities in shaping student success. Cross-country teacher training models and their impact on student achievement also represent a promising area for further exploration.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Since Latvia and Georgia were member states of the Soviet Union, they shared common educational principles, standards, goals, and missions. Schools and universities of both countries followed common curricula created by the scientific committees of the Soviet Union with the involvement of “successful” teachers and professors. Both countries were occupied and annexed by the U.S.S.R., and they declared their independence in 1991.

The Soviet legacy had a great impact on both countries. Latvia, unlike Georgia, started reforming the education system relatively early, creating a number of laws and regulations. These processes became more active in Georgia especially after the Rose Revolution, when the pro-Russian government resigned, and a pro-Western force came to power.

Latvian students have better academic records compared to Georgian students. Based on the existing research, certain factors can be identified that determine it:

1. The aims and objectives of education;
2. The expenditure of a country on education;
3. The number of students in each class;
4. The national curriculum;
5. The digital education and skills;
6. The qualifications of teachers;
7. The national examinations.

The Ministries of Education and Science of both countries strive to equip students with the relevant knowledge and competencies needed in the modern labor market. Existing countries are more or less coping with the existing challenge.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## RELIGION, SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND GENDER

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# The Specifics of the Religious Education System in Georgia (Second Half of the 19th Century)

KOKRASHVILI KHATUNA, PHD

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0001-3876-2591](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3876-2591)

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the specifics of the religious education system in Georgia during the second half of the 19th century. Analysing historical, political, and educational dynamics demonstrates how religious education functioned in the empire's border regions, particularly in Georgia, as a tool of cultural suppression, assimilation, and Russification. The research emphasizes the challenges faced by Georgian clergy and public figures under Russian policies; examines the interrelation among adaptation, education, and the preservation of cultural heritage under colonial oppression; and showcases the resilience of Georgian identity despite systemic pressure on national culture and the native language. The religious education system during the studied period reveals contradictions within the Russian church between modernisation and reactionary policies, with theological schools becoming a kind of battlefield. Georgian clergy, intellectuals, and students played a decisive role in ensuring that religious education did not fully align with imperial objectives. Against the background of systemic violence, they used it as a platform to safeguard the Georgian language and cultural heritage. Thus, in Georgia during the second half of the 19th century, the dual role of the religious education system was revealed: it served the policy of Russification and, at the same time, reflected the emergence and development of mechanisms for preserving Georgian identity within it. This duality enriches the narrative and illustrates the complexities of the historical moment.

*Keywords:* Ecclesiastical history of Georgia, Russian ecclesiastical policy, Georgian history, 19th century, religious education in Georgia, Russian Empire education system, Russian history

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The research on religious education in Georgia during the second half of the 19th century addresses a critical period in the country's cultural and political life, when Russia systematically sought to advance its colonial interests in the empire's national regions through Russification and assimilation.

This topic sheds light on how education systems were systematically weaponised as tools of assimilation in Georgia, underscoring the broader implications of empire-driven policies. The problem centres on the interplay between Russification policies and the resilience of Georgian cultural identity, specifically through religious education.

We will attempt to demonstrate how imperial policies sought to undermine national consciousness in Georgia; analyse the methods employed by the authorities in theological schools against culture, language, and identity, the mechanisms of assimilation within the religious education system; and how Georgian society resisted these policies, managing, despite challenges, to preserve the fundamental elements of its cultural heritage.

In today's globalized world, where cultural preservation and struggles over identity remain deeply relevant, we think the presented research offers a valuable historical perspective. Understanding the dynamics among education, politics, and resistance during the Russian Empire offers insights into contemporary debates over the role of education in cultural integration, assimilation, and resistance to hegemonic forces. The Georgian experience serves as a case study for examining broader patterns in colonial and post-colonial history.

## **METHODS**

This article is a historical investigation based on primary sources, scientific literature, and documents, reflecting the characteristics of the religious education system in 19th-century Georgia. The research was conducted using the principles of historicism, applying historical-comparative methods, analysis, and synthesis.

The specifics of ecclesiastical education in Georgia were examined against the background of Russia's religious-educational policies. On the one hand, the analysis of Russia's global imperial tendencies, and on the other hand, the local examples and ongoing events in Georgia, revealed both the local-regional and global-universal contexts of the research issue and their interrelation. The focus on key figures and institutions proved engaging: the influential Georgian clergy and public figures added a personal dimension, illustrating how individuals coped with and resisted the pressures of Russification. This approach complements the broader structural analysis.

## **RESULTS**

The article showcases how education and religion were wielded as tools of assimilation. It demonstrates how the resilience and adaptability of local communities counterbalanced the

suppression of native languages and cultural practices.

It was significant to show the dual role of the religious education system. The article contributes to understanding how colonial policies affect peripheral regions, contradictorily, often unintentionally fostering resistance and cultural consolidation rather than achieving total assimilation.

The initiatives of Georgian clergy, educators, and intellectuals underscore their agency in maintaining cultural heritage. These figures emerge not as passive subjects of imperial policy but as active participants in shaping national consciousness.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *1. Institutional Reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church and Educational Policy in Georgia*

By the second half of the 19th century, the clergy's legal and social status as a distinct class in the Russian Empire had significantly expanded, turning them into an untouchable caste. Following the abolition of serfdom in the 1860s, the existence of the clergy as a special and self-contained caste became outdated. (Lopukhin, 1901, p. 652) Naturally, the reform efforts of Alexander II's era also addressed the Russian Empire's ecclesiastical administration. The reforms of the 1860s and 1870s, which initiated the process of the Russian state's bourgeois evolution, aimed to break down the caste-based insularity within the Russian Church and introduce noticeable societal changes. It is worth noting that the Church did not embrace these transformations enthusiastically. It struggled to adapt to the new conditions, causing delays and hindering the reform of ecclesiastical structures. During this period, the Russian Church was essentially undergoing an imitation of reforms. Most of the initiated reforms were completed under the political reaction conditions of the 1880s, effectively taking on the character of counter-reforms (Litvak, 1989, p. 357). Naturally, the reform process in the empire's peripheral and colonial regions, including the ecclesiastical life of Georgia's Exarchate, progressed even more slowly and at a more sluggish pace than in Russia's internal provinces.

The ecclesiastical reforms of Russian Emperor Alexander II, implemented in the 1860s-1870s, aimed to actively involve the clergy and priests in public life. Revitalizing ecclesiastical life meant addressing problems in the spheres of social, economic, charitable, and public education. Naturally, innovations within the religious education system gained special significance.

It is noteworthy that, unlike the internal provinces of Russia, where the religious education system consisted of four levels, Georgia had only three: theological seminaries, district schools, and parish schools. The highest level of religious education – the theological academy – did not exist in Georgia. Consequently, outstanding students who graduated from seminaries in Georgia pursued higher theological education at theological academies in Russia. The theological academies of Kyiv, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan were the main centres of theological education in Russia (Khundadze, 1951, pp. 161-162; Bubulashvili, 2022, p. 380).

The reforms of the 1860s in the Russian Empire's religious education system did not entail fundamental changes. Essentially, they represented periodic changes to the regulations and staff schedules of religious institutions. However, positive innovations were also noted in the reform process. In 1863, the children of the clergy were granted the freedom to choose their profession, as well as the right to enter university and work in public service. However, this law was repealed again in 1879. In 1867, the principle of inheritance in selecting candidates for clerical positions was abolished (Litvak, 1989, pp. 358-360).

Additionally, the ecclesiastical reforms allowed dioceses to convene gatherings of the clergy to discuss the economic conditions of the diocese and educational and pedagogical issues in religious schools. However, these gatherings lacked sufficient authority to implement decisions effectively.

Beginning in the 1860s and 1870s, under the initiative of Bishop Gabriel Kikodze of Imereti, clergy assemblies from various dioceses of western Georgia (Imereti, Samegrelo, and Guria) repeatedly petitioned for the establishment of a theological seminary in the city of Kutaisi. These requests, voiced over several years (in 1871, 1879, 1881, 1885, and beyond), stemmed from the difficulty local students faced in continuing their education at the Tbilisi Theological Seminary. Although the clergy of the aforementioned dioceses expressed their willingness to cover a significant portion of the seminary's expenses, the authorities remained unsupportive of the resolutions and petitions adopted by the clergy assemblies of the respective dioceses. The Kutaisi Seminary was ultimately founded only in 1894, following a decision by the Holy Synod. Notably, in 1893, the temporary closure of the Tbilisi Seminary due to student unrest coincided with the government's interest in establishing a new theological institution (Bubulashvili, 2022, pp. 399–405).

In 1867, new staff regulations and statutes for theological schools and seminaries were approved, and in 1869, similar statutes were introduced for theological academies. As a result of the reform, theological schools were administratively subordinated to diocesan management; A special educational committee was established, headed not by a secular official but by a clergyman, who determined the teaching methods and content. Under the new statutes, the position of seminary rector became elective. Special bodies responsible for selecting teachers were also created within seminaries and theological schools (Litvak, 1989, p. 359).

These modest democratic elements were meant to overshadow the significant and regressive changes in the content and process of education in theological schools. Specifically, subjects like Biblical history, hermeneutics, ecclesiastical archaeology, and polemical theology – disciplines that required critical thinking from seminary students – were removed from the seminary curriculum. The teaching of civil history was also abolished. Instead, the hours allocated to classical languages and the study of Holy Scripture were increased. Books unrelated to the educational curriculum were removed from seminary libraries (Litvak, 1989, pp. 358-360).

In the Caucasus region, including Georgia, the practical implementation of reform measures was, in most cases, delayed compared to the central areas of Russia. For instance, the enactment of the new regulatory statute on theological schools, adopted in the Russian

Empire in 1867, was not carried out in Georgia until 1872.

In the 1860s, during the Russian Empire, there was a notable increase in the Russian Orthodox Church's role in public education. In 1866, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, D. A. Tolstoy, was also appointed as the Minister of Public Education. The merging of two positions under one individual indicated the strengthening influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on public education (Litvak, 1989, pp. 364-365).

The Church was entrusted with a special mission in primary education. The clergy of parishes were tasked with teaching reading and writing to the children of peasants and ensuring their basic education in parish schools. The secular and spiritual authorities in Russia regarded parishes as social entities tasked with practically fulfilling the Church's social mission and addressing contemporary societal issues.

As a result, in 1864, the Russian Empire established ecclesiastical-parish guardianship committees. Their goal was to improve the well-being of parishes, renovate dilapidated churches, enhance both the spiritual-moral and material conditions of believers, and assist orphans and the needy (E. K., 1901, p. 269).

In the Georgian Exarchate, parish-ecclesiastical guardianship committees were founded in various areas of Tbilisi only in 1887, affiliated with different churches – such as those of John the Theologian in Vera, St. Nicholas in Chughureti, the Peter and Paul Cemetery, Ascension in Sololaki, Didube, and other churches. Later, ecclesiastical-parish committees were established in different regions of Georgia as well. These committees did not fulfil the expectations envisioned at the time of their establishment; however, their valuable contributions cannot be denied. They played a role in the creation of churches and schools within the parishes, as well as the implementation of individual charitable initiatives (E. K., 1901, p. 271).

In the second half of the 19th century, the network of religious education in Georgia gradually expanded. Religious schools existed in Tiflisi, Kutaisi, Telavi, and Gori, as well as in Samegrelo, Guria, and elsewhere. It is significant that the network of religious education mainly grew through the establishment of primary religious schools. The government showed little initiative in opening secondary religious schools in Georgia, particularly seminaries (Kokrashvili, 2014b, p. 108).

Notably, at the beginning of the 19th century, after Russia conquered and annexed Georgian territories, the number of local Georgian schools and educational institutions decreased significantly. Many were closed and abolished, including the theological seminaries in Tiflisi and Telavi. The establishment of Russian schools and educational institutions was also delayed. Thus, the noble school opened by the Russian administration in Tiflisi in 1804 was, for many years, the only state-funded school in Georgia. The Russian theological seminary and the district school with a parish school in Tiflisi were not opened until 1917. The state treasury did not allocate funds, and the Georgian Exarchate borrowed the necessary finances from the missionary society – „Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission“ (Kokrashvili, 2014a, pp. 72-73).

„Until the 1890s, the only central institution of Orthodox theological education in Georgia was located in Tbilisi. This institution was the Tbilisi Theological Seminary, which operated within the framework of the Georgian Exarchate“. In 1894, after years of effort and with significant support from the clergy of Western Georgia, a local budget was allocated to open the Kutaisi Theological Seminary, which operated only until 1904.

The objective and subjective conditions of societal development also led to the formation of religious schools for women in Georgia. Between 1866 and 1879, a women's school was established at the Samtavro Monastery, which was later relocated from Mtskheta to Tiflisi and transformed into the Ioannike Women's Diocesan School. In 1892, Bishop Gabriel founded the Kutaisi Women's Diocesan School in the city of Kutaisi, among others (Sakvarelidze, 1958, p. 108; Ketsbaia, 1997, p. 98).

It should be noted that, in the internal provinces of Russia, theological seminaries and schools operated at the expense of the state treasury, while in Georgia, theological seminaries and schools functioned through the income of the Georgian Exarchate – derived from local parishioners and the Church. Despite the enormous political mission assigned to the education system in the Russian Empire for the Russification and assimilation of “foreign peoples”, the government showed little interest in financially supporting the religious education system in national regions. The formation of secondary religious schools (district schools and seminaries), which required greater government expenditure, progressed more slowly than that of primary religious schools, which were mainly established at the expense of the population. Due to budget constraints, teacher salaries were inadequate, and schools often operated in unimproved buildings.

## *2. Theological Education as a Tool of Russification: Language Suppression and Cultural Reconfiguration*

In the 1860s, the teaching of the Georgian language in public schools was significantly restricted. In 1861, a regulation was issued “On Primary Public Schools”, which stipulated that all types of schools in Georgia should conduct instruction in Russian. However, in the same year, rules compiled by the missionary and charitable organisation “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus” preserved the study of local languages in the primary classes of schools under its management (Gvanceladze, Tabidze, Sherozia, Chanturia, 2001, p. 97).

In the 1870s, the restriction of the Georgian language in the Tiflisi Theological Seminary and Georgian theological schools became a systemic phenomenon. In many cases, this occurred in quite harsh forms. In 1873, by order of the Russian Holy Synod, the Georgian language was abolished as a mandatory subject in secondary theological schools. Two hours per class were allocated to the native language, which was assigned a supportive role in the study of Russian. The Georgian language hours were primarily used for learning Russian. At this stage, preference was given to the so-called „Comparative method“, which involved learning a foreign language through the native language (Khundadze, 1951, p. 203).

It is noteworthy that due to the inadequate teaching or complete neglect of the Georgian language, the Tiflisi Theological Seminary was producing clergy who were entirely unqualified for Georgian religious services. These individuals were unable to establish proper contact with the Georgian congregation or to conduct prayers and services in Georgian.

In Georgia's theological schools, the study of the Russian language became a priority. According to the 1875 decree, „the Visual learning method“ for Russian language instruction was enhanced, requiring students to use Russian when conversing with each other. Additional hours were assigned to struggling students to prepare in Russian, among other measures. As per the 1879 order of the Holy Synod, „In the future, only individuals of Russian origin with higher education should be appointed as Russian language teachers in the theological schools of the Georgian Exarchate“ ([Georgian National Archive, Central Historical Archive, f. 440, case № 194, sheet 111](#)).

In general, it should be noted that, according to Georgian historiography, the early 1870s saw relatively favourable teaching regimes and conditions established in Georgian theological schools. Due to the elective system, a significant portion of the supervisors and teachers in these schools were of ethnic Georgian descent. Many of them distinguished themselves by their progressive pedagogical and social ideas (examples include Iase Sulxanishvili, the inspector of the Tiflisi Theological Seminary; Iakob Gogebashvili at the Tiflisi Theological School; Davit Datoshvili at the Telavi District School; Gerasime Kalandarishvili in Kutaisi; and Mikheil Gurgenidze, who headed the Samegrelo Theological School). Teachers of theological schools (such as Niko Tskhvedadze, Thoma Turiyev, and Giorgi Ioseliani at the Tiflisi Theological Seminary; and Pavle Berkanidze, Ilia, and Christofore Zarapishvili at the Gori and Telavi Theological Schools, among others) had a significant influence on students, providing them access to the works of leading thinkers and progressive ideas of the time. Despite the significant restrictions imposed during the 1860s and 70s, the Georgian language survived and was not entirely excluded from the curriculum of theological schools.

After the assassination of Russian Emperor Alexander II in the 1880s, the Russian Church began to counter the few progressive reforms implemented over the previous two decades. From this period, when a strict political regime was established across the empire, the development of the Russian Church entered a new stage. These counter-reforms led to a surge of activity among influential ecclesiastical figures and officials in Russia. Their confusion and inactivity during the reform years were replaced by relentless efforts to restore the Church's lost authority and consolidate its shaken positions, especially in the national regions.

It is known that, at the beginning of the 19th century, Tsarism completed the integration of the Church into the bureaucratic apparatus of state governance and gradually elevated the Church's status within the state. By the end of the same century, the Russian Church assumed the primary ideological function of defending the existing order. Under the leadership of its energetic administrator, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev (1880–1905), it took a firm stance on the fundamental issues of domestic policy.

The 1880s–1890s can be considered a distinctive era in the Russian Empire in terms of the relationship between the state and the Church ([Litvak, 1989, p. 357; Religija i cerkov' v](#)

istorii Rossii, 1975, p. 215). This connection is well reflected in the words of Russian ecclesiastical figures: “The Russian state, Orthodoxy, and autocracy – all these are organically intertwined. Every matter associated with faith, the Church, in Orthodox Russia also acquires the significance of a state issue” (*Cerkov’ v istorii Rossii (IX v.-1917 g.)*, 1967, p. 284).

The special significance of the Church’s role in state policy is highlighted by the appointment of the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod as a member of the Ministers’ Committee, as well as the Supreme Commission on the Press. On the initiative of the Chief Procurator, regular audiences and meetings with clergy were organized with the emperor, among other actions. Steps were taken to expand the Church’s independence from the highest secular bureaucracy. In 1881, the Holy Synod was granted the right to resolve specific issues without the emperor’s intervention, such as awarding honors to clergy, opening monasteries, introducing private changes in religious-educational institutions, and more (*Istorija religii v Rossii*, 2002, pp. 157-158).

In the last two decades of the 19th century, the counter-reforms and reactionary politics implemented in the Russian Empire were most acutely felt in the peripheral colonial regions of Russia, including Georgia. The idea of „United and Indivisible Russia“ became relevant. Russification, which by the 1880s had been methodically developed and theoretically justified within the Russian Empire as a universal political system for all colonial entities, aimed at opposing the national identities and peculiarities of various peoples, as well as their moral and intellectual lives. Russian autocracy launched attacks on several fronts, using the following as tools: (a) state policy, (b) the education system, and (c) the Russian Church. Consequently, the process of counter-reforms unfolded with extreme intensity in the life of the Georgian Exarchate, affecting all aspects of ecclesiastical life (*Kokrashvili*, 2014b, p. 112).

Several Western historians, including Edward Thaden and Andreas Kappeler, emphasize that the Russian Empire’s educational policy in Georgia exhibited a distinctly particular character. Despite their shared religious affiliation with Russian Orthodoxy, Georgian Orthodox Christians were perceived as potential sources of resistance, which led to religious education becoming a principal target of Russification efforts (*Kappeler*, 2001; *Thaden*, 1981). Russification in Georgia was more assertive than in other regions of the empire, involving not only the suppression of the Georgian language but also the abolition of the local independent Orthodox Church’s autocephaly and the consolidation of Russian ecclesiastical governance (*Thaden*, 1981, pp. 161–178).

With the new regulations for theological schools, even the minimal elements of democratization introduced during the reform period were abolished: the election of teachers was eliminated, the administration was strengthened, and the authority of bishops was increased, among other changes. During the reactionary period of the 1880s, various progressive-minded educators of both Georgian and Russian origin were dismissed and expelled from the Tiflisi Theological Seminary for various reasons. In their place, extremely reactionary teachers were appointed.

In Georgian theological schools, a political regime of surveillance and strict control over each student was established. They were forbidden from reading literature of a liberal ori-

entation, and expulsions of students, particularly Georgians, became more frequent, often for trivial reasons (Khutsishvili, 1987, p. 102). The confrontation between the administration of theological schools and students reached its peak. In 1894, following the murder of the rector of the Tiflisi Theological Seminary, Chudecki, by a student of the seminary, the institution was closed for a year. After its reopening, during the 1890s, an even more oppressive regime was imposed in the seminary: the number of supervisors increased, spies and provocateurs became more numerous, and students of different nationalities were turned against one another (Bubulashvili, 2022, p. 396; Kvitsiani, 2001, p. 153).

In the 1880s–1890s, the education sector and schools throughout the empire took on the mission of Russifying local ethnicities. Schools were to become the implementers of Russian civilization and the suppressors of national culture in the peripheral national regions of the empire.

The circular dated October 20, 1880, sent by Kirill P. Yanovsky (1822-1902), the head of the Caucasus Educational District, to his subordinates, stated: “The establishment of Russian schools in the Caucasus and attracting the local population to study in them must undoubtedly be considered the main means of consolidating Russian civilization in this region... This civilization, which strives to penetrate the people and develops through a rationally organized school system, will prove to be more resilient than the civilizations previously existing here, which it has come to replace” (Georgian National Archive, Central Historical Archive, f. 17, inv. 3, case № 300; Khundadze, 1951, p. 153).

On January 13, 1881, the publication of the “Primary School Curriculum” laid the foundation for the full Russification of public primary schools under the Ministry of Education throughout Georgia and the entire Caucasus. According to this curriculum, the teaching of the Russian language in primary schools was to begin in the second half of the first year, and from the second year onward, students were required to study all subjects in Russian (Khundadze, 1951, p.100).

Under the 1895 regulations, which fell under the Ministry of Education’s jurisdiction, local languages were removed entirely from primary schools. From the very first day of learners’ school attendance, all subjects were required to be taught in Russian. In the 1890s, to make the process of Russification more effective, the so-called “natural” (silent) method was purposefully introduced. This method was first used by Levitsky, the director of the Kutaisi public school, in schools under his jurisdiction. The method entirely prohibited the use of the native language for learning Russian, aiming to make Russian the language of thought for the students.

### *3. Primary Education Network: the Dual Models of Russification, Cultural, and Religious Integration*

In the 1880s, special emphasis was placed on primary religious education. Following the assassination of Emperor Alexander II of Russia, the Ministers’ Committee unanimously expressed the view that the spiritual and moral development of the people – an essential corner-

stone of the state system – could only be achieved through the clergy’s involvement in the governance of public schools. The implementation of this directive was undertaken by the highly energetic Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, K. P. Pobedonostsev. In 1884, the “Rules on Church-Parish Schools” were established, setting the goal for these schools to promote Orthodoxy and elementary education among the broader population (Aleksidze, 1998, p. 20).

In 1884, according to new regulations for theological schools, responsibility for diocesan theological schools and seminaries was assigned to the clergy. They were granted the right to convene independent congresses, which were tasked with electing educational and supervisory councils for theological schools and seminaries. Congress delegates were chosen from parishes, with one delegate elected for every ten parishes. Deacons and psalm readers also had voting rights. The clergy were authorized to oversee women’s education and open theological schools and educational institutions using diocesan funds, where instruction in the native language was not restricted (Litvak, 1989, p. 366).

Thanks to such congresses, the number of church-parish schools increased, the number of students grew, and old schools were renovated. Clergy oversight was extended not only to orphaned children but also to the children of impoverished clergy. Buildings were constructed for church-parish schools, and additional funds were secured to support each student. The clergy also took care to improve teachers’ material conditions by supplementing the salaries of theological school educators from diocesan funds. Unlike public schools under the Ministry of Education, church-parish schools were subordinate to the highest ecclesiastical authority.

Since 1885, the Holy Synod has developed a special „curriculum“ for church-parish schools in the Georgian Exarchate, taking local conditions into account. A church-parish school could be either single-class or two-class. In Georgian parishes, single-class schools had a three-year program, while in the Exarchate’s Russian parish schools, the program lasted two years. Two-class church-parish schools offered a four-year education. The curriculum consisted of the following subjects: canon law, reading and writing in the native language for local students, while Church Slavonic was taught to Russians, as well as elementary arithmetic. In two-class schools, this was supplemented by civil and ecclesiastical history. Some of these schools also included classes in handicrafts (E. K., 1901, pp. 214-215).

In 1885, by order of the Emperor, the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus” was placed under the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod. As a result, the society’s schools were administratively merged with church-parish schools (Khundadze, 1951, p. 65; Pkhaladze, 2000, p. 74). Sunday schools and literacy schools were also established. Education was funded by parish resources, supported by local priests, or provided through teachers appointed by the diocesan bishop, who worked under the supervision of parish clergy. In the Georgian Exarchate, parish and Sunday schools were managed by the educational councils of the respective dioceses, which were accountable to the Georgian Exarchate.

Since teaching Georgian as a native language was neither permitted nor prohibited in church-parish schools, demand for these institutions in Georgia increased significantly. By the end of the 19th century, the number of church-parish schools in the Georgian di-

ocese totalled 103, in the Sokhumi diocese – 45, in the Imereti diocese –106, and in the Guria-Samegrelo diocese – 127 (E. K., 1901, p. 217; Tatiev, 1913, pp. 16-17).

However, tensions arose in those historical regions of Georgia whose populations the Russian Empire regarded as ethnically non-Georgian. These included the Mingrelians, Svans, Khevsurs, Adjarians, and others. The imperial authorities sought to detach these groups from the unified Georgian cultural framework.

The campaign began with the expulsion of the Georgian language from schools in Samegrelo and Svaneti, where efforts were made to create alphabets for local populations based on the Russian script– even though Georgian had long been recognized as the language of their culture, literary tradition, and religious practice. In 1888–1889, textbooks were developed for primary education, specifically for parish schools and institutions overseen by the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus.” These textbooks were written in Mingrelian, Abkhazian, and Svan and primarily consisted of collections of prayers (Pkhaldze, 2000, p. 75).

It can be said that in the second half of the 19th century, two models of Russification of “inorodtsy” (a term used in Imperial Russia to refer to non-Russian peoples) existed within the Russian Empire. Both models of Russification naturally played a significant role in the field of education, with a primary focus on primary schools.

The first model was directly connected to the educational and pedagogical processes of public schools under the Ministry of Education. It sought total Russification of schools and the population through coercive methods, aiming to alter their minds and ways of thinking. By using Russian schools to eradicate native languages and strengthen the Russian language, this model deliberately fought to abolish the Georgian language, establish instruction in Russian, and alter the national consciousness of the local population through education (Kokrashvili, 2014b, p. 116).

The second model, which entailed beginning the Russification process through religion, was developed based on the experience of the clergy, particularly missionaries, and was primarily implemented in the theological schools and institutions in the peripheral regions of the Russian Empire. This model aimed to merge and assimilate the non-Russian population of the empire’s conquered territories with the Russian people through the religious factor – in this case, the empire’s prioritized state faith, Orthodoxy. This method did not prioritize teaching the Russian language in primary schools within national regions. Instead, it used educational influence in the native language to instill a Russian worldview, lifestyle, moral norms, customs, and religion among the non-Russian population. A unique characteristic of this model was that the “inorodtsy” (non-Russian peoples) were Russified not through aggressive, direct means, but rather subtly. Initially, the native language and Russian state religion were used to cultivate and establish Russian mentality among the non-Russian population, followed by their complete assimilation into the Russian Empire through the Russian language (Kokrashvili, 2014b, pp. 116-117).

Throughout the 19th century, the aforementioned second model underwent systematic development and substantiation, playing a crucial role in the expansion of Russia’s polyethnic

and polyconfessional empire and in the consolidation of the newly annexed territories. In the second half of the 19th century, following the conquest of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire, when the Russification policy became the primary direction of the state, this model was utilized to strengthen Russian power in the Caucasian countries, including Georgia. From the 1860s onward, schools established by the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus” operated in Georgia based on this model, functioning in dioceses and individual parishes. From the 1880s, church-parish and Sunday schools also began implementing this method (Kokrashvili, 2024, p. 189).

Soon, it became clear to the Russian authorities that church-parish schools, where teaching in the native languages of the local population was allowed, were somewhat hindering the planned pace of the “Russification” of the “inorodtsy” (non-Russian peoples). Therefore, in the 1890s, K. P. Yanovsky, the custodian of the Caucasus Educational District, attempted to integrate all types of primary education institutions in the Caucasus into his department, specifically into the Ministry of Education’s public school system: church-parish and Sunday schools, as well as Tiflisi self-governing schools, where, similar to church-parish schools, the Georgian language continued to be taught.

K. P. Yanovsky succeeded in city self-government schools and subordinated them to the Caucasian educational district. As a result, Georgian language teaching in these schools was restricted. However, he could not, at this stage, subordinate the church-parish schools under the Caucasus Educational District.

#### *4. Cultural Resistance, Adaptation, and Identity Preservation: The Role of Georgian Clergy and Intellectuals*

In the Russian Empire, Orthodoxy and Russianness were inseparable concepts. Clearly, in Georgia, adherence to Orthodox Christianity did not equate to political loyalty, which is precisely why the Church and religious education became instruments of Russification and ideological influence. Within this context, Georgia’s Orthodox population found itself under imperial pressure; yet it was precisely within this space that cultural resistance and national self-awareness began to take shape. Such a perspective deepens our understanding of how religious education functioned as a site of intersection between imperial authority and national opposition.

The intensified policy of Russification in primary education provoked protest within Georgian society. Leading critics included Ilia Chavchavadze, Sergi Meskhi, Dimitri Kipiani, Raphael Eristavi, and others. The movement began with a publication by Sergi Meskhi in the only Georgian-language newspaper of the time, „Droeba“, titled „An Open Letter to Mr. Yanovsky“. In it, Meskhi wrote: „The desires of Georgians are the same as those of all peoples: to preserve their language, homeland, customs, and faith. This desire is legitimate, and every government supports its people in this. Your wish, however, is for Georgians to forget their native tongue, so that as soon as pupils enter primary school, they begin learning in a foreign language. This desire contradicts both state interests and, quite clearly, pedagogical truth“ (Meskhi, 1880).

In the second half of the 19th century, the Georgian intelligentsia continued the struggle for the preservation of the Georgian language, initiated by the Georgian intelligentsia, under the leadership of Ilia Chavchavadze. The mentioned problem constituted one of the Key issues of the national liberation movement in Georgia. As a result of protest movements and at the request of the local population, the state's attitude toward teaching the Georgian language in theological schools underwent periodic shifts. In 1882, a department for the Georgian language was established at the Tiflisi Theological Seminary, and in 1883, by the decision of the seminary administration, Georgian church hymns were introduced as a mandatory subject. Naturally, such concessions were formal and temporary. By the ongoing political course of Russification throughout the empire, the suppression of the Georgian language – the primary marker of Georgian national identity – continued in the educational system (Khundadze, 1951, p. 153).

In 1883, Tedo Jordania of the Tbilisi Theological Seminary introduced a Georgian language curriculum that included secular literature. In 1885, Rector Pavel Chudetsky repealed the program and authored a shorter course, which was also rejected by the Russian Holy Synod. Instruction was then confined to reading and preaching from ecclesiastical texts. Georgian clergy continuously demanded Georgian language instruction in seminaries, but to no avail. In 1899, a comprehensive curriculum proposed by a commission led by Bishop Leonid (Okropiridze), with contributions from Bishop Kirion (Sadzaglishvili) and educator A. Grdzlishvili, was likewise dismissed by the Synod, reinforcing the imperial resistance to Georgian linguistic inclusion in religious education (Kvitsiani, 2001, pp. 153-154).

In the second half of the 19th century, under the intense pressure of imperial policy, preserving identity and resistance also involved a certain adaptation. Clergy and public figures in Georgia often did not directly oppose the system, but rather deliberately adapted to it in order to preserve their national identity. This was a flexible strategy, according to which Georgian clergy acted within imperial constraints to protect national and spiritual values. They used the academic and ecclesiastical spaces created by the system – such as theological schools and church service – for national purposes: to protect the native language and culture, and to form national consciousness.

It is also worth noting that, despite the political and ideological pressure of the Russian Empire, as well as the intensified Russification and assimilation policies, religious education brought positive outcomes for Georgia. Russian theological schools – seminaries, academies, and theological institutions – produced numerous representatives of Georgian religious intelligentsia, progressive clergy, and national and public figures (E. K., 1901, pp. 178-180): Platon Ioseliani, Gabriel Kikodze, Dimitri Bakradze, Mikheil (Gobron) Sabinin, Mose Janashvili, Giorgi (Kirion) Sadzaglishvili, Kallistrate Tsintsadze, Polievktos and Vasil Karbelashvili, Tedo Zhordania, Ambrosi Khelaia, Ekvtime Takaishvili, Sergi Gorgadze, Aleksandre Tsagareli, Korneli Kekelidze, and many others.

Several generations of researchers also emerged in the academic arena, who received specialised education in the fields of historical theology and ecclesiastical archaeology at various theological academies in Russia. Their social and intellectual lives were dedicated to uncovering Georgia's cultural treasures, highlighting the place of the Georgian Church

within the Christian world, and demonstrating the role of the Georgian Church as a defining and significant phenomenon in the processes of Georgian national self-determination and the formation of national consciousness.

This was the result of the paradoxical reality characteristic of imperial education systems: when a colonial power seeks assimilation, it often unintentionally creates space for critical thinking and cultural resistance. Education received within the imperial system was frequently used against that very system – as seen in the biographies of those figures who later actively participated in the struggle for the restoration of the independence of the Georgian Church, national-educational efforts, and public life.

Research has demonstrated that, in nineteenth-century Georgia, religious education did not serve merely as an instrument of assimilation but operated as a multifaceted arena in which imperial authority, ecclesiastical policy, and local cultural resistance converged. State reforms that sought to construct a unified ideological space through the Church often produced unintended consequences, most notably, the intensification of national self-awareness. Through this evolving dynamic, an intellectual and spiritual foundation emerged that later catalyzed the autocephalous movement of the early twentieth century, representing both a form of ecclesiastical independence and national self-determination.

## **CONCLUSION**

The educational and ecclesiastical policies implemented by the state aimed to instrumentalize the Church as a means of disseminating imperial ideology. At the same time, the Church, as an institution, sought to maintain its influence over local communities and frequently adapted imperial policies as a strategy for self-preservation. This process also involved the local population, which, on the one hand, was subject to assimilative pressures, and on the other hand, employed education as a vehicle for resistance and the preservation of cultural identity. An analysis of this triangular relationship – state initiatives, ecclesiastical strategies, and cultural resistance enables us to conceptualize religious education not merely as a tool of assimilation, but as a dynamic space in which power, identity, and resistance intersect.

The Russian Empire systematically employed education as a tool of assimilation and Russification, aiming to suppress national identity and reinforce control over peripheral regions. In response, local clergy and members of the intellectual elite sought ways to preserve and disseminate elements of Georgian culture, language, and religious tradition.

Although Russification left an undeniable imprint on both the structure and content of religious education, the enduring efforts of Georgian clerics and society reflect the resilience of cultural defiance. By overcoming the constraints imposed by imperial policies, they succeeded in safeguarding Georgia's spiritual and cultural heritage and became part of a broader national liberation movement.

## Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Religion Status, Trust, and Happiness: United States and Georgia

DINELLO NATALIA, PHD

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, D.C, USA

ORCID: [0000-0003-4436-4642](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4436-4642)

## ABSTRACT

Based on public opinion surveys and using the “three B’s” – belief, belonging, and behavior – module for measuring religiosity, this paper reveals Georgians’ differences from Americans in their more profound and certain beliefs in God, greater importance of religion in their lives, and a sharper contrast between trust in religious institutions and distrust in political ones. It also highlights Georgians’ exceptionalism in their overwhelming identification with a single religious denomination, Orthodox Christianity; higher social conservatism; support for religion’s impact on politics; and similar or greater religiosity of younger people compared to older ones. Although causality between the variables cannot be proven, research suggests a correlation among religiosity, trust in religious institutions, and happiness and well-being, especially through the benefits of social relationships and community involvement. As Georgians’ exceptionalism is rooted in history and can improve the mood in society, navigating between traditionalism and modernism, conservative values and liberal ideas is likely to continue for some time, strengthening Georgia’s spiritual, cultural, and national identity.

*Keywords:* Georgia, religion, happiness, well-being, trust

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The choice of the United States (U.S.) for an exploratory contrast to Georgia is driven by several factors. First, in its post-Soviet modernizing reforms, independent Georgia has actively sought to align with U.S. values and pursue closer ties, and the U.S. has offered support in promoting these values and establishing a partnership ([Integrated Country Strategy: Georgia, 2022](#)). Secondly, while the U.S. is a quintessentially modern society, it is widely considered more religious than other developed countries, particularly when compared to Western Europe. According to a leading scholar of religion, Peter Berger, a secular discourse resulting from modernity “can coexist with religious discourses that are not secular at all” ([Berger, 2012](#)). Although a direct comparison of such different countries as the U.S., characterized by religious pluralism, and Georgia, a majority Orthodox society, is tricky, their side-by-side investigation has value.

The founders of the U.S. favored a neutral posture toward religion to prevent infringement on religious freedom, and the country’s Constitution does not mention God. At the same time, nearly all constitutions of the States reference God or the divine. God also appears in the Declaration of Independence, the Pledge of Allegiance, and on U.S. currency ([Leppert and Fahmy, 2022](#)). A Bible is traditionally used during the presidential oath of office ([Andrew, 2021](#)), and “God Bless America” has become a standard phrase ending presidential speeches ([Vile, 2025](#)).

An association between God and country is even more pronounced in Georgia. One of the greatest Georgian writers and a leader of the national liberation movement, Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), highlighted Christian faith – associated with national spirit – as a pillar of *Georgianness* ([Chkhartishvili, 2013, p. 198](#)). In 1987, the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) canonized Chavchavadze, thus reinforcing the historical notion of an inherent link between an Orthodox belief and Georgian identity ([Sul Khanishvili, 2013](#); [Gegeshidze and Mirziashvili, 2021](#)). In the post-Soviet period, the GOC became very influential and helped promote a unique Georgian national identity ([Grzelidze, 2012 and 2023](#)). The Constitution of Georgia is explicit about religion. Article 8 provides for freedom of belief and religion, recognizes the “outstanding role” of the GOC in the country’s history, and stipulates that the relationship between the GOC and the state shall be determined by a constitutional agreement ([Constitute Project, 2018](#); [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, 2023](#)). During the run-up to the 2024 elections, the ruling Georgian Dream party proposed making Orthodox Christianity the state religion ([Georgia: Freedom in the World, 2025](#)).

## **OBJECTIVE AND METHODS**

### *Overview*

This paper aims to understand and contrast the status of religion in the U.S. and Georgia, including the expression of religiosity across several dimensions. To determine the role of religion in society and people’s lives, it delves into questions of trust in religious institutions and the effect of religion on happiness, well-being, and general satisfaction. It is the

historical record of religion as a means of social and emotional support and a source of life meaning that has suggested the choice of specific constructs for this study's exploration of their linkages to religion (Fagan, 1996).

The employed method is desk research of numerous public opinion surveys for the last two decades conducted by international and U.S. survey organizations, such as the Pew Research Center, Gallup, the World Values Survey Association, Ipsos, and PRRI. Research also uses surveys implemented by national or regional groups, including the American Bible Society and the Caucasus Research Centers. Purposive sampling has driven the selection of particular studies. Relevant to the research objective, specific criteria for choosing the surveys included balancing international, U.S., and Georgian studies; prioritizing those that facilitated coding religion status and the level of trust and happiness; and giving preference to the most recent surveys to capture present-day beliefs and sentiments.

Furthermore, the analysis in this paper builds on the U.S. and international studies that seek to identify a relationship between religiosity and other variables, with an emphasis on trust, happiness, and health. Among other research, it considers longitudinal studies implemented over the last century. Interpretation of secondary data has sought consistency between findings from examination of raw survey data and scholarly work on the respective subject matter. The claims of causality between the variables were avoided, while correlation was substantiated with evidence. Overall, this paper benefits from more than 70 sources ranging from scholarly articles and books to publications on public perceptions and assessments of the current state of religion and other institutions in the U.S., Georgia, and the world.

### *Definitions and Conceptualizations*

As survey data form the basis of this paper, the analysis of findings considers the definitions of concepts by respective survey organizations. For example, the World Values Survey conceptualizes trust as a “fundamental element of social capital – essential for the cohesion of communities, vital for effective cooperation, and crucial for economic development” (Ortiz-Ospina et al. 2016). The Pew Research Center accounts for competence, benevolence, empathy, openness, integrity, and accountability in its definition of trust (Gecewicz and Rainie, 2019). Although these two definitions are not the same in their language, in essence, both of them suggest social cohesion based on integrity and reliability. They are also compatible with the conceptualization of trust by most, though not all, scholars as a relational construct and a social phenomenon that facilitates cooperation propped by shared norms (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). A theological conceptualization of trust is rooted in faith and implies a firm belief in the integrity, veracity, and strength of God. As the latter conceptualization is based on scriptures, it is similar across various Christian traditions, although the interpretation of trust as action in accordance with God's will might be stronger in Protestantism than in Orthodoxy (Morgan, 2022; Niebuhr, 2021).

Similarly, there are commonalities and differences between various surveys, academic insights, and theological understandings in the conceptualization of happiness. The World Happiness Report defines happiness as subjective well-being, focusing on life evaluations

and emotional experiences ([World Happiness Report, 2025](#)). The Global Flourishing Study measures happiness and life satisfaction as part of a larger set of indicators, which include meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, and financial and material security ([Brownstein, 2025](#)). Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle viewed happiness as a state of flourishing and living a well-lived life, linked to contemplation and the pursuit of virtue and wisdom ([Reece, 2023](#)). Contemporary philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists often use the term “happiness” interchangeably with subjective well-being, which encompasses life satisfaction, but they also account for healthy relationships, virtue, and life meaningfulness. In contrast to secular authors, theologians emphasize a connection to the divine as a source of true happiness ([Everhard, 2023](#); [Alcorn, 2015](#)), but there are recurring themes across secular and theological writings.

Variations in the definitions of key concepts discussed in this paper complicate the interpretation of survey findings and call for caution and care. But they do not prevent the feasibility of analysis. Even though different definitions may affect survey responses, they have enough in common to enable the identification of central viewpoints and patterns. A nuanced analysis is, however, imperative, and limitations of conclusions must be acknowledged.

### *“Three B’s” Module and Narrative Structure*

The evaluation of public attitudes toward religion and religious practices uses a common module for measuring religiosity, which distinguishes the “three B’s”: belief, belonging, and behavior. Belief registers one’s relation to God and/or spiritual outlook on the world. Belonging suggests the entities (groups, communities, and nations) in which one has a place. Behavior refers to one’s actions and ways of conduct, including religious attendance and other religious practices ([Burge, 2024](#); [Jackson, 2025](#)).

Following the statement of research results, which highlights four sets of them, the discussion is organized into five sections. The first one examines the “three B’s” measurements of religiosity, based on public opinion surveys. The second section explores trust in religious institutions relative to trust in the military and distrust of political institutions. The third section employs studies and reports on happiness, satisfaction, and physical and mental health to inquire into the existence of linkages between religiosity and variables of well-being. Discussion concludes with an account of Georgians’ exceptionalism in their attitude to and practice of religion, as well as conservative views.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis of global, U.S., and Georgian public opinion surveys and studies on the relationship among survey variables has generated four sets of results, which are presented here in a summary form. The following discussion section provides evidence and documents sources behind the noted findings.

First, under deep distrust of political institutions in the U.S. and Georgia and insecurity of polarized societies, religion offers a unique combination of beliefs, belonging, and behav-

iors that balance the mind, give meaning to life, and help overcome everyday challenges. Respondents in both countries acknowledge religion's role in strengthening morality and social bonds and in helping the poor and needy ([Pew Research Center, 2017](#)). Studies also reveal a correlation between religiosity, on the one hand, and happiness and well-being, on the other, through feelings of gratitude and spiritual peace, greater satisfaction with family and friends relationships, and community involvement ([Smith et al. 2025](#); [Brownstein, 2025](#); [Dunbar, 2021](#); [Harvard's 85-year study finds happiness, 2025](#)). Even more tangibly, there is a positive association between religiosity and physical and mental health, evidenced by fewer cases of depression, suicide, and disease among religious people ([Dominus, 2025](#); [Chen, 2020](#); [Jackson, 2025](#); [Zimmer, 2018](#)). The question of causation is a complicated one, but linkages between religiosity and a more favorable perception of and satisfaction with life are apparent.

Secondly, in both the U.S. and Georgia, the majorities say they believe in God ([Jackson, 2025](#); [Smith et al., 2025](#); [Gallup, 2023](#); [Global Religion, 2023](#); [Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October](#); [Morrison, 2018](#); [World Values, 2014](#)), consider religion to be important in their lives ([Pew Research Center, 2024, March 29](#); [World Values, 2014](#); [Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October](#); [Morrison, 2018](#)), and trust in religious institutions more than in political ones ([Saad, 2023](#); [Deane 2024](#); [Civil Georgia, 2024](#); [Khoshtaria, 2024](#)). Georgia has seen a revival of religious feeling and organized religion compared to the Soviet past ([Grdzeldidze, 2012 and 2023](#)). The U.S. seems to be revisiting the role of religion after the decline in its importance earlier in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ([Jackson, 2025](#)).

Thirdly, despite some similarities with Americans, Georgians are different in many respects. They are relatively more religious in their belief in God and certainty about this belief ([Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October](#); [Morrison, 2018](#)), the greater importance of religion in their lives ([World Values, 2014](#); [Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October](#); [Morrison, 2018](#)), and a sharper contrast between their trust in religious institutions and distrust of political ones ([Civil Georgia, 2024](#); [Khoshtaria, 2024](#)).

Fourthly, Georgians are not merely different but exceptional, in contrast to Americans and Europeans, in their overwhelming identification with a single religious denomination, Orthodox Christianity ([2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, 2023](#)); higher social conservatism ([Pew Research Center, 2017](#); [Shevtsova, 2023](#)); support for religion's impact on politics ([Sulkhanishvili, 2013](#); [Pew Research Center, 2017](#)); and similar or greater religiosity of younger people compared to older ones ([Pew Research Center, 2018, July 13](#); [Pew Research Center, 2017](#)). This exceptionalism has roots in history: the GOC played a crucial role in the formation of Georgian statehood and the preservation of Georgian cultural and spiritual identity through long and difficult periods of foreign occupation or control. As a result, religious identity is tied to national identity. The lack of public confidence in politicians reinforces the GOC's authority in society and its effect on policies. While the Georgian population is overwhelmingly pro-European, the conservatism of the church, with its opposition to some Western values, influences both young and old and creates a paradoxical blend of traditionalism and modernism, conservative values and liberal ideas.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Conceptualization of Religiosity*

Religiosity refers to the degree to which a person identifies with, adheres to, and practices a religion (Holdcroft, 2006). According to an influential conceptualization by Yoshio Fukuyama (1960), it can be broken down into four dimensions: cognitive (knowledge about religion), creedal (religious beliefs), devotional (religious feelings and experiences), and cultic (religious practices). This definition serves well the below discussion of survey findings as it covers all measurements within the “three B’s” module of religiosity.

### *Measurements of Religiosity*

#### *Belief*

According to a Gallup survey, more than 80% of Americans say they “believe in God,” and one-half of believers state that “God hears [their] prayers/can intervene” (Gallup, 2023). “Believers in God” or “a higher power or spirit” were found by Ipsos to be more numerous in the U.S. than in other developed countries (Global Religion, 2023). Almost all Americans – 92% of adults – now hold some form of spiritual belief, in a god, human souls or spirits, an afterlife, or something “beyond the natural world”; and the share of Christian believers has recently stabilized (Jackson, 2025; Smith et al., 2025; Religion, 2023; Figures 1 and 2). Even though younger Americans remain far less religious than older adults, which suggests the possibility of an impending decline in the American religious landscape, on matters of spirituality, the age gaps are relatively moderate (Smith et al., 2025; Figures 3 and 4). In 2025, the American Bible Society registered the first increase since 2021 in “bible use and scripture engagement” among younger adults (American Bible Society, 2025).

Georgians stand out even among Eastern Europeans who are more religious than their Western counterparts: 99% of Georgians say that they “believe in God,” which is the highest indicator in Europe, and 73% state they are “absolutely certain about it” (Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October; Morrison, 2018; Figure 5). In the latest World Values Survey that included Georgia, the same proportion, 99%, of Georgians said that they “believe in God,” and 97% identified themselves as “religious persons” (World Values, 2014).

Survey data thus highlights that both in the U.S. and Georgia, the majority believe in God. While Americans deviate from people in other developed countries in their relatively stronger belief in God and keeping this belief, Georgians distinguish themselves as more certain and dedicated believers compared to Western and Eastern Europeans, as well as Americans.

#### *Belonging*

The U.S. is positioned between a highly religious Global South and a mostly secular Global North, according to the 2023 Ipsos survey on religion. Americans are also in the middle among respondents from 26 countries in saying that “my religion defines me as a person.” Slightly above six in ten respondents in the Pew Research Center’s 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Study identify themselves as Christian, similar to the 2019-2020 data, and 7%

identify with other religions (Smith et al., 2025). It is important that Americans' affiliation with Christianity has plateaued, and the share of those who identify with a religion other than Christianity has been trending upward (Smith et al., 2025). Christians in the U.S. are no longer leaving their denominations, and other major religions are growing.

According to the 2014 Georgian census, GOC members constitute 83.4% of the population, followed by Muslims at 10.7% and members of the Armenian Apostolic Church at 2.9% (2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, 2023). The Pew's 2017 survey suggested that even a larger share, 89%, of Georgians are likely to identify themselves with a single religious denomination, Orthodox Christianity, and 99% of the Orthodox are proud of their religious identity. Only less than 1% of Georgians say they are atheists. More than one-half (57%) refer to "personal faith" as a reason for self-identification as Orthodox. The other 29% point to "national culture/family tradition" as a reason, whereas 13% consider both reasons relevant for their belonging to Orthodox Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2017, pp. 20, 58, 53, 56). While in the U.S., younger adults under age 40 are less likely (by 17%) to identify with any religion than older adults, no significant difference was found on this indicator in Georgia, as the majority of both younger and older Georgians show similar allegiance to Orthodox Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2018 July 13).

Those Georgians who say religion is "very/somewhat important in their lives" are more likely than others (by 22%) to voice strong pride in national citizenship (Pew Research Center, 2017, pp. 148-149). The link between religious and national identities – consistent with the traditional notion of Ilia Chavchavadze – is also confirmed by the preference of more than half of the Georgians interviewed in a 2013 study for an Orthodox Christian profile of politicians (Sulkhanishvili, 2013).

Despite the differences between religious pluralism in the U.S. and the domination of Orthodox Christianity in Georgia, the sense of belonging to a particular religion confirms and strengthens religious beliefs in both countries. Identification with religion is, however, more pronounced in Georgia. Open atheists are almost non-existent there, and belonging to Orthodoxy is substantiated by personal, cultural, traditional, and even political reasons, as national identity is tied to religious one. Even though disengagement from religion has lessened in the U.S., maintaining religiosity in the future is more likely in Georgia because younger Georgians express similar interest in religion as older Georgians.

### *Behavior*

Secularization has been one of the greatest social transformations in the U.S. and other developed countries. The importance of religion in Americans' lives has been decreasing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, in 2023, 71% of respondents in a Gallup survey considered religion to be either "very" or "fairly important" (Pew Research Center, 2024, March 29; Figure 6). Rather unexpectedly, the recent Pew Research Center's study suggested that secularization has been on pause in the U.S. in the last four or five years (Smith et al., 2025). While church attendance rates in the U.S. have been declining for decades, since the COVID pandemic, the number of people attending religious services – either in person or virtually – has remained consistent at about 40% (Jackson, 2025). According to Gallup, three in 10 Ameri-

cans say they attend religious services every week or almost every week, while 11% report attending about once a month (Jones, 2024).

Georgia is among the top countries in Europe in respondents' acknowledgment of religion's importance and in following religious practices. In the 2010-2014 World Values Survey, 97% of Georgian respondents considered "religion important," 44% acknowledged "attending religious services at least once a month apart from weddings and funerals," and 61% said that they were praying to God more than once per week, "apart from weddings and funerals" (World Values, 2014). The findings of the Pew's 2015-2017 survey were largely consistent with those of the World Values Survey. One half of the Georgian respondents claimed that religion is "very important in their lives," 39% stated they "attend the services at least once a month", and 38% said they "pray every single day" (Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October; Morrison, 2018; Figure 7).

Lower religious observance among younger adults is common around the world, including in the U.S., where younger adults are less likely (by 17%) to consider religion "very important" than older adults. Georgia is an exception to this pattern. The Pew's research conducted in 106 countries in 2018 found that religion was more important (by 9%) to younger Georgians under age 40 than to older adults. In this respect, Georgia is set apart as the only country in Europe and one of the two countries, joined by Ghana, in the world. There is no statistically significant difference between younger and older Georgians in religious service attendance (Pew Research Center, 2018 July 13).

The greater religiosity of younger Georgians contradicts the overwhelmingly pro-European sentiment in society. A resounding 77% of Georgians said in a 2023 survey that they would vote to join the European Union if given the chance in a referendum (Europe Foundation & CRRC Georgia, 2023, 8). Younger Georgians' religiosity is consistent with the perception of religion's rise in importance in Georgia compared to the past. While 92% of respondents say religion is either very important or somewhat important in their lives now, a lesser proportion, 81%, point to its importance during their childhood (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 64).

Georgians' behavior in terms of religious experiences and practices suggests solid materialization of their beliefs in God and belonging to the Orthodox Church. While a pause in the secularization tendency in the U.S. is met with surprise, the situation in Georgia is different. In the aftermath of anti-religion policies of the Soviet Georgia, religion is on the rise today and affects all population cohorts. The contrast in the two countries' trends has to do with the history of religion as well as the rebirth of national consciousness, revival of traditions, and cultural flourishing in Georgia.

### *Relative Trust in Religious Institutions*

Americans' trust in the federal government has been low for decades, and public confidence in all U.S. institutions has seen significant declines. In a 2024 Pew survey, only 22% of U.S. adults said they trust the federal government to do the right thing just about always

or most of the time. The U.S. organized religion has not escaped the overall trend in declining trust. According to Gallup, in the past 20 years, the share of U.S. adults who express a “great deal/quite a lot” of confidence in the church or organized religion has fallen from 53% to 32% in 2023 (Deane, 2024). These 32% points were, however, higher compared to confidence in “the presidency” (26%) and Congress (8%), but about two times lower than confidence in “small business” (65%) and “the military” (60%) (Saad, 2023). Nonetheless, according to Pew, about 6 in 10 Americans say that churches and religious organizations have a positive impact on the country, thus revealing their better perception relative to the main political institutions (Deane, 2024).

Public attitudes to political institutions in Georgia are similar to those in the U.S. The government (the Prime Minister and the cabinet) is “fully” or “rather” trusted by 31% and “fully” or “rather” distrusted by 39%. The figures for the Parliament are 22% and 42%, respectively, suggesting an even greater distrust of the directly elected body. The level of trust in political parties is even lower (12%), with distrust expressed by almost one-half of respondents (Civil Georgia, 2024; Khoshtaria, 2024).

Signaling a divergence, trust in Georgian religious institutions is higher than in the U.S., and a contrast with predominant distrust of political institutions is sharper. Religious institutions are “fully” or “rather” trusted by a substantial majority of Georgians, 73%, and “fully” or “rather” distrusted by only 20%. For comparison, the respective numbers for the army are 76% and 7% (Khoshtaria, 2024). Therefore, while in both countries, the military is the most trusted institution, the gap in trust with the religious institutions is much larger in the U.S. than in Georgia. In Georgia, the church is trusted almost on par with the military.

Even more telling, surveys have repeatedly shown that the GOC’s leader, Patriarch Ilia II, is by far the most trusted public figure in the country: 89% of respondents in a 2021 survey had a favorable view of His Holiness, while only 4% had an unfavorable view (Orthodox Christianity, 2021). Although trust in a religious leader is not the same as trust in a religious institution, these two constructs are closely related. Integrity, knowledge, the sense of responsibility, and authenticity of religious figures in both declarations and actions have a profound effect on the attitude toward religion, while the clergy’s misconduct can erode faith (Durkin, 2025).

While a comparison of trust in clergy vis-à-vis politicians might be problematic because of different roles and historical and emotional associations around personalities, contrasting trust in various institutions is credible. A leading authority on institutions, Douglass North (1990 and 1991), viewed them as the “rules of the game,” which define the constraints that structure human interaction in political, economic, and social settings. Supported by either formal laws (as in governance) or informal social norms, traditions, and customs, institutions shape order in society (Fukuyama, 2011). A greater trust in religious institutions in Georgia – compared to that in the U.S. and in relation to political institutions – is consistent with Georgians’ greater religiosity in terms of belief, belonging, and behavior.

### *Happiness and Religion*

The 2025 World Happiness Report, which registered self-evaluation of life and did not touch upon the theme of religion, identified Finland, closely trailed by three other Nordic countries, as the number one happiest country in the world ([World Happiness Report, 2025](#)). The U.S. was ranked 24<sup>th</sup> among 147 countries, and Georgia 91<sup>st</sup> ([Country Rankings, 2025](#)). These rankings reinforce a widespread view that wealth is a critical precondition for individual and societal thriving.

In contrast to the above-noted report, the Global Flourishing Study, which bases rankings on several metrics, found a stark divide between wealthier, principally Western, countries, which scored the highest for life evaluation and financial and material security, and less wealthy countries, which reported the highest scores for meaning, pro-social character traits, relationship satisfaction, and community involvement, especially involvement in religious communities ([Johnson et al., 2025](#)). Although Georgia was not among the 22 studied countries, the results of this research are instructive because of the link between flourishing and religion.

Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines – where religion continues to play an important role ([Rainsford, 2023](#); [Balita, 2023](#)) – received the highest scores on the composite flourishing index ([Tyler et al., 2025](#)). In Indonesia, which was ranked at the top, 75% of the survey participants – a much larger proportion than in either the U.S. or Georgia – reported attending religious services at least weekly. For comparison, in Japan, which received the lowest composite flourishing score as well as the lowest scores on a sense of life's meaning and social relationships, only 3% of the participants reported attending religious services at least weekly. The U.S.'s composite flourishing score, accounting for financial indicators, occupies the 12<sup>th</sup> place, which is considerably lower than that of Indonesia, despite a 17 times difference in per capita GDP between these countries ([Johnson et al., 2025](#); [World Population Review, 2025](#)). Confirming these findings, in the 2024 Ipsos survey on happiness, Indonesia and Mexico ranked among the highest on “happiness” and satisfaction with “religious faith or spiritual life” – in contrast to Japan, which scored among the lowest on these metrics ([Global Happiness, 2024](#)).

The Pew's study of Americans corroborates the link between religiosity and the sense of well-being. Religiously affiliated Americans are more likely to feel gratitude (by 23%), spiritual peace (by 27%), and “a deep sense of connection with humanity” (by 15%) than people without a religious affiliation ([Smith et al., 2025](#)). The 2022 Gallup data indicate that religious service attenders are more likely to say they are very satisfied with their personal lives than are those who make \$100,000 or more in annual household income. Close to seven out of ten (67%) among those who attend religious services weekly are “very satisfied,” compared with 48% of those who are infrequent attenders ([Newport, 2022](#)).

Eighty percent of Americans agree that churches and other religious organizations bring people together and strengthen community bonds ([Smith et al., 2025](#)). A 2019 study found that religiosity and attendance at religious services most strongly affect engagement with the local community and the number of friends someone has, as well as the level of trust in the local community and bondedness with friends and family ([Dunbar, 2021](#)). These

findings are especially revealing, as Harvard's 85-year study highlighted positive relationships – not achievement, nor fortune or fame – as the single most important predictor of well-being. Furthermore, actively religious people are significantly less prone to depression, suicide, or diseases, such as cancer, because of “higher levels of social support, better health behaviors, and greater optimism about the future” ([Harvard's 85-year study finds happiness, 2025](#); [Dominus, 2025](#); [Chen, 2020](#); [Jackson, 2025](#)).

Although research in the U.S. and internationally suggests a link between religion and people's happiness, there is relatively weak evidence of this relationship in Georgia. Regression analysis by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) conducted in 2020 found no statistically significant association between happiness and three variables – self-assessed religiosity, frequency of prayer, and frequency of engagement in religious activities aside from attending services. However, the fourth tested variable, self-described spirituality and belief in religion, was associated with people's happiness ([Lursmanashvili, 2021](#)). At the same time, a 2018 global comparative study based on data from World Values Surveys and self-assessment of health found that significant positive associations between religiosity measures and health exist in both Georgia and the U.S. ([Zimmer, 2018](#)).

In the 2024 Caucasus Barometer survey, 66% of Georgian respondents reported being “happy” and 10% “unhappy” ([Civil Georgia, 2024](#); [Khoshtaria, 2024](#)). In 2015-2016, 17% of Georgian respondents said they were “satisfied with the way things were going in their country,” and 78% were “dissatisfied” ([Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 167](#)). These figures are far from the Georgians' overwhelming (close to 100%) acknowledgment of the religion's importance in their lives.

Although more research is needed to understand whether Georgia deviates from the international pattern that relates happiness or life satisfaction to religiosity or is consistent with it, Georgians' positive outlook on religion and its impact on social relations and values is undeniable. Georgians are rated at the top of Central and Eastern Europeans in their broad view of religious institutions' roles in society – as the ones that “bring people together and strengthen social bonds” (viewed by 73% of respondents), “strengthen morality in society” (shared by 80%), and “play an important role in helping poor and needy” (expressed by 70%) ([Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 94](#)).

### *Georgians' Exceptionalism*

Both the present-day U.S. and Georgia are characterized by deep political polarization in the struggle for power, public attitudes, and the media landscape ([United States: Freedom in the World, 2024](#); [Georgia: Freedom in the World, 2025](#)). As a culture war is fierce in the U.S., Georgia also experiences a clash between those who see themselves as defenders of traditional values and those who favor more liberal, Western-style ideals. There are, however, significant differences between the two countries regarding religion and social issues.

As Georgians overwhelmingly identify themselves as “believers in God” and “religious,” political opponents try to court voters by being both conservative and progressive, and

by speaking the language of both Georgian traditionalism and European integration (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021). This maneuvering is understandable given the state of public opinion. While being more religious, Georgians, including younger adults, are also socially conservative in their views on sexuality and gender. Homosexuality is seen as “morally wrong” by 90% of Georgians, and only 3% support same-sex marriage. There is only a 3% difference between younger and older Georgians who say that “homosexuality should not be accepted by society” – 91% and 94%, respectively. Among both younger and older adults, only 3% accept legal gay marriage (Pew Research Center, 2017, pp. 27-29, 106, 108). As demonstrated by sociological research, the GOC has played a major role in opposing LGBTQ+ rights and so-called “gender ideology” and has proven effective in preventing or slowing down the promotion of sexual and gender equality (Shevtsova, 2023).

Georgians also diverge from Americans on the issue of separation between religion and state. Less than one-half of Georgians (44%) say “religion should be kept separate from government policies,” and 52% state that “government should support religious values and beliefs” (Pew Research Center, 2018, 29 October; Morrison, 2018; Figure 8). In a 2013 study, the majority of the interviewees responded with a “yes” to the question of whether they “think that a politician needs to be an Orthodox believer” (Sulkhanishvili, 2013). A view that “religious leaders should have large/some influence in political matters” was shared by 46% of Georgian respondents in the 2015-2016 Pew survey (Pew Research Center, 2017, p.100). Consistent with these views, the GOC holds considerable influence in shaping public opinion and policy, particularly on matters like marriage and family values, and thus impacts the legislative process (Religion’s Role in Georgian Politics, 2025).

The majority of Georgians (82%) support the view that “the dominant church in the country should receive financial support from the government” (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 101). Hence, no wonder that state funding of religion is ranked “high” in Georgia (The Association of Religion Data Archives, 2025); the GOC enjoys financial benefits, such as tax privileges, and owns churches and monasteries on Georgian territory (Gegeshidze & Mirziashvili, 2021).

The survey results reinforce the general research finding that a combination of domestic and international circumstances explains the GOC’s high authority in today’s Georgian society. As a powerful symbol of the Georgian nation, vis-à-vis the relatively newly formed state, the Georgian Church enjoys a partnership with the state, although its impact on the democratization of society and the rights of marginalized groups raises criticism (Grdzidze, 2010). The exceptionalism of the GOC’s current status is backed by the Georgians’ exceptionalism in the recognition of religion as a trusted institution, internal religiosity in terms of belief in God and participation in religious practices, and conservatism in the rejection of values that contradict Christian teachings.

## **CONCLUSION**

### *Recap of Findings*

In a nutshell, the review of the global, U.S., and Georgian public opinion surveys for the last two decades and a comparison of their results with assessment reports and scholarly research findings have revealed considerable religiosity among Americans and Georgians. The analysis has suggested a correlation among religiosity, trust in religious institutions, and happiness or life satisfaction – as perceived across various dimensions of these social constructs – in the U.S. as well as Georgia.

However, the expression of religious feelings, trust in religion, and the value of religious activities as a source of joy, satisfaction, and health is substantially stronger in Georgia than in the U.S. The Georgians' exceptionalism, compared to the U.S. and Europe, in their overwhelming identification with a single religious denomination, higher social conservatism, and support for religion's impact on politics, is compellingly underscored by the extraordinary importance of religion to younger Georgians.

The surveys and the previous academic studies explain this phenomenon by a contrast between the repression of religion in the lives of youths' parents in the Soviet past and the resurgence of religious and national identities in independent Georgia. The challenges of today's world can also prompt a search for refuge in faith in God and the comfort of a close-knit religious community. Religion flourishes in times of "existential insecurity" (Norris, 2015). Secessionist wars of the past decades, increasing insecurity in Europe and the world, and conflicts within Georgia could have pushed people to seek internal spiritual peace amidst external struggle and chaos.

This study has not distinguished between independent and dependent variables and has not sorted out the issue of causality, which remains a topic for future research. At the moment, the found association among the noted variables gives sufficient rationale for proposing a few recommendations to policymakers and civil society actors.

### *Recommendations*

Given the positive implications of religiosity for the quality of life and the sense of happiness and well-being, one may wonder whether it is possible or advisable to push for the greater integration of spirituality into Americans' and Georgians' daily lives. In the U.S. case, this is neither feasible nor prudent because of the U.S. constitutional barrier between church and state and the church's entanglement in controversial policy issues, especially related to sexuality and gender (Newport, 2022). This would also be unwise in Georgia because such a policy could exacerbate divisions in society and toughen the battle between conservative and liberal tendencies.

Respect for the "freedom of belief, religion, and conscience," a tenet that is included in the Constitution of Georgia, rejection of any forms of religious persecution or discrimination, and creating opportunities for practicing religion to those who choose to practice and for the

flourishing of religious communities should be the best ways to ensure a positive influence of religion in society. It is indicative that Patriarch Ilia II rejected the Georgian Dream party's proposal to make Orthodoxy the state religion. In any case, the ruling party in Georgia does not now have a 75% parliamentary majority to approve a respective constitutional amendment (Guichard, 2024).

The current internal and external circumstances of present-day Georgia, amplified by the Georgians' religiosity, call for maintaining a partnership between the GOC, the state, and civil society. As acknowledged by respondents in the surveys, religion plays an important role in strengthening morality and social bonds, improving family and friends relationships, bolstering community involvement, and helping the poor and needy. The work in these directions should continue and even be extended, but civil society actors should not be complacent about the GOC's unique privileges and rights not given to other religious groups (2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, 2023).

In the spirit of non-discrimination and equality, a consultative role in government, especially in state education policies, should be given to all religious denominations. Also, concerted efforts should continue in the critique of harmful ideologies and the protection of the rights of women, LGBTQ+ groups, and minorities. Regardless of religious beliefs, this protection is guided by the human rights perspective and the country's interest in democracy and freedom.

Potentially, improvement in the political situation and faster economic development in Georgia can accelerate secularization and weaken conservative views, as this happened in developed countries. But lessons of the authoritarian past should deter any attempts to forcibly erase Georgians' exceptionalism: the latter is understandable, justifiable, and can be beneficial for social cohesion and spiritual peace. If Georgia moves closer in values and religiosity to the rest of Europe, the modernization process will occur naturally.

### **Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest**

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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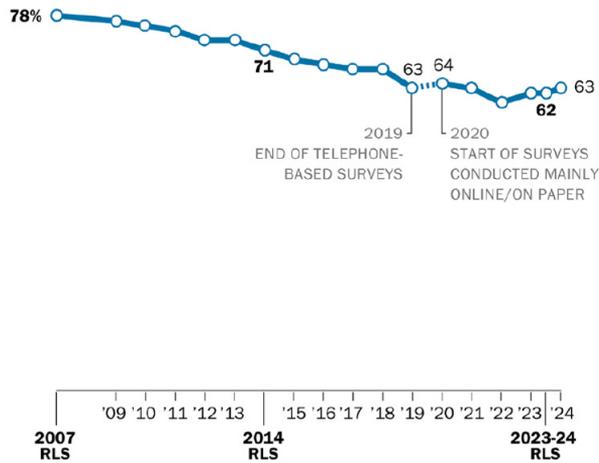
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**After years of decline, the Christian share of the U.S. population stabilizes** % of U.S. adults who identify as Christian



Note: The 2007, 2014 and 2023-24 data comes from Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Studies. Other estimates come from the Center's random-digit-dial telephone surveys (until 2019), and from the Center's annual National Public Opinion Reference Survey (since 2020).  
 Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.  
**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

**Figure 1.** Results of the Religious Landscape Study of U.S. Adults, 2023-2024

Source: Smith et al., 2025

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your beliefs -- you are religious, you are spiritual but not religious, or you are neither?

	Religious	Spiritual but not religious	Neither	Both (vol.)	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%
2023 Jul 3-27	47	33	18	2	1
2002 Jan 11-14	50	33	11	4	2
1999 Dec 9-12	54	30	9	6	1

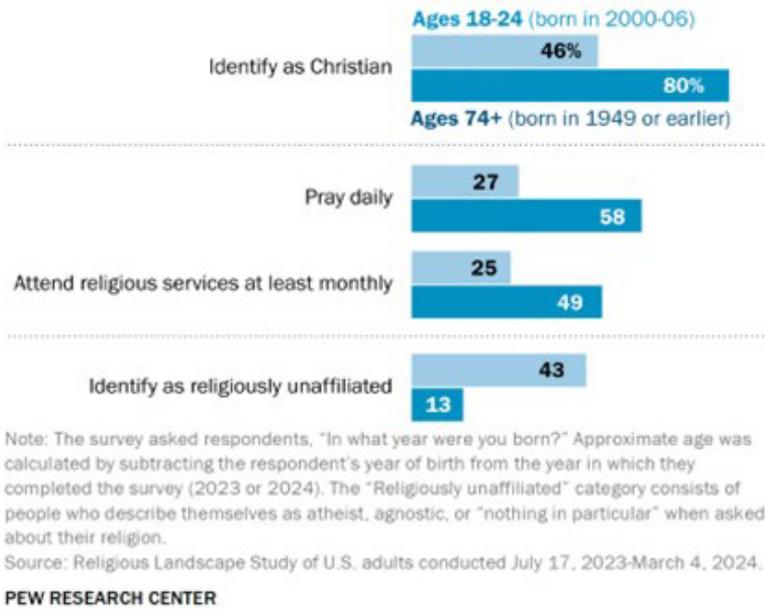
(vol.) = volunteered response

GALLUP

**Figure 2.** Religious and Spiritual Beliefs of Americans

Source: Religion, 2023

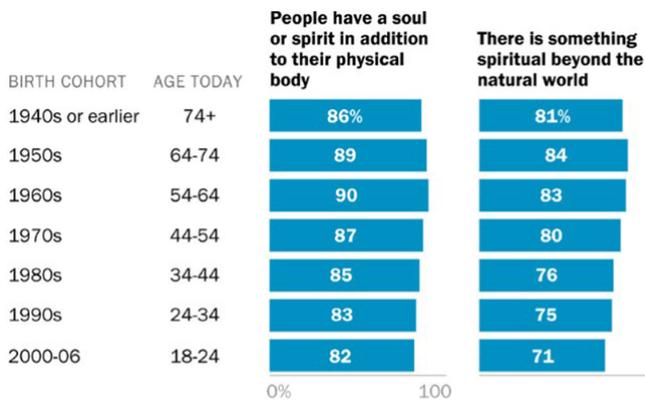
**Big age gaps in shares of Americans who identify as Christian, pray regularly** % of U.S. adults who say they do the following, by birth cohort



**Figure 3. Age-Related Differences in Religiosity of U.S. Adults, 2023-202**

Source: Smith et al., 2025

**On measures of spirituality, gaps between younger and older Americans are relatively modest** % of U.S. adults who say they believe the following, by birth cohort



**Figure 4. Age Gaps on Measures of Spirituality**

Source: Smith et al., 2025

**Belief in God more widespread in Central and Eastern Europe** % who say they...

Country	Believe in God	Believe in God, absolutely certain	Believe in God, less certain	Do not believe in God
Georgia	99%	73%	24%	1%
Armenia	95	79	16	4
Moldova	95	55	40	3
Romania	95	64	30	4
Bosnia	94	66	28	4
Greece	92	69	33	6
Serbia	87	58	29	10
Croatia	86	57	29	10
Poland	86	45	38	8
Ukraine	86	32	51	9
Belarus	84	26	58	9
Portugal	83	44	38	13
Bulgaria	77	30	47	17
Lithuania	76	34	41	11
Russia	75	25	48	15
Italy	73	26	46	21
Latvia	71	28	41	15
Ireland	69	24	44	26
Slovakia	69	37	31	27
Australia	67	13	53	29
Spain	64	25	38	31
Switzerland	62	11	51	33
Germany	60	10	50	36
Hungary	59	26	33	30
Finland	58	23	34	37
UK	58	12	45	36
France	56	11	45	37
Denmark	51	15	36	46
Norway	49	19	30	47
Estonia	44	13	31	45
Netherlands	44	15	28	53
Belgium	42	13	29	54
Sweden	36	14	22	60
Czech Republic	29	13	16	66

**Figure 5.** *Belief in God in Georgia and Other European Countries*

Notes: Orange labels: Central and Eastern European countries

Blue labels: Western European countries

“Don’t know/refused” responses are included in “do not believe in God” or certainty of belief not shown.

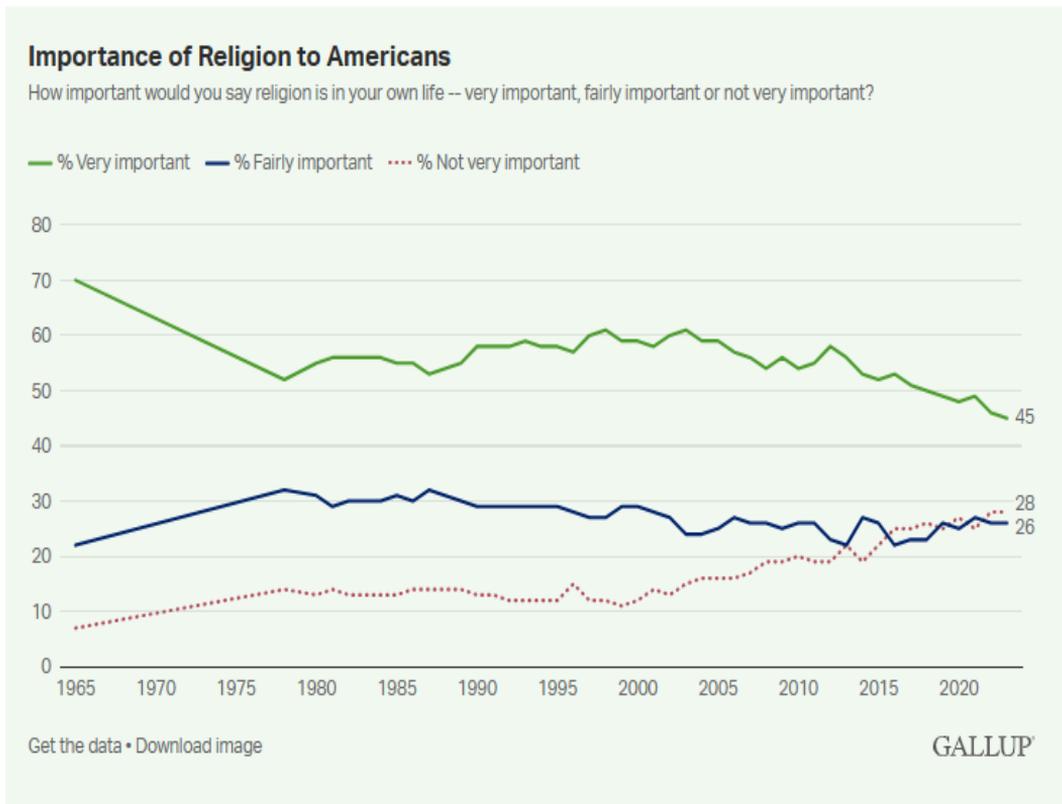
Muslims respondents in Western European countries were not asked this question.

Source: Surveys conducted 2015–2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details

“Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues”

Methodology: Pew Research Center

Source: Eastern and Western Europeans Differ, 2018



**Figure 6.** *Importance of Religion in Americans' Lives*

Source: How Religious Are Americans, 2024

**Overall, Central and Eastern Europeans are more religious than Western Europeans % who say ...**

Country	Religion is very important in their lives	They attend religious services at least monthly	They pray daily
Greece	55%	38%	29%
Bosnia	54	35	32
Armenia	53	34	45
Georgia	50	39	38
Romania	50	50	44
Croatia	42	40	40
Moldova	42	35	48
Portugal	36	36	37
Serbia	34	19	27
Poland	29	61	27
Ireland	23	37	19
Slovakia	23	31	31
Spain	22	23	23
Ukraine	22	35	29
Italy	21	43	21
Belarus	20	30	25
Netherlands	20	18	20
Bulgaria	19	19	15
Norway	19	16	18
Lithuania	16	27	15
Russia	15	17	17
Hungary	14	17	16
Austria	12	30	8
Belgium	11	11	11
France	11	22	11
Germany	11	24	9
Finland	10	10	18
Latvia	10	16	17
Sweden	10	11	11
UK	10	20	6
Switzerland	9	29	8
Denmark	8	12	10
Czech Rep.	7	11	9
Estonia	6	10	9

**Figure 7. Religiosity in Georgia and Other Countries**

Notes: Orange labels = Central and Eastern European countries

Blue labels = Western European countries

Source: Surveys conducted 2015–2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.

Source title: Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues

Pew Research Center

Source: Eastern and Western Europeans Differ, 2018

**Western Europe more united in support of church–state separation % who say ...**

Country	Religion should be kept separate from government	Government should support religious leaders and beliefs
Sweden	80%	15%
Finland	77	20
Bosnia	76	22
Denmark	76	20
Czech Republic	75	21
Spain	75	17
Belgium	72	23
Slovakia	72	24
Poland	70	25
Croatia	69	27
Estonia	68	26
France	68	29
Netherlands	68	29
Hungary	67	28
Greece	62	34
Latvia	61	29
United Kingdom	60	38
Germany	59	40
Moldova	59	36
Norway	59	36
Serbia	59	36
Ukraine	57	36
Austria	56	43
Ireland	56	41
Portugal	56	40
Italy	55	43
Switzerland	54	45
Romania	51	46
Belarus	50	42
Bulgaria	50	42
Russia	50	42
Lithuania	47	43
Georgia	44	52
Armenia	36	59

**Figure 8.** *Support of Church-State Separation in Europe, Including Georgia*

**Notes:** Orange labels indicate Central and Eastern European countries

Blue labels indicate Western European countries

“Don’t know/refused” responses are **not shown**

Source: Surveys conducted 2015–2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.

Source title: *Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues*

Publisher: Pew Research Center

Source: Eastern and Western Europeans Differ, 2018

# Gender and Sexuality in Early Ascetic Christianity With Peter Brown

SARIA ANDRIA (GIORGI), PHD  
COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

ORCID: [0009-0005-9351-5867](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9351-5867)

## ABSTRACT

This research explores how early Christian asceticism shaped theological understandings of gender, sexuality, and the body. It examines the ways ascetic practices influenced views on masculinity and femininity, as well as the significance of sexual renunciation. By analyzing early Christian texts, the study highlights the construction of purity ideals, the role of celibacy, and the pursuit of spiritual transformation.

*Keywords:* Asceticism, early christianity, gender, sexuality, celibacy, purity, body

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Peter Brown – A Foundational Historian of Late Antiquity*

This study investigates how early ascetic Christianity conceptualized gender and sexuality. It examines how renunciation of the body and sexual desire influenced theological discourse, monastic practices, and the construction of male and female identities, while also offering a critical engagement with Peter Brown's work on asceticism.

Peter Brown, born in 1935 in Dublin, Ireland, into a Scots-Irish Protestant family, is widely regarded as one of the most influential historians of late antiquity. He is the Rollins Professor Emeritus at Princeton University and has significantly shaped the study of early Christianity, particularly through his seminal works on Augustine of Hippo and Christian asceticism. His early scholarship on Augustine established his prominence, while *The Body and Society* marked a transition in his historical methodology, shifting toward a more nuanced analysis of gender, sexuality, and the body in early Christian thought. More recently, his research has focused on wealth and poverty in the late antique world.

In the preface to *The Body and Society*, Brown cautions readers about the nature of his sources, emphasizing that the evidence available is “overwhelmingly prescriptive and theoretical in nature, written exclusively by male authors” (Brown, 1988, p. vi). He further argues that the Christianity of late antiquity is fundamentally distinct from that of the High and Later Middle Ages, as well as from contemporary Christianity, separated by a “chasm almost as vast as that which appears to separate us from the moral horizon of a Mediterranean Islamic country” (Brown, 1988, p. xvii). Despite the rigidities of ancient sources, Brown acknowledges that historical accounts reveal the harsh realities faced by both men and women, who endured physical deprivation, emotional suffering, and the constraints of social expectations (Brown, 1988, p. xviii).

The Roman world was characterized by a starkly hierarchical family structure, with the *pater familias* at its head, reinforcing the primacy of the family unit over the individual (Brown, 1988, p. xxi). Marriage was not merely a private arrangement but a *school for orderly behavior*, where the balance between severity and tolerance was crucial to maintaining social stability. Women, while often subordinated in public life, exerted influence within the household, sometimes being among the few who could speak candidly to their husbands.

Brown highlights the Roman conceptualization of gender and sexuality, noting that women were often regarded as *failed males*, a perspective deeply ingrained in the medical and philosophical discourses of the time (Brown, 1988, p. 25). Masculinity, on the other hand, was perceived as fragile – men risked losing their virility through excessive emotional expression or sexual activity, particularly through frequent or uncontrolled orgasms. Conversely, adolescent boys were thought to possess an excess of virility that needed to be expended through controlled outlets (Brown, 1988, p. 17). These perspectives shaped early Christian ascetic practices, where self-denial and sexual renunciation became essential components of spiritual discipline.

*Research Question:* How did early Christian asceticism shape gender and sexuality in ways that both subverted and reinforced Greco-Roman social norms?

*Thesis:* This paper argues that early Christian asceticism constructed a spiritually transformative model of gender and sexuality that transcended prevailing Roman norms while also reproducing certain patriarchal structures, ultimately reframing embodiment within a theological and eschatological horizon.

### *Asceticism and the Rejection of Sexuality*

This study examines how early ascetic Christianity conceptualized gender and sexuality, particularly through the renunciation of the body and sexual desire. Brown argues that asceticism was not merely a set of practices but a comprehensive worldview that required the simultaneous observance of multiple disciplines (Brown, 1988, p. 8). In *The Body and Society*, he explores the struggles of early ascetic figures, such as Anthony the Great, who is depicted as engaging in intense spiritual warfare against bodily temptation. At the age of twenty, Anthony reportedly faced severe trials as the devil sought to awaken his sexual impulses. His response was radical: he renounced all possessions, provided for his virgin sister, and withdrew into the desert to lead a life of strict asceticism (Brown, 1988, pp. 213-14). Brown interprets Anthony's retreat not merely as a rejection of material wealth but as a profound repudiation of sexuality itself, reinforcing the ascetic ideal as a radical departure from worldly existence (Brown, 1988, p. 215).

When analyzing early Christian customs, it is crucial to consider both Roman legal structures and Christian perspectives on social norms. The moral and theological principles guiding early Christians were shaped not only by the Gospel but also by ecclesiastical writings, including the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (Van de Weyer, 1997, pp. 5-25), Polycarp of Smyrna (Hartog, 2013, pp. 35-100), and Hippolytus of Rome (Cerrato, 2002, pp. 20-50). These texts reveal the formation of a distinct Christian ethos, one that increasingly distanced itself from Greco-Roman conceptions of family, sexuality, and social hierarchy.

Brown's scholarship provides a crucial lens for understanding how early Christian asceticism functioned as both a theological stance and a form of resistance against prevailing societal norms. His work underscores the complexities of gender, sexuality, and power in late antiquity, offering valuable insights into how early Christians navigated their relationship with the body and the material world.

## **METHODS**

This study combines historical and theological analyses to explore early ascetic Christianity's conceptualization of gender and sexuality. The primary focus is on analyzing the writings of key early Christian figures, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Hippolytus of Rome, and on examining their perspectives in light of the socio-political and religious context of the Roman Empire. This method draws on both primary sources and

secondary scholarly literature, facilitating an understanding of how early Christian ascetics shaped their religious practices and theological views regarding the body and sexuality.

A critical component of this analysis is the examination of Peter Brown's *The Body and Society*, a foundational text for understanding the relationship among asceticism, sexuality, and gender. Brown's historical perspective will be compared and contrasted with other scholarly interpretations of early Christian asceticism. In doing so, this study evaluates both the theological motivations behind ascetic practices and their social implications in the Roman context.

This research also employs a comparative method, linking early Christian ascetic practices to related traditions, such as the Therapeutae of Alexandria and the Essenes of the Qumran community. By analyzing the commonalities and distinctions between these groups, this study aims to highlight the shared theological and sociocultural factors that influenced early Christian ascetic thought and its treatment of gender and sexuality.

Additionally, the methodology includes a textual analysis of New Testament writings, particularly 1 Corinthians 7 and other Pauline epistles, to assess the relationship between early Christian views on sexuality and broader Roman societal norms. This text-based analysis is complemented by a critique of modern scholarship on asceticism, drawing on secondary sources that engage with the philosophical, theological, and historical dimensions of ascetic practice.

## **RESULTS**

This study reveals how early ascetic Christianity profoundly reshaped gender and sexuality within the context of spiritual purity and self-denial. Women were often idealized for their virginity, while men sought transcendence over gender distinctions through ascetic practices.

An illustrative case is that of Saint Ignatius of Antioch ([Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 293](#)), who, with intense passion, sought martyrdom, asking his fellow Christians not to show excessive affection towards him as he approached his grim fate at the hands of beasts. Ignatius' martyrdom exemplifies the deeply spiritual longing for communion with Christ through suffering. This desire for martyrdom wasn't unique to Ignatius, as demonstrated in the martyrdom of Saint Shushanik ("I will go to a sincere death") and Origen's passionate pursuit of martyrdom. Even amid physical suffering, this fervent longing for union with Christ typifies early Christian spirituality.

As Christianity evolved and external persecution faded, the longing for spiritual unity with Christ endured. Christians began to wage an internal war against their "sinful" nature, leading to the rise of asceticism as a form of spiritual martyrdom. This self-discipline, chosen willingly, was a form of inward martyrdom – embodied through practices such as *hesychia* (silent prayer) ([Nikodimos, 1979, Vol. 1, p.107](#)). This internal ascetic struggle became the dominant means by which Christians achieved spiritual union with Christ. Asceticism flourished through the influence of figures like Saint Anthony the Great and became synonymous with the quest for holiness.

A significant shift occurred as asceticism began to be institutionalized, mainly by establishing monastic communities. The notion of monasticism as a form of spiritual discipline vividly illustrates Anthony the Great's role in this transformation (Chryssavgis, 2004). Despite criticisms from figures like Brown, who critique asceticism as a withdrawal from civic duties, this research suggests that early Christians who chose the ascetic life were not escaping from society but were engaged in a more profound spiritual commitment. Though different in lifestyle from lay Christians, monks shared the same ethical and doctrinal standards, reflecting the broader Christian quest for holiness.

## DISCUSSION

### *Contextualizing Asceticism in Early Christianity*

The analysis reveals that early Christian asceticism both challenged and reinforced traditional gender roles. While celibacy and renunciation offered women spiritual authority, they also subjected them to restrictive ideals of purity. The study highlights how early Christian views on sexuality shaped later theological traditions, influencing monasticism, clerical celibacy, and gendered conceptions of holiness.

Brown's critique of Greco-Roman social norms and their historical context is well-founded (Brown, 1988, p. 8). However, his theological analysis tends to approach mystical experience in a fragmented manner. Isolating biblical references to sex or interpreting a single artistic depiction fails to capture the broader theological and cultural picture. His discussion of the Roman system is accurate, particularly in highlighting how individuals were primarily valued for their reproductive role (Brown, 1988, pp. 6, 20). His assertion that citizens were expected to have five children and that those unable to contribute to the city's population were seen as inadequate citizens aligns with evidence from other historical sources.<sup>1</sup> Marriage and procreation were seen as essential duties for all elite Romans, with children valued both personally and as contributions to societal expectations. In the words of Keith Bradley, "marriage and procreation were culturally induced social obligations, not the result of individualistic choices" (1991, p. 171). Marriage and procreation were viewed as natural law, with Lucretius linking the union of man and woman to the birth of children in the rise of civilization (Hug, 2014, p. 18). Marriage was seen as a legal act, and having children with a lover was not permissible. Children were more than just an expected outcome of elite Roman marriages; their presence validated the marriage itself and distinguished it from other unions (Hug, 2014, pp. 19-20). Elite men could form lasting, monogamous relationships with women of lower social status (Brown, 1998, p. 13), but these women were considered concubines rather than wives. They were not expected to bear children for their

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<sup>1</sup> See Bruce W. Frier, *Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian's Evidence*, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 86 (1982): 213–251, <https://doi.org/10.2307/311195>; See E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities, and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) for further reading on this topic.

See also: Hopkins, M. K. (1965). The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage. *Population Studies*, 18(3), 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2173291>

lovers and had no legal claim to their property (Hug, 2014, pp. 19-21). Similarly, the moral stance of Christian ascetics reflected the scriptural teaching that the family was the only legitimate path for having children (1 Timothy 2:15, NIV, 2011). Christian asceticism was a voluntary practice, not driven by pressure, coercion, or necessity. By contrast, the chastity of many virgin priestesses was not a matter of personal choice; the city recruited its virgins by dedicating them to the service of the gods (Brown, 1988, p. 8).

### *Childbirth and Familial Continuity*

Christians did not oppose the social structure; Jesus adhered to the laws of the state and upheld moral principles, and Christians followed his example (Matthew 22:21). They were not opposed to sex, but rather to disorder and chaos. This does not mean that they agreed with everything the state imposed; in fact, their protests often led to imprisonment. Christians were explicitly persecuted for their ascetic practices (Kidder, 2003, pp. 96-97).

In examining the formation of the New Testament, we must also consider the context of the Roman Empire, where women's rights were severely diminished. This reality is reflected in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul adopts elements from the state's social structure and explicitly states that his guidance is personal opinion rather than divine command (v. 25). Paul's writing is particularly significant given the profound social inequality of the time, where women were regarded as servants and even seen as "failed males" (Brown, 1988, pp. 10, 22). They had no legal rights, and mature men often married young girls: "In the Latin world, men appear to have married even later: they could treat their young wives almost as daughters" (Brown, 1988, p. 13). Views on marriage and sexuality were similarly peculiar; as Brown describes, "The genital regions were mere points of passage... the outlets of a human espresso machine" (Brown, 1988, p. 17). Slaves endured even harsher conditions, stripped of all rights and regarded as mere property of their masters, including control over their bodies: "Every master is held to have it in his power to use his slave as he wishes" (Brown, 1988, p. 23). Paul does not challenge the institution of slavery; instead, he leaves it intact, a stance that raises the question of why he did not explicitly condemn it as unacceptable (1 Cor. 7:21).

The significance of childbirth for the city is evident in the celebration of a boy's first ejaculation, which his family honored during the Liberalia festival on March 17 (Brown, 1988, p. 28). With this emphasis on familial and societal continuity established, he then shifts his focus to critiquing asceticism, beginning with Antony the Great and asserting that its origins trace back to him (Brown, 1988, p. 216).

Brown criticizes the monks for devoting excessive time to thoughts of sex and struggling against sexual desire, which he finds unacceptable. He explains:

"Among the monks of Egypt, the problems of sexual temptation were most often seen in terms of the massive antithesis of 'desert' and 'world.' Sexual temptation was frequently treated in a somewhat offhand manner, presented as if it were no more than a drive toward women, toward matrimony, and hence toward fateful conscription, through marriage, into the structures of the settled land." (Brown, 1988, p. 217)

### *Critique of Asceticism*

Asceticism, derived from the Greek term *askesis*, originally signified physical training or exercise aimed at excellence. In modern contexts, it refers to the practice of self-denial and abstinence from pleasures, often leading to suffering, as a means to achieve spiritual perfection, self-control, or honor God through sacrifice. Scholarly views on asceticism, including those of Weber (1963, pp. 164-184), Yinger (1957, pp. 417-420), Urbach (2002, pp. 35-56), and Baer (1955, p.15) have varied, with some scholars interpreting it as a significant element of rabbinic ideology. For instance, Fraade argues that the Pharisees advocated ascetic practices. Still, many scholars have contested this interpretation, emphasizing that the rabbis preferred a milder form of self-denial rather than rigorous abstinence (Fraade, 1986, pp. 259-276). Asceticism is also examined in the context of monasticism, where it is viewed not as an expression of superiority but as a self-sacrificial service to God, aiming for divine communion through liturgical practices. While scholars like Peter Brown highlight monastic asceticism as a rejection of sensuality for spiritual focus (Brown, 1988, pp. 229-230), it is crucial to recognize that asceticism, as a broader concept, predates the institutionalization of monasticism in the fourth century, encompassing a variety of spiritual disciplines beyond hermitage (Brown, 1988, p. 236), such as the communal dimension of liturgical service in Eastern Christian thought.

### *Asceticism in Theological Context*

Peter Brown's assertion that monks perceived sexuality as a threat to spiritual life is not a misrepresentation; rather, it reflects an authentic monastic perspective. However, their rejection of sexual activity was not rooted in hatred but in a profound desire for communion with God, subordinating all else to this pursuit. Brown observes: "The abiding presence of sexual desire, and of sexual feeling in the mind of the monk, took on a new meaning. Sexuality became, as it were, a privileged ideogram" (Brown, 1988, pp. 229-230). To understand the dichotomy between "pure spirit and the sensual body" (Brown, 1988, p. 236), Brown highlights instances of monks breaking their vows. However, while individual failures are inevitable, using such cases to critique monastic asceticism as a whole is neither just nor objective (Brown, 1988, p. 230).

### *Spiritual Practice and Service*

Asceticism, both as a spiritual practice and as a literary tradition, is an intrinsic element of Eastern Christian thought. Contrary to Brown's assertion that asceticism emerged in the fourth century, ascetic practice predates this period. While the fourth century witnessed the institutionalization of monasticism, as mentioned above, and the proliferation of eremitic lifestyles, asceticism is a broader concept. The Greek term "μοναχός" (*monachos*) implies solitude, but ascetic life (referred to in Old Georgian as *მონაზონობა*) encompasses a wide spectrum of spiritual disciplines beyond hermitage.

The monastic vocation was not about superiority but about self-sacrificial service. Monks sought divine encounter through an intentional, liturgical commitment. The Greek term "λειτουργία" (*liturgy*) embodies the communal dimension of this service. Etymologically,

it derives from “λαός” (people) and “ἔργον” (work), originally denoting public service (Liddell, 1940, p. 472). The verb “λειτουργεῖν” signifies service performed for the community’s benefit (Vintilescu, 1972, p. 140). In biblical texts, “λειτουργία” denotes acts of devotion and collective worship, later acquiring a Eucharistic connotation, particularly during times of persecution (2 Cor. 35:3).

Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 BCE–40 CE), Pliny the Elder, and Josephus (Fraade, 1986, pp. 253-288) describe the Therapeutae, a Jewish ascetic group, in *De Vita Contemplativa* (Steyn, 2009, pp. 424-448). Their practices parallel those of the Qumran community (likely the Essenes) and early Christians (Saria, 2012, pp. 20-30). Nineteenth-century historians dismissed Philo’s account as literary embellishment, but the Dead Sea Scrolls affirmed the historical reality of such ascetic communities. Philo describes the Therapeutae as healers of both body and soul, emphasizing their devotion to contemplation. They abstained from food until evening, prohibited meat and wine, and engaged in rigorous meditation. On the Sabbath, they gathered for communal worship, maintaining distinct spaces for men and women. Their simplicity was reflected in their diet, limited to bread, salt, and water. Philo notes that they revered the numbers seven and fifty as sacred (Saria, 2012, pp. 20-35).

The Essenes, also known as Esevites, established isolated communities in the Judean desert, distancing themselves from mainstream society. Their communal structure was marked by shared property, strict discipline, and ritual purity, including ablutions and sacred meals. Rejecting temple sacrifices, they opposed the corruption of the Jerusalem priesthood but refrained from active rebellion. The community was divided into hierarchical groups under strict regulations (Saria, 2012, pp. 24-40). They envisioned cosmic dualism, anticipating an eschatological battle between the “Sons of Light” and the “Sons of Darkness,” culminating in the triumph of righteousness. However, the Essene movement faded because it failed to realize this apocalyptic vision (Saria, 2012, pp. 26-28).

The Qumran excavations have yielded extensive material evidence of Essene life, including manuscripts documenting their beliefs and practices. Among these texts is a reference to a “Truth-Telling Messiah” who was rejected and crucified. Some scholars have speculated on connections to New Testament narratives, but caution is necessary in drawing direct parallels. Burrows (1955, as cited in Saria, 2012, pp. 26–42) argues that the Dead Sea Scrolls do not fundamentally alter our understanding of early Christianity, emphasizing the need for rigorous historical analysis rather than speculative associations (Saria, 2012, pp. 26–42).

Ultimately, monastic asceticism must be understood within its theological framework rather than through isolated examples of failure or external critiques. Its essence lies in the pursuit of divine communion through disciplined practice, deeply embedded in the spiritual traditions of Christianity.

### *Biblical Foundations of Asceticism*

Asceticism is not a new social phenomenon but has deep biblical roots. Figures such as Samson, who took Nazarite vows, and John the Baptist embody the ascetic tradition. The Old Testament also includes schools of the prophets, which cultivated spiritual lives

through discipline and ritual. These schools and practices laid the foundation for ascetic movements in the New Testament ([Matthew 5:48](#)). For example, the “schools of the prophets” in 1 Samuel 10:5, 19:18, and 2 Kings 2:3 influenced the spiritual atmosphere of the time. Nazarite vows, as seen in Samson’s story ([Judges 13:5, 16:17](#)) and Acts 18:18 and Matthew 2:23, further demonstrate the longstanding role of asceticism. These practices, grounded in theological commitments to holiness, purity, and divine service, have been integral to the Old and New Testaments.

The asceticism of the Old Testament shares the same fundamental principles as that practiced by Christians in the 1st, 4th, and 5th centuries, as well as in other eras. However, the specific forms and expressions of ascetic activity have varied across time.

### *Early Christian Martyrdom*

Asceticism gradually diversified over time, with its most distinct form emerging at the end of the 3rd century and the dawn of the 4th century. This form, known as eremitism or monasticism, represents a withdrawal from worldly affairs. Although eremitism, too, is multifaceted in nature, it is vital first to understand why this specific manifestation of asceticism gained prominence in the late 4th century and why it was not as evident earlier ([Matthew 19:21](#)). Before the 4th century, the first three centuries of Christianity in the Roman Empire were marked by intense persecution, where Christianity was primarily defined by martyrdom ([Bigg, 1909, pp. 1-518](#)). Christians faced extreme forms of repression, including physical violence, leading to countless deaths under various emperors ([Bigg, 1909, pp. 24-162](#)). Even more perilous were the verbal persecutions, where Christians were subject to severe calumnies. As documented by 2nd-century apologists, Christians were accused of atheism for refusing to worship the Roman gods, with figures such as Athenagoras countering these accusations ([Barnard, 1972, pp. 20 – 150](#)). Similarly, accusations of cannibalism arose from misunderstandings of Christian liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, with opponents distorting Christ’s words about the bread and wine ([Groton, 1914, pp. 3-67](#)). Another damaging accusation involved incest and sexual immorality, rooted in misinterpretations of Paul’s writings about unity in Christ. In this context of both physical and verbal persecution, many Christians sought refuge in remote areas, particularly during the Decian persecutions of the 3rd century ([Esquivel, 2021, pp. 341-50](#)). As persecution subsided, some of these Christians, accustomed to solitary life, chose to continue in isolation, leading to the rise of eremitical forms of asceticism. While this retreat from persecution contributed to the development of monasticism, it cannot be considered its sole origin; other factors were undoubtedly involved in the emergence of this profound spiritual practice ([Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 279](#)).

### *Bultmann’s Influence on Christian Thought*

Christians began offering the highest form of bodily sacrifice for the love of Christ, mirroring Christ’s own self-sacrifice through his crucifixion for humanity. In his study of prim-

itive Christianity, Rudolf Bultmann traces the influence of Old Testament, Jewish, Hellenistic, and Gnostic ideas on early Christian thought. He admits that the practical behavior of the church and its members resembled that of Gnosticism in that it rested upon a sense of superiority over the world (Bultmann, 1956, pp. 206-209). Bultmann critically analyzes this aspect, noting how Brown sarcastically references Augustine's frequent sermons on the rich and the poor (Brown, 2012, pp. 72-90). While Augustine emphasized social issues, it is essential to recognize that Christians were not engaged in society for social work; their primary aim was the acquisition of spiritual virtues. Just as Christ dedicated Himself to humanity through His death on the cross, so too did Christians aim to bear witness to His love with their own lives, spiritually uniting themselves with Christ in the process. If this were a decisive factor, then asceticism must have truly begun in the 1st and 2nd centuries, as the persecutions of that time were no less intense. It is clear that certain Christian groups, facing extreme repression, chose to retreat from the sword of their persecutors. However, the definitive reason for this movement is found in spiritual reality, which is clearly evident. It is crucial to remember that the first three centuries of Christianity were marked by martyrdom, not merely because Christians were persecuted and therefore became involuntary victims, but because many Christians actively sought martyrdom. The crown of martyrdom was seen as more exalted than any other, and those who received it were considered faithful witnesses to Christ, spiritually crucified, buried, and resurrected with Him in His glory. For this reason, many Christians yearned for martyrdom.

### *The Pursuit of Spiritual Virtue*

This study reveals how early ascetic Christianity profoundly reshaped gender and sexuality within the context of spiritual purity and self-denial. Women were often idealized for their virginity, while men sought transcendence over gender distinctions through ascetic practices.

An illustrative example of this desire is the case of Saint Ignatius of Antioch (Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 293), who sought martyrdom with such passion that he asked fellow Christians not to express excessive love for him, as he was about to face a dreadful fate at the hands of beasts. Despite the inevitability of his impending death, Ignatius, already spiritually a martyr, did not look back towards earthly attachments, nor did he desire any diversion from his path towards martyrdom. His unwavering focus on the crown of martyrdom shows the depth of his desire for unity with Christ through his suffering. This desire for martyrdom was not unique to Ignatius but was shared by many early Christians. For example, the martyrdom of Saint Shushanik exemplifies the same sentiment: "I will go to a sincere death." (C'urtaveli, 2021, pp. 207-218) Origen's example further confirms this, as he encouraged his father, who was imprisoned, to embrace martyrdom. Origen himself, inflamed with the desire for martyrdom, would have surely fallen victim to the persecutions but for his mother's intervention. These examples conclusively demonstrate that there was an overwhelming divine desire among Christians for communion with Christ through martyrdom – the path of true sacrifice, which embodies the confirmation of the Savior's truth through suffering.

*Martyrdom as Union with Christ*

The era of martyrdom came to an end in Rome, as Christianity was first tolerated, then accepted, and ultimately recognized as the official faith. Persecutions ceased, and no one was pursued for the sake of Christianity. However, the divine longing for communion with Christ remained alive in the hearts of Christians. As external persecution faded, Christians turned inward, choosing to wage war against their “sinful” nature, seeking to overcome sin on their own terms (Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 279). In doing so, many withdrew from the world, desiring to become worthy of union with Christ through spiritual struggle during times of great adversity. Asceticism, in this sense, became a form of spiritual martyrdom – an inward, voluntary self-discipline carried out without external force and embodied in an ever-new way of life called hesychia (Nikodimos, 1979, pp. 107–138) or silence in prayer. Hesychia means, however, far more than merely refraining from outward speech (Ware, 2000, p. 89). This spiritual state was a continuation of the early martyrdoms of the 1st to 3rd centuries, where Christians demonstrated their commitment to truth through physical sacrifice. Thus, after the example of Anthony the Great became widely known, particularly through the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria, countless Christians followed in his footsteps. A fiery passion for ascetic life took root, and by the 4th century, asceticism had become a prominent form of spiritual martyrdom. Historically, Christians did not live in peace, even in the fourth century, as the Persian king persecuted and tortured monks (Alfeyev, 2000, p. 16). The proper foundation of asceticism lay in its ability to fulfill the Christian desire for martyrdom, making it the most actual path to spiritual communion with Christ. The devout individual chose this path through seclusion in monastic life. Initially, seclusion manifested in various early forms (hermits, wanderers, barefoot ascetics, and recluses, among others). Later, it evolved into organized monastic communities established along their boundaries, collectively known as asceticism (Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 279).

*Anthony the Great, Monasticism and Ascetic Literature (Paterikon)*

Brown asserts that Anthony the Great is foundational to the development of ascetic life (Brown, 1988, p. 215), despite the presence of ascetics before him, such as Paul of Thebes, whom Anthony himself buried at the age of 113. While these early figures were significant, it was Anthony’s influence that truly brought asceticism to prominence, attracting a vast following of disciples. However, in Syria and elsewhere, as Chryssavgis notes, there is no single figure comparable to Antony, at least not in the way Athanasius presents him (2004, p. 79). Antony may not be the founder, but he is clearly the father of monasticism (Chryssavgis, 2004, p. 79). His prominence as a spiritual figure is further confirmed by Gregory of Nazianzus, who regarded him as a spiritual father. This marks a critical turning point in the 4th century, in which ascetic literature began to solidify as a distinct genre within Christian writings. Anthony’s epistles, along with the writings of his spiritual successors such as Ammonas and the monastic rules of Pachomius (*cenobitic*) (Chryssavgis, 2004, p. 79), played a crucial role in the formation of ascetic thought. These texts, alongside the contributions of other key ascetics such as Macarius of Egypt, helped establish a robust tradition of spiritual and ascetic literature. Even Evagrius Ponticus, despite his theological

controversies, made substantial contributions to this literary tradition, influencing both the content and form of subsequent ascetic writings (Bingaman and Nassif, 2012, pp. 50-130). This period of prolific writing gave rise to the foundational Patristic and monastic works that define Christian asceticism today, including influential collections such as the “Paterikon,” which continues to hold a central place in the ascetic tradition (Moschus, 1992, pp. 5–25). Notably, these texts are characterized by their succinct and profound style, and Georgian translations have further enriched their legacy (Shoemaker, 2021, pp. 73–79). The *Patericon* (or *Paterikon*, Greek: πατερικόν), derived from πατερικόν βιβλίον (“father’s book”), often translated into English as *Lives of the Fathers*, and sometimes referred to as *gerontikon* (Greek: γεροντικόν), is a genre of Byzantine religious literature. It consists of collections of sayings of saints, martyrs, and hierarchs, as well as narratives about their lives (Moschus, 1992, pp. 1-20). These texts have their origins in early monasticism. One of the earliest works in this genre is *Leimōn pneumatikos* in Greek, known in Latin as *Pratum spirituale* (“Spiritual Meadow”), sometimes abbreviated “Prat. Spirit.,” and also referred to as the *Leimonarion* or the “New Paradise.” (Moschus, 1992, pp. 1-287) Written in the 610s, it recounts the author’s personal experiences with prominent ascetics he encountered during his travels through Palestine, Sinai, Egypt, Cilicia, and Syria, sharing the edifying stories these ascetics imparted to him.

The ascetic life did not develop without literature; instead, monastic writings evolved along two main trajectories. In many cases, Brown critiques monks for indulging in fantasies, particularly regarding sexuality, portraying them almost as psychiatric patients like Antony (Brown, 1988, pp. 214-31). However, in reality, monks shared their spiritual thoughts and visions with one another, like Barsanuphius & John. (2003, pp. 57-199) or John Climacus (1982, pp. 1-291).<sup>1</sup> Often, these exchanges took the form of anecdotes or parables, serving as illustrative examples for deeper understanding (Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 281).

### *Monastic Life and Commitment*

Monastic and mystical spiritual literature can be categorized into two interrelated aspects: (1) the didactic and spiritual teachings of monks, which include reflections on their struggles, ethical guidance, and theological insights found in ecclesiastical writings and epistles; and (2) the shorter, often aphoristic narratives known as paterika – brief sayings or stories aimed at conveying specific moral or ascetic lessons. The former represents a mystical dimension, seeking to articulate divine experiences and spiritual purification, while the latter is pragmatic, offering concise wisdom rooted in lived ascetic practice (Gabidzashvili, 2010, pp. 279-80). These writings collectively function as formative tools for the spiritual and intellectual growth of monastic communities, reinforcing the ideals of monastic superiority and devotion. Through paterika, details of monastic lives that might be absent from official vitae are preserved, shaping not only the legacy of early Christian asceticism but also the broader theological discourse on monastic piety.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Chryssavgis, J. (2004). *John Climacus: From the Egyptian desert to the Sinaite mountain*. Ashgate.

This broader literary tradition shaped monastic self-understanding and influenced external perceptions of ascetic life. However, interpretations of monasticism have varied significantly among scholars. One such perspective is offered by Brown, who presents a critical view of early Christian asceticism, arguing that it represented a withdrawal from civic responsibilities rather than a legitimate mode of engagement with society.

Brown interprets the works of Christian writers such as Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom, and others – as well as Christian life in late antiquity – as acts of defiance against civic duty (Brown, 1995, p. 25) and an attempt to escape worldly responsibilities (Brown, 1998, p. 44). He even goes so far as to suggest that asceticism contributed to social impoverishment. However, this perspective overlooks the reality that early Christians did not evade their social obligations or burden others (Brown, 1998, pp. 44-47, 54). Many sustained themselves through manual labor, embodying a self-sufficient way of life. Even the apostles, while preaching the message of Christ, actively traveled and worked rather than leading idle lives. Brown's analysis lacks a spiritual dimension and presents an overly one-sided view of ascetic existence, failing to acknowledge its deeper theological and ethical foundations (Brown, 1982, pp. 166-95). For Brown, the monk is portrayed as a self-centered egoist, with the prestige of monastic life stemming from his status as the "lonely one" (1998, p. 52). The Church does not often consider it necessary to speak about material things; instead, it focuses on spiritual poverty and on how the human person may be enriched in God. It is not material poverty or wealth that affects a person, according to the teachings of the Church, but a poor soul that blinds his vision of God (Behr-Sigel, 1995, p. 30).

Monks differ from laypeople only in their way of life; their adherence to Christian teachings and doctrine remains the same in principle. Both monks and lay Christians are equally bound by the understanding of sin articulated in patristic writings (Gabidzashvili, 2010, p. 281). What is forbidden for a monk is equally forbidden for any Christian – pride, unlawful sexual relationships, and other moral transgressions. The key distinction lies in their commitments: a monk takes a vow of celibacy, while a married Christian, through the sacrament of marriage, vows to remain faithful to their spouse. The principle of making a sacred commitment remains constant; only the form and lifestyle differ.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Early ascetic Christianity's approach to gender and sexuality was intricately linked to its conception of spiritual perfection. While it offered alternative models of identity transcending prevailing social norms, it simultaneously reinforced specific hierarchical structures. This study advocates for a more nuanced interpretation of ascetic ideals, particularly in their influence on Christian thought regarding the body and sexuality.

When examining the lives, teachings, and practices of specific monks, avoiding anachronistic interpretations stemming from a 21st-century lens is crucial, especially when scrutinizing the fourth century's legal and cultural context. The ascetic life and its spiritual ideals must be understood within the parameters of that era, which were significantly shaped by a worldview rooted in the eschatological expectation of the kingdom, which did not dismiss

the relevance of worldly life and marriage.

While these spiritual teachings, especially in paterika and hagiographies, were written for future generations of monks and Christians, they must also be understood as presenting a demanding path intended primarily to guide and instruct rather than to be replicated uncritically. For instance, the process for a woman to become a nun involved various stages of communal life, rigorous testing, and spiritual formation throughout 10 to 15 years, often under the supervision of a mentor. Thus, it is misleading to interpret the rejection of marriage and sexual relations as the sole motivation of these ascetics. Instead, their primary aim was to draw nearer to God, and for many, the monastic life represented the most effective means of daily, dedicated spiritual training.

This investigation suggests that early Christian asceticism should be viewed not merely as an institutional framework, as Brown has suggested, but rather as a profound, spiritually motivated endeavor to transform the individual's relationship with both the divine and the material world.

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This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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