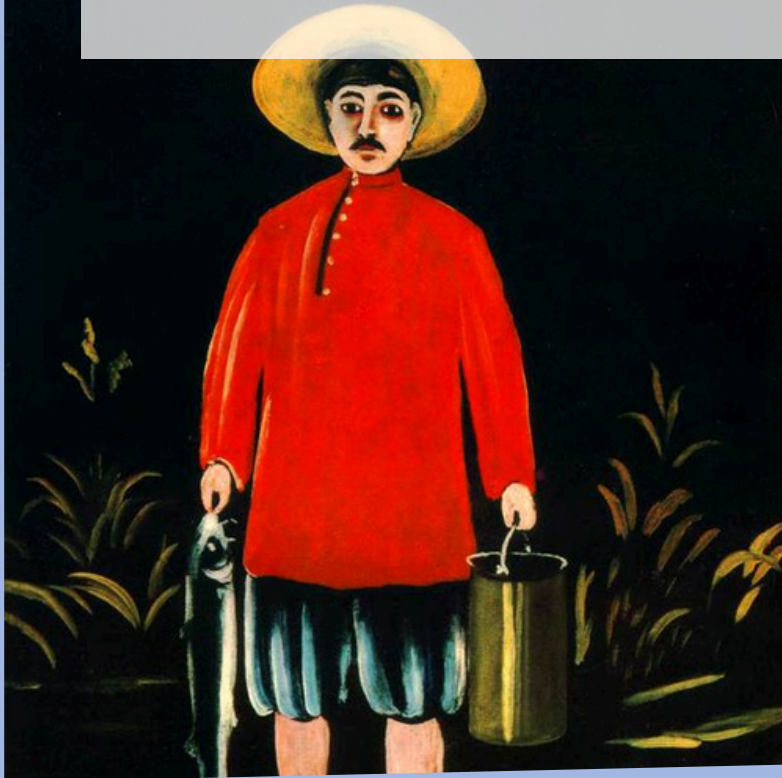




CCI FRANÇAISE
EN GEORGIE



GEORGIAN CULTURE



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I - HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Georgia is a country in the South Caucasus region, acting as a bridge between Europe and Asia. Although its population is relatively modest, at 3.7 million, it is ethnically and culturally diverse.

Georgia's history is marked by the kingdoms that have shaped its heritage and culture, such as the Kingdom of Iberia in ancient Georgia (302 BC - 580 AD). Over the centuries, the country's rulers turned it into a fearsome power and regional pillar, as witnessed by the Kingdom of Georgia under Queen Tamar in the 13th century, or that of her predecessor Bagrat III, who unified Georgia in the 11th century.

Nevertheless, Georgia's strategic geographical position made it the target of numerous empires eager to subjugate the country. The state faced invasions from the Roman, Persian, Mongol, Byzantine and Ottoman empires, followed by Imperial Russia in the 19th century. After a brief period of independence between 1918 and 1921, Georgia was finally incorporated as a republic into the Soviet Union. The country regained its independence in 1991.

Nevertheless, the country's political situation remains unstable in the 21st century. Shaken by a civil war between 1991 and 1993, which led to the independence of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and then by the Russian-led war of 2008, which resulted in the annexation of these two regions, Georgia's stability is frequently threatened. Georgia is therefore a relatively young country, all the more so as its first democratic elections only took place in 2004.

Relations with Russia have always been uncertain and hostile, with the Georgian government having long expressed its desire for closer ties with the European Union and NATO. In December 2023, following the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, Georgia was officially granted candidate status for EU membership. However, recent policy decisions by the once pro-European Georgian government are increasingly turning towards Russia, making the country's future uncertain.

I - LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

A. Georgian language

Georgian is a unique language, spoken exclusively in Georgia. Over 80% of Georgians speak this language, but two other languages are also officially recognized in the country: Ossetian, spoken in South Ossetia, and Abkhazian, in Abkhazia¹. The Georgian language belongs to the so-called "Kartvelian" linguistic family and encompasses various dialects that can be found throughout Georgia. Mingrelian, Svan and Laz are also spoken in the country.²



Source : Global Voices en Français

There are also similarities between the Basque language, Euskara, and Georgian. Although Basque is an isolated language, meaning that its origins are entirely unique, scientists have nevertheless managed to find similarities with Georgian. As a result, many hypotheses about the links between the two populations have been put forward. Indeed, Georgia's ancient name in the Middle Ages was Iberia, which has long raised the question of its links with the Iberian region. However, the necessary proof to support this hypothesis has yet to be found.³



1. Vallotto, D. (2024, April 30). La langue géorgienne, complexe et fascinante. Babel. <https://fr.babel.com/fr/magazine/decouvrir-la-langue-georgienne>

2. Idem

3. Ibidem

B. Georgian literature

Georgian literature is made up of exceptional works tracing the country's history and highlighting the artistic uniqueness of the Georgian people. The earliest recorded accounts date from the 4th and 5th centuries⁴. Many of these stories are initially linked to religion. This is the case, for example, with the story of the Christianization of Georgia, entitled "The Life of Saint Nino".

Over the years, other timeless classics have become part of Georgia's history, and even achieved international success.



"The Knight in the Panther's Skin" manuscript from the National Manuscript Centre of Georgia.



Shota Rustaveli

The poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" (ვეფხისტყაოსანი) by Shota Rustaveli is a case in point. Dating from the 13th century and containing 6,350 verses, this poem is considered a classic of Georgia's Golden Age⁵. The story takes place in an imaginary setting and follows the adventures of two knights, Avtandil and Tariel, united by a deep friendship. Tariel, an Indian prince, falls madly in love with the beautiful Nestan-Daredjan, but their love is thwarted by political circumstances. Aided by Avtandil, Tariel overcomes many obstacles, including battles and hardships, to finally find and save his beloved. The poem is a hymn to love, heroism, friendship and chivalric values, while exploring profound philosophical themes.

Little has been found to retrace the life of Shota Rustaveli, and "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" is the only work signed by his pen to have been found⁶. Nevertheless, his influence on Georgia is considerable. His poem is a blend of Eastern and Western culture, and accurately depicts the cross-cultural customs of the time.

4. Guide Voyage Géorgie. (2024, Mars 18). La littérature géorgienne : un trésor méconnu à explorer. Guide Voyage Géorgie. <https://guide-voyage-georgie.com/culture-et-religion/la-litterature-georgienne-un-tresor-meconnu-a-decouvrir/>

5. Mahé, J.-P. (2002, Novembre). Le chevalier à la peau de panthère : l'épopée persane du Géorgien Chota Roustavéli (Clio 2011 ed.). clio.fr. http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/pdf/pdf_le_chevalier_a_la_peau_de_panthere_l_epopee_persane_du_georgien_chota_roustaveli.pdf

6. DOKHTOURICHVILI, M. (2018). Chota Roustavéli, poète d'un apogée politique et culturel de la Géorgie, son œuvre et ses traductions en français (Vol. 49). Académie des Sciences et Lettres de Montpellier. https://www.ac-sciences-lettres-montpellier.fr/academie_edition/fichiers_conf/DOKHTOURICHVILI-2018.pdf

Among other renowned authors, one of the most famous is Ilia Chavchavadze, known for his writings, journalistic articles and political demands.

Chavchavadze contributed to the country's cultural awakening, while reinforcing the nationalism of the Georgian people. To achieve this, he initiated the creation of the newspaper Iveria, which openly advocated patriotism and the development of national culture through literature and language.⁷

In particular, he is one of the founders of the "Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians" (ართველთა შორის წერაკითხვის გამავრცელებელი საზოგადოება), which aims to democratize access to literature and literacy.⁸



Source : Ilia Chavchavadze. archive.gov.ge



Photo of the Society's museum.

7. Allego. (n.d.). Ilia Chavchavadze. Allgeo.org. <https://www.allgeo.org/index.php/en/711-ilia-chavchavadze>

8. National Archives of Georgia. (n.d.). Society for Spreading Literacy Among Georgians. National Archives of Georgia. <https://archive.gov.ge/en/tsera-kitkhvis-gamavrtselebeli-sazogadoeba-1>



Source : Otar Chiladzé, Babelio.com

And he's not the only one to have left his mark on Georgian literary culture. Otar Tchiladzé, the leading author of the 80s, is a notable example. His book "Iron Theatre" (რკინის თეატრი) has risen to the position of literary classic in the field of Georgian Romanticism.⁹

II - MUSIC AND DANCE

A. Traditional music



Source : Classykeo.com

Musics and songs have always played an important role in Georgian culture. There are three distinct types of Georgian polyphonic song from different parts of the country: the polyphonic dialogue of the Kakhetia region, the contrasting polyphony of western Georgia, and the polyphony of Svanetia.¹⁰ Although today the tradition of these songs is perpetuated in the majority of the country, this was not always the case. Indeed, Georgian polyphony has long been repressed. This was the case in the 19th century, when Georgia was under the control of the Russian Empire, which prohibited the practice of religious singing.¹¹

9. Frédéric, B. (1994, Septembre). Violence et torpeur. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1994/09/FREDERICK/7469>

10. UNESCO. (n.d.). Le chant polyphonique géorgien - patrimoine immatériel - Secteur de la culture - UNESCO. <https://ich.unesco.org/fr/RL/le-chant-polyphonique-georgien-00008>

11. De Laleu, A. (2020, Mai 16). Sacrés ou populaires, la beauté des chants polyphoniques géorgiens. Radio France. <https://www.radiofrance.fr/francemusique/podcasts/la-chronique-7-d-aliette-de-laleu/sacres-ou-populaires-la-beaute-des-chants-polyphoniques-georgiens-9584973>

Yet the origins of these songs go back a long way: in the 12th century, during the reign of Tamar I, numerous songs recounting her exploits have been found. In those days, however, the songs were often accompanied by music, whereas today they are mostly sung a cappella.¹²

To underline the importance of this tradition and its authenticity, Georgian polyphonic singing was recognized by UNESCO in 2001 as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This recognition helps to strengthen and preserve this art form, threatened by the rural exodus and the lack of interest shown by new generations. By recognizing its cultural importance and originality, UNESCO is enabling this ancestral art to continue to be perpetuated.¹³



Source : unesco.org

B. Traditional dances

In addition to a well-developed musical culture, Georgia has a particular interest in the art of dance. A blend of different influences, such as Persian or Turkish dances, traditional Georgian dance nonetheless has a unique character, found nowhere else but in the Caucasus region. Often, the dances recount Georgian history and culture, making them an integral part of the national heritage.¹⁴

12. Ibidem

13. UNESCO. (n.d.). Le chant polyphonique géorgien - patrimoine immatériel - Secteur de la culture - UNESCO. [ici.unesco.org. https://ich.unesco.org/fr/RL/le-chant-polyphonique-georgien-00008](https://ich.unesco.org/fr/RL/le-chant-polyphonique-georgien-00008)

14. georgia.to. (n.d.). Georgian Folk Dance: Exploring the Heart of Georgia's Cultural Heritage. Georgia.to. <https://georgia.to/georgian-folk-dance-shows/>

There are different types of dances:

- **Kartuli :**

This dance, performed in pairs, is undoubtedly the most popular of all Georgian styles. A symbol of love and respect, the Kartuli dance has its origins between the 11th and 12th centuries, making it the oldest dance style in Georgia. The style is unique in that female dancers appear to float above the ground, while their partner performs a choreography called gasma (men perform various foot movements without moving the rest of the body).¹⁵



Source: georgiaabout.com. Kartuli dance



Source: geofolk.ge. Khorumi, the Sacred Dance of Georgian Warriors

- **Khorumi :**

This highly unusual dance, evocative of battle, originated in the Adjarian region. Because of its depiction of battle scenes, this style of dance can feature more than thirty dancers on stage, making the choreography particularly impressive.

- **Perkhuli :**

Like other dance styles, Perkhuli includes songs performed by the dancers. This folk dance is mostly performed by men, but new variants including women are becoming increasingly popular.



Source: European Association of Folklore Festivals

¹⁵. Georgia Travel. (n.d.). Georgian National Dance. Georgia Travel. <https://georgia.travel/why-georgia-georgian-dance>

C. The Sukhishvili National Ballet



The Sukhishvili National Ballet is a 75-year-old folk dance troupe. Founded by Iliko Sukhishvili in 1945, the troupe is known for its dynamic choreography and colorful costumes. The choreographies presented blend traditional dances with modern influences. Sukhishvili is internationally renowned and performs on the world's most prestigious stages. The company's current choreographer is Iliko Sukhishvili's grandson, in collaboration with his wife, making the Ballet a family affair.¹⁶

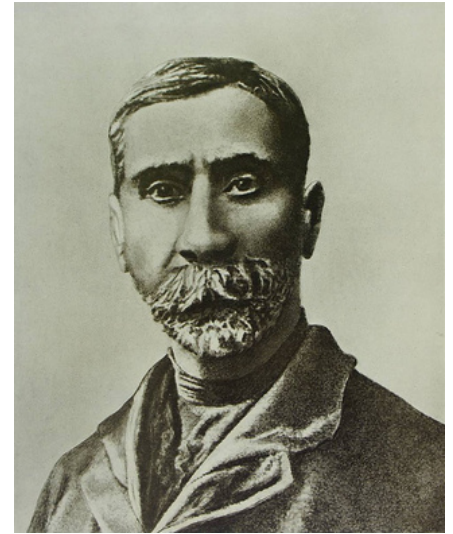
III - GEORGIAN ART

The Georgian art scene is diverse in terms of genres and trends. Numerous artists have succeeded in establishing themselves on the international scene thanks to their creativity, which often reflects nationalism and homage to Georgian culture.

15. Georgia Travel. (n.d.). Georgian National Dance. Georgia Travel. <https://georgia.travel/why-georgia-georgian-dance>
16. Soukhishvili.net. (n.d.). Soukhishvili. Soukhishvili.net. <https://sukhishvili.net/fr/france/>

A. Niko Pirosmani (1862-1918) :

Arguably Georgia's best-known international artist, Niko Pirosmani has established himself as one of the greatest Georgian artists of his time. Pirosmani's paintings portray a great deal of sensitivity, thanks to his painful childhood. One of his most famous paintings, "Actress Marguerite", depicts the French actress Marguerite de Sèvres, whom he is said to have met during one of his performances in Tiflis.¹⁷ Other paintings, such as "Fisherman in a Red Shirt", "Family Picnic" and even his still lifes depict scenes from the everyday life of 19th-century Georgians.



Actress Marguerite. 1909



Fisherman in a Red Shirt. 1908



Family Picnic. Sd.

B. David Kakabadze (1889-1952) :

David Kakabadze was one of Georgia's first modernist painters. He dabbled in various art forms: sculpture, theater and even theatrical painting. Having lived in Paris for several years, he was inspired by the avant-garde movements of the French painters of the time.¹⁸

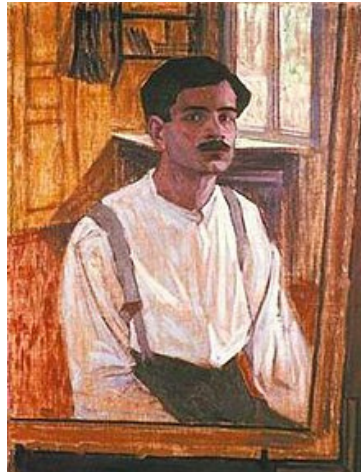


17. Mygeostrip. (n.d.). *La légende de Niko Pirosmani*. mygeostrip.com. <https://mygeotrip.com/fr/la-l%C3%A9gende-de-niko-pirosmani>

18. Atinati. (n.d.). DAVID KAKABADZE. Atinati. <https://www.atinati.com/artists/61f91179da16f40038018a03>



Imerethia - my mother. 1918



Self-portrait in a mirror. 1913



Rioni power station. 1931



C. Zurab Tsereteli (1934) :

Zurab Tsereteli is a famous Russian-Georgian sculptor. He is particularly renowned for his imposing, grandiose sculptures. Director of the Russian Academy of Arts since 1997 and founder of the Tbilisi Museum of Modern Art in 2012. Many of his sculptures can be found in Georgia as well as in Russia.



Chronicles of Georgia - 1985 - Tbilisi, Georgia.



Peter the Great - 1997 - Moscow, Russia.



Monument of St George - 2006 - Tbilisi, Georgia.

IV - GASTRONOMY

Georgian gastronomy is renowned the world over for its culinary diversity and originality. It is an essential part of Georgian culture, reflecting the hospitality and generosity of the Georgian people. Georgian specialties are often a combination of spices and warm flavors, making them comforting dishes. Another specific feature is the use of nuts and herbs, which give each dish a unique taste.

Here's just a sample of the delicious dishes awaiting you during your stay in Georgia:



- **Khachapuri :**

An emblematic Georgian dish, and probably the best known, khachapuri is a must on Georgian tables. There are different varieties of this dish, specific to different regions of the country: adjaruli khachapuri, with its distinctive boat shape and egg yolk filling, comes from the Adjarian region. The more "classic" imeruli khachapuri also comes from the Imereti region. Megruli khachapuri, on the other hand, comes from the Mingrelia region.

- **Adjapsandali :**

This traditional vegetarian dish often accompanies dishes as a garnish. Sometimes served hot or cold, this eggplant ratatouille seduces with its unique taste.



- **Chakapouli :**

Like many Georgian meat dishes, chakapouli is simmered for many hours. It consists of veal or lamb simmered with tarragon leaves and tkemalis (a variety of Georgian plums). This dish is considered a classic on Georgian tables and is served for all occasions.



- **Khinkalis :**

Khinkalis are one of the most popular dishes in Georgian cuisine. These purse-shaped ravioli, generously filled with minced meat (usually beef or pork), onions, herbs and spices, are steamed or boiled. What makes khinkalis unique is their preparation: they are shaped to create a pouch containing a tasty broth, which is drunk before the rest of the bite. Originally from the mountainous regions of Georgia, today khinkalis are enjoyed throughout the country, symbolizing conviviality and tradition at mealtimes.



V - WINEGROWING

Georgian wine culture is world-renowned, not least because the country is considered the cradle of this beverage, created over 8,000 years ago.

The traditional technique involves pressing the grapes with the feet, then storing them in clay jars called "Qvevri", which are then buried. The uniqueness of this process led to its inclusion on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list in 2013.

All regions of Georgia produce wine, but the most famous is the Kakheti region. The country boasts over 525 different grape varieties, some of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

Several types of wine can be found here, including one in particular: amber wine. Its distinctive color and taste are due to the fermentation process of white grapes, preserved with their skins in qvevri.

Saperavi, a dry red wine, is the most common type of wine, not least because of its longevity. Some red wines are also sweet, such as Kindzmarauli, which contributes to the originality of Georgian viticulture.



Qvevri buried for the fermentation process.

Type of Saperavi grape used to make the eponymous wine.



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