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## THE ECHOES OF ANCIENT GREEK CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN GEORGIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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## Abstract

By employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnomusicology, cultural history, and performance studies, this presentation uncovers the deep-rooted influences of ancient Greek culture, theatre traditions on Georgian religious syncretic rituals, as well as on folk music, dance, and musical-poetic performances. The world's familiarity with Georgia is largely due to the ancient Greek myth of the Argonauts, in which Medea, the daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis, helps the Argonauts steal the Golden Fleece from Colchis—located in what is now modern-day Georgia. After Greek colonizers became interested in Georgia, the Milesians (the inhabitants of Miletus) founded city-like settlements in Colchis, transforming it into their strategic eastern outpost. From a political, socio-economic, and religious perspective, Colchis became an integral part of the vast trade network connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. An important outcome of Greek cultural expansion was its influence on various layers of Georgian culture:

— The traditions of Greek theatre and chorus can be partly linked with Georgian pagan circular dances, performed with chorus accompaniment and featuring a soloist, the Coryphaeus, dancing at the centre of the circle. This also highlights the influence of Greek theatre traditions;

— The influence of Greek theatre masks is also revealed in Georgian culture, including the ithyphallic sculptures of the Kazbegi hoard, which depict masked dancers in a ritual honoring the moon cult, where they also took on the role of the chorus;

— During the pagan ritual of Berikaoba, celebrated in honour of the fertility cult, the berikas wore goat or bull skins and masks, reminiscent of the Greek satyrs who laid the groundwork for the chorus in Greek drama;

— The theatre built within the Roman fortification in Apsarus or Apsaros (Nowadays, Gonio in West Georgia) had a significant influence on the syncretic art of the region by staging Greek dramas in general; for example, the influence of the Greek chorus is evident in the pre-Christian syncretic poetic-musical masterpiece Eteriani, which was performed as a theatrical production, featuring the singing of both poetic and prose texts. Notably, sections of the poem were performed in responsorial and antiphonal styles, with the chorus playing a role similar to the Greek chorus by commenting on events. The chorus engaged in dialogical interaction with the characters, reflecting or amplifying the emotional tone of the scenes;

— Echoes of Greek tragedy continue to resonate organically within the Georgian cultural context, extending into the 20th century; Zakaria Paliashvili's first opera Abesalom and Eteri (1919)—widely regarded as the best Georgian opera is usually examined in relation to Greek tragedy, as the choruses in the opera serve a function similar to that of the Greek chorus in opera dramaturgy;

In conclusion, the Colchian culture, with its rich traditions, provided fertile ground for the introduction and establishment of Greek culture in Georgia, fostering a mutually enriching integration of the two. The unique Georgian a cappella choral traditions (even if it had not yet developed into a high level of polyphonic structure, which emerged much later), archaic songs of the pagan period organically combined with Greek cultural traditions. All this was made possible by

the Georgian culture's openness to integrating foreign artistic elements into its national context, reflecting its highly developed nature. This paper seeks to analyze the cases mentioned above by examining archival and visual materials to explore the multifaceted influence of Greek culture on Georgian art.

**Keywords:** Ancient Greek Theatre, Greek Chorus, Cultural Heritage, Chorus Traditions, Myth of the Argonauts, Syncretic Art.

## Resumo

Ao empregar uma abordagem interdisciplinar que combina etnomusicologia, história cultural e estudos da performance, esta apresentação revela as influências profundamente enraizadas da cultura grega antiga, das tradições teatrais nos rituais sincréticos religiosos georgianos, bem como na música folclórica, na dança e nas performances musicais e poéticas. A familiaridade mundial com a Geórgia deve-se, em grande parte, ao antigo mito grego dos Argonautas, no qual Medeia, filha do rei Eetes da Cólquida, ajuda os Argonautas a roubar o Velocino de Ouro da Cólquida — localizada no que hoje é a Geórgia. Após o interesse dos colonizadores gregos pela Geórgia, os milésios (os habitantes de Mileto) fundaram assentamentos urbanos na Cólquida, transformando-a em seu posto avançado estratégico a leste. De uma perspectiva política, socioeconômica e religiosa, a Cólquida tornou-se parte integrante da vasta rede comercial que conecta o Mediterrâneo ao Mar Negro. Um resultado importante da expansão cultural grega foi sua influência em várias camadas da cultura georgiana:

— As tradições do teatro e do coro gregos podem ser parcialmente ligadas às danças circulares pagãs georgianas, executadas com acompanhamento de coro e apresentando um solista, o Corifeu, dançando no centro do círculo. Isso também destaca a influência das tradições teatrais gregas;

— A influência das máscaras do teatro grego também é revelada na cultura georgiana, incluindo as esculturas itifálicas do tesouro de Kazbegi, que retratam dançarinos mascarados em um ritual em homenagem ao culto à lua, onde também assumiam o papel do coro;

— Durante o ritual pagão de Berikaoba, celebrado em homenagem ao culto à fertilidade, os berikas usavam peles de cabra ou touro e máscaras, remissivas dos sátiros gregos que lançaram as bases para o coro no drama grego;

— O teatro construído dentro da fortificação romana em Apsarus ou Apsaros (hoje, Gonio, na Geórgia Ocidental) teve uma influência significativa na arte sincrética da região, encenando dramas gregos em geral; por exemplo, a influência do coro grego é evidente na obra-prima poético-musical sincrética pré-cristã Eteriani, que foi encenada como uma produção teatral, apresentando o canto de textos poéticos e em prosa. Notavelmente, trechos do poema foram encenados em estilos responsorial e antifonal, com o coro desempenhando um papel semelhante ao coro grego, comentando os eventos. O coro interagiu dialogicamente com os personagens, refletindo ou amplificando o tom emocional das cenas;

— Ecos da tragédia grega continuam a ressoar organicamente no contexto cultural georgiano, estendendo-se até o século XX; A primeira ópera de Zakaria Paliashvili, *Abesalom e Eteri* (1919), amplamente considerada a melhor ópera georgiana, é geralmente examinada em relação à tragédia grega, visto que os coros da ópera desempenham uma função semelhante à do coro grego na dramaturgia operística.

Concluindo, a cultura colchiana, com suas ricas tradições, proporcionou um terreno fértil para a introdução e o estabelecimento da cultura grega na Geórgia, promovendo uma integração mutuamente enriquecedora entre ambas. As tradições corais e a cappella georgianas singulares (mesmo que ainda não tivessem se desenvolvido em um alto nível de estrutura polifônica, que emergiu muito mais tarde) e as canções arcaicas do período pagão se combinaram organicamente com as tradições culturais gregas. Tudo isso foi possível graças à abertura da cultura georgiana à integração de elementos artísticos estrangeiros em seu contexto nacional, refletindo sua natureza altamente desenvolvida. Este artigo busca analisar os casos mencionados acima, examinando materiais de arquivo e visuais para explorar a influência multifacetada da cultura grega na arte georgiana.

**Palavras-chave:** Teatro Grego Antigo, Coro Grego, Patrimônio Cultural, Tradições Corais, Mito dos Argonautas, Arte Sincrética.

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## Introduction

**B**y employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnomusicology, cultural history, and performance studies, this article reveals the profound impact of ancient Greek culture, theatre and chorus traditions on Georgian culture, religious syncretic rituals, as well as on folk music, dance, and musical-poetic performances. By identifying shared themes of fate, morality, and communal identity, this research illustrates how the echoes of Greek tragedy have been adapted and transformed to resonate within the Georgian cultural context, contributing to the nation's rich artistic heritage. This article seeks to analyze the cases mentioned above by examining archival and visual materials to explore the multifaceted influence of Greek culture—particularly ancient choral traditions—on Georgian art.

Overall, Georgia has navigated the need to establish political, economic, and cultural ties with many countries while fostering both receptiveness to foreign influences and a strong commitment to preserving its national identity. As discussed in my earlier publication,<sup>1</sup> the study of transculturalism through the example of Georgian culture reveals a delicate balance between embracing foreign influences and preserving national traditions: "The preservation of national identity amidst the influence of foreign cultures has been an inherent characteristic of Georgian music since ancient times when it was closely intertwined with Sumerian-Mesopotamian, ancient Greek, and Roman cultures. The proximity to the Sumerian-Mesopotamian civilization has instilled a significant aspect of Georgian culture—a steadfast adherence to traditions that have endured in the consciousness of Georgians to the present day. Throughout different historical periods, Georgia has attracted the attention of various empires such as Persia, ancient Greece, Rome, Arabia, the Mongols, Timurids, Ottomans, and the Russian Empire. Faced with frequent military invasions, Georgia has consistently engaged with diverse cultures, demonstrating remarkable acceptance and openness towards foreign influences.

The distinctiveness of ancient Georgian music evolved through interactions with different ethnicities, fostering an openness to varied cultural influences in engagements with both friendly and adversarial nations. This process involved assimilating diverse features that originated in neighboring or distant lands." (Ghvinjilia, 2023, p. 118).

It is believed that the great unification of Colchian tribes on the Black Sea coast occurred in the 13th century BCE<sup>2</sup>, and from the 8th century BCE (in the middle Bronze age), the first Georgian State—Colchis, also known as Egrisi<sup>3</sup>—was formed, uniting present-day western Georgia. According to Georgian musicologist Rusudan Tsurtsunia, the Georgian tribes represented a fusion of Eastern and Western traditions, having interacted—as confirmed by scholars—with the proto-Greek peoples such as the Etruscans and Pelasgians, followed by contact with the ancient Greeks and, later, the Romans. (Tsurtsunia, 2020, p. 38).

According to numerous sources cited in Tsurtsunia's research,<sup>4</sup> the ancestors of the Georgians were not only connected to many different cultures, but also possessed a highly developed culture of their own, including a distinctive musical tradition. As the researcher notes, the semantics of this original music were largely shaped by the interactions that the ancestors of the Georgians had with the peoples of Asia Minor and the Greek world since ancient times (Tsurtsunia, 2020, p. 32).

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1 Ghvinjilia, G. (2023). The concept of transcultural music in a globalized world and the future perspective of music research: On the example of Josef Bardanashvili's compositional style. *Journal of Music Theory and Transcultural Music Studies*, 1(1), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10926722>

2 In this article, the terms Common Era (CE) and Before the Common Era (BCE) are used as secular alternatives to the traditional Anno Domini (AD) and Before Christ (BC) notations, which refer to the same calendar era.

3 In classical antiquity and Greco-Roman geography, Colchis was the exonym used for the Georgian polity of Egrisi, —a historical region in Western Georgia, located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea and centered in what is now western Georgia. The names—Egrisi, Egri, Eguri, Shida Egri comes from the name of the Egri tribe. Today, the root "Egr" is preserved in the name of the historical and geographical region of Western Georgia "Sa-m-egr-el-o". It has two meanings: In a broad sense—the old Georgian name of Western Georgia. Egrisi is the same as Colchis and Lazika. In a narrow sense—one of the provinces of the feudal kingdom of Egrisi. It included the territory between the rivers Rioni and Egristkali.

4 Tsurtsunia, R. (2020). ქართული მუსიკის ისტორია უძველესი დროიდან XX საუკუნემდე [*History of Georgian music from ancient times to the 20th century*]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State Conservatoire.

The world's familiarity with Georgia is largely attributed to the ancient Greek myth of the Argonauts (13th–12th century BCE), in which Medea, the daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis, helped the Argonauts steal the Golden Fleece from Colchis (modern-day Georgia). Medea became a source of inspiration for European writers, artists, and composers. As Georgian musicologist Marina Kavtaradze states, in Western culture, Medea's face serves as a powerful metaphor for womanhood; Thanks to Euripides' tragedy, she has become one of the most tragic yet iconic figures in literature, accused of murdering her children and brother. Love and revenge, jealousy and guilt, duty and politics, dependence and independence, pride and rage—all these human passions are reflected in Medea's face. (Kavtaradze, 2019, p. 362). Medea's homeland, Colchis, was very attractive to the Greeks. The legendary journey of the Greeks in pursuit of the Golden Fleece and its eventual capture suggests that ancient Colchis was a prosperous land—one that attracted Greek interest not only for its material riches, but also for its advanced culture and intellectual achievements.

Colchis proved to be of great interest to the Greeks, thanks to its secret gold-processing technology, flax processing, from which ship sails were made, and its rich wood resources. Researcher Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, in his article *Did the Greeks Go to Colchis for Metals*, argues that the Greeks, in an effort to adapt their artistry to the tastes of local rulers, established schools of gold- and silver-smithing in Colchis in the 5th century BCE, along with workshops for producing metal seals and engraved gems (Tsetskhladze, 1995).

Greek colonization refers to the expansion of the Archaic Greeks, particularly during the 8th to 6th centuries BCE, across the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The second phase of colonization, around the 6th century BCE (c. 550 BCE), extended to the eastern coast—known in antiquity as Colchis—where the Greeks founded major cities such as Phasis<sup>5</sup> and Dioscurias.<sup>6</sup> After Greek colonizers became interested in lands of nowadays Georgia in the 8th century BCE, the Milesians (the inhabitants of Miletus) founded city-like settlements on the territory of present-day Georgia (According to Greek sources, the region was known as Colchis, but according to Georgian sources, it is referred to as 'Egrisi'), transforming it into their strategic eastern outpost. From a political, socio-economic, and religious perspective, Colchis became an integral part of the vast trade network connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Greek colonization of the territory of present-day Georgia officially began around the 6th century BCE, during the Archaic Period of Greek expansion. The Greeks established colonies along the eastern coast of the Black Sea, in the regions known as Colchis (modern-day western Georgia) and Iberia. The Greeks established colonies like Phasis (modern-day Poti) and Dioscurias (Sukhumi) along the Black Sea coast. According to Georgian Classicists Irine

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- <sup>5</sup> Phasis (Ancient Greek: Φάσις; Georgian: ფაზისი, Pazisi) was an ancient city located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. It was founded in the 7th or 6th century BCE as a colony of the Milesian Greeks, near the mouth of the eponymous river in the region of Colchis. Its modern-day equivalent is believed to be the port city of Poti, Georgia. The name Phasis is first attested in Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 700 BCE), where it refers to the river, not the city. The first Greek settlement in this area was likely established no earlier than the late 7th century BCE, and most probably at the beginning of the 6th century BCE, taking its name from the nearby river.
- <sup>6</sup> This city was located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. The name Dioscurias—modern-day Sukhumi—can be traced back to the 6th century BCE, when it was settled by Greek colonists who named it after the Dioscuri (the twin half-brothers—Castor and Pollux or Polydeuces in Greek and Roman mythology, known together as the Dioscuri or Dioskouroi).

Darchia and Maia Shukhoshvili, "Ancient Greek was taught and spoken in our country as early as in the 4th century, or at the time of existence of a well-known Rhetoric School in Phasis. It is not accidental that in 2001, after the archaeological excavations in the ancient capital of Georgia – Mtskheta, the so-called writing case of a Mtskhetian pupil was found, on one side of the case there are images of muses, and on the other those of Homer, Demosthenes and Menander." (Darchia & Shukhoshvili, 2018, p.105).

The territory of Georgia is rich in artefacts, including those that prove our close relations with Greek and Roman cultures.



*Image 1. Woman mask with grape clusters. Terracotta. Shida Kartli. Sarkine, Georgian National Museum: repository Archaeology. Kingdom of Iberia (400 BCE - 580 CE); 2nd century BCE*

These political and economic, especially cultural, relations were valuable to Georgians, and they never stopped studying these artefacts, as well as the languages of our 'visitors.' The study of Greek and Hellenic culture and history has long played a significant role in Georgia's cultural and intellectual life. As Irine Darchia and Maia Shukhoshvili state, "The students of well-known Georgian medieval educational centers—Ikalto and Gelati Academies were studying Ancient Greek language and culture in XI-XII centuries. Georgian writers, historians and philosophers in the Middle Ages (first of all Ioane Petritsi) were well aware of ancient Greek myths and literature, which is obvious in their works; and we may assume that the knowledge of Ancient Greek served as the basis for their education." (Darchia & Shukhoshvili, 2018, p.106).

Nowadays, as Georgia gains the opportunity for European reintegration following the collapse of the Soviet Union, these studies play an important role in the country's educational programs. As stated by Irine Darchia and Maia Shukhoshvili, "Teaching of classical languages and cultures in Georgia takes on a special importance, as the western

and eastern parts of our country are historical Colchis and Iberia; consequently, Georgia has been a partner of ancient Greece, Rome and Byzantium. For that reason, the sentence "I am studying classical culture" means for Georgians "I am getting acquainted with the history, literature and culture of my own country". (Darchia & Shukhoshvili, 2018, p.105).

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## Information about ancient Georgia can be found in ancient writings. Ancient writers describe the Colchian coast in considerable detail.

Ancient Greek literature contains numerous references to Colchis, underscoring its significance in both mythology and historical narratives. Some notable sources include: The *Histories* of Herodotus, often regarded as the "Father of History," describes the Colchians, highlighting their distinct customs and potential connections to other civilizations. According to Herodotus, the Colchians were famous for their flax cultivation; The epic poem of Apollonius of Rhodius *Argonautica* recounts Jason and the Argonauts' journey to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece, offering vivid depictions of the land and its people; Pythian Odes of Pindar, An ancient Greek poet of Thebes. Pindar references Colchis, particularly in relation to the myth of the Argonauts, celebrating the heroism associated with their legendary voyage;<sup>7</sup> According to the Greek geographer Strabo (1st century BCE—1st century CE), everything needed for shipbuilding was available here;

In Greco-Roman sources, there was a polis called Gonio<sup>8</sup> on the territory of Adjara, known as Apsarunti; The Roman writer Gaius Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) writes about the Absarus River and the Apsar fortress. The Apsar is also mentioned by another Roman writer, Flavius Arrian; According to the Greek traveler and historian Procopius of Caesarea, during his trip to Gonio-Apsaros (6th century CE), he came across the ruins of a theatre, in a city that was famous for its theatron and hippodrome. All these sources provide valuable insights into how the ancient Greeks perceived and mythologized Colchis.

David Braund's *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia* is the first major scholarly work of monumental scope about the ancient Georgia written outside the country. It provides a comprehensive study of ancient Georgia, focusing on Colchis and Iberia. The key themes of the book are: Greek influence in trade, settlements, and cultural exchange in Colchis; myth and historical narratives about the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece; and political history related to local dynasties and their ties with empires (Braund, 2023). This is a fundamental work, but it is still primarily focused on political, economic, and social issues, as well as the interconnections of civilizations and migration processes. Our focus will be exclusively on cultural connections.

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<sup>7</sup> Pindar. (2019). *Pythian Odes*. Laskaridis Foundation. In *ToposText* (an indexed collection of ancient texts). Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://topostext.org/work/19>

<sup>8</sup> Gonio (Georgian: გონიის ციხე, previously called Apsarus or Apsaros (Ancient Greek: Ἄψαρος) — a Roman fortification in Georgia, on the Black Sea.

## The ancient Georgian cities whose culture was most influenced by Greco-Roman world

The cultural and political legacy of Greco-Roman civilization extended to numerous regions, including the Black Sea basin. Clear evidence of this influence can be seen in the results of archaeological excavations in the territory of modern Georgia, including the ruins of ancient cities and numerous cultural artifacts:

Uplistsikhe (VI-IV centuries BCE) — A city in a rock near Gori was called the „City of Priests“. Based on the remains of buildings uncovered during excavations, it has been determined that a theatre dating to the 2nd–3rd centuries CE stood here, where ritual-like spectacles were performed. It was built following the architectural principles of Greco-Roman theatre design. Like the ancient theatres of the Roman era, the stage here was elevated, and the amphitheater was made of stone. Today, only one set of spectator seats can be seen carved into the rock. A clay statue of an artist—a masked magician, was discovered here.

Dzalisi (2nd century BCE – 8th century CE) was an ancient city near Mtskheta, mentioned by the Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy in his *Geographical Handbook* (*Geographike Hyphegesis*). Between 1971 and 1976, excavations at Dzalisi uncovered the ruins of a palace, residential buildings, a temple, a water supply system, and a bath complex. In 1975, a highly artistic mosaic floor was discovered. We assume that we are dealing with mosaic floor of the so-called 'Temple of Dionysus' that was common in the ancient world. The "Temple of Dionysus"—or, according to another interpretation, a triclinium (banquet hall)—occupies an area of 48.6 square meters. It is likely that ritual festivals associated with Dionysus were held here in ancient times. The vivid color palette of the mosaic is composed of small pebbles in twelve different shades. In the central part, beneath a vine-covered alley and seated on a throne, are depicted Dionysus—the Greek god of viticulture and winemaking—and his wife Ariadne. The mosaic also portrays figures holding musical instruments. This mosaic floor testifies to the popularity of Dionysus, the god of theater and wine, and his cult.

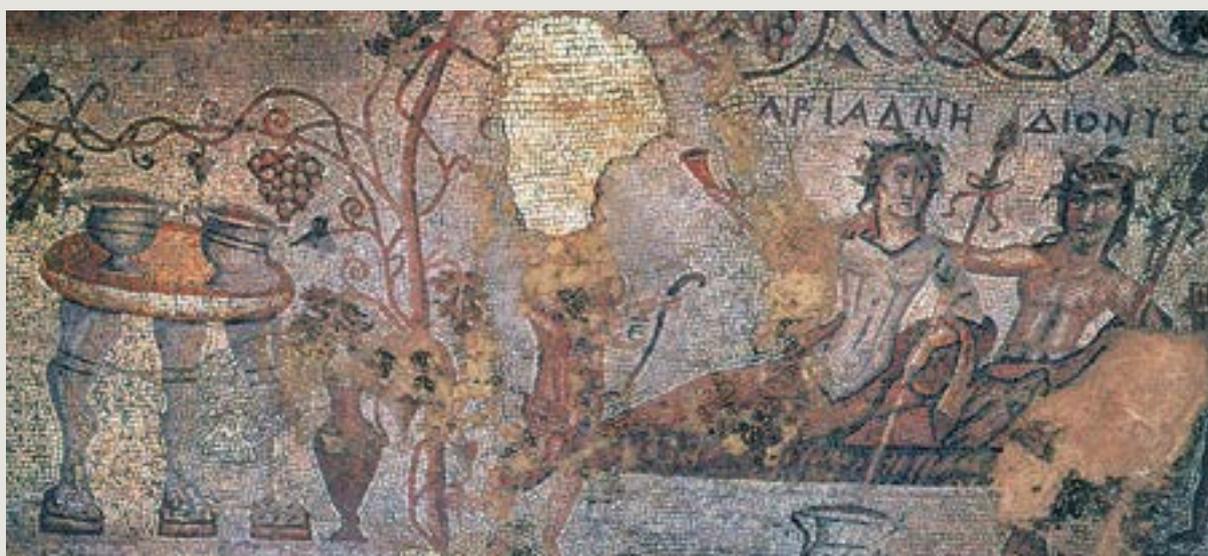
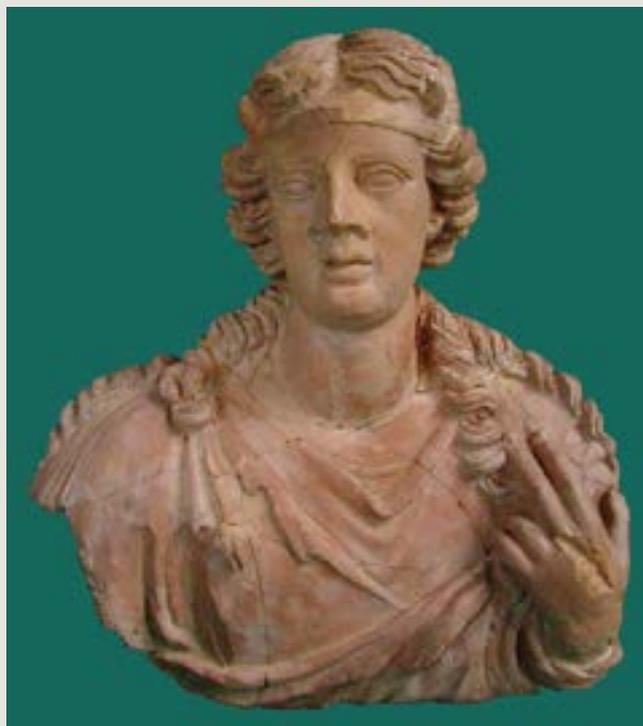


Image 2. Dzalisi Museum: Temple of Dionysus — Triclinium (Banquet Hall) Mosaic.  
Georgian National Museum



*Image 3. Ariadna. Terracotta. Inland Kartli. Sarkine, Georgian National Museum: repository Archaeology. 2nd century BCE*



*Image 4. Dionysus. Terracotta. Inland Kartli. Sarkine, Georgian National Museum: repository Archaeology. 2nd century BCE*

Theatre masks, as well as statues of Dionysus and satyrs were discovered in the ancient city of Vani (2nd century BCE) in Western Georgia.



*Image 5. Powdery mildew. Bronze. Imereti, Vani. Georgian National Museum. Repository: Archaeology. BCE. III-II centuries.*



*Image 6. Satirical sculpture. Bronze, gold. Imereti. Vani. Repository: Archaeology. BCE. III century.*

Roman fortification—City of Polis in Gonio had a significant influence on the syncretic art of the region; The fortress of Gonio is rectangular in shape; length 228 meters, width 195 meters. The settlement of Apsari is mentioned in the myth of argounavts. Here have been found the remains of barracks, glassware, coins, remains of a bath, water reservoirs, paving stones and a bath mosaic of the 8th century BCE.

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## An important outcome of Greek cultural expansion is the influence of ancient theatre and choral traditions on various layers of Georgian culture:

An important outcome of Greek cultural expansion is the influence of ancient theatre and choral traditions on various layers of Georgian culture. This was made possible by the highly developed Colchian culture's openness to integrating foreign artistic elements into its own national context:

—The traditions of Greek theatre and chorus can be partly linked with Georgian pagan circular dances, performed with chorus accompaniment and featuring a soloist, the Coryphaeus, dancing in the center of the circle. This also highlights the influence of Greek theatre traditions. As it reminds the Greek Dionysias. However, the symbolic meaning of the circle has national roots as well. According to Rusudan Tsurtsunia archaeological excavations show that in the Paleolithic era, our ancestors lived in small villages, that later were replaced by family villages, the circular layout of which, apparently, reflected certain features of the perception of the world: people also built circular dwellings—quite large, circular domed houses, which were also surrounded in a circle by agricultural buildings for various purposes. Round houses remained a characteristic element of the building culture of this geographical area for a long time. This element (circular houses) gradually developed into a certain artistic and aesthetic category, which is manifested not only in architecture, but also in musical and choreographic culture - it seems that the circular foot is the fruit of the same ideas that once led to the creation of circular houses and villages. Such a ritual circular foot print is depicted on a The Trialeti Chalice—a silver cup, from the 2nd millennium BCE discovered during the Trialeti (Sakartvelo) excavations in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> (Tsurtsunia, 2020, p. 16).

—The influence of Greek choral traditions may have been reflected in the Georgian ritual of *Berikaoba*. During the pagan ritual of *Berikaoba*, celebrated in honour of the fertility cult. People were dressed in goat, camel, bear, ox, and sheep skins and masks, reminiscent of the Greek satyrs who laid the groundwork for the chorus in Greek drama; A comical spectacle, *Berikaoba* is a ritual celebrating the cult of fertility. 'Ber' means child. There were mainly three types of *Berikaoba*: entrance, door-to-door, and square. The ritual was held in the spring, a week before the start of the Great Lent of Easter. Berika wore goat or sheep skin, a mask over her face, and large ears and horns on her head. The second main member of the ritual was the queen, named Kekela, whose role was necessarily played by a son dressed in a bridal dress. The beriks would go from door to door through the village, greeting everyone with joy and presenting

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<sup>9</sup> The cup is now in the collection of the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi.

them with gifts. The participants of the celebration would go to their destination with dancing and games and would be rewarded with the gifts they had collected.

—Masked dancing, as reflected for example in the poses of the Kazbegi Ithyphallic statues (Kazbegi hoard), depicts figures dancing, singing, and performing rituals in honor of a moon cult. They also took on the role of the chorus. These ritual masks may also have been influenced by the masks of Greek theatre as well as those of the Georgian *Amiraniani*—a monument of Georgian folk oral tradition, the common name for tales based on the story of Amiran's journey to the Caucasus (15th century BCE).<sup>10</sup>

The unique Georgian a cappella choral traditions revealed in the songs of the pagan period, provided a solid foundation for the assimilation of Greek choral traditions into Georgian culture. All preserved songs and ethnic traditions indicate that collective voices in Georgian songs reflect the ancient Greek chorus' role as a commentator and emotional amplifier within a narrative.

—Another point of intersection between ancient Colchis and Greek civilization is reflected in the Svanian ritual associated with *Meliai Tulefiai* (also known as *Melia-Telefia*). The scientist Shalva Amiranashvili has established that the Trialeti Chalice (a silver cup) depicts the Svanian fertility deity Melia-Telefia, and people involved in ritual dance procession dedicated to Melia-Telefia (AmiranaSvili, 1961, p. 50.). These figures indicate, on the one hand, the connection of Georgia with the Hittite culture, in whose pantheon there was the god Telipinu,<sup>11</sup> And on the other hand, it is also connected to Greek culture. As Rusudan Tsurtsunia notes, surname of the Greek god of fertility—Dionysus is *Ba'ssareus* (Tsurtsunia, 2019, p. 44). As it is indicated in *Theoi Project—Greek Mythology*, "The name of this garment again seems to be connected with, or rather the same as, *bassaris*, a fox (Hesych. s. v. *bassarai*), probably because it was originally made of fox-skins." (Atsma, 2020). In addition, Telipinu endured in later mythology as the Greek Telephus<sup>12</sup> and the Caucasian Telepia. Ethnologist Junis Oniani also studied the Svanian carnival festivities of the early spring cycle of Murqvamoba-Kviriaoba associated with Telefia, which, in his opinion, contained elements of a phallic ritual and revealed a certain connection with the Greek Dionysian festivals (Oniani, 1969, p. 72).

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<sup>10</sup> The collection and publication of oral variants of *Amiraniani* began in the 1810s, initiated by Teimuraz Bagrationi. Around 150 versions have been collected in various forms—prose, verse, and mixed prose-verse (the verse is composed in both high and low shairi meter). This multi-layered material can generally be divided into two main branches: the Colchian version (Gurian, Imeretian, Racha-Lechkhurian, Svan, Megrelian, and Abkhazian), and the Iberian version (Kartlian, Kakhetian, Pshav-Khevsurian, Tushetian, Meskhetian-Javakhetian, Mokhevan, Mtiuletian, and Fereidani Georgian). The scholarly study of this monument began in the 1840s.

<sup>11</sup> Telipinu was a Hittite god, most likely serving as a patron of farming, though some have also suggested he was a storm god or an embodiment of crops.

<sup>12</sup> In Greek mythology, Telephus was the son of Heracles and Auge, who was the daughter of King Aleus of Tegea. He was adopted by Teuthras, the king of Mysia in Asia Minor, whom he succeeded as king. Telephus was wounded by Achilles when the Achaeans came to his kingdom on their way to sack Troy and bring Helen back to Sparta, and was later healed by Achilles. He was the father of Eurypylos, who fought alongside the Trojans against the Greeks in the Trojan War. Telephus' story was popular in ancient Greek and Roman iconography and tragedy. Telephus' name and mythology were possibly derived from the Hittite god Telipinu.

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## The Estimated impact of Greek theatre traditions in Georgian folk epic-romantic epic *Eteriani*

The influence of the Greek tragedy, chorus traditions is evident in the pre-Christian syncretic poetic-musical masterpiece *Eteriani*, which was performed as a theatrical production (X-XI centuries). What distinctive features can be identified as evidence?

Findings are based on the work of Georgian orientalist-Assyriologist, biblical scholar, folklorist, writer Zurab Kiknadze's Research on Georgian folk epos.<sup>13</sup>

—the mythological foundation of Greek tragedy, where characters often struggle with fate, the gods, and eternal forces beyond human control, mythologem of eternity and vanity have much in common with foundation of *Eteriani*;

—The tragic finale: The tragic end of *Eteriani*'s characters, Prince Absalom and Eteri, mirrors the structure of Greek tragedies, where the hero's downfall is inevitable and often results from a fatal flaw or external divine force. By transcending the fairy tale ecosystem, *Eteriani* connects to deeper mythological ideas similar to those explored in Greek tragedy, such as human frailty in the face of destiny;

—Similar to how Greek plays integrated music and verbal texts, Georgian syncretic musical-poetic composition was shaped by the intersection of these art forms;

—*Eteriani* shows that it was a syncretic musical-poetic composition, which may have been performed as a theatrical performance; The three-part perfectly structured plot is built on the principle of theatrical dramaturgy—exposition, development, and tragic finale;

—The chorus playing a role similar to the Greek chorus, it is engaged in dialogical interaction with the characters, commenting on events reflecting or amplifying the emotional tone of the scenes;

—Es poem according to tradition of sung poetry seemed to had been performed through retitation or vocalisation. It is well-known fact that tradition of sung poetry in Georgia was common practice and it is additional coincidence with Greek culture as especially lyric, choral, and dramatic poetry—was sung and often accompanied by musical instruments. Epic poetry, though not sung with instruments, they were chanted or recited rhythmically by rhapsodes;

—*Eteriani*'s poetic text is structured in dialogues, suggesting an antiphonal (call-and-response) performance, which indicates the practice of its antiphonal performance and which is reminiscent of the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy;

—Dialogical structure as a dramatic tool: The dialogue-based construction of *Eteriani* can be analyzed in comparison with the dramatic dialogues of Greek tragedy, where characters often engage in moral, emotional, and philosophical exchanges. This structure enhances the dramatic tension and emphasizes the characters' internal conflicts, a common feature in both Georgian and Greek narratives;

—By connecting the origins and performance aspects of *Eteriani* to the traditions of Greek tragedy and chorus, you can highlight how this Georgian epic poem fits into a larger tradition of syncretic art forms where music, poetry, and drama interact. Echoes of Greek tragedy continue to resonate organically within the Georgian cultural context, extending into the 20th century. Zakaria Paliashvili's opera *Abesalom and Eteri* (staged in 1919)—widely regarded as the best Georgian opera is usually examined in relation

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<sup>13</sup> Kiknadze, Z. (2001). ქართული ხალხური ეპოსი [Georgian folk epos]. In Proceedings of the Department of Folklore Studies (Vol. 4). Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Logos Press.

to Greek tragedy, as the choruses in the opera serve a function similar to that of the Greek chorus in opera dramaturgy.

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## The dawn of a new era

Before the 60s of the 1st century CE, a new international-political order was established in Asia. As a result of Roman general Pompey's eastern campaign, almost all of Asia Minor passed into the hands of the Romans. Iberia was declared a vassal of Rome, the so-called 'friend and ally' country.

At approximately the same time, at the end of 2nd century BCE and the beginning of 1st century CE, Roman garrisons started to enter Colchis, the largest of which was located in Gonio Fortress, which is one of the most important Roman monuments of ancient Georgia.

The Romans (1st century BCE – 4th century CE) did not fully colonize Georgia, but they exerted cultural influence over western Georgia, particularly the region of Colchis.

During the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161), relations between Rome and Kartli improved. Pharseman II arrived in Rome, where he was given a grand welcome and, as a sign of respect, a statue of Pharseman on horseback was erected in the central square.

The forms of Hellenistic colonization differed from the previous Greek colonization. They invaded the interior of the country, where the Latin language and culture could not replace the Greek cultural phenomenon established over the centuries. Greek influence persisted for centuries.

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## Conclusions

To conclude the discussion, it is important to emphasize that all of this once again serves as evidence that the history of Georgian musical culture is not a homogeneous phenomenon, especially at this stage of its development. Georgia has been closely connected to various empires and nations over the centuries, including ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. These interactions naturally led to cultural exchanges and mutual influence. However, the high level of development attributed to ancient Georgia in foreign sources is especially credited to its connection with Greek civilization. Georgia's history consistently demonstrates that, due to its distinctive geopolitical location, it was never a closed or sterile culture. The Colchian culture, with its rich traditions, provided fertile ground for the introduction and establishment of Greek culture in Georgia, fostering a mutually enriching integration of the two. The unique Georgian polyphonic a cappella choral traditions organically combined with influence of Greek theatre and choral traditions. All this was made possible by the Colchian culture's openness to integrating foreign artistic elements into its national context, reflecting its highly developed nature. This presentation seeks to analyze the cases mentioned above by examining archival and visual materials to explore the multifaceted influence of Greek culture—particularly ancient choral traditions—on Georgian art.

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საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმი

Image 7. The official logo of Georgian National Museum

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