

## Education as a Priority – A Longstanding Tradition in Georgia

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Since ancient times, education has been one of the priorities in Georgia - a country with longstanding statehood traditions. Georgians belong to the few nations who managed to invent their own alphabets, and through that created rich original and translated literature.

According to the evidence of the related part of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” ( a medieval Georgian collection of chronicles) ascribed to Leonti Mroveli (the 11<sup>th</sup> century), prior to the coming of Alexander the Great to the Georgian land “six languages were spoken in Kartli – Armenian, Georgian, Khazarian, Assyrian, Hebrew, and Greek. Every king of Kartli, as well as each man and woman, spoke those languages”. Khazarian in this context means Scythian-Sarmatian, while Assyrian stands for Aramaic. The spreading of all these languages is corroborated by the inscriptions preserved in Georgia. The only exception is Scythian-Sarmatian, which is due to the fact that Scythians were illiterate and didn’t leave any written evidence about their existence. The knowledge of all those languages implies the existence of related educational traditions.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century there were far-famed schools in Georgia. Among the graduates of those schools there were not only Georgians, but also foreigners. Some of them became outstanding scholars.

The Greek philosopher Themistius (317-388) applied to the Phasis (Poti, in Western Georgia) Academy on the recommendation of his own father Eugenios, who graduated from the same school. It is supposed that instruction in those schools was bilingual – Greek and Georgian. In such schools humanities were given a preference; oratorical skills were much emphasised as well. In the debate between the confronting groups in 554 that followed the assassination of the western Georgian king Gubaz, one leader with the pro-Byzantine orientation excelled his rival, who supported the pro-Iranian orientation, not only by the force of his arguments, but by his eloquence as well. It seems that the debaters were educated in those schools.

In historic sources, there is little information on education in ancient Georgia. The majority of scholars associate the creation of the Georgian alphabet with the spreading of Christianity. There was also another opinion on the issue, according to which the Georgian alphabet derived from Phoenician or Aramaic. Other scholars support the idea of the alloglotography tradition, when Georgian texts were written down with foreign script. According to written sources, the early Christians in Georgia were literate people. This was also true for the wife of the pitiakhsh of the Lower Kartli – Shushanik.: While in jail she took psalms, learned them with diligence, worshipped God day and night and chanted tearfully. The early version of the life of Saint Nino - the enlightener of Kartli, was written down in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by her follower, Salome of Ujarma. Evagre of Pontus, known as an Egyptian, played an essential role in the cultural life of the Middle East. A Number of pieces of the ascetic-mystic genres are ascribed to him. Peter the Iberian (Kartveli) was a brilliant representative of the old Georgian monastic colony. The name of Murvanos, Nobarnugos - by the Syriac sources, a distinguished representative of philosophic-theological thought, and the author of many works - is associated with the building of the Georgian churches in Jerusalem. Some scholars consider him the author of the areopagitic theory (Sh. Nutsubidze, E. Honigmann).

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A famous writer and an ecclesiastic figure of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries Ioanne Moschi was ethnically Georgian. Georgians were known as founders of monasteries, enlighteners, authors of many original literary pieces, translators and copy-writers. There were Ilarion the Georgian/Iberian on the Ulumbo Mountain, where the Byzantine Caesar Basil I sent his children for education. By that time Ilarion the Iberian's disciples, founders of the Ivron monastery, resided there. - Ioanne and Ephime (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.); Grigol Bakurianisdze (the 11<sup>th</sup> c.) in Bulgaria; Prokhore, the founder of the Cross Monastery (the 11<sup>th</sup> cent.) in Jerusalem; Anthimos the Iberian, or Anthimos the Iverianu - a public figure in Rumania, the Georgian, ecclesiastical and political figure, writer, artist, and the founder of printing-houses; the last mamluk ruler in Iraq - David pasha Manvelashvili - the founder of the printing-house, a reformer in economic, political, cultural and military fields.

The Georgian monks who lived and worked abroad founded monasteries primarily for Georgians. Their special concern was the education of those youngsters who remained in Georgia. According to a source of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Giorgi the Athonite, invited to Georgia by Bagrat IV, brought 80 Georgians to Byzantium to get an education: "He took responsibility not just for ten, twenty, forty, but for eighty", "While in the East, Tornike brought a number of the famed monks, dressed in rags, and his desire was only for Georgians to be the inhabitants of that monastery".

The monasteries that were founded by Georgians abroad were ecclesiastical, educational and cultural centers, uniting Georgians outside the country and paving the way for the development of literature, philosophy and historiography. There emerged the best literary, grammatical and calligraphic traditions as well as the principles of translation. The monks staying abroad created their own works in Georgian and Greek languages. At the same time they translated from Greek to Georgian, and vice-versa. Hence, thanks to their activities some texts lost in original were preserved in old Georgian. Those Georgians were not only educated themselves, but they also made a significant contribution to the world culture and education.

As in any medieval community, education in ancient and medieval Georgia was the prerogative of the clergy; churches and monasteries were centers where youngsters received education, which consisted of several levels.

Education in medieval Georgia started at the age of 6-7. According to the evidence of the Life of Giorgi the Athonite the parents brought their children Tekle and Giorgi to the monastery when they were 7 years old. According to related evidence, the children Giorgi and his sister were taught by a woman in the primary school. Three years later Giorgi was taken to Khakhuli "to Basil, the son of Bagrat and was left with Ilarion of Tuali". Nestan, the daughter of the Indian king (from "The Knight in the Panther's Skin") started her education when she was 7, while Ilarion the Georgian did the same when he was 6. Learning-teaching was organized by distributing students in groups according to the age. "All equal by age" studied together. As it was believed in those years, the age for education was limited and for the "aged people" it "was not feasible" to study. The Georgian educators were aware that kids needed "playing and fun", that there was a tradition of the youngsters "singing, entertaining, and being in nature". Theology, philosophy, chanting and foreign languages were taught in the churches and monasteries. History and sometimes Medicine were also included in the curricula. Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century the existing tradition of writing "healing books" has never ceased to exist. There appeared a special collections intended for teaching purposes - textbooks and manuals, e. g. "the Shatberdi collection".

Physical and intellectual training in the process of upbringing had to be harmonically combined. If the former remained a priority over a long period of time (for instance for Rustaveli the 13<sup>th</sup> c.), later on, according to Archil Bagrationi (the 17<sup>th</sup> c.), it was replaced by intellectual upbringing. Medieval educators paid attention to using knowledge and education in practice. Education was based on the following principles: justice, love, devotion in friendship, and close ties with the society.

Only in individual cases was education accessible for everybody, in most cases it remained a privilege for the rich and the higher social strata. At the same time, aspiration towards education can be traced in the lower stratum as well. Giorgi the Athonite paid special attention to the necessity to establish egalitarianism in teaching – learning. He believed that talent, “having a ready wit” and “aspiration” that are necessary for succeeding are equally distributed on each level. “The Great Joseph was a slave, and he became a king of Egypt. David and Amos were not shepherds, one became a king, and the other became a prophet”. The parents, who were not able to educate their children, brought them to Giorgi the Athonites: “Some were brought by their parents and pled for heeding; others were left at the door. Some of them abandoned their parents themselves and fled”...

The children of the nobles were taught at home. For instance, the son of King Bacur (the 5<sup>th</sup> c) Peter the Iberian was taught by Mithradates the Laz. “Wakhtang (King of Kartli in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c) was raised up and taught by “Michael, the bishop and he learned all commandments of God”. Others also participated in his raising. Queen Tamar was brought up by her aunt Rusudan. The tutors of the scholar - Wakhushti Bagrationi (the 18<sup>th</sup> cent) the son of Wakhtang VI, were the brothers Garsevanishvili: Yese and Giorgi, as well as French missionaries. Wakhushti Bagrationi spoke Greek, Latin, French, Turkish, Russian and Armenian languages. The famous scholar was not an exception in this regard.

Since Georgians for a long time received education in Byzantium, where King David the Builder sent 40 youngsters for education, the king decided to overcome the shortcoming first thing, and to fill that gap. He had built a monastery in Gelati “as another Jerusalem, for learning all good and teaching the scholars, as in another Athens”. That obviously confirmed a new ambitious message of united Georgia – “to replace weakened Byzantium”: For that purpose the king “gathered people, honest by their life and furnished by virtue, found not only in his kingdom, but from all over the world of whom he heard some good, pureness, perfection, fullness of spiritual and physical virtue; he was seeking and found, brought them and settled them there”, - relates David’s chronicler. The Rector of the Gelati Academy “Modzgvart Modzgvart” “Tutor of the Tutors” was a very important person. According to the “Regulations of the Royal court”, “when he was invited to Darbazi (state council) he needed one mule and three horses for “the Tutor of the Tutors” and two for his disciples”. Creating activities lasted in the subsequent centuries by Arsen of Ikalto, Ioann Petritsi (the 12<sup>th</sup> c.), Evdemon Chkhetisdze (the 16<sup>th</sup> c.), Anton I and Zakaria Gabashvili (the 18<sup>th</sup> c.) and many others. There is evidence on the founding of the Ikalto Academy headed by Arsen of Ikalto. By that time legislative activities were developed. Arsen of Ikalto translated “Homocanon” by the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to that, Minor Homocanon was already translated by Giorgi the Athonite.

Teaching-learning in schools was based on the principles of trivium-quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, music, philosophy of three kinds -”actual, visual and expressional”, rhetoric of three kinds – “consentient, debating and solemn”. It is noteworthy that the majority of the European universities were founded later than Mangana in Byzantium and Gelati in Georgia. Oxford -in the end of the 12th century – beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Cambridge – in 1209; Sorbonne – in 1215. The earliest European University – Bologna was founded in 1158; Close to that time there was Iqalto University in Georgia.

Good examples of educated people were the kings themselves. David the Builder “Day and night, while moving had books on his mules and camels and when **demoting** (?) they gave him the books first of all”.

In the late Middle Ages the discovery of the roads, Renaissance, Reformation, Guttenberg’s invention and scientific innovations sped up the entering of a new era in the world. The process of secularization was launched; new education was set up, obliquely touching Georgia as well. Because of the tense political situation the split Georgia was somewhat isolated from the core processes. The 16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries are considered as the renaissance of the Georgian culture. However educational and cultural traditions couldn’t reach the heights of the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

By the observation of the Italian missionary Archangelo Lamberty, who spent 20 years in Megrelia (Western Georgia) in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “the Megrelians are so illiterate, that nobody among them understands the Georgian books, which are written by their genuine, old and pure language “ , “The Georgian writing today would have vanished, if the women didn’t preserve it” (. “There are the priests after the leader. Megrelians called them the pope. One can easily imagine what can be their knowledge, virtue, goodness, if we imagine knowledge, virtue and goodness of the bishops. Sometimes I wanted to figure out what their knowledge was, and I showed them just the Georgian alphabet. Some of them didn’t know even the first letters” (Archangelo Lamberty).

The French Jeanne Shardin also corroborates that “there are many among the bishops, who are not able to read. They learn prayers by heart. As to the priests, they are so illiterate, that hardly read prayers” (Shardin). Some poets of those times complain that “many holy scripts were spoiled left without the cover”, or “nobody needs gospel, neither the Book of Apostles”. One can compare such a situation with the reality of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the whole Georgia was impatiently waiting for the issuance of the Bible edited by Giorgi Athonite. In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia witnessed an unprecedented case – an illiterate Catholicos-Patriarch was elected in times of Rostom (1633-1658) - the first vali (viceroys), appointed by the Safavids. As the author of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” relates, “He had no experience of literacy and was poorly educated. However he administered the church in a good manner”.

In those hard years, European missionaries contributed significantly to the dissemination of education throughout Georgia. They founded schools, mostly for the commoners. But they hardly gathered students for those schools. They also sent youngsters to Rome for education, and thus played the role of a bridge between Georgia and Europe. It is not accidental that the first Georgian books were published in Rome. Afterwards, thanks to the activities of Archil Bagrationi, Georgian books started to be published in Russia. By 1709, that innovation regarding printing reached Tbilisi on the initiative of Wakhtang VI. In the introduction to the first text-book written by Wakhtang, which was published in 1721 in Tbilisi, it was stated that he had invited the typographer Ishtvanovich, the disciple of Anthimos the Iverianu “from Wlachia” and therefore the printing-house was set up in Tbilisi. In the 18<sup>th</sup> there were published four Georgian text-books. Setting up “the Commission of Educated People”, maintaining judicial activity, restoring historiography, prolonging and supplementing “Kartlis Tskhovreba”, encouraging scientific research, original and translated literary works – all that was associated with the educated king. He was the founder of Rustvelology and the first publisher of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin “. The departure of the Great enlightener to Russia together with the big part of educated Georgians was a hard blow on the Georgian culture and education. It is noteworthy that those Georgian new-comers to Russia and their descendants contributed a lot to the Russian culture and education.

In times of Wakhtang VI’s son Wakhushiti, the role education was diminished to such an extent that literacy was considered as a major achievement.

However, in those late medieval centuries there emerged historic poems, heroic, romantic and didactic epos; there were created fables, “Wisdom of a Lie” by S.S. Orbeliani, dictionaries, works on world geography, chemistry, cosmography and geodesy, text-books on chemistry, physics, psychology and philosophy.

Aspiration towards education was still alive. Archil, who placed intellectual upbringing prior to physical upbringing, thought that “wisdom is eternal, can’t be left”, “learning is yours, constantly with you, cannot be contended can not be wrenched”, - confirms David Guramishvili.

The majority of youngsters received education at home. However, according to the thinkers of those times Archil and David Guramishvili - while realizing the role of the family in upbringing - emphasized the decisive role of the teacher in the educational process. They argued that society as a whole took part in bringing up the young generations.

Erekle II paid great attention to education; in 1755 the Tbilisi seminary was opened in the yard of the Anchiskhati Temple, later a seminary was opened - in Signaghi, and later - in Telavi. In 1782 a school was opened based on the Telavi Seminary. It was similar to the Moscow Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy. The first Rector of the seminary was Gayoz. Catholicos. Anthony was one of the teachers of the Tbilisi Seminary. That school functioned until the invasion of Agha Muhammad Khan in 1795. Non-Georgians could receive education in those schools as well. Vocational education, which was based on long-time collaboration of the teacher and the apprentice, was also accessible.

After the annexation of Georgia in 1801 and the establishment of a Russian administration, a new educational system was introduced. New pedagogic principles became crucial: the teacher had to be very patient, relying more on himself than on a hard-working disciple. Education had to be introduced as fun. The teacher had to think more about encouraging creative ability than overworking the memory. According to the regulations issued in 1804, school education became three-level: the parish school, the public school and the 4-year gymnasium. The duration of an academic year was 11 months – from August 1 till July 1. New courses were introduced: Statistics of Russia, Basic Political Economy, Experimental Physics, Natural Sciences, etc. The students also learned painting. Education in the gymnasium was free of charge and accessible for all estates. Although education was free of charge in Tbilisi as well, according to the data of the third decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the nobles had to pay for the education of commoners, the majority of students in the schools were the children of the noble. The children of the citizens were represented as a minority, and there were no children of the rest of free estates, either. Children of Moslems still got education in the madressa. The disciples of gymnasia had to learn one local language, including Russian, German and French. Every year 5 alumni were sent to Russian universities with the indispensable terms that after graduation they would have to work as teachers in Trans-Caucasian schools.

One can see that in spite of control there was corruption in the system of education. It was revealed before the awaited visit of Emperor Nikolai I to Georgia in 1837. Director Hassenmiller had been responsible for bribery and stealing money (50000 rubles) from renovating works. He was exiled to Siberia. The main goal in education was Russification, and the seemingly equal access to education was not equal at all. As compared to the urban population who knew Russian better, the rural population who didn't know Russian could not get an education. Yakob Gogebashvili, who investigated the situation in this respect, introduced some suggestions for overcoming the existing gap. A lot of work aimed at the eradication of illiteracy was done by the "Society of Spreading Literacy among the Georgians", "Society of the Antiquity Lovers". In 1846 there a public library was founded. Later on, after a long interval of the reprisals following the 1832 plot, newspapers and journals were republished, performances were staged and there appeared the opera.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Tergdaleulebi" (literally, "those who drank the water of the river Terek", the term used to refer to those who got educated in Russia) were solidly presented in the historic arena. They made a significant contribution to all spheres of education and culture.

There were scholars, enlighteners, writers and political figures among them. Centers of Kartvelian studies were set up in Paris and Petersburg, as well as in some other Russian cities. Georgians, and especially the Royal family members forcibly exiled to Russia, contributed to the development of those centers and at the same time to the advancement of different fields of Russian culture and education.

The issue of founding a higher educational school in Georgia, on agenda throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, encountered obstacles. The main arguments against the issue were the non-existence of a higher school and unavailability of people who knew Russian. Russian was implied as the language of instruction at the university. According to the observation of one Russian official, Baron Nikolay, the interest of Georgians in higher education was determined only by the desire to get better employment, unlike Russia, where there appeared a class of people, who felt that education was not only obligatory for getting the right for employment in some office, or carrying epaulets".

In 1871, with regard to the expected visit of Alexander II to Tbilisi, people of Georgia applied to him to open Technical Institute or Agricultural Academy. Poet Giorgi Tsereteli commented on the opening of the University in the following way: “Nothing except a good university is able to enlighten the youngster and to explain him /her needs and demands of people. Apart from knowledge, which can be useful in a life, the seed of honesty and citizenship is planted in the heart of a youngster, and if this seed falls in well-prepared soil, be sure, it will bring a good fruit. If some young people don’t justify this idea and the graduates of some universities think more of their stomach and pocket and not of public service, the main reason of it is, that they were not well prepared for accepting good seeds”.

One point of the plea, which was submitted with regard to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reign of Alexander II in February 1888, was once again founding a higher school: “Let the decision be made, if a university or technological institute could be founded in Tbilisi, the city would provide a plot for the construction and 1000000 rubles in silver for building it”, - was stated in the plea. After a long discussion, only the university was included in the text.

However a little later - in 1894, when a visit of the minister Ermolov was awaited, the necessity to found a Technological Institute was argued again: “Economic life in Caucasus is connected with the fields, for which our nature created favorable conditions. Export of manganese, copper, coal, cobalt and other fields of mining industry, on one hand, and on the other hand, export of maize, wool, wine, seed-corn, and fish point to the areas which can have a future. Only a local institute is able to deal with these fields”.

Literature, poetry and humanities were developed. The names of Michael Tarkhnishvili – the founder of the Georgian physiology and chemist Petre Melikishvili – the first rector of the Georgian University are already associated with that century. A longstanding dream about founding a university came true in the Independent Democratic Republic of Georgia.

On January 26 1918, the university was solemnly opened. The language of instruction at the university was Georgian. The university gave birth to all the other higher schools that later emerged in Georgia. There was founded the Conservatoire. But even before that Tbilisi was a cultural center. A little earlier – in 1917 there was set up the Institute of History and Archaeology - the first research institute in the Russian Empire, which served as a basis for the subsequent opening of the Institute of Language, History and Material Culture (the so-called Enimki). Later on, all humanitarian institutes sprang up from the Institute of Language, History and Material Culture.

The Georgian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1941. There was no science left, in which Georgians didn’t have a distinguished representative. The Georgian Encyclopedia and the Georgian Explanatory Dictionary in 8 volumes was published. Fields like historiography, ethnology and archaeology - which developed thanks to the efforts and contribution of the founder of the Tbilisi University Ivane Javakhishvili and later his students - Simon Janashia and Niko Berdzenishvili - still attract scientific interest and attention. The American National Academy has recently selected the Director of the Georgian State Museums, archaeologist David Lordkipanidze ,as a member.

An outstanding psychologist Dimitri Uznadze, the creator of “Theory of Attitude ”, who gained world-wide recognition for Georgian psychology, and the linguistic school led by Akaki Shanidze, Giorgi Akhvlediani and Arnold Chikobava reached enormous success. These traditions were further promoted by Givi Machavariani and Tamaz Gamkrelidze. The latter was selected as member of the National Academy, which was the first case in Georgia as well as in the whole former Soviet Union, except Russia. One should mention the School of Oriental Studies and the representatives: Giorgi Tsereteli, Sergi Jikia, Constantine Tsereteli, etc

Fundamental research work was left by the experts of arts Giorgi Chubinashvili, Shalva Amiranashvili and others.

The Georgian scientists Elephter Andronikashvili, Giorgi Chikovani, Givi Khutsishvili and Irakli Gvetsiteli contributed to the advancement of various fields of physics.

Eugeni Kharadze laid a foundation for astronomy and astrophysics.

Geology, geography, and geophysics were developed. Alexander Javakhishvili and Theophane Davitaya made a lot for the progress of the fields. We should mention the accomplishment of the Georgian school of physiology the founder of which was the world-renowned Ivane Beritashvili. Petre Kometiani was the founder of biochemistry in Georgia and one of the founders of neurochemistry in the world.

The Georgian school of mathematician-mechanics carries out research in two major directions – mathematics and the theory of applied flexibility. N. Muskhelishvili, I. Vekua, V. Kuprava are some of the bright representatives of the first area, while K. Zavriev, T. Kakushadze, M. Mikeladze, M. Mukhadze and others should be mentioned in the second.

There was a famous school of engineering. Graduates of the Georgian Technical University are currently participating in the projecting of the overground 40-span bridge together with the Mercedes factory in Stuttgart, the Asuan dam in Egypt, a 4 km bridge on Yangtze in China, the constructing of Bhalay metallurgy factory in India and the irrigation system in Syria. The graduates also participate in the investigation and restoration of the cities destroyed by the earthquake and building of roads in Afghanistan.

With the funding of CERN-European Organization for Nuclear Research in the CAD/CAM engineering center, 5 parallel projects of ATLAS are being implemented, which implies the montage of the ATLAS detector in the depth of 100 meters (1992-2007). 10 Georgian engineers are participating in this project. Georgian architects successfully work in different countries.

The Georgian theatre, cinema, and music are recognized round the world. The graduates of the Georgian conservatoire have won in many competitions and received many awards.

It is worth mentioning that during the Soviet time, Georgia preserved the right to have its mother-tongue as the language of instruction in schools. However, there were Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijanian, Ossetian, and Abkhazian schools as well. In 1978 when the Kremlin made the decision to violate that right and give an equal status to Russian and other languages – all Georgians rose and the authorities were forced to give up.

From the seventh decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the educational system, as well as the whole Soviet system crashed down. Great changes were ahead. It was clear to everybody that existing system was outdated for an open society.

Currently, there are reforms in the system of education underway in Georgia. The country has made the first steps forward in this process. United National Exam has been established to put an end to the system of corruption. The nation is looking forward to the future, and is very optimistic about it.