

Georgia Country of Ancient Medical Traditions

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The Georgian nation is one of the oldest in the world and Georgian medicine was well developed in each historical era. Unfortunately, we have no primary written historical sources for the ancient period, but on the basis of later Christian accounts, we can judge the culture and medicine of ancient Georgia.

In the 18th century K.J. Sprengel's classic of the history of medicine begins with *Cura Mediana* (treatment by Medea) and thus recognizes the antiquity of Kolkh-iberian medicine. There exists a well-founded version linking medicine with the name of the Kolkhetian ruler's daughter Medea, famed for her knowledge of various remedies. Graeco-Roman medicine, the source of modern medicine had this background

In the first century (as in the case of all Hellenic culture) Graeco-Roman medicine was closely bound to the ancient Pelazgian, pre-Iberian world. The Georgians and the Caucasians were always close to the Hellenic world. It resulted from genetic, anthropological, intellectual and cultural links between them.

It is noteworthy that the majority of ancient Greek physicians (at least those who wrote in Greek) were from Asia Minor: Georgian, Armenians and Greeks. Iberians regarded the Greek language as the language of scientific and international communication. The question of the nationality of the so-called Greek physicians is very complicated, requiring further investigations.

The Devil was considered as a cause for all diseases in pre-Christian Georgia. In the period of Christianity some basic changes took place. Baptized man supplicated the Holy Spirit for his health and recovery. The level of Georgian medicine is given in the literary record of the 5th century Martyrdom of Shushanik, in which the author gives not only the methods of treatment and care of the patient, but also described the direct and indirect causes of disease.

In the work of Sabatsmindeli, Sinanulistvis Simdablisa, medical knowledge necessary for monks and nuns,

together with many interesting comments, is given. Here is noted as well, emergency situations in which to call a doctor. It denotes that the medical profession existed independently in the 6th century in Georgia. Monastic medicine was especially emphasized in religious literary sources. It is evident, that monastic medicine played a significant part in medical practice.

All saints are healers, and there are no exceptions. Petre Iberi, Shushaniki (5th century AD) and Grigol Khandzteli (8th-9th centuries AD) were the famous healers of their times. Ilarion Kartveli (9th century AD) must be especially mentioned. He was known worldwide, treating patients without fee.

The first medical book, *Ustoro Karabadini* still extant, is dated 10th century. Last year we celebrated its 1000th anniversary. A doctor with encyclopedic knowledge, who calls himself Kananeli, writes it. It should be noted that these works include not only the advanced medical knowledge of that period, but also some methods originating from Sumerian medicine, which makes this book especially important.

Many scientific works are devoted to the Georgian renaissance and its pioneers Ioane Petritsi and Arsen Ikaltoeli. Arsen Ikaltoeli was recognized as the greatest anatomist of this period.

In the 13th century Khojakopili wrote a medical book *Tsigni Saakimoi* that corresponds with the "golden period" of Georgian history. In the 10th-13th centuries many Georgian institutions were created in Georgia and abroad. One the leading role was developed to the building of hospitals.

The ruins of these hospitals are still to be seen in Georgian cloisters in the western and eastern Georgia, southwestern part (now in Turkey) Tao-klarjeti, and Georgian cultural centers abroad: Jerusalem, Khalkedon, Petritsoni, Sinai and Black Mountains. In some of them e.g. at Athone monastery there are some hospitals for different infectious diseases and mental and general care. These hospitals had very rich

libraries. Thus, Georgian medicine, practical and scientific, existed and developed side-by-side.

The greatest Georgian doctor and philosopher, Zaza Panskerteli-Tsitsishvili (15th century AD) is the first lay person, holding an especial place in the history of Georgian medicine. His book *Samkurnalo Tsigni* (The Book of Treatment) is a real masterpiece in this field. The last big work in the medicine of old Georgia was *Iadigar Daudi* written by David Batonishvili (Bagrationi) (16th century AD). There are more than 500 medical manuscripts in Georgian foreign libraries.

We may say, that Georgian medicine is a phenomenon of a composite nature, created on the basis of two great traditions of East and West, and includes equal contributions from both worlds with evidence characteristic of both philosophies. It has depth and variety from the one side and the fixed and systematized discipline from the other. It makes Georgian medicine interesting and original.

The document of the period of the King Erekle II show that "Ekimbashi" - chief doctors, trained his pupils for 20-25 years and only after attending his course, had they a right to conduct independent practice and to have their own trainees.

The 17th-18th centuries are significant because of the expansion of European culture and knowledge in Georgian medicine. In the second half of the 18th century the King of Georgia, Vakhtang VI took some young people to Moscow and St Petersburg, where they

received good university medical education. Among them especially must be mentioned Iliia Gruzinov (Namchevadze) as a talented person who knew many European languages and was sent at state expense to Europe. Soon, he became well known in the scientific circles in Germany, France and England. Duchenne, the famous French scientist deservedly emphasized the great contribution Iliia Gruzinov made. Iliia Gruzinov died when he was 32 years old in the burning Moscow in 1813. Muscovites called him the "Hero Professor".

In 1801, after annexation, Russia tried to reconstruct the basic structures of country convenient for its own policy. It also affected medicine as well. It is true that Georgian medicine was always composite by nature, combining European and Oriental medical traditions, but as the result of Russian occupation, Georgian medicine acquired and European orientation. Dozens of brilliant Georgian physicians received their education in Russian and European medical schools. In Tbilisi, the Caucasian Medical society was founded, which had a worldwide response and whose honorary members included Virkhov, Pirogov, Pasteur, Hirstli and Mechnikov. In the short standing period of Independence of Georgia in 1918-21, a medical faculty was founded at the Georgian University in Tbilisi. It became the center, where many renowned Georgian medical scientists were educated.

At present more that 30 000 physicians work in Georgia. The Georgian Medical Society is duly proud of its wide intellectual potential and professionalism.