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A FRAGMENT OF GEORGIA-BYZANTINE MEDICAL HISTORY

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SUMMARY

This article throws light on the role of Georgia ranging from the ancient Greek cultural to the Byzantine periods.

Drawing on similarities between proto-Georgian and proto-Greek culture, the author mentions the strong ethnic linguistic and mythical hands. In particular stress the special place of Georgian medicine in the texts of ancient Greek and Roman historians, geographers and doctors.

In a more detailed discussion of historical sources particular attention is paid to the role of prominent Georgian figures in the Byzantine period including their important role in the translation of scientific and philosophic treatises and their active participation in the foundation of hospital and quarantine facilities.

Georgian-Byzantine relations represent an integral part of permanent Georgian-Greek, Georgian-Roman relations which had been established long before Christ, namely, in the period which can be characterized as proto-Georgian and proto-Greek ethnic and language one. This is a unified cultural and ethnical layer which formerly had turned into a number of largely differentiated national cultures of the region. Sumerian, Kheta-Subarul, Minos, Knodos, Mycenaean and other myth-based cultures which had by then turned into reality. The undoubted parallels between the *Amirani* and *Prometheus* legends as well as the *Argonauts* are a set of subjects and facts which enable us to judge on the base of something more than mere close neighbourhood relations¹.

Parole chiave/Key words: Georgia - Medical Relationship - Byzantine period

Medicine itself like the world around us is a very old entity and, as we have learnt, is of fairly conservative and metaphysical nature. Several general polarly differentiated concepts of esoteric wisdom seem to have passed through centuries without changes and still remain a subject of hot debate and contradiction until today. The historical aspect of medicine's global attitude has acquired great importance. Georgia and its medicine has always been a matter of concern among Greek and Roman historians, geographers and doctors. They often mention Georgia (in particular, Kolkheti and Iberia) as the motherland and the cultivation region of all the curative herbs; the Georgians have always been considered brilliant experts in producing medicines and poisons (Medea, Hekate, Mitridates of Pontius, Eupator the VI and others)².

The experts of the 1st century BC, the Kilikian Greek doctors Dioskorides and Horatio, Plinius, a 1st century historian describe the Kolkheti curative flora and preparation of poisons (medicines). In this respect an interesting issue is the information by Claudius (395 BC), Plutarch, pseudo-Plutarch, and Hippocrates^{2, 11}.

Apart from the old Byzantine sources, we should stress the activities of the great Georgian Petre Iberieli (412-488). He was a regent to the throne and he abdicated the throne for the purpose of dedicating his entire life to the service of God and to that of his nation. He was substantially educated at Constantinople at the ruler's court. Later on when he became a Maiumi bishop he started his medical activities along with the church affairs. He built numerous hospitals and was personally involved in curing the patients. By that time he had gained a large publicity all around the Middle East and Byzantine.

During his activities in Palestine he erected a Georgian monastery and an inn for Georgians and Greeks only in Jerusalem³. According to the brilliant theory of Nutsbidze-Honigman, it was Petre Iberieli himself and not Dionisius Areopagus who published the marvellous Neo-Platonic works: *Areopagitic Books, Areopagitic Corps, The Areopagitics*. These

works were written in Greek and like the similar theological treatises, they contain passages which are extremely important for medical science.

Z. Chitchinadze, a prominent Georgian figure stresses that it was Petre Iberieli who had made the first Georgian translation of the *Karabadin* medical book. Unfortunately, Z. Chitchinadze does not specify from what language the translation was made nor what original work is behind this translation. It is not clear which information source Z. Chitahinadze refers to⁴.

It is also a matter of interest for the history of medicine that Petre Iberieli's mother, Queen Bakurdakht, was a founder, as far as we know, of the first civil hospitals for travellers and vendors. She used to establish those hospitals along the caravan trails, and she also established them at hotels which can undoubtedly be regarded as quarantine facilities⁵.

In Palestine, at the St. Saba first-rank monastery (founded in 483), Martviri Sabatsmindeli was active from the second part of the 6th century to the first part of the 7th century. He wrote a mystical-ascetical work entitled *Mercy on the Fallen*. C. Kekelidze considers this work as a unique one, while in the opinion of J. Garrity and A. Halex, this work is an excerpt from 7-12 chapters (second part) of the 7th century's Syrian writer Martviri Sahdoni's *perfection*⁶. The work of Nartviri Sabatsmindeli is not a piece of purely medical nature. It is more like a monastery charter's regulation and reflects an exceptionally high level of medical and biological thinking. Information on the medical practices run within the monastery was passed on by Cyril Squitopoleli in the *Life of Saba* written in Greek in 555. This text was translated into Georgian in the 7-8 Centuries.

Illarion Kartveli (822-875) gains a particular standing in the history of Georgian medical science. Being a son of a prominent landlord he was educated both at home and abroad from an early age. His activities in Georgia, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Bithunia and Macedonia were essentially associated with medicine. Illarion Kartveli is held to have established two Georgian monasteries in Byzantine. The first of them, Olympis (Ulumbos)

was founded in Asia Minor's Bituinia in 864. There were also three other Georgian monasteries there. Another, the Romanas, was built near Constantinople by the ruler Basili in 876 to enshrine the remains of Illarion. By that time, Illarion Kartveli was a world-famous medical man. He was honoured with the highest praise by his contemporaries. The main thing is that Illarion was a doctor who took no money from his patients. The ruler Basili, deeply impressed by his morals and wisdom, trusted his sons to him and ordered them to learn Georgian as a sign of respect towards Illarion. After Illarion's death a monastery after his name was built by Basili and by his order, the *Life of Illarion Kartveli* was written by a monk named Basili. This text has not been saved up to now, but it had become the groundwork for the *Life of Illarion Athens* version (991). Theofilus, a monk (1074-1100) compiled an enlarged version of the *Life*, however, the comparison of both versions made by Georgi Atoneli made possible the inclusion of a concise version of the *Didi Svinksari* book dated from the 12th century. This work is the greatest document in the history of Georgian-Byzantine cultural relations. It is also indispensable for understanding the level of medical science at that time, because this book describes the biography of one of the greatest doctors of that epoch.

A new era in the rapprochement and integration between Georgian-Byzantine cultures starts after the foundation of the Athens Iberi monastery. Khalkedon peninsula is the place of the monastery's location where a unique literary, philosophical and, medical school was created to play the greatest role in both nations' life. It was the place where philosophical and medical literature was translated from Georgian into Greek and vice versa, and original works were written in Greek by the Georgian monks as well.

The Iberi monastery of Athens was established in 980-983 by a Georgian feudal Varazvatche Chortchanel-Khursisdze thereafter called Ioanne Mtatsmindeli. There were several hospitals and leprosariums at the monastery. Authors of different epochs witness this fact⁷.

Among the medical works and translations made there is the most important translation of Grigol Noseli's *To be born a man* made by Georgi Atoneli (1009-1015) from Greek into Georgian. This is Basili the Great's 6 days 30th chapter accomplished by his brother, namely Grigol Noseli.

Georgi Atoneli's particular interest in the medical aspect of the book (it exists as a separate manuscript) shows a special attention paid to medicine at the monastery.

Besides this, Georgi Atoneli translated into Greek such works as *Balahvari*, *Abukura*, and some other writings, which philosophically and attitudinally, had a strong but somewhat oblique influence upon medical outlook. Unfortunately, it should be remarked that the huge library of the monastery had been continuously robbed by both domestic and foreign invaders.

Several dozens of manuscripts were eventually brought away by the direct order of the then Russian Tzar, Alexei Michailovich (19th century). Among them there were books by Alexandre Graciani, Oribasi, Razes, Galen and others. It is difficult to recreate a complete view of both the translation and creative work done in the monastery. According to the data available, the monastery was at the top of the world cultural centres.

The Iberi monastery of Athens is a prolongation of a chain of Georgian cultural relations cradles of which also existed at the Jerusalem Cross in St. Saba's first-rank monasteries, in Shavi Mtis and Sina Mtis monasteries and others.

Among these cultural establishments, a noteworthy one is a Petritsonis (Batohkovo) monastery. It was founded in the Balkan peninsula in the Middle Byzantine period by Grigol Bakurianisdze, a Georgian noble, a great figure at the Byzantine ruler's court known as the Domesticos and Vipatos of the West, in 1083.

Along with his brother, Abbas, he always endeavored to help his own nation. And the founding of the monastery was a confirmation of this. The Petritsoni monastery's charter prohibited any other nation's monasterial activities but Georgian, this is why the monastery is a purely Georgian phenomenon. A semi-

nary was also there, about which Louis Pet, a French researcher, wrote the following: *Here we have a rare, one may say, unique example of a seminary functioning in Byzantium, in the modern sense of the word*⁵.

The world-scale Georgian philosophers, Ioanne Petrici and Arsen Ikaltoeli, worked there. They were educated at the Constantinople Mangani Academy. Ioanne Petrici was one of the best-loved pupils and loyal followers of Ioanne Italosa. Then they continued their activities at the newly-founded Gelati Academy; later on, Arsen had established the Ikalto Academy (East Georgia).

Their knowledge of medicine was profound and substantial, their activities being of a revolutionary nature, in the best sense of the word.

Ioanne Petrici is the translator of Nemesios Emeseli's *On the nature of Man* and of *Relations* by Prokle Diadohor. As he says himself in the notes to *Relations*, this happened in 1089-1125. So, these neo-platonic Renaissance works were known to Georgia far earlier than to other European nations. *On the nature on Man* represents a treatise of anatomy and physiology and we need not dwell on its outstanding significance now. It is well known among authorities.

We cannot but dwell on Petrici's original work entitled *Practica*. It seems it was initially written in Greek then translated into Latin. *Practica* was utilized as a manual at the *Salerno School* which is considered to be one of the cradles of the Italian Renaissance. The Latin version of the translator's name is spelt so: Petricelli, Petroncelli, Petronia. There is a certain body of evidence that all these names are just variants of Ioanne Petrici (5, 9, 10).

Arsen Ikaltoeli, who was a like-minded person and accomplice of Ioanne Petrici, was termed, among other things, also *an anatomist* by Anton the First Catholicos (1720-1786).

The same information is given in Ioanne Bagration's *Kalmasoba* (18-19 century). In fact, the philosopher with a higher medical education was a practitioner too, because according

to many facts there were lots of hospitals within all the above-mentioned monasteries. Arsen translated for the second time Ioann of Damasous' *transactions* (first translated in the 11 th century).

It makes one think that both translations and original versions of works were considered as the Georgian Academies' guidance books.

Let us briefly dwell on the art of translation. Here we cannot help mentioning the Georgians' free approach to the source texts. In particular, a difference is very distinct between *metaprasul* and *svinaksarul* editions although the entire conceptual and theological disposition was not corrupted by this. Heterogeneous was the attitude towards spiritual and bodily (psycho and pneuma) aspects. Some translators neglected differences between them⁸, which probably was an attempt to incorporate their outlook into this aspect. It is also interesting that some translators used to add several *explanations* to their works which gave their work quite a creative flair, while adding originality to the work itself. Old Georgian manuscripts on medicine exceeded 500 volumes and are dispersed throughout the world's libraries and archives (Tbilisi, Paris, Moscow, Leningrad and others). Their copies are stored at the Museum of Georgian Medical History. On making text analysis it is easy to detect along with Arabic and Persian terminology, a lot of Greek terms. Ancient Georgian doctors often referred to Greek, Roman and Byzantine authors and cited their opinions. There are dozens of hellenisms in Kananelis *Erroneous Karabadin* (11th century) and in Khodzhkhopelis *Book of Medicine* (13th century), Zaza Panaskerteli-Tsitsishvilis *Medical Book of Karabadin* (15th century), David Batonishvilis (Bagrationi) *Iadigar Daud* (16th century) and in many other medical books.

Favourable Georgian-Byzantine relation were especially intensive during a stable historical and political situation, but before the Byzantine Empire fell, those relation were completely blocked. After 1453, the relations were continued with the one-faith nations, namely: Greeks, Bulgarians, Italians etc. In 1801,

after the annexation of Georgia by Russia and annulment of Georgian sovereignty, all the relations gradually came to an end. Nowadays all these monasteries are occupied by Greek monks. We believe that even a general glimpse over the medical facts is another proof of profound cultural relations that existed between the two great nations.

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