

GOLDEN  
FLEECE

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ART OF  
GEORGIA

# TBILISI IN THE WORKS OF GEORGIAN AND FOREIGN ARTISTS

Since its beginnings, the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, one of the oldest cities in the world, has stood out for its individuality and unique charm. The geopolitical location at the point where Europe meets Asia, on the Silk Road, the caravan route connecting the West and the East determined its historical fates and diversity. “Tbilisi, built on both banks of the narrow gorge of the river Mtkvari, was destroyed and rebuilt many times, yet it always kept its individuality, which was shaped by Sololaki hill with the Narikala Fortress, the remnants of old city walls and of the Shahistakhti fortification (a small castle on a rectangular plan with five round towers), Isani, a rocky plateau with Metekhi Church and other antiquities, Mount Tabor with a church on the top, the largest and one of the oldest districts, Kala, with Anchiskhati and Sioni, Betlemi, Sourp-Nishan, Jvarismama and Norasheni and with other churches and Catholic temples, a synagogue and a mosque, and have retained dominance over the course of centuries. The urban fabric of Tbilisi has been woven by domed baths, caravanserais, religious buildings and residential quarters on both hilly or low terrains. In the late medieval period Tbilisi was a walled town with stone or brick houses with built-in balconies and flat terraces” (Mania 2018, 12). Many foreign travellers, writers and public figures have been fascinated by Tbilisi. Some of them considered it an exotic, fabulous East, for some it was the “Paris of the Caucasus,” for others – the centre of the governorate of the Russian Empire (Tumanishvili 2008, 218).

Tbilisi, razed to the ground by Agha Mohammad Khan in 1795, gathered strength for a long time. In 1801, after the accession of Georgia to the Russian Empire, Tbilisi became the cultural and administrative centre of Transcaucasia. It was established as the main economic and trade city of the Caucasus. However, from the beginning of the first half of the 19th century it became a multi-ethnic city with unusual social layers and lifestyles that still maintained a strong link with medieval traditions (Mania 2018, 12). From the 1860s, Tbilisi saw the dawn and development of capitalism. It reached its peak at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Initially, the architecture of the city changed following European fashions. That made Tbilisi more contrasting and diverse.

This process did not go smoothly for the main part of the population – artisans and merchants. They could not easily give up the old life style and hardly adapted to new ones. The city seemed to be more medieval. It was divided into two parts: the old part with its narrow streets, lanes, *polortsis* (an open square where people gathered), and terraced houses. It was a typical medieval Asian city, and the new part with wide streets and its architecture was more like a European city. The population was also different between the two parts: craftsmen and small merchants lived in the old districts, and aristocracy and bourgeoisie in the new ones.

By the mid-19th century, not only was the ruined city restored but also many state institutions were opened: the Botanical Garden (1845), the Caucasian Museum (1852), Observatory (1844, 1860–62), St. Michael Hospital (1865), the railway station (1872) and the Caucasian silk manufactory (1887) (Mania 2018, 14). From the first half of the 19th century, gymnasiums for women and men were

founded in Tbilisi, as well as theological seminaries, institutes, lyceums and military schools. A number of charities gave boost to the artistic life of the city, such as by founding the Caucasian Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts. In 1879, the society opened the first school offering professional art education. Georgian professional theatre was founded in the mid-19th century. The Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre located at Erivansky Square was considered the best in Europe. The French writer Alexander Dumas, who visited Tbilisi in 1858, noted: “As soon as I entered the vestibule, I was amazed by the simple, refined style of the ornaments. I had a feeling I had stepped into the lobby of the theatre of Pompeii. Above, in the foyer, ornamentation was replaced by Arabic carving. The hall was reminiscent of a fairy palace, not because of sumptuous decoration but because it was tasteful. Who knows, they may not have spent even one hundred Manat for gilding but I can say without hesitation that I have never seen a theatre hall as attractive as that in Tbilisi” (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 5). The “opera disease” gripped the Tbilisi society. In the streets of the city, taxi drivers and greengrocers’ children alike would sing arias by Italian composers. Opera music in old Tbilisi co-existed perfectly with the melodies in the gardens of Mushtaidi or Ortachala.

Another sign of the flourishing cultural life of Tbilisi was the Georgian press, which originated in the first half of the 19th century. The first Georgian newspaper was published in Tbilisi in 1819. From the 1840’s, Georgian book publishing gained momentum.

No picture of 19th-century Tbilisi would be complete without mentioning foreign artists living in Tbilisi: German, Polish, Italian, Russian and Armenian. Tbilisi attracted people who wanted to explore an exotic country with an ancient culture and artists relocated forcibly to Georgia as “the Siberia of the South” (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 3). Not surprisingly, all of them felt obliged to show Tbilisi in their works. This, perhaps, is why Tbilisi featured so prominently in the works of both Georgian and foreign artists working in Georgia.

The German artist Paul von Franken (1818–84) created a number of paintings dedicated to Tbilisi. He settled in Tbilisi in 1853 together with his wife, artist Helene Köber-Franken. Known as “the painter of Caucasia,” Paul von Franken was a representative of late Romantic painting, who, like other European artists, arrived in the Caucasus to discover the unknown world and stayed there until 1861. The years in Georgia turned out to be very important for Franken’s art. He often travelled around the Caucasus, which further aroused his interest in the Caucasian people and their customs. The regions of Georgia, views of Tbilisi, the Caucasians human types and the local ethnography hold pride of place in his oeuvre (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013, 76–77).

One more German artist who worked in Tbilisi at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was Richard Karl Sommer (1866–1939) (Fig. 1; see Cat. pp. 471–472). In 1884, he enrolled as auditor with the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg. In 1893, he received a title of class III artist. In 1890–1900, Sommer worked in Central Asia. This was one of the most fruitful periods in his life: he created a series of pictures on oriental themes. After Central Asia, Sommer continued his studies at the Munich Academy, and in 1900 he settled in Georgia. He travelled a lot around Georgia and created ethnographic paintings, portraits (*A Gurian, A Megrelian, A Caucasian*, etc.), images of human types, everyday life and battle scenes and architecture. He participated actively in the artistic life of Tbilisi and exhibited his works from 1910 to 1920. He was one of the founders of the Society of the Artists of the Caucasus. Sommer was engaged in teaching and working with other artists. He headed an art studio that opened in 1907 in the First Gymnasium for Boys (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013, 254).

Sommer saw Tbilisi only as an eastern city. The image of Tbilisi he created, with minarets, *masjid* domes, stained-glass windows and mountain slopes peppered with settlements, epitomises a city of the Orient (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 5).

The artist Oscar Schmerling (1863–1938), a descendant of German colonists living in Georgia, was educated in Saint Petersburg and Munich (Cat. pp. 473–475). He held the post of director of the school of painting and sculpture at the Caucasian Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts and provided instruction at the Tbilisi Fine Arts Academy. Oscar Schmerling is known as one of the first representatives of Georgian caricature. He published his humorous works in the Georgian and foreign press for years. His contribution to the development of Georgian book illustration is important. Tellingly, it was to him that illustrations for *Deda Ena*, the Georgian school primer, were commissioned. He painted portraits, ethno-types, landscapes and genre scenes. His well-known graphic caricature series tells us about daily life of Tbilisi citizens (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013, 313).



Fig. 1

Richard Sommer, *Shah Ismail's Mosque in Tbilisi*, 1910s, oil on cardboard, 45 × 32.5 cm, Tbilisi History Museum (Cat. p. 471)

Graphic series *Old Tbilisi* by Borys Romanowski (Cat. pp. 476–482), a Polish artist who came to Tbilisi in the 1920s, was created in 1927–30, and it exemplified the artist's more contemporary, modernist vision. Born in Ukraine, the artist trained at the Kyiv School of Graphics and Painting. In 1910, he went to Paris, where he continued his education at the Academy of the Fine Arts. In 1908–11 Romanowski worked at the Paris Opera. His first solo exhibition was organized in Paris in 1911, and in 1912 he returned to Kyiv. He was a co-founder of the Union of the Artists of Ukraine, and in 1922 was elected for its President. During World War I, Romanowski went to the front as a correspondent. In 1918–25, he worked as a designer in Kyiv theatres and opera. In 1925, he arrived in Georgia on the advice of the Georgian director Kote Marjanishvili. In *Old Tbilisi*, the artist tries to capture the exoticism of the life in Tbilisi and the residents' specific areas of activity – faithfully and in every essential detail. In 1929, his solo exhibition was staged in Tbilisi's Hotel Orient. From 1934, the artist lived in Sokhumi, where he taught at a school of the fine arts. During 1937–41 he worked at a Tbilisi film studio as a designer and decoration artist (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013, 297). Despite their in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Tbilisi environment, both Romanovski and Schmerling retained their outsider's eye in capturing the city (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 7).



Fig. 2

Mose Toidze, *Old Tbilisi Corner*, early 20th c., oil on canvas, 35 × 44 cm, Tbilisi History Museum (Cat. p. 469)

The panoramas, districts and streets of Tbilisi were explored and painted by Georgian artists as well. The works of Mose Toidze (1871–1953) are outstanding examples. He received art education in Saint Petersburg but returned shortly to his homeland only to fall under the influence of the Northern Impressionism. His images, however, are unique.

Mose Toidze's work is noteworthy primarily for his narrative, highly diversified painting (Fig. 2; see Cat. pp. 469–470). Interestingly, he watches everyday life of Tbilisi from an alienated standpoint. His half-fantasy world is populated by people resembling colourful fairies (Tumanishvili. 2020, 49). Such is his *Bazaz-khana* (Textile Market), where the artist, in his distinctive fashion, uses oversized settings to create colourful, decorative scenes. His views of old Tbilisi are outstanding, revealing Toidze's bent for experiments in a bolder, more contemporary, individual vision. Illuminated, with sharp accents, evocative, often dusky surroundings, with veiled figures in long robes, it conveys the soul of a disturbing, mysterious city. These images of Tbilisi life chime in with the work of the early 20th-century Fauvists: Maurice Vlaminck, Albert Marquet and the likes (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 9). In 1922, an art studio headed by Mose Toidze was founded in Tbilisi. From 1930, he was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Typical for everyday life in Tbilisi were sports and entertainment shows: wrestling, boxing, cockfights, ram fighting, etc. The most popular secular holidays were *Berikaoba* and *Keenoba*. *Berikaoba* was held during the carnival before Lent. Folk actors, *berikas*, appeared in animal masks causing general amusement, in which the artistry of the Georgian people was clearly visible. *Keenoba* was a solemn spectacle depicting the Georgian expulsion of foreign invaders. In this show, *keen* (tsar) represented the enemy team, and the leader of the other team was king. King always had to win the battle. *Keenoba* began on the first Monday of Great Lent (Black Monday), and all social strata of Tbilisi residents participated, from the nobles to just artisans (Grishashvili 1928, 23–30).

Lado Gudiashvili (1896–1980) made two paintings on these themes: *Berikas defeated Bokauli* (Cat. p. 657) and *Throwing Keen into the Water* (Cat. p. 656). With their exaggerated and stylized figures, the scenes presented old Tbilisi seen with an outsider’s eye: expressive yet at the same time internally restrained (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 10).

Lado Gudiashvili studied at the school of painting and sculpture of the Society for the Encouragement of the Caucasian Fine Arts. In 1916–17, he participated in historical expeditions to Georgia’s various provinces, and made copies of medieval Georgian murals. He took active part in the artistic milieu of Tbilisi and was a member of the Syndicate of Futurists. He painted *The Fantastic Douqan* series and the Kimerioni cafe together with Zdanevich, Waliszewski, Goncharova, Bazhbeuk-Melikov and Terentieva. Dedicated to Sofia Melnikova, *The Fantastic Douqan* was on view at an exhibition at the Temple of Fame (today the National Gallery of Georgia) organized by the Society of Georgian Artists. In 1919–26 he lived in Paris and studied at Académie Ranson. His works were on display in Belgium and the USA. Lado Gudiashvili’s works are in the collections of Madrid and Paris museums as well as private collectors. In 1923, Galerie La Licorne in Paris staged Gudiashvili’s first solo show, and in 1925 another one was held at Galerie Joseph Billiet. Lado Gudiashvili’s unique, exotic painting attracted the attention of Europeans. He was a close friend with Picasso, Modigliani, Matisse, Derain, Leger, Utrillo, Aragon, Breton and other famous artists of that period. After returning to Georgia, Gudiashvili taught at the Tbilisi State Academy of the Fine Arts, and worked in the field of theatre and decorative arts. He participated in dozens of exhibitions in Georgia and abroad. The first Tbilisi show of Gudiashvili’s works was held in 1926. From 1928, he was a prolific book designer. 1935 saw his solo show in Paris. In 1927, he painted the vestibule of the Hotel Orient, and in 1946, the altar at Tbilisi’s Kvashveti Church (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013, 235).

Some of the foreign artists who came to Tbilisi in the mid-19th century saw the city as a place with old cultural traditions and tried to render its overall soul and character. Those who arrived relatively late and discovered signs of the Asian world in the city, focused on depicting the life of the Tbilisi bohemians, *karachokhels* (petty merchants or artisans in old Tbilisi, distinguishable by unique outfit and code of conduct) and *kintos* (handicraftsmen in old Tbilisi, until the 1930s). Georgian artists were attracted by their city’s charm, its houses on slopes, dense development fitted into the landscape, winding, bumpy, sometimes cobblestone streets and collapsed walls. Their priority was to capture the distinctiveness of the buildings: the balconies with thin proportions, balusters, carved palisade and twisted columns, some fitted with *musharab* or coloured-glass verandas. The Georgian artists mainly painted residential houses and their immediate surroundings. In them they could sense the mixture of tastes inherent in the local artistic tradition: simplicity, quietness, cosiness, generosity, depth and self-restraint (Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004, 10).

## TBILISI IN PICTURES

### Paul von Franken (1818–1884)

The German artist Paul von Franken, known as “The Artist of the Caucasus,” dedicated a number of paintings and graphic works to the theme of Tbilisi. In 1853, by the order of Vladimir Sologub, the State Councillor of the Russian Empire, he came to the Caucasus with his wife – the artist Helene Kiober-Franken, to depict the battles in the Caucasus, and lived in Tbilisi until 1860. He also travelled to Armenia. The years spent in Georgia proved to be important for Franken’s career. He created landscapes, scenes of markets and crowded places, as well as characteristic free sketches of city views, Caucasian types and ethnographic elements. In 1886, the artist’s wife brought Paul von Franken’s works devoted to the Caucasus theme to Tbilisi, which he created even after returning to Europe. In *Tbilisi*, painted by the artist in 1879, a wide panorama of the capital with old culture and traditions, is shown realistically – starting with the scene on the left side of the picture which shows the everyday life of Tbilisi and ending with densely built terraced houses in the background of the mountainous terrain and the Narikala citadel.

[M.So.]



Paul von Franken (1894–1944)

## *Tbilisi*

1879

Oil on canvas

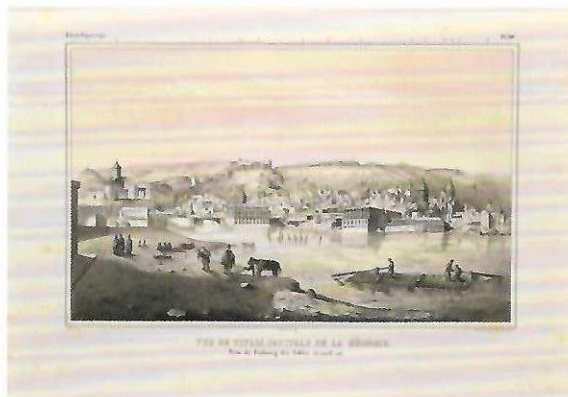
137.8 × 224.7 (in frames: 156 × 238) × 5.1 cm

From “Metekhi” art museum, acquired  
on 19 August 1923

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM  
Inv. No. Nb8/ქსბ.6 301

The painting depicts the Tbilisi landscape. Foreign painters have always been attracted by beauty and exotic side of Tbilisi. This is the city where Europe and Asia meet.

In the centre of the multi-figure composition, we can see women dressed in colourful clothes. In the foreground, there are three women with a baby and a cradle. In the background of the architectural landscape, there is a scene showing citizens’ everyday life. The sunny weather and blue sky represent the typical atmosphere of the city.



## *View of Tiflis, Capital of Georgia from the Faubourg des Sables, to the North-East*

From: Frédéric Dubois de Montpéroux (1798–1850),  
*Voyage au Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les  
Abkhases, en Colchide, en Géorgie, en Arménie  
et en Crimée. Avec un atlas...*, Paris 1840–1843,  
National Museum in Krakow  
Inv. No. MNK III-ryc. 580/49



### Mose Toidze (1871–1953)

In the painting *Old Tbilisi Corner* by the Georgian artist Mose Toidze the capital city has been unfolded in front of us with all its diversity. Ahead is Dabakhani Lane, on the left – a fragment of the Narikala Castle, on the horizon, in the centre, Metekhi Cathedral is visible. There is also a mosque here. A Tbilisian lady has got off the balcony to look at the sight. The townspeople can be seen on the roofs of their houses, talking and dancing. They especially love spending time in this way. The Tbilisi old district has always been attractive, with its narrow streets, balconies and glazed loggia, merlon castles and domed churches. That is why it became a source of inspiration for many artists. Mose Toidze is more interested in expressing picturesqueness of the landscape than the story – the desire to convey light and shadow and the artist's special manner of painting bring his work, in some cases, closer to Impressionism or post-Impressionism.

[M.So.]

Mose Toidze (1871–1953)

### *Old Tbilisi Corner*

Early 20th century

Oil on canvas, cardboard

35 × 44 cm

Purchased from the artist

Artist's initials in the lower corner: *M. T.*

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N 0-451



Mose Toidze (1871–1953)

### *Maidan*

Early 20th century

Oil on canvas

38.5 × 51.5 cm

Artist's signature in the lower left corner: *M. Toidze*

Purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

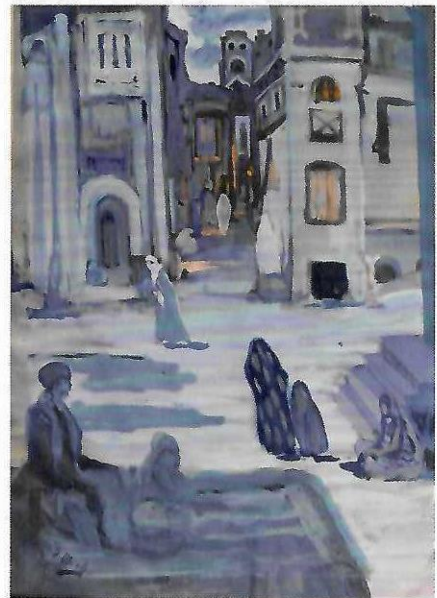
Inv. No. N n-667

Mose Toidze dedicated a number of works to the theme of old Tbilisi. Among them is the painting *Maidan* dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.

Maidan, the most crowded shopping square of Old Tbilisi, is engrossed in active trading. Merchants have brought new products for sale. Watermelons lying on the ground, brought by the peasants from the village, are cut in half to attract the customers.

Stalls with various products can be seen behind. We can also see a camel, which has never been unusual for Tbilisi, because caravans loaded with thousands of goods come to Maidan from the east. Here you can meet "foreigners of all nationalities," as the French traveller Jean Chardin wrote. All roads cross here and this environment attracts everyone. The atmosphere of old Tbilisi is amazing. Here you will always find what you want and meet everyone and everything that interests you. The painter realistically depicted the central square of 19th-century Tbilisi with all its vividness and clarity.

[M.So.]



Mose Toidze (1871–1953)

### *Old Tbilisi Corner*

Early 20th century

Gouache, paper

42 × 30.5 cm

Artist's signature in the lower left corner: *M. Toidze*

Purchased by the city municipality

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N n-272

Mose Toidze was particularly fascinated by the diverse districts of old Tbilisi, which is often reflected in the artist's works.

Tbilisi has been a city of rich architectural traditions since ancient times. Both the East and the West have always been equally loved here. If you want an architectural trip to Europe and Asia at the same time, then you must visit Tbilisi. The coexistence of different cultures has always been noticeable in one or another corner of the capital. Here you will meet narrow streets, which sometimes lead you to the colourful oriental baths, and sometimes – to modern style buildings, most of which are the works of European artists. Tbilisi absorbs, adapts and creates an interesting synthesis. In Mose Toidze's pictures, created on the theme of old Tbilisi, we can perfectly feel the "duality" of the capital. Tbilisi is a visible example of the synthesis of cultures and will always remain so in the memory of anyone who has visited it at least once.

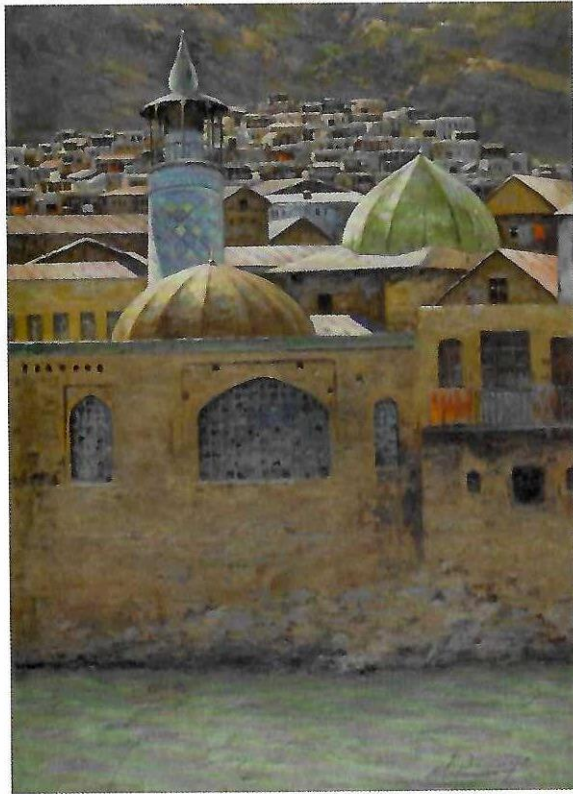
[M.So.]

## Richard Karl Sommer (1866–1939)

The German artist Richard Karl Sommer settled in Georgia in 1900 and actively participated in the artistic life of Tbilisi. The main focus of his work is the expression of colour and the alternation of light and shadow.

Richard Sommer's work depicts the Shah Ismail's Mosque in Tbilisi. The mosque was located on the banks of the Mtkvari River near the Metekhi Bridge. It was built by the Shah of Iran, Ismail I, in 1522–1524, on the place of a church destroyed by him. The mosque existed until 1951. The composition is built by contrasting the architectural structure in the centre and the river in the foreground. The colour palette is rich with green-blue-lavender accents that enhance the impression.

[M.So.]



Richard Karl Sommer (1866–1939)

### *Shah Ismail's Mosque in Tbilisi*

1910s

Oil on cardboard

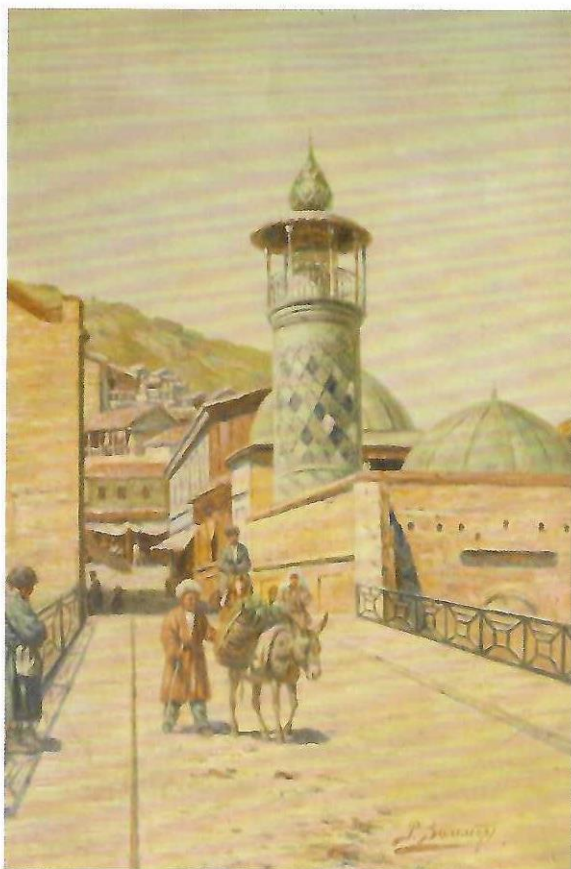
45 × 32.5 cm

In the lower right corner, the artist's signature in Russian: *Р. Зомер.*

Purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N n-454



Richard Karl Sommer (1866–1939)

### *Metekhi Bridge*

1910s

Oil on plywood

42 × 28 cm

Artist's signature in Russian lower right: *Р. Зоммер*

Purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-504

In 1870, the old wooden bridge over the river Mtkvari was replaced by the first metal bridge, built to design by the English architect Frederic Webster Ordish. It was named "Metekhi Bridge" after the name of the Metekhi temple built by King Vakhtang Gorgasali in the 6th century, which overlooks the bridge.

This landmark was depicted by Richard Karl Sommer in the painting *Metekhi Bridge*. In the centre of the composition, men dressed in oriental dress come across the bridge with a donkey and a horse carrying a load. The Shah Ismail mosque and minaret can be seen in the background. In the work, Richard Sommer conveys the oriental atmosphere characteristic of old Tbilisi with its colourful accents and sense of light.

[M.So.]



Richard Karl Sommer (1866–1939)

### *Market Scene (Bazaar)*

1910s

Oil on plywood

23.5 × 32.5 cm

Artist's signature in Russian lower right: *Р. Зоммер*

Purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-453

The market was one of the central parts of late feudal cities. *Bazaar* is a Persian word, which appeared in the Georgian language in the 12th century and is used to refer to a trading square. In the 19th century, the term bazaar was used to call rows of shops and workshops, which were located along the street or in the squares. Imported and local goods were traded here every day.

There were three large markets in old Tbilisi, two of them – on the right bank of the Mtkvari river, were situated directly in the city, and one was within the walls of Metekhi. It was the grocery market. Richard Sommer's painting *Market Scene* shows the stall of fish and vegetable sellers. Here we can see a seller holding a wooden bowl full of fish. Next to him, there are two elderly men with lambskin hats (*papakhi*) on their heads, choosing products. The artist realistically conveys Tbilisi's everyday life.

[M.So.]

## Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

For the Georgian cultural life of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the work of the descendants of German colonists, to whom Oscar Schmerling belonged, is especially important. Tbilisi became a native city for Germans. Their rational way of life, cultural, educational, publishing or trade-economic activities added a special touch to the multinational and multi-confessional Tbilisi environment.

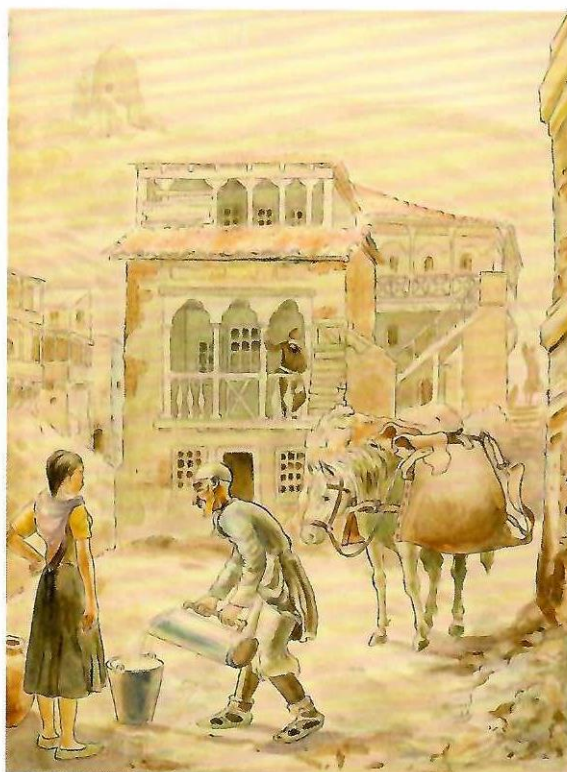
Oskar Schmerling made a significant contribution to the development of Georgian art with his creative and pedagogical activities.

He created pictorial and graphic works, ethnotypes, portraits, landscapes and genre scenes. Schmerling is one of the founders of Georgian caricature. The cycle of his caricatures “Fleeting Tbilisi” is particularly noteworthy, the publication of which he began in the form of postcards in 1910, and most of them are currently kept in the Tbilisi History Museum.

The Old Tbilisi life was unimaginable without *tulukhchis* (water carriers), whom Oscar Schmerling depicted in his graphic picture *Tulukhchi*. For a long time Tbilisi was supplied with drinking water from the river Mtkvari, and the carriers and sellers were *tulukhchis*, who carried water from street to street in wineskins made of ox skin. A *tulukh* was attached to a horse or mule. Those who did not have a horse or a mule carried the *tulukh* on their backs. Despite the existing aqueduct in Tbilisi, *tulukhchi* did not lose their importance until the beginning of the 20th century.

The influence of Eastern culture was especially visible in the “tea houses” of old Tbilisi. Visiting a tea shop and the tradition of drinking tea became part of the daily life of the townspeople, and this led to the establishment of a new profession – a tea carrier. Mainly Persians worked in this way. Oscar Schmerling realistically depicted the daily activities of a Tbilisian tea carrier in his work *Chai-Chi*.

[M.So.]



Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

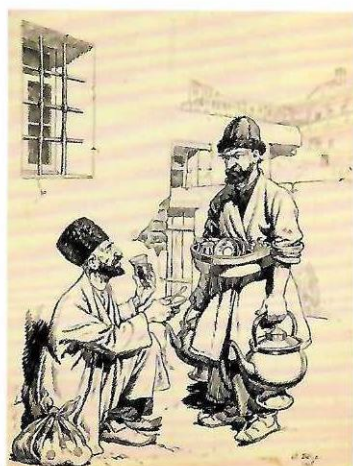
### *Old Tbilisi, Tulukhchi (Water Carrier)*

1900–1930

Pen, ink, watercolour, paper

34.5 × 25.5 cm

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM  
Inv. No. 3591



Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

### *Chai-Chi*

1928

Pencil, pen, ink, zincography, paper

17 × 12 cm

It was brought to the museum from Levan Sklifasovsky, son of Nikoloz Sklifasovsky.

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM  
Inv. No. 4377



Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

### *Religious Holiday*

1900–1930

Pen, ink, watercolour, paper

24.5 × 43 cm

Received from Krasnoselskaya in 1977

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM  
Inv. No. 4519

Oskar Schmerling was interested not only in the daily life of Tbilisi citizens, but also in the depiction of the history and culture of Georgia,

which we can clearly see in his work, including scenes depicting religious celebrations. In ancient Tbilisi, there were many folk and religious holidays, which often ended with feasts. Oskar Schmerling's graphic image depicts the celebration of one of religious holidays. On the left, under a tree, there is a table, on both sides of which cross-legged men sit, and opposite, young people dressed in national clothes dance and play. A church and a cart with a canopy can be seen in the background. There are watermelons and a wineskin on the right edge of the picture. A diverse environment is shown along with the religious story.

[M.So.]

Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

### *A Street in the City*

1900–1930

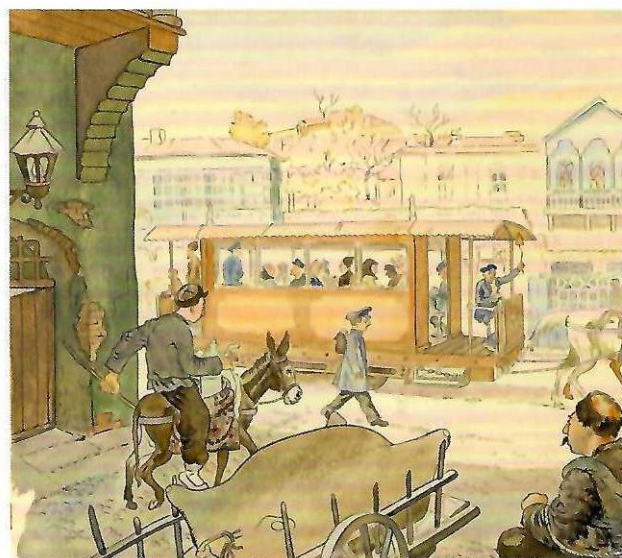
Pen, ink, watercolour, paper

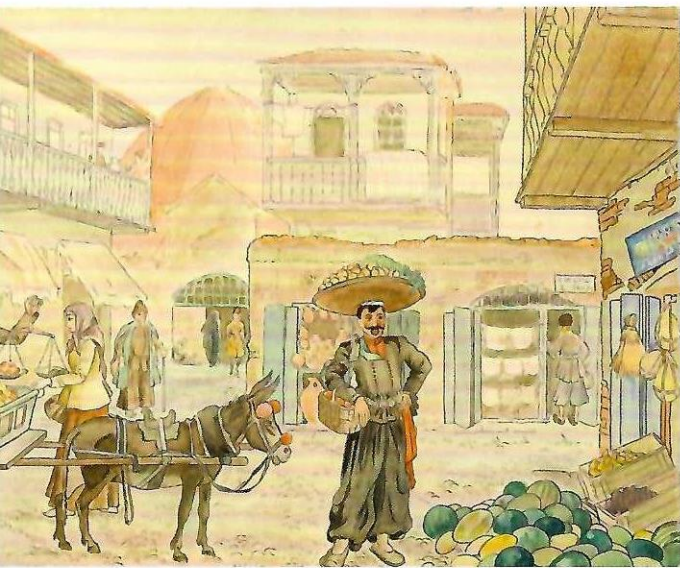
24.5 × 35.5 cm

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM  
Inv. No. 3593

The narrow and wide streets of Tbilisi, with colourful houses and carved wooden balconies, have always been a source of admiration for foreign travellers. In 1883, for the first time in the history of Tbilisi, the horse railway – *konka* was launched, the length of the line was about 2.5 km, in the next period, its length increased even more. *Konka* was a horse-drawn open carriage, the seat backs of which changed position depending on the direction. It was forbidden to stop on uphill and downhill slopes. It was stopped by ringing a bell held by the conductor. When going uphill, two more horses were attached to *konka*. The conductor standing on the steps would sometimes sell tickets from one or the other side of *konka*. It was later replaced by a tram. In his work, Oskar Schmerling shows *konka* on one of the streets of the city.

[M.So.]





Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

*Bazaar / Kinto with Tray*

1900–1930

Pen, ink, watercolour, paper

34.5 × 25.5 cm

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM

Inv. No. 3592



Oskar Schmerling (1863–1938)

*Tbilisian Kinto (Trader)*

1903

Pencil, paper

31 × 42 cm

Received from Al. Jabadari in 1921

Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, GNM

Inv. No. 638

Old Tbilisi was something special, a peculiar world, where people of different nationalities and social strata were united by all the signs and manners characteristic of their existence. Here they created a highly colourful and interesting mix of people of many nationalities.

There were several bazaars in old Tbilisi. Foreign travellers, writers and artists who came there were always amazed by the character of the Tbilisi bazaar and the variety offered for sale.

*Kintos*, who belonged to the small merchant class, were an integral part of old Tbilisi and trade culture. The *kinto*'s outfit consisted of an *akhalukhi* (special shirt) opened on the side and decorated with buttons and loops, wide pants tucked into socks, boots and a *kartuz* (a special hat) on his head. They would carry fruit and vegetables arranged on a wooden tray on their heads and were distinguished by their eloquent speech and response.

Oskar Schmerling was interested in the phenomenon of *kinto* and dedicated several works to it, including *Bazaar/Kinto with Tray* and *Tbilisian Kinto*. *Kintos* remained in Tbilisi until the 1930s.

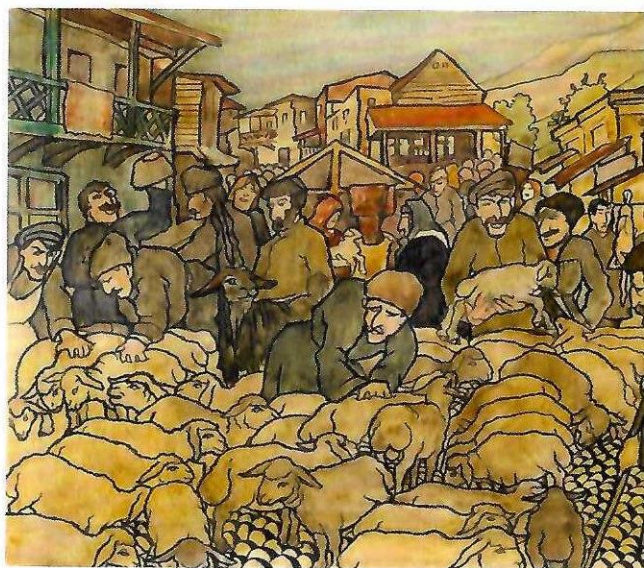
[M.So.]

### Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

Old Tbilisi and its characteristic landscapes attracted many Georgian and foreign painters; however, there were very few who conveyed the daily life of people living in this city in their works as impressively as the Polish artist Boris Romanovsky was able to do. In 1927–1930, he created an extensive cycle of graphic images “Old Tbilisi” commissioned by the Tbilisi Municipal Museum (now Tbilisi History Museum). These graphic works are a kind of photo chronicle of old Tbilisi. Here you will meet everyone who was an integral part of old Tbilisi.

The work *Lamb Sellers* depicts the scene of the sale of lambs brought to the capital by peasants from nearby villages. They have already come to the square and lined up rows of fluffy, white, little lambs. The afternoon sun is shining and intense trading is in full swing. In one corner, a seller shows products to a citizen. In the middle of the flock of sheep, the most interested buyer enters and carefully selects the lambs. People shout from all sides. However, soon the trade will end, and the Tbilisians will return to their houses and shops.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

#### *Lamb Sellers*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

21 × 28 cm

Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner: *Б. Р. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N 0-838



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

#### *Morning in Tbilisi. Fruit and Vegetable Sellers with Donkeys*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

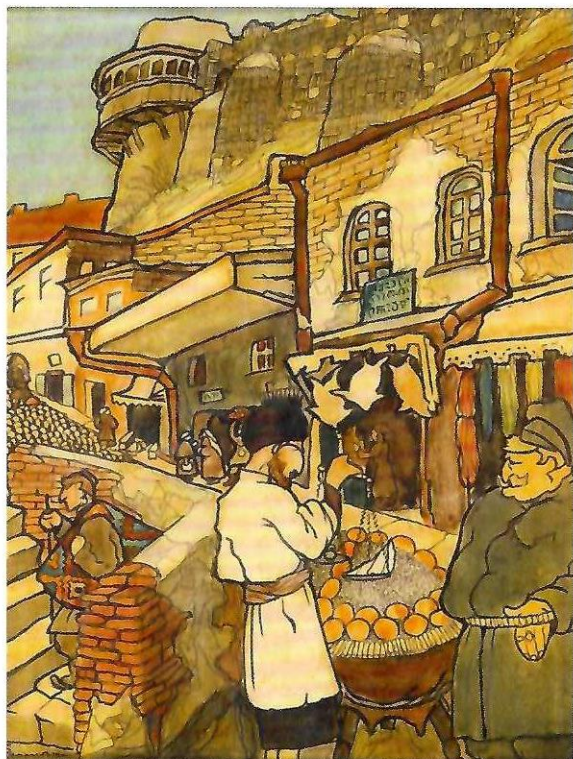
20.5 × 27.5 cm

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner: *Б. Р. – 30*

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N 0-810



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Fruit Seller on the Wine Uphill*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

27.5 × 21 cm

Artist's signature in Russian and year lower left:  
*Романовский – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased  
from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-820

In his works, Boris Romanovsky depicted the episodes of the diverse everyday life of old Tbilisi, types of Tbilisi residents, their environment and activities.

It is early morning in Tbilisi. In the streets you can only meet gardeners and traders. Fruit and vegetable vendors descend from the hill. Colourful Georgian *khurjinis* (saddle bags), full to the brim, hang on their shoulders. One seller has stopped, he has products in his hand. He offers fresh apples and pears to Tbilisi residents who have woken up early and come out on the balcony. In the second picture, the fruit seller is already selling his products at the turn of a wine hill. He weighs the fruit for a *kinto*. In the background, the palace of Queen Darejan can be seen with its carved balcony. The Wine Uphill was located on the left bank of the Mtkvari, near the Metekhi Cathedral. Wine and vodka *dukans* (taverns) and cellars could be found here. In his works, Romanovsky conveyed the charm of these picturesque place.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Siraj-Khana (Wine Cellar)*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

21 × 28 cm

Artist's initials and year in the lower left corner: *B. R. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased  
from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-809



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Chai-Khana (Tea House)*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

21 × 28 cm

Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner:  
B. R. – 30

Commissioned by the museum and purchased  
from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-813

Old Tbilisi was unimaginable without *siraj-khanas* (*siraj-khana* is a Persian term, *siraji* means winemaker and *khane* – house. It was a trading place for wine and drinks). Wine houses were especially loved in Tbilisi. Most wine in the South Caucasus was drunk here. The carts loaded with wineskins came here along with *sirajis*. Here the whole street is dedicated to wine and wine houses. *Sirajs* bought wine from *Kakhetian* peasants and then recommended the best of them to townspeople to taste it during a feast.

In his graphic work *siraj-khana*, Romanovsky shows a shop like that. Men dressed in traditional Georgian clothes sit at the table and taste wine. All around them are wineskins (wine storage made of ox hide), which are, of course, full of wine. Behind the arches hang jugs, an icon and deer antlers.

In addition to wine houses, there were also *chai-khanas*, or tea houses, in old Tbilisi. However, they did not hold such an important place in the lives of Tbilisi residents as the *siraj-khanas*. *Chai-khana* was created under the influence of Eastern culture and was mostly a meeting place for men. In the 19th century in Tbilisi *chai-khana*, men gathered and learned news from each other. There are two large *samovars* with ready-made tea and cups on the counter. The shopkeeper standing at the counter pours tea and looks with interest at the guests. Probably, someone has brought some exciting news from the capital to the tea house.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Feasting Tbilisian Men in a Carriage*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

21 × 28 cm

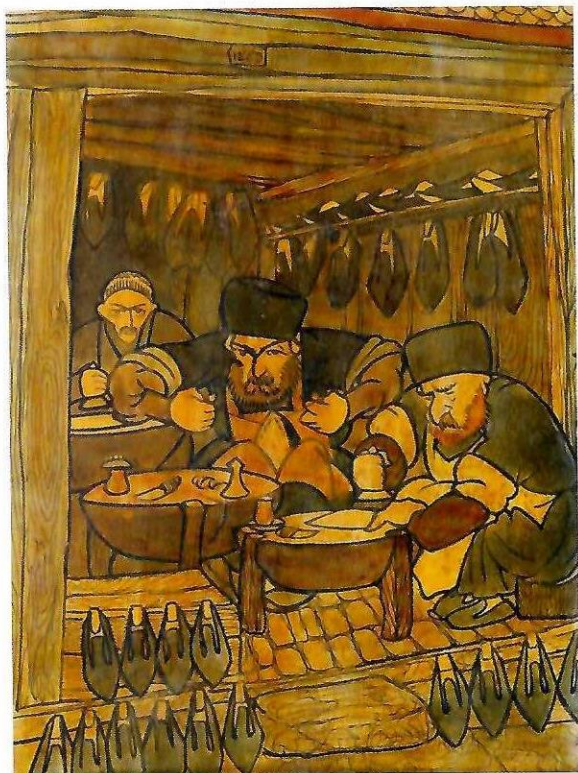
Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner:  
B. R. – 30

Commissioned by the museum and purchased  
from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-821

On hot summer days, the people of Tbilisi often went by phaeton to the gardens of Ortachala and Krtsanisi, where the city feast was held. Romanovsky depicted such entertainers in his graphic work *Feasting Tbilisian Men in a Carriage*. Feasting men sit in a two-horse phaeton. They are accompanied by a musician, a barrel organ player, because Tbilisi feast and music were inseparable from each other. Old Tbilisi remembers many musicians who enjoyed special popularity not only in Georgia, but also in the entire Caucasus. The landscape of the capital can be seen in the background of the picture. The city feasts sometimes lasted until the morning. The companions often continued feasting in the world-famous sulphur baths of Tbilisi until dawn.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Shoemaker's Shop*

1927–1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-817

Boris Romanovsky dedicated a number of works to merchants and craftsmen in the series depicting daily life in Tbilisi, among them *Shoemaker's Shop*, where women's and men's shoe artisans – *kharazis* – are portrayed. Townsman *kharazes*, like other craftsmen, had their own professional union, which was called *amkari*. *Hamkar* is a Persian word meaning co-employment. All local artisans, regardless of rank or nationality, could join this union. Each *amkari* had its own charter, flag and coat of arms, it was governed by its own administration, which was led by *ustabashi*. The *ustabashi* of *amkari* had great influence in old times, he enjoyed strong authority as was the elected leader. *Ustabashi's* duty was supervision. On holidays, the *amkaris* came out with their flags. These unions were one of the most important and established structures in old Tbilisi, which played an important role in the current life.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Women in Chadors with Water Jugs in Sayed-Abad District*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner:  
*B. R. – 30*

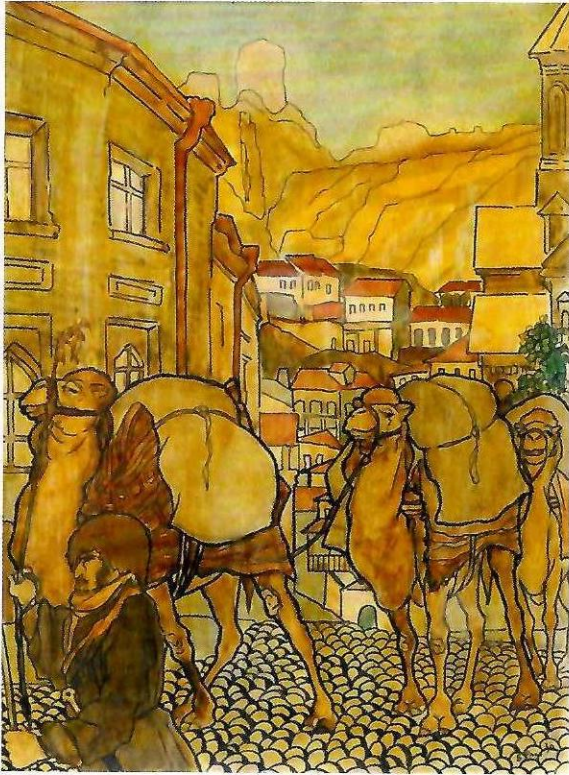
Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-818

The multi-ethnic face of Tbilisi can be clearly seen in Boris Romanovsky's graphic work *Sayed-Abad District*. By the 18th century, the entire territory of Tbilisi consisted of three main parts: Tbilisi itself – the oldest part of the city known as Sayed-Abad (currently the area of sulphur baths and balneological resort), Kala – the central part of the city, and Isni – Avlabari, located on the left bank of the river Mtkvari. The name of the district Sayed-Abad comes from the Persian tribe – Sayds, who settled in this part of the city.

People of different nationalities and religions co-existed in Tbilisi for a long time. Their background was easily recognisable by their clothing. Women's chador was characteristic of the Muslim community. In the picture, we can see women in chadors with jugs of water walking down the central part of the narrow, cobble street of Sayed-Abad. There are houses all around, and in the background one can see the outline of the Narikala fortress tower.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

***A Caravan of Camels***

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

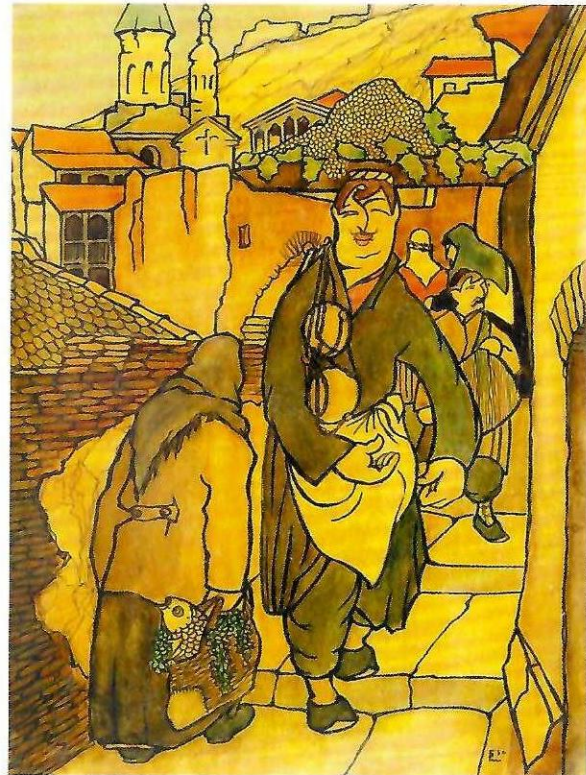
Artist's signature and year lower right: *B. Rom. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-842

The convenient geographical location of Tbilisi led to the existence of several trade routes in the city. Tbilisi had active trade relations with Turkey, Persia, India, Russia and various European countries. Before the opening of the railway (1872), goods had been transported by camel, horse, mule, cart, boat, raft and ferryboat. In his work *A Caravan of Camels*, Boris Romanovsky depicted a characteristic scene from the city – a merchant travelling with a loaded caravan in old Tbilisi, which you could often meet in the capital at that time. In the background is a corner of old Tbilisi with a view of the Narikala Castle ruins.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

***Kinto with a Tray Full of Mulberries on His Head***

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

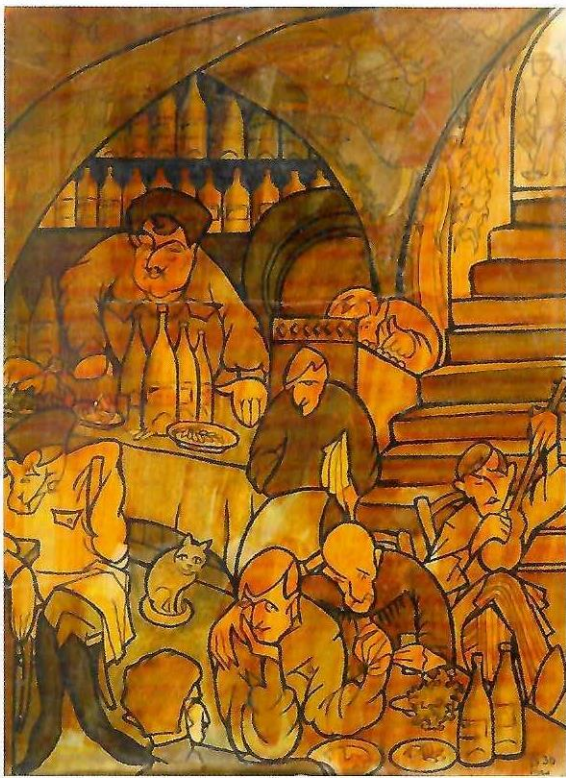
Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner: *B. R. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-812

The theme of a Tbilisian *kinto* always attracted writers and artists. Newspapers and magazines of that time often published humorous letters or pictures, the main character of which was a *kinto*. In his work, Boris Romanovsky depicted a *kinto* going shopping on wide tiled stairs. He has a wooden tray full of mulberries on his head and a scale over his shoulder. On the left, there is an old lady with the fish she has bought. In the background of balconied houses, the Kldisubani church and Narikala castle, we can see representatives of different nationalities, which emphasises the multiculturalism of the city.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *At the Tavern*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 20.5 cm

Artist's initials and year in the lower right corner:

*Б. Р. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-808

In old Tbilisi, there were many good places for a feast, where guests were entertained with a variety of dishes and good wine. Among them were Tbilisi cellars and *dukanis* (taverns). Boris Romanovsky stylised the environment of one of these taverns – with a long staircase leading down to it, arched vaults, tipsy guests and the characteristic type of a fat shopkeeper with bottles of wine and food in front of him. In the shop we can see a musician, an integral part of the Tbilisi feast.

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Fish Shop*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

Artist's inscription in the lower right corner:

*Б. Романовский М – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

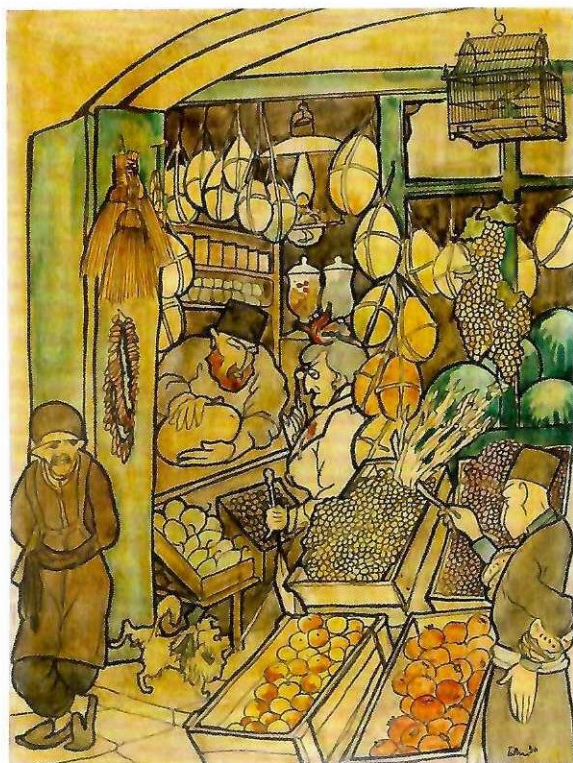
Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N 0-815

In the 18th–19th centuries the main and colourful bazaar, where the exotic face of old Tbilisi was clearly visible, was the Middle bazaar. The Middle bazaar (market) – the shopping center of the old city – was a narrow street lined on both sides with taverns and shops of various artisans. The shops in the Middle bazaar were mostly one-storey buildings. The front room of the shop was used for trade, and the back room – as a warehouse or workshop. In the two-storey shop, an owner lived on the second floor, on the so-called *bala-khana*.

Live fish were sold in taverns located near the Maidan. A shop of this kind was painted by Boris Romanovsky in the graphic picture *Fish Shop*. Fish had an important place in the diet of old Tbilisi residents. The fish of the Mtkvari river were especially valued, because at that time Mtkvari water was used for drinking.

The centre of the picture depicts a basket filled with fresh fish. An interested buyer looks curiously into the basket. In the back the shopkeeper is portrayed while cutting fish. Different kinds of fish are displayed on the open shutters of the shop. The artist depicted a detailed characteristic signs of the fish shop. On the left, one can see the shutters of *Dabaghi* (leather trader).

[M.So.]



Boris Romanovsky (1879–1947)

### *Fruit Shop – Persian Grocery*

1930

Mixed technique, paper

28 × 21 cm

Artist's signature and year lower right: *Б. Ром. – 30*

Commissioned by the museum and purchased from the artist

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-839

*Bakal-khana* (in Persian) was a fruit shop where various fresh and dried fruit was sold at any season of the year. Boris Romanovsky presents one of such fruit shops in his work *Persian Sabaklo (Fruit Shop)*. In front of the *bakal-khana*, various types of fruit are displayed in boxes, the upper part of the shop is covered with melons hanging on ropes, in the background, in the depth, watermelons are stacked. A red-bearded man at the counter, presumably a Persian shopkeeper, is serving a lady accompanied by a small dog on a leash. In front of the stall, one of the sellers repels insects, while the other, standing by the wall in the left corner, rests and observes him. The artist conveyed the daily life of *bakal-khana* with humour.

[M.So.]

### Aleksandre Tsimakuridze (1881–1954)

Aleksandre Tsimakuridze was one of the prominent representatives of Georgian landscape painting of the 1920s–1930s.

In the first half of the 20th century, Tbilisi was gradually losing its old appearance, which is why in 1926–1930, the Tbilisi Communal Museum commissioned Aleksandre Tsimakuridze, and other Tbilisian artists, to create an extensive series of views of old and new Tbilisi. The architectural charm of the old districts of fleeting Tbilisi – houses with wooden balconies and narrow, twisting, stone-paved streets became the main source of inspiration for the artist.

Such is the blue house N2 at Abbas-Abad square. The plan of the square has been preserved since the Middle Ages, and the ensemble of buildings belongs to the latter half of the 19th century and the 20th century. The square changed its name several times, and in 1827 it was named Abbas-Abad Square to commemorate the capture of the Iranian fortress of the same name by General Paskevich.

Tsimakuridze depicted one of the outstanding buildings surrounding the square, the “Blue House,” which housed the headquarters of the Russian army, the Hauptwacht (Headguards) and the officers’ hotel. The house consisted of two parts. The second floor of the left part was designed in the Georgian style with a carved balcony, the columns on the first floor on the right bore signs of Russian classicism. The house had an arched gate. On the right is a three-storeyed house, decorated with shutters on the first floor and two-pillared balconies on the second and third floors.

Adherent to classical artistic principles, although undoubtedly showing tendencies of Impressionistic painting, the Georgian painter Tsimakuridze skillfully conveyed the historical and architectural appearance of old Tbilisi and its colourfulness.

[M.So.]



Aleksandre Tsimakuridze (1881–1954)

***Blue House N2 at Abbas-Abad Square***

1927

Oil on canvas

52.5 × 77.5 cm

Artist's signature and date in the lower right corner:

*Tsimakuridze 1927*

Purchased from the artist in 1927

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM

Inv. No. N n-699



Aleksandre Tsimakuridze (1881–1954)

### *A Two-Storey House*

1927

Oil on canvas

41.5 × 51.5 cm

Purchased from the artist in 1927

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-510

One of the prominent examples of Tbilisi's urban landscape is Tsimakuridze's painting which shows a two-storey house built in 1840, distinguished by high artistic skill. The residential house

shown from the side of the inner courtyard is very decorative. On the first floor, it has wooden balconies along the length of the facade with carved railings, the tradition of which comes from the "Oda houses" (wooden house on piles) of West Georgia. A coloured glazed loggia with *musharabi* (stained glass) on the second floor is supported by a semicircular and an arrowed arch. Two trees and a girl can be seen in the paved yard.

The historical part of old Tbilisi has significantly changed its appearance over the decades. Tsimakuridze's series of old Tbilisi gives an insight into past life, the unique charm of the districts, streets and residential houses of 19th-century Tbilisi.

[M.So.]



Aleksandre Tsimakuridze (1881–1954)

*Balconied Houses in  
Sourp-Nishan District*

1927

Oil on canvas

55 × 80 cm

Purchased from the author in 1927

Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi History Museum, GNM  
Inv. No. N n-707

In this skilfully constructed composition, the structural arrangement and rhythm of the street and houses can be felt, which makes the environment moderate and balanced. The artist's

Tbilisi is illuminated by the sun, but the colour is both warm and cold at the same time, which is built on a peculiar combination of contrasting colours. The light reflection and the gentle net of shadows falling on the buildings and the ground make the image more obvious. Tsimakuridze creates an environment as delicate as lace with warm, gentle and transparent colour.

[M.So.]

Bibliography: Grishashvili 1928; Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2004;  
Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2013



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