

## TRADITIONAL GEORGIAN MEDICAL CULTURE AND MODERNITY

The information about the medical traditions of the ancient population of Georgia is provided by archaeological material. „In the Upper Palaeolithic layers, significant amounts of pollen (*C. jacea*, *A. annua*, *A. absinthium*, *A. millefolium* and *U. dioica*) were recorded in the cave, likely due to their flowering branches being brought in by humans for use. Detailed consideration of the pharmacological characteristics of the examined species showed that almost all of them have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antimicrobial and antipyretic activity and can be used successfully for the treatment of many inflammatory diseases (Martkoplshvili, Kvavadze 2015, 50) Archaeological finds include various surgical instruments (pincers, scalpels, and sickle - shaped knife reminiscent of the ancient Roman cephalotribe...), medical vessels, healed bones, trephined skulls and so on, beginning from the Bronze Age. It is noteworthy that the folk trephination practice had been preserved in Khevsureti (a highland province of Georgia), as late as the 50s of the twentieth century. According to the above-mentioned data, Georgian and Greek mythological traditions, the information provided by the ancient foreign authors, the Georgian historical medical and literary monuments and ethnographic material, the level of the traditional Georgian medical culture was quite high. It is noteworthy that the main heroine of the myth of Argonauts, Medea, who was the daughter of Aetes, king of Colchis, was very much aware of the secrets of making various medicines. Medea grew her medicinal herbs in special garden (Orphic Argonautica 1977, 107-108). Some medicinal plants from the garden of Medea, for example, laurel [*Laurus nobilis*] and Cornel [*Córnus*] are still used in the Georgian folk medicine.

Great importance is attached to the information given in Natural History by Pliny the Elder. It says that the best dill juice was prepared in Iberia (ancient kingdom of Georgia). The juice mixed with honey, was an excellent ointment (Greek and Roman Authors 1864, 112).

One of the oldest, original monuments of Georgian literature *The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik* (5th century), composed by Iakob Tsurtaveli (Jacob of Tsurtavi), who was the priest of the martyr, supplies ample of important information about ancient methods of medical treatment. From this work, we find that the clergymen pursued medical practice (see, Georgian Prose 1982).

Whereas, according to the one of the oldest historical sources of Georgia - *The Conversion of Georgia* (9<sup>th</sup> century (AD), in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (AD) the royal court of Georgia was served by a professional doctor (Life of Kartli 1955, 104). This is confirmed by ring found in one of the burials from the 4<sup>th</sup> century (AD) during archaeological excavations, with a men's representation in it. A cup entwined by a snake was represented on the ring. According to the opinion of Georgian archaeologists, the ring must have belonged to a professional healer (Apkhaidze 1955, 126).

Medical literature can be found in Georgia from the beginning of the 11th century. We also have 13th, 15th and 16th century medical books. This means that medical knowledge was highly developed in medieval Georgia. Of course, this knowledge was formed much earlier; however, earlier written sources have not reached us. It is clear that the professional physicians of that era were also interested in folk medical experience. This is because, in these medieval medical books, in addition to the classical medical knowledge of the civilized world of that time, some folk medical knowledge was also reflected. Some of Medical books at any rate served a noble cause, namely, to raise the level of medical knowledge

among the population of Georgia. Professional doctors, tried to spread medical knowledge among the people, therefore, if a person became ill and could not consult a doctor, he/she should have had enough knowledge to treat himself. David Bagrationi, in introduction of 16<sup>th</sup> manuscript *Iadigar Daudi* wrote: "I prayed to God to grant me sufficient intelligence and ability, power and understanding so that I should be able to join these two books (the books *Iadigar Daudi* is based on) and translate them as best as I can [...] so that if anyone falls ill at a place where there is no doctor, the man should no die" (Bagrationi 1985, 96). At the beginning of the 20th century, David Gambashidze, a clergymen wrote a medical book for the same purpose.

When Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire, the European medical system, which entered to Georgia through Russia, took its place and Georgian professional medicine moved into the field of traditional folk medicine. Some of the professional doctors who were brought up with the Georgian medical traditions have been granted the status of folk healers.

Above-mentioned processes have led to the fact that Georgian traditional medicine, in addition to empirical medical experience, also includes certain elements of assimilated medicine from classical medicine, which over time has developed into folk medical knowledge. Georgian traditional medicine was also influenced by the medical systems of the societies with which Georgians had certain relations to. In turn, Georgian medical knowledge was passed outside of the borders of the country, this is known from the information given by Jean Chardin, who wrote about several Georgian folk remedies from a folk healer from Tbilisi (Chardin 1975).

The variety of Georgia's nature and the diversity of her relief including high mountainous territories, hills and plateaus, plains and coastal plains, her Geographical position at the junction of Europe and Asia and the way of her historical

development facilitated the emergence of original popular traditions in different regions of Georgia. Under various natural conditions; all these traditions were united in the common Georgian traditional culture conditioning its diversity.

Traditional medicine of the regions of Georgia is distinguished by certain peculiarities. In the highlands, the geographical environment, socio-economical and historical conditions together with the specific pattern of their life facilitated special development of the treatment of traumas, reaching to a professional level. In the lowlands, the professional medicine was created on the basis of folk medicine; apart from the folk traumatology it also included obstetrics and professional therapeutic practice.

Like the old medieval Georgian and modern medicine, the traditional Georgian medicine knew three conditions of man: normal – health, man’s physical and spiritual health; deviation from the norm – illness; intermediate condition – impaired health, when one feels “neither well nor bad.”

Georgian traditional medicine includes quite interesting views on the relationship between diseases and the environment (natural and socio-cultural). According to these views, Malaria was connected to the humid climate of the swampy areas. This reflected the way of life of the local ancient people. According to archaeologists, in the Colchis Plain where swampy soil prevailed, a special way of life has been confirmed since the Neolithic period, which meant that the locals migrated to the mountains in summer and continued to live in lowlands in winter (Khakhutaishvili 1995, 50). Such a way of life, among other factors, was undoubtedly due to the prevalence of malaria in the region. There is an opinion about many peculiarities of the locals' life: the selection of high-altitude, dry wood as a building material, the excessive use of pepper and garlic in the local diet were due to the prevalence of malaria here.

The folk health care system was primarily concerned

with raising a healthy generation. Caring for the health of the baby and the mother was conditioned by many rules that the woman followed during pregnancy: restriction of physical activity, food ration ... Breast-feeding of the baby should be especially mentioned. The baby should have been breast-fed for at least 12 months, sometimes mother suckled the child until he/she was two or three years old. Suckling the baby was the main condition, which guaranteed its good health. A free breastfeeding regimen promoted complete nutrition and calming of the nervous system.

According to the methods of treatment of diseases in Georgia, one can distinguish between three groups of diseases: maladies treated basically by the empirical-rational remedies, treatment which combines both empirical-rational and magical-religious remedies and maladies treated only by magical-religious methods.

In the traditional Georgian medicine the folk classification of the diseases, based on different principles is attested, for instance according to the serious and mild diseases of the body parts and organs (head, eyes, liver...), contagious, communicable/epidemic or immunofacient diseases. Theoretical knowledge conditioned successful treatment of a number of diseases, in many cases the principles were analogous with the modern medical treatment and remedies, but as to the methods and medicines, they were different. Many medicines - herbal (mint, marjoram...), animal (coagulated blood, various kinds of fats...), mineral (medicinal stones, mineral waters...), ointments prepared on the basis of honey, various kinds of oils and the so-called home-made medicines including natural ingredients, methods of trauma treating, sequential treatment of the wound: pre-treatment with vodka or boiled water; stop bleeding with salt or any plant: parsnip, tobacco leaf or powder. A drug-soaked flax or hemp rope, was inserted into the deep wound to act as a tampon. warm, natural baths

(water, mud, dry-heated plants) - for diseases of the joints; massage - in case of various types of traumas, mastitis... fracture immobilization, traditions of the prevention of diseases, taking care of the sick person had a favourable influence on the patient and were effective even from the point of view of modern medicine.

This knowledge is not lost, even now they use: the peach oil in case of ear pain; Antispasmodic and sedative herbs: Mint [*Mentha*], Garden Heliotrope [*Valeriana Officinalis*] ... extract or tincture to relieve headache; The most effective herbs for treating gastrointestinal and liver diseases were: broadleaf plantain [*Plantago major*], yarrow [*Achillea millefolium*], Elecampane [*Inula helenium*], Oregano [*Origanum vulgare*], [*Leonurus* ], Blackberry [*Rubus*] roots, bitter dock [*Rumex*], marsh-mallow [*Altaea*], Chicory [*Cichorium intybus*], Absinthe [*Artemisia absinthium* ] ..., for the treatment of kidneys - dog rose [*Rosa canina*] or other plants.

The original method of treating purulent inflammation of the eye has been proven in one of the regions of Georgia - Lechkhumi. The healer would turn the patient's painful eyelid over, cover it with a thin plate of flint, drain the bloody pus, causing the pain to subside. He then continued his treatment with rose tin baths and diapers (Soselia 1985, 175-176). They also knew about dripping breast milk during various eye irritations.

In Georgia, the fact of using the *Contraria contrariis curantur* method is also confirmed. For example, cold-induced headaches were treated with "heat", and overheated headaches were treated with cold compresses. During specific headache, caused by high blood pressure, the barber was invited to bleed the patient. People noticed increase blood pressure by headache, facial flushing, or rapid heartbeat. This was linked to "extra blood" and barber was asked to take the "extra blood"

out. A barber was a person who could perform minor surgical procedures such as bloodletting, or pulling teeth.

The folk traditions of bioethics should be specially mentioned. The folk bioethical traditions meant gentle attitude towards the patient, support and empathy on the part of friends and relations and treating the sick person with special love. These traditions also included special attitude towards the physically and mentally handicapped persons, facilitating their integration into social life; they were isolated only in urgent cases, taking into consideration the form and seriousness of the illness, which was an impressive example of solidarity and humane attitude towards the sick.

In folk medicine a rather large place was occupied by the practice of magical-religious healing, which was resorted to when the objective cause of the disease was unknown or treatment was ineffective.

Sometimes the cause of the disease was thought to be man, or to put it more correctly, man's unknown power, his/her evil gaze – “an evil eye,” – negative aura; Sometimes to the soul of the deceased, if the traditional rules prescribed for him were violated; In other cases the illness, as the cause of upsetting the social order, was attributed to antisocial elements – the evil spirits, their habitat being in the vertical dimension considered to be under the ground and under the sky, in the horizontal dimension it was the territory beyond man's “home,” the area beyond the socially regulated interior. the time of their activity was “untimely time,” “darkness” – the period between sunset and sunrise.

At the same time, the good forces of the world – God, angels, deities and saints were also considered as the causes of diseases, who besides taking care of people's welfare they could also punish them, in most cases the punishment being illness.

Basically, the disease was thought to be punishment for the sin committed in towards God, deity, saint and the dead person.

The ethical norms of the Georgian people were mainly established on the basis of the religious creed, therefore, sickness as a sanction, may be considered to be a factor of regulating the moral norms and one of the forms of the social control over the population in different regions of Georgia.

Perceiving illness as a punishment is one of the most ancient forms of social control. The unreal etiology led to the differentiated use of magical-religious means of disease prevention and treatment. If the cause of sickness was thought to be a crime against a deity or the influence of evil spirits, then "treatment" also meant influencing these causes. In one case, these rituals served to win the heart of the deity, and in the other - to expel the evil spirits. The exorcism ritual for the mentally ill, was mostly held in churches, while in the highlands of eastern Georgia it was held in local shrines.

As above-mentioned, when treatment was not effective, charms and other magico-religious rituals were used.

For example, charms were used to cure patients affected by an evil eye, or those who had experienced great fear.

An incantation directed against all the malice, evil spirits etc., in general these have been attested in Georgia. The population believed that charm helped everyone - those frightened by evil spirit or attacked by evil eye, also those whose sickness was caused by an evil spirit.

Treatment with spells had a psychotherapeutic effect and was especially effective in combination with naturopathic treatment.

The traditional medicine of Georgia viewed children's infectious diseases on the basis of religious beliefs and ideas; these diseases are called **sakhadi** (infectious disease, after

which the patient acquires immunity for it), **batonebi** (masters, lords) and **Angelozebi** (angels). There are seven of such diseases: **smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, mumps, German measles** and **chicken-pox**; so the name **sakhadi**, indicates that after these diseases the human body acquired immunity, means that population of Georgia had some definite knowledge about their character.

Georgians believed that children's infectious diseases (**batonebi**) were divine, they were sent by God, but they have their own patron, mainly St. Barbara. Only in Khevi (mountainous region of Eastern Georgia), the cult of St. Barbara is replaced with the cult of St. John the Baptist, maybe for the reason that St. John the Baptist is generally considered to be the patron saint of children, and his protection here seems to be natural.

Batonebi was a debt owed to God and it was obligatory to suffer at least from one of these diseases. In this regard, the term ghvtis vali (God's debt) spread among the East-Georgian mountaineers, and the term sakhadi ('something to be paid') serves as a good proof of this.

When batonebi "visits home", the sick child's room must be cleaned and decked with pleasant things (flowers, etc.). Spring is batonebi's favorite season. Rose and violet are their beloved flowers. At the sick child's bedside, a table is laid with sweets and sometimes with red eggs. Candles made of crushed or well dried walnuts are lit. Walnut candles may be lit in the corners of the room. The room is filled with very pleasant fragrance to gratify the angels. Every evening the grandmother, mother or aunt of the sick child tries to amuse him by singing the lullaby. The content of such songs is worship and praise of the angels. The song expresses happiness caused by their "visit". The bans connected with this disease play a great role in these customs. The bans refer to the sick child and the members of his family. Thus, for instance, the sick child is not

allowed to eat bitter and peppery dishes, meals with garlic are also forbidden, because it is said that the angels hate its taste and smell. The female members of the household are not allowed to sweep the room, cook meals in the same room, etc., because the dust and steam may burn the eyes of the angels. Women are forbidden to knit and sew, as needles might prick the eyes of the angels. The father is not allowed to drink alcohol, because of the angels that hate strong drinks, also was forbidden noise, crying, cooking in the house of the sick... The wishes of the sick had to be satisfied, because the sick person was considered to be the embodiment of angels. The rules designed to glorify the angels of the “Batonebil” actually created a calm and pleasant environment for the sick person, had a positive effect on his nervous system and fastened recovery.

The mother of the sick child with her naked breasts goes round the bed on her knees. Her breasts touch the ground. She entreats the Mother Earth to help her. This is a reflection of an ancient belief and a manifestation of the cult of the Mother Earth. The eminent Georgian ethnographer Vera Bardavelidze studied all the aspects of the beliefs related to this disease, linking them to the cult of the Great Mother (Bardavelidze 1957, 93). According to the mentioned materials, it can be concluded that in the beliefs related to children’s infectious diseases various religious layers can be clearly presumably, Christianity, which became the state religion in Georgia in the 4th century, exerted considerable influence on the cult of batonebi (children’s infectious diseases). This cult was reinterpreted in terms of the Christian religion. The nature and character of the diseases play one of the leading roles in the origins of the beliefs and customs related to batonebi, and it is clear that the belief in a debt owed to God was actually determined by the immune character of these diseases. The various customs related to the above-mentioned diseases are largely results of

folk empirical observations and imply a rational mode of care and treatment. The conditions created to please 'the angels' – dim light, pleasant scent, music and calm atmosphere in the family, and light diet are beneficial for the sick child and his nervous system. It is known that the nervous system of a patient is out of order and calm and pleasant surroundings exert a salutary effect on him.

Today, when the corona virus pandemic has spread almost to the entire world, it is probably interesting to what extent the Georgian people resorted to epidemics. Various epidemic diseases were periodically spread in Georgia: typhoid, dysentery, measles, cholera, plague ..., which were considered incurable. Therefore, various methods have been used since ancient times to prevent them or to stop the spread of the epidemic. Mainly to divert the spread of the disease from the hearth. The facts of eviction and relocation of individual families, as well as the whole district or village are confirmed. The patient was isolated in his own house and/or in special buildings away from the village. In some mountainous regions of East Georgia, in a ravine far from the village, in mostly elevated places, the remains of above-ground and underground tombs can be seen, which, according to the locals, were used to accommodate the sick during the plague epidemic. These small buildings were a kind of complex, consisting of a surface aqueduct, probably to place the sick, from a pit tomb, to bury the dead. Archaeologists do not deny the fact that "the origin of some of the collective tombs may be linked to an epidemic or any social calamity" (Kalandadze 1980, 24) and to the shrine, which points to the care of the clergy for the physical and spiritual salvation of the sick. The sick realized that they were neither forsaken by God nor by men. This gave them hope of survival and alleviated their sense of despair. According to legend, when the Plague spread in one of the mountainous regions of Georgia, Khevsureti, the infected villagers of Anatori, went, of their own free will to die in specific little buildings, distanced

far away from the village. This fact is particularly interesting in terms of bioethics.

We also note that the Georgian Folk Moral Code includes very important traditions of bioethics, which include correct, benevolent attitude towards the sick, especially the mentally ill. Also noteworthy fact is the folk traditions of palliative care, which implied the tender attitude to a mortally doomed person not only by his family members, but also by his relatives and neighbors. They often stayed with the sick person at night, to take care of him, allowed his family members to rest. This tradition is still alive in the villages of Georgia. Attitudes towards patients and people with disabilities have not changed either.

According to the population of Georgia, the healer must be well versed in his work experienced, highly responsible, and a quiet man.

It is known that the disease causes changes not only in the human body itself but also in the society. It is a deviation, one of the reasons for the disruption of public order, the sick in his surrounding society, can no longer perform the function that was entrusted to him in health, can not fulfill her/his social obligations, disrupts the usual way of life and rhythm of society. This is why the attitudes of the society towards the sick were different in different peoples and different eras. In ancient societies, the attitude to sick men was mostly negative (Sigerist 1977, 389-390). In Georgia, the attitude towards the patient, no matter what kind of illness he had, was positive. The sick were not deprived of care and were treated with respect and restraint. Such an attitude towards the disabled and disabled person activated the feelings of solidarity and humanity in the society.

Many traditional remedies have stood the test of the time and have been introduced into modern medicine. These are, for example: Colchian ointment, Phytomal, Turmanidze ointment or others.

Last year our ethnographic expedition was working on the issues of traditional medicine. In one of the mountainous regions of Georgia – Khevi. While working, it was found that the practice of magical-religious healing, healing is no longer actually proven here. However, almost every family uses traditional medicinal plants to treat or to prevent various diseases. The rules of consumption which was established over the centuries, are well preserved in the memory of the local population. Also, it is noteworthy fact that the traditional medical knowledge, if necessary, takes the form of an active healing practice. The following is true: in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet medical system collapsed and it took a long time to replace it with a new medical system. At that time, my colleagues and I had to work on the traditional medicine in one of the regions of Georgia - Kakheti. It turned out that the population, which was often unable to access state medical services, resorted the traditional medicine, which led to the revival of many local healing traditions.

All of the above-mentioned is a sign that Georgian traditional medicine was an organic part of the overall Georgian medical culture and together with the official medical institutions, it served the population and still serves. Of course, with some modifications, this reality is conditioned by the existence of still incurable diseases and various sociocultural factors ... I am for from the idea from comparing folk medicine with the official medicine. Although, not only in the past, but even today folk medicine performs a definite function in the medical service of the population, which is conditioned by a number of certain factors – social, economical, psychological, by the low level of the state health care. At the same time, even in the countries where the level of the state medical service is very high a certain part of the population does resort to folk medicine, as there still are incurable diseases; hence seriously sick patients use any means, folk medical practice among them, to alleviate their suffering.

But the chief cause of the viability of folk medicine was its being rational and effective. This can be said not only about naturopathy but about magical and religious medical practice as well.

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**ნინო მინდაძე**

## **ტრადიციული ქართული სამედიცინო კულტურა და თანამედროვეობა**

საქართველოს უძველესი მოსახლეობის სამედიცინო ტრადიციების შესახებ ინფორმაციას არქეოლოგიური მასალა გვანვდის. ბრინჯაოს ხანიდან მოყოლებული არქეოლოგიური აღმოჩენები მოიცავს ქირურგიულ ინსტრუმენტებს, შეხორცებულ ძვლებს, ტრეპანირებულ თავის ქალებს... შუა საუკუნეების ქართულ სამედიცინო ლიტერატურაში იმდროინდელი ცივილიზებული სამყაროს კლასიკური სამედიცინო ცოდნის გარდა, გარკვეული ხალხური სამედიცინო ცოდნაც აისახა.

საქართველოს რეგიონების ტრადიციული მედიცინა გარკვეული თავისებურებებით გამოირჩევა. მაღალმთიანეთში გეოგრაფიულმა გარემომ, სოციალურმა, კულტურულმა და ისტორიულმა პირობებმა მათი ცხოვრების სპეციფიკასთან ერთად ხელი შეუწყო ტრავმების მკურნალობის განსაკუთრებულ განვითარებას. დაბლობში ხალხური ტრავმატოლოგიის გარდა, ტრადიციული მედიცინა მოიცავდა მეანობას. ანვითარდა ხალხურ მკურნალთა ინსტიტუტი.

ქართული ტრადიციული მედიცინა ოფიციალურ სამედიცინო დაწესებულებებთან ერთად ემსახურებოდა მოსახლეობას და დღესაც ემსახურება. ბევრმა ტრადიციულმა სამკურნალო საშუალებამ გაუძლო დროს. ზოგიერთი მათგანი დანერგილია თანამედროვე მედიცინაში.