



SILK IN GEORGIAN CULTURE AND RELIGION: PAST AND PRESENT

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INTRODUCTION

- **Silk is a Philosophy**
- Today, silk producers and designers have found new application of silk fiber.
- **Silk is a philosophy**: it is everywhere and yet invisible;
- **Silk is a bridge** between civilizations (Ancient Silk Rout), between the epochs - past and present;
- **Silk has been a part of many religions** - Christian, Muslim, Buddhism, appearing in religious attire, embroidery and different religious items; it has become a material and immaterial commodity throughout centuries;
- **Silk is transparent** and light, and still very firm;
- Its softness, elegance and grace have **inspired poets and artists**, and is loved by rich and poor alike.
- **Silk** could become our **vision** of peaceful world which is not cruel, vulgar and coarse; Silk is our **wish** to see the future relations between the nations as soft and transparent, as firm and clear as silk itself;
- **Silk is a network** made of delicate thin silk thread which unites world nations, many of which are presented here at the conference;
- Silk is like a **Sphinx** which is being revived all the time; it finds new life forms and is virtually immortal! It continues to find new applications in industry, art, fashion.



○ **Historical roots:**

- Sericulture in Orthodox, Islamic and other religions have always been a part of common historical memory. Historical roots of silk production in Georgia, wide application of silk fiber and silk thread in different branches of industry, culture, religion, art and lifestyle, historical annals reflecting sericulture and silk application – all evidence about the significance of sericulture and silk production in Georgia
- Ancient trade route from west to East -“Silk Road” passed through Georgia which played an important role in popularization of silk production and silk trade.
- Marco Polo, (born in 1254), a 13th century Venetian explorer, writer and merchant who travelled to Central and Eastern Asia, visited Georgia, describes in his Kingdom of Georgia the capital city - Tbilisi: “In this country is a fine city of great size named Tiflis, surrounded by subordinate towns and townships. The inhabitants are Christians (that is Armenians and Georgians) besides a few Saracens and Jews, but not many. Silk and many other fabrics are woven here. The inhabitants live by their industry and are subject to Great Khan of Tartars”



MARCO POLO, (BORN IN 1254), A 13TH CENTURY VENETIAN EXPLORER, TELLS ABOUT GEORGIAN SILK



- Throughout the centuries, silk has found application in producing **religious items** and in different branches of culture. Historically, **silk attires** often richly decorated with **embroidery**, were sown for the royal family members and for high society representatives. Silk cloth and embroidery was also used for production of religious items and decoration of chambers.
- **The purpose of the present paper is to investigate diverse application of silk fiber in Georgia at present and identify its significance in future.**
- **The rationale is that it will presumably lead to restoration of Georgian silk production, as the initiatives in this direction have been made.**



“SILK IN TRANSITION”

- **“Silk in transition”** the term has been introduced by us and indicates that the present silk fiber production technologies have been advanced and is striving for further changes to make the production more efficient, applicable and accessible for a wider circles of customers; furthermore, it means that silk has found its way to different branches of industry and is applied in different areas, such as design, fashion, medicine and industry, just to name a few.



SILK IN GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

- In 1940, in one of the small churches near the village “Pataragori”, a body which was preserved in a cave beside the church wall was excavated. The scientists identified the body as “Mummified”. Through the morphological study and method of carbon dating the age of the cloth of the body was defined. It belonged to the 990 +/- 90. The body was dressed in a greenish-brownish attire decorated with natural silk blaze. The cloth was identified to be woven in Georgia. <http://ka.wikipedia.org/wiki/aleksi> (Shushania).



GEORGIAN SILK EMBROIDERY

- **Composition is made of silk cloth and silk thread, also it is embroidered with gold and silver thin thread, decorated with pearl, coral beads. The embroidery was donated by Shergil and Natel Dadiani to Martvili Monastery. Size: 34x 34. Kept in Katskhi Trinity Church. Western Georgia.**



JESUS FAMILY TREE. SILK GOLD AND AND SILVER
EMBROIDERY. SIONI CHURCH, TBILISI, SOURCE JANASHIA
HISTORICAL MUSEUM 149X158.



Georgian Ecclesiastic embroidery



. COMPOSITION "MOURNING OF JESUS. MADE IN: SILK, GOLD AND SILVER EMBROIDERY, SILK THREAD.
SILK EMBROIDERY. SVETITSKHOVELI CHURCH, EAST GEORGIA.
1446-1466. 156X204 CM

- Georgian ecclesiastical embroidery is an organic and original part of Christian art in which it is perfectly reflected embroidery artist's refined taste and mastery, profound knowledge of the Christian liturgy as well as canonical symbolism and iconographic schemes and technical skills without which such highly artistic pieces of Christian art could not be created.
- Embroiderers were equally mastered in monumental (Epitaphios, curtains, bigomophorions), as well as in tiny (reliquaries, cases for icon, an adornments for bishop's vestment) embroidery methods.



GEORGIAN TRADITIONAL EMBROIDERY. SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE DEDICATED TO MEDIEVAL AGES GEORGIAN EMBROIDERY

საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმი
შალვა ამირანაშვილის სახელობის ხელოვნების მუზეუმი



სამეცნიერო კონფერენცია
შუა საუკუნეების ქართული ნაქარგობა:
ტრადიცია და თანამედროვე ტენდენციები

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თბილისი, ფურცელაძის 3



GEORGIAN TRADITIONAL EMBROIDERY

DADIANI PALACE

- The patterns of ecclesiastical embroidery which are preserved in the storage rooms of textile and embroidery collections housed in the Dadiani Palaces Historical and Architectural Museum, date back to the 17th-19th centuries. Many of them attract attention by their composition, dynamic and subtle design, iconography, inscriptions containing considerable data, refined color palette and exquisite technique.



GEORGIAN SILK IN THE 1970S

- In 1950-1990, Georgia was producing classical silk textile (mostly textile gained from the *crêpe** thread): *crêpe de chine, crêpe-georgette, crêpe maroken, crêpe chiffon*. *Crêpe* spinned thread was giving a graining form to textile. Textile with the smooth surface was also produced. The quality of *Crêpe Satin*, made by the Kutaisi silk factory till 70-ies of 20th century, has to be especially mentioned. Women's dresses for the Sukhishvili's National Dance Company which deserved admiration in many countries were designed by Georgian well-known theater painter Soliko Virsaladze and were sewed with locally produced silk material. Pure silk jacquard and imprinted materials, made by the Georgian painters and designers were approved on the various exhibitions and fashion shows.

○ *



NEW LIFE OF ANCIENT GEORGIAN ATTIRE

- Georgian artists, culture managers, museum specialists give new life to some wonderful ancient samples of silk embroidery and historical silk attire, religious items decorated with silk needlework by studying, investigating, collecting, promoting and displaying them.



- Some samples from S. Virsaladze's collection designed for Georgian National Sukhishvili Balley



SILK DRESS DESIGNED FOR THE DANCE COMPANY.



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COSTUM

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Satin, t



TBILISI STATE SILK MUSEUM

- The Museum and its library give clear understanding about the glorious past of Georgian sericulture demonstrating the samples of silk cloth produced in our country decorated with wonderful patterns and colors reflecting historical traditions and fashion trends of the periods they were created. For example, when we studied the colors traditionally used in the 18-19th century textile, we easily identified the most frequently applied coloration in modern silk art.



Decorative flowers hand-made, 19th century produced from Georgian silk (Exhibited at Silk Museum)



NEW LIFE OF HISTORICAL DRESSES

One example of attempt to popularize Georgian silk has been recently made by Art Palace, Tbilisi (Director Giorgi Kalandia). The project involves creating patterned materials that mimic the garments worn by Georgian historical figures. Local artists are recreating fashion history by mimicking the colors and patterns of ancient garb and transferring it onto material used in the modern world. Historically, garment of high class were particularly made from fine quality Georgian silk. The project: “Historic Garments Brought to Life” restores wonderful pieces of silk fabrics worn by Georgia’s medieval nobility. (Georgian State Museum of Theatre, Music, Cinema and Choreography - Art Palace. <http://www.artpalace@ge>.) **attempts to attract public interest to revival.**



Tbilisi's Art Palace restores fabric worn by Georgia's medieval nobility. Wonderful pieces of fabrics – historical patterns. Georgian silk never ceases to attract attention of wide public.



BATIKA – SILK ART IN GEORGIA HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT OF GEORGIAN SILK

- *Batika is truly one of the most labor-consuming, and only a very industrious and diligent artist continue working in this direction. Besides, the material is very expensive and requires particular knowledge and experience to work in silk art”, says in her interview Eka Khuntsaria, a member of the group.*



BATIKA, 2014-2018. E. XUNTSARIA. GEORGIAN NATIONAL COSTUMES



BATIKA. E. XUNTSARIA. GEORGIAN ALPHABET. 2016





BATIKA, 2016,



A WALL IN BATIKA ART STUDIO, TBILISI, GEORGIA, 2017



ONE CAMEL FROM SILK ROAD ROUTE
CARAVAN... SILK ROUTE WILL BRING SILK BACK
TO GEORGIA!



- The study of the historical patterned materials that mimic the garments worn by Georgian historical figures exhibited at the Museum of Art in Tbilisi, and analysis of interview results with well-known Georgian silk artists also testifies that modern silk art has been inspired and stimulated by unique historical patterns of Georgian silk textile. There is a hope that one day the artists will paint on silk material produced in Georgia.
- In the beginning was silk fabric and it gave birth to silk art, there is a hope that now art will bring to life once glorious Georgian silk textile to play its exclusive role in industry and art.
- Increased popularity of silk art is a reflection of century-old traditions of silk production in Georgia. **So, along with other applications of silk in different branches, *Batika* may also appear as a one of the inspirations for revival of Georgian sericulture.**



SILK FOR PRODUCTION OF SAILS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

- Ancient Georgians used silk to construct sails because it needs fabrics that may be woven or manufactured as films.
- Construction of such sails requires stitching, bonding, reinforcements and other features to achieve this. It is also important to have high resistance to ultraviolet light and flex strength – strength lost due to bending and folding. Cotton and silk textiles and raw silk from a rough sail cloth was particularly used for this purpose which allowed ships to sail into the wind. Silk fabric used for making sails, tents, and other items where sturdiness is required. Silk fabric was also used for sails in Europe.
- Historically, cotton and silk was used in Georgia to produce household products such as curtains, rope, upholstery, buttons, umbrellas and clothing which are usually made out of light, strong fabric originally silk. Silk fabric also was also popularly used for bookbinding and in fashion – clothes and decorations, handbags and shoes manufactured in Georgia.



Historically, cotton and silk was used in Georgia
to produce sails



SILK IN GEORGIAN FASHION DESIGNERS

- Silk has always been one of the favorite materials for clothes and Today, silk producers and designers have found new application of silk fiber. It is ageless and seasonless, and always look fashion.
- The designers of the world today create iconic pieces that are relevant in many situations; it fits mood and lifestyle of many who prefer natural fiber. The technologies of silk fiber are being developed and now silk is more wearable, washable and comfortable. Another quality of silk is that it is feminine and sexy for young customers, yet sophisticated enough for an older customer that embraces its relaxed, bohemian sensibility.



- Today, silk clothing is no longer a domain of the rich, luxury-goods purchasers who wants timeless investments.
- It has gone through democratization process, and today we witness new treatment of 5000 year old fiber which has been rediscovered and silk garments are available in an affordable prices and has a wide circle of customers.



- Demna Gvasalia an artistic director of Balenciaga,. The signature of the house of Balenciaga is a strict, well-shaped clothes created from a high-twist silk – “gazar”, cut with a minimum of seams. At Paris Fashion Week Gvasalia presented his triumphant first collection for Balenciaga, where offered the audience, a mix of Balenciaga’s legacy with new, radically different innovative clothing. Shimmering lurex knits teamed with oversized puffer coats and architectural proportions excited the fashion industry.





SILK AND GEORGIAN DESIGNERS

- In December 2013, *House of Thierry Mugler* announced David Koma, 29 years old Georgian born, London based fashion designer, as a new Artistic Director of the *Maison Mugler*.
- Koma's collections are inspired by feminine forms. Through his women's ready-to-wear collections, Koma has reinterpreted the brand's fashion codes and introduced mixture of minimalist style with metal and silk details.



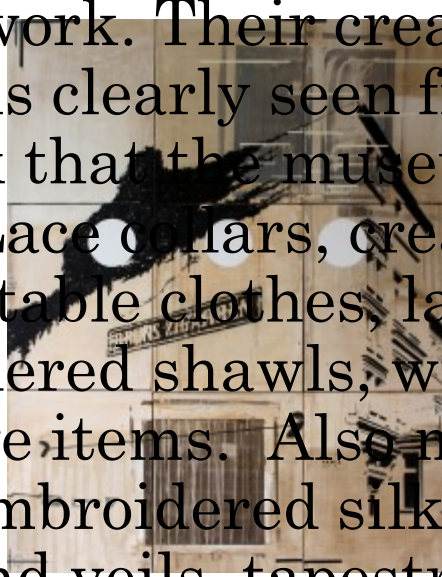
SILK IN GEORGIAN DESIGNERS' WORKS

- ESMOD alumna, Tamuna Ingorokva is one of the more recognizable names on the Georgian fashion scene. Since 2002, she has been producing designs under her namesake label and cultivating a solid client base. A self-proclaimed minimalist, having worked under Nina Ricci in Paris, Ingorokva Fall/Winter 2016 collection exudes that understated elegance that many other Georgian designers are struggling to achieve. She uses silk materials to convey feminine look of a strong modern woman.



SILK IN HOUSEHOLD

- Georgian women have always been particularly talented in needlework. Their creative talent and high artistic taste is clearly seen from numerous samples of artwork that the museums keep today. Those are: Lace collars, cream silk tulle, Hand embroidery, table clothes, lamps, beadwork, embroidered shawls, wide range of antique and vintage items. Also many different articles, such as embroidered silk pictures, wedding dresses and veils, tapestries, shoes and accessories, women's outwear, silk needlework, silk embroidery tapestry, and others have been produced in Georgia.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Georgian artists should unite and create an **international organization** of painters, and designers, also practitioners and educators who will promote Georgian silk work throughout the world, **initiate publication of journal (Georgian Silk Art) and researches** in this area. Batika,- painting on silk, clothes, accessories and household items created from silk, silk embroidery, Georgian national garment of men and women, and other creative inventions will establish silk art as a recognized art form, validate and encourage the production, collecting, and displaying of Georgian silk through education of all segments of the population, including the international arena.



CONCLUSIONS:

- Silk has much broader meaning – being a means of communication between nations
- Silk is a part of Georgian national mentality, a common memory of our community.
- Application of silk in art, fashion and design in industry and in production of religious items, preservation of century-old traditions, silk museum activities and exhibitions dedicated to popularization of silk, restoration of historical cloth samples, testifies that modern silk is respected and highly evaluated by Georgians.
- Silk affection can be traced through artistic activities inspired and stimulated by the unique quality of silk, by its virtues and splendor. The century-old traditions will regain after a 30-year disruption because silk cloth is an organic part of Georgian family life, fashion and home design.
- Hopefully, initiatives started for restoration of sericulture in Georgia will continue as substantial projects and bring into life unique Georgian silk fabric.



TASTE AND TALENT OF GEORGIAN ARTISTS COVER TOPICS SUCH AS *MEMORY* AND *IDENTITY* - THE ISSUES ACTUAL IN TODAY'S POST-SOVIET CULTURE OF GEORGIA, . YET THE CENTRAL AXIS TO THEIR WORKS REMAINS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HISTORICAL ROOTS AND MODERN REALITY, BRIDGING PAST AND PRESENT.



CONCLUSIONS

- **Georgian art is saturated with passion for art and a strong attachment to traditions. One can trace the influence of the highly developed civilizations of the world, but Georgian art remains authentic in its essence.**
- **Each piece of art is nourished with the affection for their homeland. A brilliant approach to color and expressive brushstrokes are one of the characteristics of Georgian artists;**
- **Deep affection for motherland, with roots deep in Christianity, Search for personal truth and desire to learn about the transcendental world was and still is the source for their enlightened art.**



LAST MESSAGE.....

- **There is “one secret” about Georgian painters. They do not lose ties with real objects which become a common plane for sharing ideas and setting communication between people. For example.**



