Georgia's European Ways

Political and Cultural Perspectives

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"LOOSENED FROM THE EAST, WE ALWAYS ASPIRED TOWARDS THE WEST"

"Loosened from the east, we have always aspired towards the west. Every turn in our history is marked with this aspiration, Every swing of our creation was branded in yellow with this aspiration"

From Grigol Robakidze's[1] address to the European Socialist International delegation in the name of Georgian writers. Barrikadi, No 1, 1920.

Georgia's aspiration towards Europe is based not only on historic stories, but also on numerous documents and proven facts and events. It is interesting to explore the impact this material has had on our life and culture, and to understand the basic features of our story that have motivated us to always move in one direction, and why this direction has always seemed desirable for us. If we take a broader view of history, not only will the long story of the European choice become obvious, but we will also become convinced that, as Robakidze said, "every swing of our creation was branded" with our aspirations towards the West.

Indeed, Western elements can be seen in all spheres creative. But when this becomes obvious in architecture – that most complex sphere, which combines lifestyle and art, and which is the clearest manifestation of talent, skill, taste, and, most importantly, the choice of the nation – no questions about orientation remain, as architecture is not the same as, for example, clothes, which very few can order in Paris or make on the spot, imitating foreigners. The implementation of architectural projects is a result of the collective contribution of society at a specific time and era and is directly dependent on a nation's political, social, religious, and cultural situation as well as its historically shaped traditions and lifestyle.

[1] Grigol Robakidze (1880-1962) – a Symbolist Georgian author.

Architecture is the clearest reflection of a nation's character, soul, and heart. Building and architectural experience often reflects the knowledge and aspirations hidden deep within layers of consciousness which have accumulated over centuries. Despite the fact that we have repeatedly failed to achieve full-fledged integration with Europe due to various circumstances, a look at Georgian architectural heritage will make it absolutely clear that "we have always aspired towards the west". . However, this aspiration has taken its own, unique path.

Of course, had we had the appropriate desire, we have always possessed the necessary amount of information regarding building and architecture in Europe to be able to follow the European path of architectural development., However, in order for the appropriate will and readiness to have expressed themselves, an equal environment would have been needed. The notion of an aspiration towards the West carries the implication of having only the best values in common, and does not include the loss of freedom or national identity. It was due to these types of threats that we responded to the violence coming from Orthodox Christian Europe – the Byzantine Empire – with the rejection of the accompanying culture and decided to create a wholly original ecclesiastic architecture, This aim was achieved and we took such a "praiseworthy path" that Georgian heritage is invariably mentioned when listing the achievements of Orthodox Christian architecture.

Unlike the Byzantine Empire with its relative security, Georgia faced constant Muslim expansion and frequent continued enslavement which gave rise to other threats and a specific reaction to these threats. In most cases, Georgia's direct confrontation with outside imperial ambitions endangered the survival of the nation and the instinct for self-preservation forced us to conform to outside influences, but even in these most complicated times, we managed to create and disseminate our own culture. Alien forms and elements, even those coming from mortal enemies, were so skilfully "stewed" in Georgia's cultural "fermentation" that the final product nevertheless retained a "taste" of our own.

A constant openness towards alien elements, which is a central feature of our soul and character, enabled us to introduce these elements broadly in the arts and everyday life, even though they were mostly imposed on us by force. Such new elements were introduced in amounts and with such tact as to become merely organic decorations, becoming part of the final image of what we already had and ultimately expressing only the authenticity and diversified nature of our own artefacts. Suffice it to mention that some architectural and construction forms characteristic of the Islamic world found their place not only in secular architecture, but also in Georgian churches.

Thousands of buildings extant on current, or historic, Georgian territory confirm the aforementioned. Correspondingly, this is an issue for much

broader research. Given this, we will try to describe the historic picture in general terms and then consider the recent past in more detail.

There is no doubt that for centuries, the main reason for the preservation of "our own" culture was the character of the nation, and its main feature that has taken shape historically: being surrounded by mostly hostile countries, cultures, and civilisations and often facing the threat of disappearance, we viewed the preservation of our unique face as the only method for survival. However, what is meant by "face"? What is it? Is it loyalty to the culture, religion, lifestyle and taste? Is it a selfless obstinacy, or the fear of being assimilated by others? In our opinion, it is all this together supplemented by the central aspect that determines every nation's subscription to one concrete worldview of civilisation: cultural orientation, which is the path to the desirable world that we regard as most appropriate for us. And, for Georgia, this path has long borne a name: Europe.

It is our precise architectural heritage that reflects the nation's spiritual and cultural face that provides the main evidence for our historic orientation. As regards the question of whether Georgian architecture is European or Asian, the answer is unambiguous: our culture in general and architecture in particular is obviously European. That is strongly individualistic, open, marked by Christian values and, if we refer to modern definitions, definitely democratic. Architecture which is "closed" to the environment by blind facades turned towards the streets with the deliberately blocked and sealed characteristic of Asia has always been alien to us. Being historically situated at the crossroads of multiple ethnicities and cultures, ethnic groups with equal rights existed harmoniously in Georgia, creating their own culture and art without losing ties with their own individual roots. In short, the main principle of today's Europe – the harmonious unification of various nations within one European family – has been natural and well-known to Georgia for a long time.

Unlike other periods, the architecture which flourished during the era of Georgia's absorption by the Russian Empire is definitely European not only in Tbilisi, but also in small towns or other big cities. Reflections of western architecture can be seen everywhere: in town planning, residential structures, or buildings serving some other functions. Therefore, the only thing one needs to do to admit that the architecture of our recent past was European is simply express the desire to see it for what it is.

However, if we keep turning a blind eye to the urban heritage of 19th and 20th century Georgia and take a look at the appearance of European cities in general, we will indeed fail to see anything familiar with our cities. However, in its essence, architecture is not confined to its visible side. As an inseparable part of life, it is also alive, so it is born and can die. Like in

any living organism, spirituality and the features that ultimately determine the national character and cultural choice expressed in historic memory are decisive in defining architecture.

It is clear that in this regard, even externally most "non-European" pieces of architecture in our country are precisely European in their essence, as they bear fundamental European values and a European cultural spirit. Georgian architecture is Christian, free, and open; harmoniously combined with the landscape and climate. It shares the cultures of many ethnicities and civilisations and, at the same time, it is emphatically individualistic.

Isolated from Europe after the fall of Constantinople (1453), Georgia established contacts with the Western world and particularly from the 19th century, as part of the Russian Empire. The geographical position of our country, particularly its coastline on the Black Sea, enabled us to establish and maintain contact with Europe more quickly than we did with the central part of Russia. Therefore, the opinion that everything European reached us only via Russia is not valid. The role of the empire was not decisive in bringing about the Europeanisation of our country. That said, it is true that our absorption by the Russian Empire did open for us a path to Europe that had been blocked for centuries. However, we had been aware of the existence of this path since ancient times. Moreover, we were already related to Europe due to our common spiritual roots in classical culture and the Bible.

The public that enjoyed this open road to Europe brought new fashions, aesthetics, and various novelties back to the country and disseminated

them. However, this could not have happened had the necessary climate not already existed in the country. It is clear that the "grounds for such Europeanisation were being prepared earlier, back in the 18th century, never mind the fact that it was Europe that Georgia had naturally been culturally oriented towards for centuries. The 'East' with its specific habits and traditions was imposed on it by force during the last centuries of the existence of Georgian kingdoms." (Beridze, V. Architecture in Tbilisi. Vol. 1, p17)

Although Georgia was the political and administrative centre of the Russian Empire in the Transcaucasus, the gap between Georgia and Europe was particularly evident here in the early 19th century. One fact can help us to clarify the situation in general: at a large industrial exhibition in London in 1851, architect Joseph Paxton presented a huge Crystal Palace made of metal and glass, built over a period of five months with the use of the most up-to-date materials and technologies. The building's total floor area amounted to more than 71,000 square metres. At that time, Georgians lived in conditions of serfdom, which was abolished only 13 years later, in 1864. This comparison illustrates how far removed we were from the achievements of Paxton and Europe in general, but we had already achieved some success in architecture. By the 1840s, this weak country, which continued to live according to the rules of feudalism, elaborated and developed an example of free creation appropriate for the new era and conditions: the residential houses typical of Tbilisi, which were a combination of local, classicist, and traditional architecture, and are believed to constitute the first serious step made by Georgian architecture under the conditions of obsolescent feudalism.

This victory was not easily won: being part of the Russian Empire and hence of a new socio-political environment, that this entailed made it necessary to construct buildings with new functions previously unknown in feudal Georgia. In addition, the official construction policy of that time envisioned the implementation of obligatory projects elaborated in advance only by relevant services of the empire in the "Russian Classicist" style. This rule was equally valid for state and public buildings, as well as residential architecture. Given the fact that, at that time, we did not have any professional architects, engineers, or builders appropriate for that time, the scope of the obstacles our compatriots had to overcome is clear.

Living conditions also changed during this era, leading to the elimination of traditional dwellings such as houses with "bani" (flat earth cover roofs) and "darbazi" (hall) type houses. These disappeared from towns together with the Feudal system. However, due to certain universal features that are regarded as exemplary even in modern architecture such traditional styles continue to be topical. These features were best described by Marcus Vitruvius Pollio in the 1st century BC: firmitas, utilitas, venustas

(firmness, convenience, beauty). Even in the world of the 21st century, the Bani buildings often decorated with vegetative covering, continue to be widespread and popular.

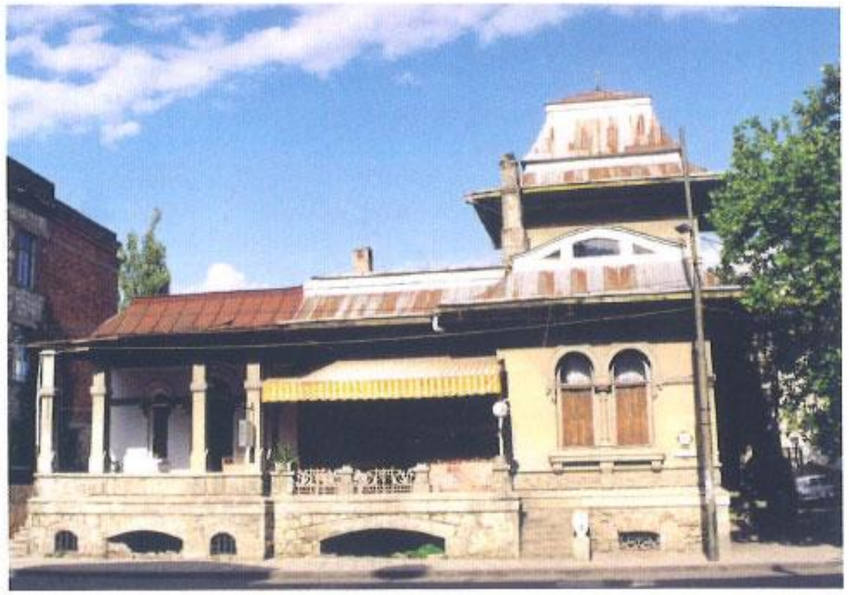
Although modern circumstances demanded change, traditional architectural forms well-adjusted to local environmental conditions and lifestyle for centuries were not easily replaced. However, a solution was found: the need to have a direct connection with the environment and a corresponding love of open spaces led to the replacement of the "bani" houses by residential houses with large broad balconies or "shushabandi" glassed galleries.

One important factor is particularly noteworthy: balconies have never been an unknown architectural form for us. They have been part of our architectural vocabulary for centuries. The simple explanation is that balconies became widespread in residential houses due to functional, not artistic values. The American architect Louis Henry Sullivan (1856-1924) said in 1896 that " form always follows function". Even earlier than this, Vitruvius also identified function as one of the obligatory principles of architecture. Correspondingly, this wise architectural decision transformed balconies into such a viable form that they continue to be irreplaceable in all Georgian districts and regions.

By taking into account our own lifestyle and natural conditions and creating residential houses typical for Tbilisi, we were successful in preparing for the obligatory building requirements stipulated by imperial policy and in introducing new forms appropriate for this new lifestyle. Although the population was unable to put up resistance to architectural projects and state building plans imposed by the government, it did enjoy more freedom in building residential houses, where massive and total control was impossible. Therefore, owners and craftsmen often resorted to improvisations on the obligatory classicist details in facades and boldly added features such as balconies on both sides, open and closed staircases and passages, arches over entrances, and passages within buildings.

Balconies on main facades seemed to play the role of a theatrical stage for residents embodying the free nature and character typical of southern countries. Artistry and a love of the arts were quite widespread in all Georgian regions and these balconies were best adjusted to this type of soul and sentiment. Compared to the central facades, the areas on the other side of residential houses were more domestic, but also open and broad.

It was these residential houses and neighbourhoods that were created and built with the active involvement of local residents, not the official buildings ordered by the imperial state representatives, that precisely reflected the true sentiments of the public of that time; their tastes, orientation and



creative skills. Similar buildings were quickly constructed based on both the influence of Tbilisi as well as local interpretations in the towns of Georgia, big and small – places like Telavi, Signagi, Kutaisi, and so forth. This had an interesting effect in the context of the development of a truly Georgian architecture and a full awakening of the Georgian population of the time. This process highlighted the reality that the population, which had been stupefied by numerous problems after they found themselves taken in to the Russian Empire, had "awoken" and was ready for economic and cultural change.

These events provide an excellent confirmation of Georgian writer and public figure Geronti Kikodze's assertion that: "A spiritually free nation can create many beautiful and great things even in political slavery." (Kikodze, G. Nationality, Language, and Aesthetic Culture) As a popular phenomenon, residential houses in Tbilisi can be seen as the best historic facts reflecting the spiritual, mental, and physical state of the public at that time. However, architecture not only describes history, it is often prophetic. Created on the basis of ancient knowledge, cultural traditions, and life experience, it comprehensively reflects a nation's capabilities and vital power in every concrete situation. At the time of yet another historic trouble, the emergence of a new architecture in the country that had joined the Russian Empire under the name of the Tbilisi and Kutaisi governorates predicted back in the times of serfdom the emergence of a spiritual force that was to save the Georgian nation. This prediction soon came true in the emergence of Ilia Chavchavadze and other public figures of his generation. This phenomenon is indicative of the start of Georgia's genuine Europe-

anisation and our final awakening in the 19th century, which eventually facilitated the achievement of political freedom.

It is noteworthy that the houses typical of Tbilisi – so-called Tbilisi House -- became desirable and attractive not only for the various long-term resident ethnicities of Georgia, but also for the Germans, who started arriving from Baden Wurttemberg beginning in 1817. These Germans established settlements not only in Didube and the area adjacent to the current David Aghmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi, but also in Abkhazia, Outer Kakheti, Shida and Kvemo Kartli, and the districts of Dmanisi and Tsalka. Their unique architectural heritage is well-preserved and can still be seen in the villages they used to populate. These houses have specific lattices, German Fachwerk, and traditional Georgian wooden balconies.

This was probably the first time in Georgian history that our local architecture had an obvious impact on the popular architecture of a prominent Western European country well-known for its building culture. Germans settled not only in Georgia, but also in other areas of the Russian Empire, including our neighbour Azerbaijan. This issue is also interesting because the planning of these German villages follows the rules of a popular architecture which is purely German. The contribution of Georgian relatives is ruled out, as there were almost no mixed families in these villages. No professional engineers or architects were involved and, given the isolationist lifestyle of most Germans, it is unlikely that local Georgian craftsman were included. It follows that the European population – in this case the Germans – built with their own hands the houses that bore signs of Georgian influence. Their lives in these houses were calm and happy until the outbreak of World War II, when they were all evicted by Stalin.

Together with the local population, local craftsmen played a major role in successfully creating Tbilisi houses. Depending on their professions, the craftsmen were united in hierarchical and well-organised groups called amkari (guilds) that adhered to their own obligatory traditions and written and unwritten laws. They created a genuine example of a democratic and civil society. These people bore the invaluable traditions and life or professional experience our ancestors had laboriously perfected and developed over centuries. In conditions characterized by a lack of appropriate technologies and industry, the development of the construction business raised the viability of guilds and individual craftsmen, who survived almost until the Soviet era. The craftsmen of the guilds immediately sensed the novelties brought in by the time, making their activities even more varied and multi-profiled. The professionalism of these craftsmen created a strong basis for a new and more complicated stage in our architecture, in which eclectic architecture, as in European and other cities throughout the world, started to become widespread in Georgia. Buildings of this type implied varied facades created on the basis of a mixture of European styles from different periods. Just like the "darbazi" and "bani" houses were earlier displaced by houses with balconies in Tbilisi, this time it was eclecticism that ushered in a new wave of change.

The facades of Eclectic buildings were decorated with ornaments that had been elaborated in Europe and were well-known there. However, novelties and improvements could also be seen in these designs and functions. With the exception of courtyards, entrances were also constructed in the shape of halls with staircases in them. Their artistic side and decorations were often richer and subtler than those found on facades. Walls were mostly painted with various designs and landscapes. Marble was used for staircases and mosaic and terrazzo for floors. Decorative lattices made of metal and other details of fences, balconies, windows, gates, entrances, roofing, doors, and staircases also deserve special mention. Metal work or elements made of cast iron or iron became so popular and, correspondingly, reached such a high level of design that some of them can undoubtedly be regarded as true works of art.

All the storeys of houses built in the Eclectic style had small balconies with decorative metal banisters. These roofless and small open spaces were insufficient for people. Therefore, Georgians failed to part with the large wooden balconies that were quite organic and built broad wooden balconies with balustrade decorations on the back side of every storey of these European Eclectic houses.

This novelty is most important in the history of Georgian architecture. It is absolutely original and inimitable. We added traditional local features to the European Eclectic style, which was cosmopolitan in general. Local craftsmen, who were quite skilled in building techniques, interpreted this new task in a free, creative, and interesting manner and transformed what had been a purely European phenomenon in Georgia not into Eclecticism, but rather into an organic and successful fusion of alien and local elements.

The development of the country sped up after the abolition of serfdom. The construction of new plants and factories and the completion of the Baku-Poti railway line facilitated economic development as well as the improvement of living conditions. Due to the slow pace of industrialisation, the need for skilled craftsmen remained an important issue in the building industry, but their ranks were gradually bolstered by local engineers and architects, who were professionals with academic educations. Most of these were foreigners, many had been born and raised in Georgia and were well acquainted with local conditions. Correspondingly, their projects tended to be reflections of local conditions and building traditions rather than just simple rep-

etitions of European forms. They often employed a European Eclecticism Georgianised through balconies on the back sides of buildings, creating matchless and excellent examples together with local craftsmen.

Appropriate town planning regulations had already been widely put into place. Various buildings designed for political, government, military, educational, scientific, cultural, public and other purposes were intensively constructed, as well as modern bridges and other infrastructure. Like in Europe, buildings that could bring profit through rent were also built. Big hotels satisfying European standards and demands were also built more frequently. Muddy streets were paved and horse trams were replaced by electric ones.

At the end of the 19th century, Georgia had become fascinated by the idea of building a cable car, a trend which was very popular in the world at this time. In 1900, the government of Tbilisi signed an agreement to build one on Mtatsminda. The construction according to the design of the French engineer A. Blanch started in 1903. The architectural work was done by the Tbilisi architect Alexander Shimkevich. The work involving reinforced concrete was done with the help of Niko Nikoladze, the Georgian developer and public intellectual. The Mtatsminda Funicular, which turned out to be one of the longest and most difficult routes for a cable railway at that time, was opened in a solemn ceremony in 1905.

It is noteworthy that not only the cable railway, but many other buildings constructed during that time – banks, schools, residential houses, hospitals, theatres, operas, museums, and so forth – presently continue to retain their originally intended functions, an impressive indication of the sound architectural and engineering values of the era.

Despite the aforementioned progress achieved in the residential sphere, the Eclecticism that was widespread in architecture mostly produced buildings with various facades that were not so interesting in terms of creativity. However, the overall lack of style and the Eclectic "ratatouille" which dominated Russia and some other countries at the end of the 19th century did allow one interesting phenomenon to emerge. Architects, who became uninspired by European Eclecticism reverted to old roots and national motives and, compiling samples taken from their own past, tried to create something new and at the same time, "traditional".

A number of such buildings were constructed in Georgia. However, in spite of the noble desire to build "in Georgian", local architects soon became convinced that this was self-deception rather than genuine creation. However, taking into account the political situation at that time, this fact is indeed noteworthy. The use of a well-known Medieval Georgian decoration in these modern buildings was a daring step in a country that had been under Russian captivity for most than one century and that constantly faced the issue of the continuing threat to the existence of the mother tongue. In addition to being "one loud word confirming the nation's existence and national thirst" (Beridze V. Architecture in Tbilisi, Vol. 2, p 45), such an inventiveness raised hopes that the country was ready to embark upon a genuine creative journey in architecture. This was proven through the creation and spread of a new European style – Modernism – throughout Georgia.

This new style first appeared in the decorative and applied arts in the 1880s in Europe and started to be used in architecture at the very end of the century. This was the end of the creation of modernism as a full-fledged artistic and architectural style based on 50 years of active creative searches undertaken by theoreticians and practicing specialists in various European countries.

The scientific achievements and inventions of the 19th century, and the corresponding technical opportunities previously non-existent in human history, as personified by Paxton's Crystal Palace, heralded the quick onset of an industrial era of amazing scale. Opponents of the trend emerged in England proper and a movement called "Arts and Crafts" was launched in 1861 under the leadership of William Morris (1834-1896), a poet and architect inspired by socialist ideas and by the works of art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900).

Morris and his friends opposed capitalist industrialisation and uniform mass production, trying instead to elevate traditional craftsmanship to the level of art. Morris himself implemented his ideas by building his residential house (Red House, 1859), effectively preparing the grounds for the term "design". It is true that he was bitterly defeated in the struggle against modern industry and standardisation, but it was due to his efforts

that people in various European countries started searching for new styles and original forms to embody them.

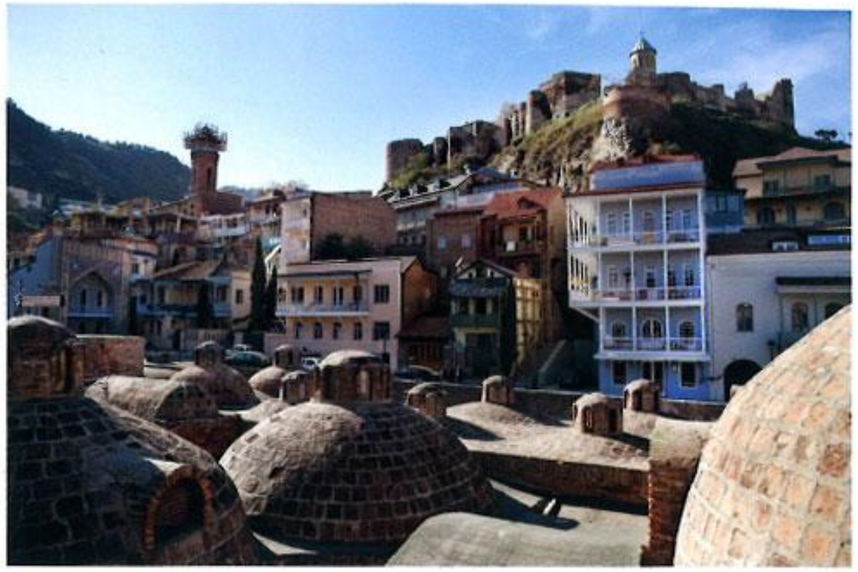
Illustrated magazines, periodicals, placards, and international and regional exhibitions that were quite frequent in European countries also helped facilitate the final shaping of modernism. Finally, the new style became established in architecture as well and the first structure created in the modernist style was Belgian architect Victor Horta's (1861-1947) Hotel Tassel built in 1894.

Each country adopted this new style in its own specific manner and it evolved under a variety of names: Art Nouveau, Jugendstil, Style Liberty, Modernisme, Modern, and Secession. In Russia and Georgia it was known as Modern. The movement's trademark was to approach a structure as a single, unified work of art, as it aimed to unite every minor detail of a house and its interior in a uniformity of style. The creation of these buildings absorbed almost all fields of art, tempering a wide array of media to adhere to a single aesthetic: painting, sculpture, mosaic, stained-glass, wallpaper made of decorative fabric or paper, moulded or plastered decoration, artistic woodwork, the subtlest of metal lattices on balconies and staircases, chandeliers, door and window handles, coloured and glazed ceramics, terrazzo, majolica, and decorative structures made of metal and glass – all these were made in one style.

The artistic charm of the style also made use of a number of progressive features: It actively introduced and broadly used up-to-date technological and building achievements. Correspondingly, innovations such as electricity, central heating, lifts, sewerage systems, and others made Modernist houses not only beautiful, but also comfortable.

In addition to architecture and design, Modernism penetrated almost all spheres of life and the arts and, unsurprisingly, spread rapidly throughout the world. In Europe coming off of a long period without any true stylistic innovation, everyone welcomed with admiration the emergence of a new style. Few could remain indifferent to Modernism's unusual and absolutely original approach to decoration, its symbolic and poetic motives, its colourful and fabulous issues, its carnival-like and jubilant appearance, and its closeness to the world of fantasy.

Modernist masters realised that this was going to be the last style of the old and brilliant era, so acute emotions and impressive artistic decisions prevailed in their creation. They could feel well that people had started working much harder than they used to in order to achieve higher living standards. New challenges emerged due to a growing political demand in the countries. This new and completely different era of fierce world wars



and rapid urbanisation was developing at a high speed, ensuring scientific and technological progress, but endangering the Earth at the same time. Correspondingly, it was not accidental that William Morris and his comrades, who were at the origins of Modernism, were the first to shape the notion of environmental threats and underscore their significance.

Modernism made abundant use of natural forms: not styled and petrified flowers, but twisted leaves and quivering and coiling weeds; not eclectic petrified mascarons, but vivid images resembling Faiyum portraits. Architecture became as loud, polyphonic, and musical as ever, reviving a magic world.

Modernism transformed the line, which had started back in the times of Barocco, into a real undulating whip, creating asymmetric and dynamic compositions never seen before. Open spaces became fluctuating and decorated with frames of plastic forms and the decoration of interiors and facades was new and original.

In general, Modernism's uniqueness can be attributed to its relatively short life span. The period itself is generally considered to have lasted just 20 years, but in spite of its brevity, this limited time proved to be sufficient for it to expand throughout the world. It is noteworthy that, due to the complicated nature of implementation and the specific features of certain themes, it failed to develop in some European countries. Modernism required lavish creative imagination and a poetic nature in addition to a delicate, mostly manual and almost lapidary working technique along with

high professionalism in performance. Very soon, it became the patrimony of the elect, but presented humankind with numerous unique works of art.

Despite its seemingly "non-serious" appearance, it was the novelty and progressive nature of Modernism that laid the foundations for 20th century architecture. In this regard, its contribution to the overall history of architecture is unmatched.

If we go back to Georgia after this lengthy definition of Modernism, we will be surprised to see how rich our architectural heritage is in this style not only in Tbilisi, but also in Sokhumi, Batumi, Poti, Kutaisi, Gagra, Akhali Atoni, Borjomi, Kobuleti, and Dusheti. The first three towns are ports; the fourth was an industrial town; and the remaining four – health resorts. It is, however, the example of Dusheti, a small administrative settlement in a mountain region, which had a Modernist building, which proves that the new style was indeed very popular in Georgia. It is clear that there were no ideological, philosophical, or other intellectual grounds prepared here, but this proved to be no obstacle in introducing and spreading this completely new style that was very interesting in terms of creation. This was an organic continuation of the trend in the development of Georgian architecture that started with the creation of Tbilisi residential houses in the early 19th century. The successful path of the development of builders' skills moved from relatively boring Eclecticism to Modernism without hindrance and set a new path for the natural development of both professionals and local craftsmen, who proved to be both open and technically prepared to creatively share in this new style.

By the time Modernism was introduced in Georgia, William Morris had already died. He would probably have been happy to see that in Georgia at that time excellent grounds were in place to uphold his arts and crafts philosophy and that manual work, not machines, was the leading force in building and architecture. Therefore, the style that was meant only for well-off people in Europe became available for people with medium and low incomes in Georgia. Correspondingly, buildings with various functions built in the Modernist style can be seen everywhere in Georgia, in different neighbourhoods of cities populated by varying social strata, health resorts, and provincial settlements.

In 1901, seven years after the first Modernist building – Victor Horta's Hotel Tassel – was built in Europe, the first building in this style appeared in Georgia: the pavilion of the brothers Nobel, decorated with sculptures by the Georgian artist Iakob Nikoladze, was unveiled at the Caucasus exhibition. The building can now be seen only in photos, but most of the other structures remain. They show full well the praiseworthy professionalism of local craftsmen and the preferred choice and taste of our population.

New building materials and implements were delivered directly from Europe via the Black Sea. Foreign craftsmen and their workshops also participated, together with local craftsmen, in the construction and decoration of buildings. Decorative, marble, and mosaic workshops of Novak, Wilsey, and Andreoletti were held in Tbilisi. Many foreign artists also participated in painting and decorating halls and rooms. It is important that we encounter the realistic landscapes of various Georgian regions together with the themes widespread at that time in the buildings of Eclectic and Modernist style.

Professional Georgian engineers and architects with academic educations started their activities at the end of the 19th century. Houses in the Modernist style designed in 1902 and 1904 by architects Simon Kldiashvili (1865-1920) and Grigol Kurdiani (1873-1957) are still standing in Tbilisi at 4, Rome Street and 28, Ninoshvili Street, making the environment very attractive thanks to their beauty and originality. Prominent Georgian figures – Ilia Chavchavadze and philanthropist David Sarajishvili in Tbilisi, Niko Nikoladze in the village of Didi Jikhaishi, Abkhaz Prince Giorgi Sharvashidze in Sokhumi, and philanthropist Akaki Khoshtaria in the village of Sujuna – chose the Modernist style for their residential houses. However, as noted above, unlike Europe, this style was available not only for the well-off in Georgia. Representatives of almost all social strata actively shared in it.

Despite the overall interest in Modernism, the creative approach of local craftsmen and the public nevertheless had an impact on the architecture of residential houses. As in the case of Eclecticism, the back sides of hous-

es were again covered with traditional balconies, but the decorations of these balconies were done in the Modernist style and wooden banisters were replaced with decorative nets.

In Georgia, Modernism also acquired many features rarely found elsewhere. There were numerous houses built that had little in common with the Modernist style, but their details were nevertheless in the Modernist style. It is quite common to resort to this style when repairing or reconstructing houses. The reconstruction of the Artsruni Caravanserai is of particular note. Originally built in the 17th century near the Sioni Cathedral in one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Tbilisi and destroyed and reconstructed many times since then, in 1912, its facade was reconstructed in the Modernist style.

The population's universal interest in Modernist motives in Georgia at the beginning of the 20th century, the era of industrial capitalism, revived the anonymity of artists typical of the Middle Ages. Despite the existence of established rules for building and architecture introduced by the state, not everyone could afford to adhere to them and many agreed upon plans directly with craftsmen to make concrete changes in their houses, provided the changes were insignificant. Correspondingly, unknown craftsmen were active in renovating houses of various styles and eras. They made Modernist gates for courtyards and halls, window lattices, staircase and balcony banisters, plastered and moulded elements, paintings in halls and rooms, door handles, and frames for mailboxes. The artistic value of the works was so high that the dream of William Morris to raise craftsmanship to the level of art was indeed coming true in Georgia of that time.

Along with being international in nature, Modernism became the most democratic style in Georgia. It enabled any interested person, irrespective of his or her social or public status, to have his/her own say and become involved in the European process. It is also pleasing to note that this process was a genuinely creative one, not one of mere mechanical repetition. Among the examples that have been found and studied up to now, there are only several houses with identical balconies and staircases in Tbilisi, while all other houses, more than 300 in number, are single and unmatched in our architectural heritage.

One more internationalist and democratic feature of Modernism in Georgia was that the Latin greeting SALVE that could frequently be seen on the floors of halls in buildings of the Eclectic style was replaced by new words of the same meaning in Georgian, Armenian, and Russian.

The functional variety of Modernist buildings is very specific in Georgia. In addition to residential houses and banks built in this style in Georgia, there was also a hospital, a maternity house, the conservatoire, a library, a carriage depot, a pawnshop, a greenhouse, schools and other educational institutions,

shops and manufacturing plants, and theatres and theatre cinemas. We can still see a tobacco plant, the country's first thermoelectric power plant, and a magnetic observatory in the village of Karsani near Mtskheta. There are also excellent memorial monuments at historic cemeteries in addition to buildings.

The cinema theatres built in the Modernist style are particularly noteworthy. It is known that the emergence of these two novelties in the world occurred at almost the same time and it is most important that the same can be said about their successful introduction in Georgia. At that time, Modernist style cinema theatres had been built in almost all big cities. It is known that the Brothers Lumiere presented the first public film screening in history on Boulevard des Capucines in Paris in 1895. The first film was shown in a theatre in Tbilisi a year later, on 16 November 1896. The Modernist cinema theatres constructed in Georgia – in Kutaisi, Batumi, and in other cities – have unfortunately all been demolished, and the only remaining example can be found in Tbilisi: the Apollo, which was built in 1909.

So what were the features of the Modernist style that enabled it to charm all the craftsmen of our country? The first thing to mention is probably the fact that the approach was indeed new and full of creative joy, not something like the endless repetition of pre-existing elements, as in Eclecticism. In addition, the introduction and emergence of Modernism implied, to a certain extent, a moving along the European path and, by extension, professionally competing with Europe. The introduction and development of Modernism was directly linked to our constant aspiration to become a free country equal with Europe in our own capabilities, culture, and art, as we had been unable to make independent decisions for a long time.

However, the Modernist style could not have become so firmly established in Georgia if it had only been embraced by craftsmen and builders. As usual, ordering customers – the people – also made a major contribution to the evolution of architecture. The Modernist style allowed people, who yearned to be free, to make a choice and to move in the direction of those countries that they had long aspired to live with on an equal footing.

Although we continued to exist as a conquered country, this particular status had no impact on our creative freedom. We moved step by step with Europe and the rest of the world, trying to make our contribution to all spheres of culture and art, including architecture. Previously, when speaking about the development of architecture, we used to refer to residential houses alone, but a new approach proved to be necessary in the Modernist era. Along with local people representing various social strata, the bourgeoisie also became interested in this movement. They started building various public, medical, and industrial buildings in the Modernist style.

Local entrepreneurs became increasingly rich and powerful as capitalism developed. Some of them proved to be great philanthropists and sponsors. In this connection, it is worth mentioning the People's House that the brothers Levan, Stepane, Petre, and Iakob Zubalashvili had commissioned in Tbilisi to immortalise the name of their father, Konstantine.

The idea of building people's houses came from European countries and was meant to serve the segment of society that was unable to receive sufficient education or satisfy their cultural needs because of the inequalities caused by capitalism.

The first people's house in the Modernist style was built by a pioneer of the style, Victor Horta, in Brussels in 1899. In 1965, the house was demolished to build a skyscraper and the Belgian public has gone through a painful reckoning regarding this serious mistake. Fortunately, the People's House built by the Zubalashvilis is still standing, although it is now called the Kote Marjanishvili Theatre, not Konstantine Zubalashvili's People's House. The brothers Zubalashvili held an international contest in 1902 to build the house. Thirty-two architects from across the Russian Empire participated. The Zubalashvilis selected the project in the Modernist style submitted by S. Krichinsky. A. Rogoysky, an architect from Tbilisi, was tasked with the construction of the building.

The story of the Zubalashvili family and this building is the best proof that Georgia and its citizens of that time were indeed European. Therefore, we are going to dwell briefly on this contribution to the development of their country. The deeds carried out by the Zubalashvilis not only in their homeland, but also in other countries – places where they lived or worked – were inestimable. They presented the Louvre in Paris with 581 works. The antiq-

uities they bought to Russia are now kept in the State Museum, the Kremlin, the Kuskovo and Pushkin museums, and the Cathedral of Vasily the Blessed. In Georgia, they built 15 Catholic churches and contributed greatly to the construction of the university and the conservatoire. They sent talented young people to the best European universities. The Zubalashvilis opened the first free cafeteria (called the Samadlo restaurant in Soviet times, and which no longer exists) and a shelter for the poor (the former children's hospital in Zubalashvili Street that now hosts a district administration) in Tbilisi.

The People's House in Tbilisi was exemplary in the Russian Empire due both to its professional attitudes and its interethnic nature. Concerts and performances were held here in a multitude of languages including Georgian, Russian, Armenian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Polish, Jewish, Ossetian, Assyrian, Lithuanian, German, and Greek. There was a special monthly schedule of soirees for troupes working in 12 languages. There were various cultural circles, a free library, and a cafeteria. There was a special musical group that staged operas. The People's House was an excellent manifestation of the multicultural nature of our capital and a cultural centre of international importance.

For the People's House, the Zubalashvilis chose the European Modernist style as the most up-to-date and progressive of the time. The main facade of the building was decorated with a bas-relief. In this case, it is the content of the work that is important, not its artistic image, as it seems to finally sum up and close the chapter on our historic choice and to chart the vector of our future development. On one side of the bas-relief, there are three figures in classical clothes symbolising the three European arts – literature, music, and painting. On the other side, there are three Georgian women of varying social status, a fact which is reflected in their different clothing. Next to them, there are stones with well-known Medieval Georgian ornaments, showing the old age and worth of our culture. The figure symbolising literature gives a book to a Georgian woman. This is the plot of the bas-relief that serves the ancient idea of the place of Georgia and its culture being ultimately viewed only in close integration with Europe.

It is important that this ancient idea of aspiration towards Europe was voiced again in the 20th century. It was reflected in an artistic manner on a building constructed in a European style. The introduction and spread of the Modernist style enabled us to enter into a dialogue with European countries using our own "loud" timely and equal architectural word.

The Modernist style was attractive in Georgia mostly due to the fact that it was not introduced in a violent manner, something which directly and unambiguously identified it with freedom of choice and, most importantly, it had nothing to do with the conquering power of Russia. It implied our voluntary involvement in Europe. Georgia was getting ready to start

"walking" independently at that time and political independence was also obtained in 1918-1921.

Unfortunately, the independence achieved as a result of the collapse of the Russian Empire did not last long. Georgia again found itself facing a long period of captivity and, ironically, again Russia was the conquering force, although this time it was Communist Russia that proved, in the end, to be much crueler. Thus, the country and its architecture were subordinated to a totalitarian system for decades.

This is how the Europeanisation of our country and architecture has developed at the beginning of the 20th century. Almost one hundred years have passed since then and free and independent Georgia is aspiring to become a full-fledged member of the European family. Let us see how our environment and architecture will change with regard to this new political situation. We managed to "Europeanise" pretty well, when we were a conquered country. Now that Georgia has become independent, its capital – "the old city doomed to be courageous" (Tbilisi, Titsian Tabidze) –which wrote all pains and successes with its buildings in our long history, will hopefully move ahead to stand side-by-side with the rest of contemporary Europe. Political freedom will definitely produce positive results and, like our ancestors did, we will occupy a worthy place in Europe, as will our architecture.