

EUROPEAN PARALLELS OF GEORGIAN ORNAMENT IN BASQUE CULTURE

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In this article, the study of Georgian ornament is presented from an ethnological standpoint, in which samples of European traditional culture are used as parallel material.

The study objects were selected from the material representing the Basque ethno cultural heritage, which is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Bilbao and the Historical Museum of San Telmo¹. In order to expand the research, photographs of exhibits preserved in the museums of Bayonne and Bilbao were also used photographs of exhibits which kept in the museums of Bayonne and Bilbao.

Interest in traditional Basque culture, was driven by the kinship ties between the Georgian and Basque peoples, which civilized society has been talking about for millennia.

¹ The scientific research team consisting of Lia Lursmanashvili, Gulnara Kvantidze, and Nato Pailodze collected the material during a business trip to the Basque Country on March 18-24, 2024. within the framework of the project “Research on the Types of Ancient Georgian Woven Ornaments and Processing of Textiles with Traditional and Modern Technologies”, with the financial support of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (Grant (FR-21-19932).

The research was conducted using data collection, photography, and comparative-analytical methods. Visual material was processed using the method of visual anthropology, direct observation of photographs. The collected material was systematized, classified, and identified. Appropriate analysis was performed.

The article discusses hypotheses about the study of Basque genetic connections, one of the most important of which concerns the common origins of Georgians and Basques. It also discusses the similarities and differences in the linguistic and funeral customs of these ethnic groups.

The study showed that there are great significant similarities between Georgian and Basque ornaments, which were most evident on memorial, namely Basque, disc-shaped tombstones, wooden household utensils and furniture.

The similarity between the ornaments existing in Georgian and Basque life, among the symbols-signs, was observed in the types of the cross (floral, enclosed in a circle, radiant); Between the Georgian Borjghala and the Basque Lauburu; from floral decor – in the lily, from solar signs – in the star, from zoomorphic – in the bull, from bird figures – in the eagle and the dove. Also noteworthy are the simple geometric outlines, the diverse compositions of which are abundantly represented on both Georgian and Basque everyday objects.

In order to strengthen the argument of the common genetics of these two ethnic groups, the paper cites as examples: the cultivation of one endemic variety of wheat, the placing preparation of wine in clay kvevri (pots) on using chacha; the coincidence of the Georgian sacred tree - oak and the Basque sacred tree - genrika; Georgian and Basque three-part folk songs and a folk dance similar to the khorumi.

Keywords: ornament; Basque tombstone; cross; Georgian Borjghali²/Basque lauburu; lily; Georgian Oak/Basque Genrika; Georgian/Basque wine; Georgian/Basque wheat.

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² The borjghali is a symbol of Georgian identity, representing the sun, rotation, and eternity.

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აბსტრაქტი

წინამდებარე ნაშრომში ქართული ორნამენტის კვლევა ეთნოგრაფიული რაკურსითაა წარმოდგენილი, რომელშიც პარალელურ მასალად ევროპული ტრადიციული კულტურის ნიმუშებია გამოყენებული.

საკვლევ ობიექტებად შეირჩა ბასკური ეთნოკულტურული მემკვიდრეობის ამსახველი ნივთიერი მასალა, რომელიც ქალაქ ბილბაოს არქეოლოგიურ და ქალაქ სანტელმოს ისტორიულ მუზეუმებშია დაცული³. კვლევის გაფართოების მიზნით, ასევე გამოყენებულია ქალაქ ბაიონასა და ქალაქ ბილბაოს მუზეუმებში დაცულ ექსპონატთა ფოტომასალა⁴.

ევროპულიდან, ბასკური ტრადიციული კულტურით დაინტერესება, ქართველ და ბასკ ხალხებს შორის არსებულმა ნათესაურმა კავშირმა განაპირობა, რომლის შესახებ ცივილური საზოგადოება, ათასწლეულებია საუბრობს.

კვლევა ჩატარდა მონაცემების შეგროვების, ფოტოგრაფირებისა და შედარებით-ანალიტიკური მეთოდების გამოყენებით. ვიზუალური მასალის დამუშავება მოხდა ვიზუალური ანთროპოლოგიის, უშუალოდ ფოტოზე დაკვირვების მეთოდით. ჩატარდა შეგროვებული მასალის სისტემატიზაცია-კლასიფიკაცია და იდენტიფიკაცია. გაკეთდა სათანადო ანალიზი.

სტატიაში განხილულია ჰიპოთეზები ბასკური გენეტიკური კავშირების კვლევის შესახებ, რომელთა შორის ერთ-ერთი მნიშვნელოვანია, ქართველთა და ბასკთა წარმოშობის საერთო საწყისებს ეხება. საუბარია ასევე ამ ეთნოსთა ენობრივსა და სამგლოვიარო წეს-ჩვეულებათა მსგავსება-განსხვავებებზე.

კვლევამ აჩვენა, რომ ქართულსა და ბასკურ ორნამენტებს შორის მსგავსება დიდია, რაც ყველაზე მეტად მემორიალურ, კერძოდ, ბასკურ, დისკოს ფორმის საფლავის ქვებზე, ხისგან ნაკეთ საყოფაცხოვრებო დანიშნულების ჭურჭელსა და ავეჯზე გამოვლინდა.

ქართულსა და ბასკურ ყოფაში არსებულ ორნამენტთა შორის მსგავსება სიმბოლო-ნიშანთა შორის დაფიქსირდა ჯვრის სახეობებში (აყვავებული, წრეში ჩასმული, გასხივოსნებული); ქართულ ბორჯღალასა და ბასკურ ლაუბურუს შორის; ყვავილის დეკორიდან – შრომანში, სოლარული ნიშნებიდან – ვარსკვლავში, ზომორფულიდან – ხარი,

³ სამეცნიერო ჯგუფმა ლია ლურსმანაშვილის, გულნარა კვანტიძისა და ნატო ფაილოძის შემადგენლობით მასალა მოიძია ბასკეთში მივლინების დროს 2024 წლის 18-24 მარტს, პროექტის - „ძველი ქართული ნაქსოვი ორნამენტის სახეობების კვლევა და ტექსტილის ტრადიციული და თანამედროვე ტექნოლოგიებით დამუშავება“ ფარგლებში, შოთა რუსთაველის საქართველოს ეროვნული სამეცნიერო ფონდის ფინანსური მხარდაჭერით (გრანტი (FR-21-19932).

⁴ ელექტრონული მასალა მოგვაწოდა აღნიშნულმა მუზეუმებმა.

ფრინველის სახეებიდან – არწივი და მტრედი. ნიშანდობლივია ასევე ის მარტივი გეომეტრიული მოხაზულობები, რომელთა მრავალფეროვანი კომპოზიციები უხვადაა წარმოდგენილი როგორც ქართულ, ასევე ბასკურ ყოფით საგნებზე.

ნაშრომში ამ ორი ეთნოსის საერთო გენეტიკის არგუმენტის გამყარების მიზნით, მაგალითებად მოყვანილია: ერთი ენდემური ჯიშის ხორბლის მოყვანა, ღვინის თიხის ქვევრებში ჭაჭაზე დაყენება; ქართული წმინდა ხე-მუხისა და ბასკური წმინდა ხე – გენრიკას თანხვედრა; ქართული და ბასკური სამხმოვანი ხალხური სიმღერები და ხორუმის მსგავსი ხალხური ცეკვა.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ორნამენტი; ბასკური საფლავის ქვა; ჯვარი; ქართული ბორჯღალი/ბასკური ლაუბურუ; შრომანი; ქართული მუხა/ბასკური გენრიკა; ქართული/ბასკური ღვინო; ქართული/ბასკური ხორბალი.

Introduction

Ornaments represent the first and oldest handmade embellishment, where the “artist” tries to tell us a story about our historical past. The ornament has ability of being an universal cultural element. Similar ornaments are often repeated in the art of ancient civilizations. It is difficult to determine the ethnic affiliation of these ornaments, whose cultural spaces are far apart. First, the connection between cultures must be clarified, and then the nature of this connection must be determined.

Approximately 6,000-7,000 years ago, two ancient cultural spaces emerged in what is now the Caucasus and southwestern Europe. Both were inhabited by Iberians. One was the “Iberians of the East” – Georgians and Caucasians, and the other was the “Iberians of the West” – Basques (southwest Europe, Bay of Biscay, western foothills of the Pyrenees) (Dzidziguri, 1982).

Research is still ongoing to determine the genetic roots of the Basques, as the myth of their mystical origins has not yet been definitively explained.

There are various hypotheses in the scientific community in this direction. The issue is being studied from historical, archaeological, ethnographic, folkloristic (Khukhunaishvili-Tsiklauri, 2003, 2010), anthropological (Nasidze, . 2001, Nasidze, 2003), In the areas of linguistics and other scientific fields. Many scientific works have been devoted to determining the origin and linguistic issues of the Basques, conferences have been held, popular science films have been made; radio and television programs have been devoted to the issue, and newspaper articles have been published, websites have been created. The Shota Dzidziguri Basque Studies Center is successfully operating at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, where Basque language teaching is conducted in English (lecturer Martin Artola).

Among the numerous scientific works, we will focus on a few of them. One of the most important among Georgian scientific works is Shota Dzidziguri's fundamental monograph "Basques and Georgians", in which the author brought together all the cultural-historical and linguistic theories existing at that time (1982) about the origin and linguistic issues of the Basques.

Of particular importance in the study of Iberian-Caucasian languages are two summary monographs by Arnold Chikobava: “History of the Study of Iberian-Caucasian Languages” (1965) and “Introduction to Iberian-Caucasian Linguistics” (1979). In the field of comparative language studies, such a comprehensive generalizing work as this latter textbook represents is probably rare (Kurdiani, 2007: 25).

Mikheil Kurdiani's work "Fundamentals of Iberian-Caucasian Linguistics" is invaluable. In it, using the historical-comparative method, the mutual kinship of the Basque-Georgian . . . language groups and their belonging to the Iberian-Caucasian family of languages is proven.

Nico Marr, who carefully studied the kinship ties between the Basque and Georgian languages, made an equally important contribution to the study of Iberian-Caucasian languages. According to one of

the scientist's assumptions, in ancient times ethnic groups of the Kartvelian-Caucasian origin migrated to northern Spain, which was rich in mineral resources.

Nico Marr compares the migrating Caucasians to shepherds who are rushing to new pastures. Nico Marr's version of migration was shared by Rene Lafon. He considered it possible that the Proto-Georgians who left the Caucasus moved towards Europe (Marr, 1933). The version expressed by scientists is confirmed by the discovery of similar archaeological artifacts in the Caucasus and the Iberian Peninsula (Марковин, 1976; Djaparidze, 1976:303-305).

When discussing the Iberian-Caucasian hypothesis of the Basques, the work of researcher Fuste is particularly interesting. As a result of archaeological excavations conducted in Basque Country in 1964, he discovered a 5,000-year-old copper deposit, in which the skeletons of people who died in an avalanche were found. Based on anthropological research, it was determined that the deceased belonged to the Iberian-Caucasian race (Dzidziguri, 1982:102-103; Planas, . . . 1966:371-376).

To strengthen the linguistic and genetic Georgian-Caucasian hypothesis of the Basques, it is important to study ethnographic parallels. In this regard, Salome Gabunia's work - Basque-Georgian Ethnographic Parallels - is interesting, in which, based on comparative ethnographic research, the Georgian parallels of Basque customs related to the deceased are studied. The essence of the existing similarities and differences is explained.

In terms of ornament research, Irakli Surguladze's immortal work *The Symbolism of Georgian Folk Ornament* is unique. The author did not leave a single ornament attested in Georgian life that he did not research in depth. The works of Giorgi Chitaia, Vera Bardavelidze, Kitty Machabli and other Georgian scholars, which are noted in the text as references, have also done us a great service.

In conducting a comparative analysis, we were greatly assisted by Eldar Nadiradze's fundamental work - *Memorial Culture of Georgia*. This is the first and unprecedented work of in-depth research on Georgian tombstones. The author has studied in detail all the issues surrounding the topic, which were devoted to the dynamics of burial customs, the identification and argumentative review of the semantic nature of the tomb inventory, structures, and ornaments on the tombstones.

An interesting ethnographic overview of Basque life and traditions is given in Giorgi Makharadze's book "Beyond Georgia is Georgia – Again My Journalistic Kitchen". It includes letters published in magazines and newspapers in 2003-2008. The book discusses the existence of homogeneous Basque and Georgian (inhabitants of Western Georgia) blood groups based on the research of various scientists. It also discusses the similarity of agronomic and botanical connections between these two countries (people).

Methods

The study has historical-ethnographic character. The research methods included data collection, photography, and comparative-analytical methods. The visual material was analyzed through visual anthropology, with direct observation of the photographs. The collected data was systematically organized, classified, and identified, followed by an appropriate analysis.

Results

As a result of studying the issue, it was determined that there is a kinship connection between the Basques and Georgians, but due to the sensitivity of the issue, scientists have difficulty stating this definitively.

If not for the blood relationship between these two peoples, what can be attributed to the numerous similarities that exist in the linguistic structure of these two ethnic groups, in the rules and traditions of mourning, and now in the symbols and signs?

Based on the study of the material available to us, it can be said that similarities between Georgian and Basque ornaments were observed on memorials, namely tombstones and wooden products.

The similarity of Georgian ornament with Basque was revealed in the types of crosses (circled, radiant, flourished), in the Georgian borjghala and lauburu, which became a symbol of national identity; in the depiction of anthropomorphic figures on tombstones in a single style; The placing of tools on grave monuments as a sign of the deceased's work; relief images of lilies, stars, bulls, eagles, and doves. And, most importantly, the linear ornaments on wooden furniture, also known as vardule, which uniquely replicate the decor of Georgian furniture.

Perhaps the similarities listed above can be attributed to the universality of the ornament, but what can we attribute to the fact that in the whole world, only Georgians and Basques producing put wine on chacha?

(<https://rhonea.fr/fr/blog/les-differentes-etapes-d-elaboration-d-unvinn53#:~:text=Les%20vins%20rouges%20sont%20%C3%A9labor%C3%A9s,moins%20de%20couleur%20au%20vin.>) Only Georgians and Basques sing three-part folk songs, and the Basques also created a folk dance similar to the Khorumi...

Is it a coincidence of cultures and nothing more than the fact that two identical endemic varieties of wheat are cultivated only in Georgia and the Basque Country? (Makharadze, 2008).

It should also be no coincidence that the rotating sun – the Borjghali and the Lauburu – were preserved as symbols of national identity by Georgians and Basques.

Finally, the sacred tree – an oak in Georgia, which has the midges wrapped around its head, and the sacred tree – Gernikako Arbola, which was destroyed by the fascist Nazi Germany in 1937. Both are symbols of national identity for these ethnic groups.

The rest is left to the reader.

Discussion

Based on the existing scientific research, several key hypotheses have been proposed regarding the genetic origins of the Basques can be identified: I. The Basques and Caucasians share a common ancestor; II. The Basques migrated to the Caucasus after the Ice Age; III. The Basques originated from North Africa during the Neolithic period; IV. The Basques are descendants of Paleolithic Europeans who evolved locally; V. The Basques in France are partially of Aquitanian descent; and VI. The Carthaginians, the Varduli, and the Autrigones have been considered potential ancestors of the Basques.

Among the hypotheses presented, it is crucial for the current study to determine whether there exists a genetic or linguistic link between Georgians and Basques. The reviewed scientific literature indicates a potential kinship between the two groups. However, despite the use of DNA testing, researchers hesitate to definitively claim a direct relationship between these ethnicities, offering only indirect suggestions (Young, 2009, Flores-Bello, 2021).

An extraordinary work has been published on this issue by Avtandil Nikoleishvili. In the article, scientist discusses in detail the possible linguistic and kinship ties between the Basques and Iberians, finally asking what the Basques and Georgians have in common historically, which he himself answers - we do not know (Nikoleishvili, 2024:48-64).

Given the sensitivity of the issue, it is naturally very difficult and risky to give a definitive answer. It concerns the establishment of facts that occurred over millennia. After the migrations, humanity underwent many assimilation processes, which introduced changes to the genetic codes.

The Caucasian race played a very large role in the process of Europeanization. As already noted, about 6000-7000 years ago, the migration of proto-Iberian elements began southward and reached the desired territory. They brought there metallurgy, agriculture, and the traditions of cultivating various types of crops...

Since the time, a significant part of Western Europe was under the influence of tribes of Iberian origin until Indo-European groups began to intermingle with the Iberians. The Basques are the only surviving ethnic group that has preserved the culture and traditions of "Old Europe". They are rightly called "Old Europeans" (Tivadze, 1959; Dzidziguri, 1982: 102-103; Planas, ... 1966:371-376: https://www.facebook.com/sudioreporter/videos/1281336446350339?locale=gl_ES).

Georgia and the Basque Country are two ancient civilizations., with small territories and few people. Despite difficult historical processes, both have preserved their language, writing, religion, and national identity. Despite the territorial distance, there are many similarities between them in terms of linguistic, everyday life, and cultural elements. This may be due to the blood of biological ancestors, or the result of close cultural-social ties with Roman civilization, or simply coincidence.

Based on the study of the research objects available to us, it can be said that similarities between Georgian and Basque ornaments were observed on memorials, namely tombstones and wooden products. Therefore, we decided to study the issue in this direction, because over time, the ornaments on tombstones spread not only to Basque, but also to European realities, such as coins, coats of arms, jewelry, and more.

Memorial Monuments - discoidal Tombstones. I've read an interesting myth in Basque mythology, a myth about the sun. It turns out that before Christianity, the Basques were very afraid of the sun god. They thought that after death the sun would eat them. To avoid this, people created sun-shaped tombstones to worship the sun (Barandiaran, 1974:129-132).

Basque tombstones are works of art created by common people. Several types of them are attested in ethnographic life. One of the oldest and most interesting types is the "Hilarri", which Literally means "stone of the dead" (hil – dead and harri – stone). It consists of a trapezoidal/rectangular or square-shaped lower part and a round, disc-shaped top. The stela repeats the anthropomorphic aspect – the disk is the human head, and the base is the body. The tombstones were set in the ground so that their front side faced the rising sun. Just as a deceased person is laid to rest or buried facing east in Christian tradition. Some scholars believe that the disc-shaped steles are cosmic monuments that represent the foundation of the sun and the earth, and establish an invisible connection between the underworld and the afterlife. Symbolically, this is the process of transition from one way of life to another (Leizaola, 1970; Leizaola, 1980; <https://patrimoine-environnement.fr/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/1er-prix-Journal-28-64-Ecole-publique-dItxassou-Itxassou-PetitJournal.pdf>).

Disc-shaped funerary stelae were widespread not only in the Basque Country, but throughout the western Mediterranean regions, but today they can be seen mainly in the Basque Country. The oldest stela dates back to the Neolithic period. there are also preserved monuments from the 3rd-1st centuries BC and the early, middle and late periods of the New Age. Archaic tombstones clearly depict only motifs made of simple symbols. On early monuments, we rarely find the name and date of the deceased, and some of them only have a few sentences of a religious nature engraved on them. The date marking on the steles begins in the 9th-10th centuries, as for the later, 17th-century steles, which are mainly found in Lower Navarre, in particular in the Lantabat Valley, they were probably made by a single craftsman. The stone steles are distinguished by the high technology of production, the text is given in two or three languages (Basque, French, Gascon), the punctuation is preserved. (<https://www.musee-basque.com/visites-activites/parcours-a-themes/florilege/stele-discoïdale/>).

The height of the tombstones varies between 34-100 centimeters. Several units exceed 100 cm. The diameters of the discs are also different (Ucla, 1980: 89-110).

This attitude towards funerary monuments was conditioned by the tradition of special care and respect for the deceased, characteristic of Basque ethnographic life (Duvart, 1954:146; Gabunia, 1995), which was also facilitated by the fact that the Basques were known as famous builders and skilled stonemasons since ancient time. They exported their knowledge throughout the Iberian Peninsula. They built castles, churches. . . They created the famous Basque Gothic style in the 15th-18th centuries. When working stone, the Basques mainly used the champlévé technique (<https://www.musee-basque.com/visites-activites/parcours-a-themes/florilege/stele-discoïdale/>).

Based on such data, it is entirely logical that the origin of Basque-style funeral stones stems from the presence of the Proto-Basques of the Neolithic period. The study of funerary monuments should be conducted using the methods of studying a work of art. The sculptor's gesture, thought, and depth of knowledge are fascinating, as he has to think simultaneously about faith, the properties of the stone, and the decoration (Thénenon, 1984:191).

Basque tombstones are highly artistic in terms of content and motif. The relief paintings on the discs are rich in rhythmic rows of geometric figures, closed and open shafts, stylized forms of flowers and plants, by solar signs... Among the images are anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and bird figures (Daire, 1996).

In order to identify the collected research material, we separated the monuments from each other according to the typology of the ornament, and selected for discussion those tombstones whose discs bear similar types of ornaments established and used in the Georgian space. With the principle of such differentiation, a quantitatively abundant and typologically diverse material was collected: **A. Geometric ornament; B. Floral ornament; C. Solar signs; D. anthropomorphic images, tools of labor; E. Zoomorphic figures; F. Bird images; Furniture.**

The rhythmic alternation and organized arrangement of these figures-point, line, circle, circumference, rhombus, triangle, squiggle - constitute universal elements of archaic art. Each symbol carries its own encrypted subtext, the interpretation of which is particularly challenging (Gabashvili, 2023:1).

One of these encrypted motifs is inscribed on a tombstone preserved in the Santelmo Museum, which scientists have dated to the 4th-1st centuries BC (Fig. 1). The stone is rectangular in shape, damaged, and its surface is uniformly covered with several long vertical and small inclined horizontal lines.

The composition of the lines at first glance resembles straight and tall trees. Perhaps the master created a stylized motif of the Tree of Life or depicted a series of arrows. Similar multifaceted and diverse geometric figures are attested in the mountains of eastern Georgia. In Mtiuleti and Tush-Pshav-Khevsureti, cryptograms have been inscribed on stones since time immemorial, which were used for various purposes in everyday life (http://saunje.ge/index.php?id=1199&option=com_content&lang=ru).

The Georgian artist-designer and researcher Giga Gigauri became interested in the issue. According to him, the existence of such cryptograms was common among the peoples of ancient cultural civilization. When studying the area of their distribution, one of such countries turned out to be Iberia/Basque, located on the Iberian Peninsula. A certain part of the cryptograms has survived to this day in the Georgian ethnographic reality in the form of ornaments on sepiskveri and bread printing presses, furniture, small boxes, woven and embroidered accessories, jewelry . . .

The abovementioned simple motif depicted on the Basque tombstone is very similar to geometric shapes characteristic of Georgian decor, such as: "mukhlispekha" (knee-shaped), "katmis pekha" (chicken-footed), "isrispiruli" (arrow-shaped), as well as the poplar tree ornament depicted on the "sabukhari" (On the cuffs of the top) of the Pshauri attire.

The cross, an universal "icon" among sacred symbols, has evolved and adapted in various contexts. It first embraced ancient civilizations and then penetrated belief systems.

The cross is a religious emblem, the vertical plane of which is an expression of the spiritual world, and the horizontal plane of which is an expression of material life. The intersection of these two planes is a symbolic indicator of the interconnection of the physical and spiritual worlds of humanity.

The cross is a decoration, a motif, an architectural design, it is a fundamental figure, the construction of which served as the basis for the construction and compositional schemes of the vast majority of symbols. The meaning of the cross is not determined by its location and volume, it represents the general compositional basis of the entire decoration and the constructional basis of individual elements (Surguladze, 1986:35).

The gravestones attested in Basque society show a wide variety of crosses. Most of the crosses depicted on the disc must date from the pre-Christian period, as the Basques adopted Christianity in the 9th century. Earlier crosses were most likely influenced by either Greco-Roman or neighboring pagan cultures, or both.

The tombstones are decorated with Roman, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Y-shaped crosses (Davy, 1955:69), sometimes as a central figure, sometimes in compositions. Most of the crosses placed as central figures are set in medallions, and a chevron medallion is also found and where.

The subtextual content of the cross as a sign-symbol depends on how it is represented – as a central figure with a medallion, without a medallion, or combined with other symbols. The cross depicted in a circular medallion symbolically denotes the transition to eternity, while the one without a frame, standing as a central figure, the cross implied the sun (Ucla, 1983:69-72).

The cross is a generalized cosmogonic sign and represents not a bounded territory, but the entire world. Whereas the free, equal-armed cross is of an archaic type and denotes orientation on a plane (Surguladze, 1986; Cirlot, 2001:69-71).

The image of the cross enclosed in a circle is a sign of the incarnation, passion, victory, and salvation of the Lord. The circle is the most perfect universal symbol among geometric shapes. God is compared to a circle because of its inconsistency and infinity (Berelashvili, 2013:88).

In the context of Georgian ethno-culture, the cross is primarily regarded as a symbol of the Christian faith, although its origins can be traced back to the pagan period. Numerous tombstones in Georgia feature the cross as a decorative element. The cross is also a prominent symbol in the adornment of Khevsurian clothing. This form of embroidery is referred to as cross embroidery, not only because of the technique used, but also because the cross serves as the central element of the motif, determining the placement of various other signs and symbols around it within the design.

In Georgia, the cross enclosed in a circle is associated with the Bolnisi cross. This is an equal-armed cross surrounded by a carved ornament. The classical form of these crosses can be traced back to the second half of the 5th century, and their spread lasted for an extended period. Although their appearance evolved over time, they retained one key characteristic—being enclosed within a circle. Examples of such crosses can even be found on monuments from the 19th and 20th centuries (Nadiradze, 2001:199).

Among the various cross motifs found on Basque grave discs, radiant and flourished crosses are particularly notable (Fig. 2).

The rays of the radiant crosses sometimes fragment in a schematic manner, covering the surface of the disc. The combination of rays and the sun with the cross carries profound symbolic significance, representing the inseparability of the sun (God) and its attribute—the cross (Nadiradze, 2001:200). The flowery crosses depicted on the grave discs are often presented within compositions, where the artisans incorporate celestial bodies, stylized plant and geometric patterns, tools and other elements into the decoration.

Flowering crosses have been a prominent feature in Georgian art since ancient times and, as a symbol of renewed life, are associated with Christ. This cross embodies the imagery of the "tree of life," the "Golgotha cross," and the cross signaling the Second Coming. The association of the Old Testament tree of life with the New Testament cross, along with corresponding imagery, is commonly found in Christian fine art and various church writings. According to the interpretations of the Holy Fathers, the front face of the cross represents the "tree of life" that God planted in Paradise (Berelashvili, 2013:88).

The cross is another significant symbolic figure, belonging to the category of cosmogonic signs. It frequently appears on Basque funerary monuments, both as a central element and in various combinations with other motifs. One notable tombstone, dating to the 1st century BC, features a spiral-shaped ornament as the central figure, framed by an arc of inverted right triangles (Fig. 3). The second tombstone, dated to the 4th-3rd centuries BC, also showcases a spiral ornament. Compared to the first, this second example appears less refined, giving the impression of incompleteness. A tombstone from a somewhat later period is similarly adorned with a spiral-shaped ornament, but here the spiral is combined with a cross and a stylized flower motif, altering the meaning of the primary ornament.

The spiral-shaped ornament associated with the principle of eternity is often attested on Georgian tombstones. Its geometric form is closely aligned with symbols representing the sun and light.

Among its various symbolic meanings, its connection to the sun, light, and eternity is particularly significant, suggesting its association with the cult of the deceased. The figure typically consists of a twisted spiral or a series of interconnected spirals, with similar circular ends that emphasize the rotational nature of the design (Nadiradze, 2001:232). This ornament is universal, appearing not only in Georgian and Basque cultures but also in the traditions of other ethnic groups across the Caucasus and the Iberian Peninsula. There is ongoing debate among scholars regarding its origin and various semantic loads (Surguladze, 1986:41-45).

The Basque Lauburu and the Georgian Borjgali. Many centuries ago, even before the birth of Christ, humans realized the immense importance of the sun for themselves and their kin. From that point onward, they worshiped the sun as a deity. The Lauburu (Lau—four, Buru—head) symbolizes the mythological origins of the four elements (water, earth, air, fire). Its vertical arms are compared to the emotionally charged female expression—fire and water, while the horizontal arms represent male mental and physical energy—air and earth (<https://kalismabijoux.com/en/blog/amulets/the-lauburu>). <https://basqueimports.com/culture>).

The lauburu emerged in Basque culture during the Copper Age and has been an integral part of the Basque worldview for approximately 2,000 years (Barandiaran, 1970:212, 1981:139). For the Basques, the lauburu serves as a prehistoric amulet symbolizing sacred fire, offering protection from malevolent forces.

The Basque cross, or lauburu, is commonly used in the daily life of the Basque people. This ornament appears on disc-shaped tombstones both as a central motif and within larger compositions (Fig. 4). The symbolic meaning of the lauburu, like that of the cross, is influenced by the specifics of its depiction. When presented alone, it signifies the passage of the souls of the deceased into eternity; when depicted alongside astral symbols, it is regarded as an astral symbol of the sun.

The lauburu is not only a traditional symbol of Basque culture but is also present in nearly all ancient civilizations across the world. It is often referred to as the "eye of God." A significant aspect of the lauburu is its role as a symbol of national identity for the Basques. The Borjgali image is similarly found on Basque tombstones.

The Georgian Borjgali, much like the Basque lauburu, represents an astral symbol of the sun, eternity, light, and warmth. It rotates around its axis in a singular direction. The Borjgali serves both protective and purifying functions. Its representations are found not only on Georgian tombstones but also on fireplaces, hearthstones, furniture, and textiles (Surguladze, 1986:66-80). Like the Basque lauburu, the Georgian Borjgali is a symbol of national identity.

b. Floral Ornaments. In addition to geometric shapes, Basque artisans also used floral motifs to decorate burial monuments. On the discs, flowers such as six-petaled stars, lilies, and roses are arranged in compositions. All three types of flowers carry religious significance and are used to convey specific meanings on the tombstones.

In Christianity, the lily originated from the pagan world, having been adopted from ancient Indian art. In Greek culture, it acquired symbolic associations with power. In addition to being a symbol of power, it represents purity, innocence, and the Virgin Mary. It also signifies the "Resurrection" and "Ascension." A lily standing upright on its stem is an expression of divine thought. Like other flowers, it symbolizes the heavenly paradise, the abode of souls. The flower, in general, is an epithet of the Savior: "You, who brought forth this flower, the Redeemer" (Cooper, 1986:90-92).

The symbolic significance of the lily in Christian art is extensive, in addition to power, it is a symbol of purity, innocence, the Mother of God; it is a sign of "resurrection" and "exaltation"; the lily,

raised as a stem, is an expression of divine thought; it, like other flowers, is a symbol of heavenly paradise, the abode of souls. The flower, in general, is an epithet of the Savior: You who brought forth the lily, gives life (Cooper, 1986:90).

The lily is predominantly used on Basque tombstones to adorn the arms of the cross. In Christian art, combinations of lilies, roses, and star-shaped flowers are commonly found. On tombstones, artisans often depict four- and eight-petaled roses. The rose is utilized both for its symbolic meaning associated with the cross and as a replacement for it. Due to the semantic nature of the rose, some Basque tombstones feature only roses across their entire design. In general, this ornament is most frequently applied to reliefs in various sizes. It can serve as either the primary or secondary symbol within a composition (Ucla, 1983:69-92). Specific forms and motifs of the rose are common in early medieval Georgian reliefs (Berelashvili, 2013:72, Machabeli, 2007:38-40).

C. Solar Signs. Among the solar symbols, the most prevalent on Basque tombstones is the star, which typically appears in compositions alongside other elements. The star is depicted by the artist as a symbol of the deity's eternal nature (Ucla, 1983:92). In Christian art, the eight-pointed star holds particular significance, symbolizing eternal bliss. The number eight, in Christian symbolism, is linked to the Day of Judgment, representing the second coming of Christ. The faces of the star were often depicted in artistic embroidery in a cross form, symbolizing the means through which Jesus Christ achieved salvation for humanity (Berelashvili, 2013:74). Solar symbols are characteristic of Roman-period steles (Barandiaran, 1981), though they are also found on monuments from the 16th to 17th centuries.

D. Anthropomorphic images, tools. The depiction of anthropomorphic figures in stone is a long-standing tradition in folk art. In this regard, the Basque museums hold fascinating materials. One of the early examples is the so-called "Lady of Mesterica" (Fig. 5), dating from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE. It was discovered in Mutriku (Basque Country). The bust is so unique among existing models that scholars speculate it may have Celtic origins. The archetype is referred to as a lady, but its coarse facial features suggest a more masculine nature. Some scholars do not entirely dismiss this hypothesis.

Equally significant are two small and one relatively larger disc-shaped tombstones from the Archaic period (Fig. 6). These three stones are displayed in a row in the museum corridor. The smaller tombstones form a human configuration, with one appearing to be in a suppliant posture. Both smaller stones feature a cross on their faces.

The third, relatively larger tombstone has a different design. An anthropomorphic figure is positioned within a rectangular arched medallion, and the image suggests a deceased individual holding a cross with both hands. Like the previous two figures, the face of this figure displays a cross encircled by a ring, which is further adorned with flat, wide, crescent-shaped details.

Also noteworthy is a tombstone in the Iberian-Roman style from the 2nd-1st centuries BCE (Fig. 7). The artist arranged anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and labor tool images in three tiers, with a war arrow placed along the side. Three figures, holding hands, are positioned within a rectangular semicircular arch. The upper tier features a line of labor tools, likely a stone chisel and hammer. The lower tier seems to depict zoomorphic figures of oxen.

The ox is one of the most important figures in the cultural world of ancient civilizations. It symbolically represents strength and honor, and its image is also associated with burial ceremonies for the deceased (Green, 1989:51).

The semantic nature of the ox extended across both Eastern and Western cultures, including the Mediterranean (Italian and Iberian) as well as the inland cultures of the European continent. Therefore, it is entirely logical for the ox to be depicted on the aforementioned figure.

The figure of the ox holds significant cultural and symbolic value in both Basque and Georgian funeral customs. In the Basque Country, during funeral processions, loaves of bread were traditionally tied to the horns of an ox, while in Georgia, particularly in the region of Svaneti, candles were placed similarly. The ox was often sacrificed in honor of the deceased (Gabunia, 1995:61-62).

The depiction of agricultural and military tools on tombstones has been a longstanding practice. Such items, which symbolize the deceased's life and occupation, are found on both pre-Christian and Christian tombstones. This tradition reflects remnants of pre-Christian religious beliefs, where personal items were provided to the deceased for their journey into the afterlife. For instance, the moon and axe symbolize agricultural life (Leizaola, 1970; 1980). The axe, while a tool of agriculture, is also associated with the worship of thunder and lightning. These representations can be traced back to the Hispano-Roman period (Duvart, 1954:).

In Georgia, the representation of anthropomorphic figures on tombstones is an integral element of ancient folk art, with such tombstones found throughout the country. Although rooted in Christian tradition, this practice is likely linked to the broader tradition of depicting anthropomorphic figures, which has been widespread in Georgian culture. These anthropomorphic representations have been identified in regions such as Svaneti, Mtiuleti, and Kartli. V. Bardavelidze suggests that these depictions may reflect remnants of ancient religious and symbolic beliefs (Bardavelidze, 1939; Nadiradze, 2001:119).

E. Zoomorphic Figures Among the funerary monuments preserved in the San Telmo Museum, the tombstone from the Palace of Eulate, dating back to the 14th-16th centuries, stands out due to its intricate ornamental decoration and notable height (Fig. 8). The stele features two wolves, symbolically representing the guardians of the Palace of Eulate (Navarre). The varying heights of the stele likely signify the rank and status of the deceased, with the use of protective symbolism reflecting the individual's desire to assert dominance over other families. The motif depicted on the tombstone later inspired the design of the coat of arms of the Palace of Eulate (<https://www.santelmomuseoa.eus/uploads/Actividades/Diversificacion/viens-decouverte-meme.pdf>)

The earliest confirmed association between wolves and humans dates back to the Paleolithic period. The wolf stands as one of the most iconic animals in Europe, historically linked with themes of fertility, protection, destruction, punishment, the sun, and heroic deities.

Equally intriguing is the statue found in the courtyard of the Basque Museum, which, due to its shape, is often interpreted as resembling a pig (Fig. 9), although some scholars argue that it may depict an ox. This monument dates to the Celtiberian period and is notable for its unusual form. A disk-shaped tombstone is placed between its legs, adding to its uniqueness. The stela is believed to originate from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD.

The exact intentions of the sculptor behind this statue remain unclear, but based on the rounded shapes of the body and head, as well as the length of the limbs, it seems more likely that the figure resembles a pig rather than a bull. It raises the question of why the artist chose to create a statue of a pig. According to Celtic mythology, "Moccus" is a god attested in inscriptions from the 2nd or 3rd century BC, and is associated with the Roman god Mercury. Etymologically, Moccus is connected to the boar, a potent symbol of hunting, war, and prosperity. In Celtic iconography, pigs were depicted with significant ferocity. For instance, Aeste's legionaries wore helmets adorned with boar images in

battle, and the goddess of the Ardennes was depicted riding a boar. Given these symbolic associations, it is possible that the tombstone is a sculptural representation of a pig placed on the grave of a high-status warrior (Green, 1989:91).

In contrast, there is no evidence of pig imagery in Georgian sculpture, nor has the pig ever been regarded as a mythical character. However, there is one tradition where a pig is depicted as a positive hero: during the devastating invasion of Murvan the Deaf (735-737), Georgians hiding in the Nekresi monastery complex were reportedly saved by pigs. Since then, Nekresi has been the only temple where pigs are sacrificed and slaughtered.

F. Bird images. Based on the available material, bird imagery appears less frequently than floral motifs on Basque tombstones. Among the preserved material examined at the Santelmo Museum, only depictions of doves and eagles were found.

One of the Basque tombstones features three doves (Fig. 10). The disc's surface is divided into four equal sections by a Greek cross, with three sections containing a dove and an inscription appearing in the fourth. It was determined that the bird motif on this stela is attributed to Oger de Ursua, a figure from the 16th century. The portrayal of birds, particularly doves, is also a common feature in Christian art. In the Old Testament, the dove symbolizes peace, love, and friendship. It is also emblematic of the Holy Spirit, which is believed to carry the souls of the deceased to heaven. Additionally, the dove is often depicted as representing the soul of the deceased. As one of the oldest and most universally recognized symbols, the dove holds significant symbolic meaning across cultures worldwide (Nadiradze, 2001:204-205).

Symbolic representations of the dove are prevalent in Georgian church architecture and the ornamentation of ancient Georgian manuscripts. Georgian tombstones frequently depict a scene featuring two birds, with either a vessel or a Borjgali placed between them. This motif, which is widely recognized in Christian art, traces its origins to the ancient traditions, highlighting the strong link between Christianity and folk art (Nadiradze, 2001:205).

Particularly notable is a tombstone housed in the San Telmo Museum, which features the image of an eagle (Fig. 11). Scholars suggest that this image represents the "Arrano beltza" (literally, a black eagle), a symbol first used by King Sancho VII of Navarre (1194-1234) as a royal seal in a document from 1219, where the king explicitly identifies the eagle as his emblem.

In ancient cultures, the eagle was viewed as a symbol of the sun, light, and power. It first appeared in Persian mythology as an emblem of strength, victory, and fertility. The Greeks later associated the eagle with Zeus, designating it as both his servant and messenger, tasked with supplying him with arrows. The Romans, having inherited this symbol from the Etruscans, adopted it as a representation of imperial power. Within Christian symbolism, the eagle is often seen as a symbol of divine goodness (Gelovani, 1983:21).

Furniture. A large portion of the ornaments depicted on memorial monuments are repeated in wooden items. The surfaces are adorned with cross, geometric, floral, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic signs and symbols (Fig. 12).

Another prominent floral ornament on Basque furniture, which we did not specifically address when reviewing memorial monuments, is the flower of the sun—known as "Eguzkilo" in Basque and Carduus in Georgian—which is recognized as a symbol within Basque ethnoculture (Fig. 13). According to legend, the sun goddess would transform into a flower at night to protect her people from malevolent forces. This legend forms the basis for the symbolic meaning of the flower, which the Basque people associate with the sun's power, life-giving energy, and a protective function against the

evil eye. The flower, as a symbol of solar energy, is connected to the land and agricultural activities. The "Eguzkilo" is depicted with this symbolic meaning on jewelry, furniture, and other everyday or decorative objects. The flower, as a talisman with protective properties against the evil eye, was hung on the doors of homes. The sunflower thus serves as a symbol of Basque cultural identity. (<https://liliberina.com/en/blogs/infos/connaissiez-vous-les-eguzkilo-un-voyage-dans-le-folklore-basque?srltid=AfmBOor9xRW-Xoic7Bsann5NyGW42aRRpziRbNxe5qCLlc150V85pTW>).

One of the notable features of Georgian folk furniture is its diverse decoration, which varies across different regions of Georgia. In comparison with the Basques, similar motifs and symbols can be identified, including the cross, the borjgali, and the varduli (rose ornaments). The varduli, known as khutani in Georgian ethnography, are characteristic of the architectural styles found throughout almost all regions of Georgia (Fig. 14).

Cross-cultural research has established that there are shared elements between the Basques and Georgians; however, it remains difficult to assert with certainty the exact nature of their connection. Without direct blood kinship between these two peoples, the numerous similarities in their linguistic structures, mourning rituals, and symbolic representations raise intriguing questions. While these similarities could be attributed to common elements of universal culture, the fact that both Georgians and Basques are unique in producing wine from chacha invites further reflection on the depth of this cultural connection (<https://rhonea.fr/fr/blog/les-differentes-etapes-d-elaboration-d-un-vin--n53#:~:text=Les%20vins%20rouges%20sont%20%C3%A9labor%C3%A9s,moins%20de%20couleur%20au%20vi>).

Only Georgians and Basques sing three-part folk songs, and a folk dance similar to khorumi was also created by the Basques. The convergence of cultures and nothing more-how can we explain the fact that two identical endemic wheat species are cultivated only in Georgia and the Basque Country? (Makharadze, 2008).

It should also not be coincidental that the rotating sun-the Borjgali and the Lauburu-became symbols of national identity for both Georgians and Basques. Finally, the sacred oak tree in Georgia, around which the midges entwine, and the sacred tree-Gernikako Arbola ("the Tree of Gernika -in Genrika, which was leveled by Nazi forces in 1937 both are symbols of national identity for these ethnos.

The rest is left to the reader.

Thanks:

A. Scientific team thanks Mary Khukhunaishvili-Tsiklauri and Martin Artola, who helped us to do the right management of our business trip to Basque country.

B. Scientific team thanks Bayonne Museum and the Bilbao Ethnographic Museum for their assistance.

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Description of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Tombstone with Geometric Ornaments. Bastazari Gastiburus Altar. Bilbao Archaeological Museum. 4th-1st centuries BC

Fig. 2. Basque tombstone with radiant and floral relief; cross with lily shape; cross with star shape. Spain. Santelmo Museum.

Fig. 3. Basque tombstone with spiral relief. Found in Gorliz (Basque Country). Bilbao Archaeological Museum. Pre-Roman Period. 1st century BC

Fig. 4. a. Basque tombstone with relief Lauburu/Borjghali Motif. Found in Laragan (Gorliz). Bilbao Archaeological Museum. 1st century BC - 1st century AD b. Cross with lauburu/Borjgali. San Telmo Museum. 16th-17th cc.

Fig. 5. Basque tombstone with human relief representation. Found in Mesterika (Basque Country). Bilbao Archaeological Museum. 1st century BC - 1st century AD

Fig. 6. Basque tombstone with relief of three humans in different sizes. **a.** Found in Navarre. Undated. **b.** Found in Leintz Gatzaga (Gipuzkoa, Spain). Undated. **c.** Inscribed with "Ivan Lopez". Found in Urbiloa (Navarre). Santelmo Museum. 16th-17th century

Fig. 7. Iberian-Roman style tombstone with relief depictions of humans, animals, tools, and weapons. Found in Navarre. Santelmo Museum. 2nd-1st century BC

Fig. 8. Basque tombstone with relief of wolves. Found in Navarre. Santelmo Museum. 14th-16th Century

Fig. 9. Zoomorphic stone sculpture. Basque Museum. 3rd Century BC - 1st century AD

Fig. 10. a. Basque tombstone with relief bird representation. Santelmo Museum. 16th c. b. Basque tombstone with relief eagle representation. Found on Mount Lizarraga (Navarre). Santelmo Museum. 12th-14th c.

Fig. 11. Trio of wooden furniture and wooden chest with geometric and floral motifs. Bayonne Basque Museum. Undated

Fig. 12. Candleholders with stylized floral and geometric ornamentation. Santelmo Museum. Undated

Fig. 13. Georgian small box with geometric ornaments. 18th-19th century. Simon Janashia State Museum of Georgia.

Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5

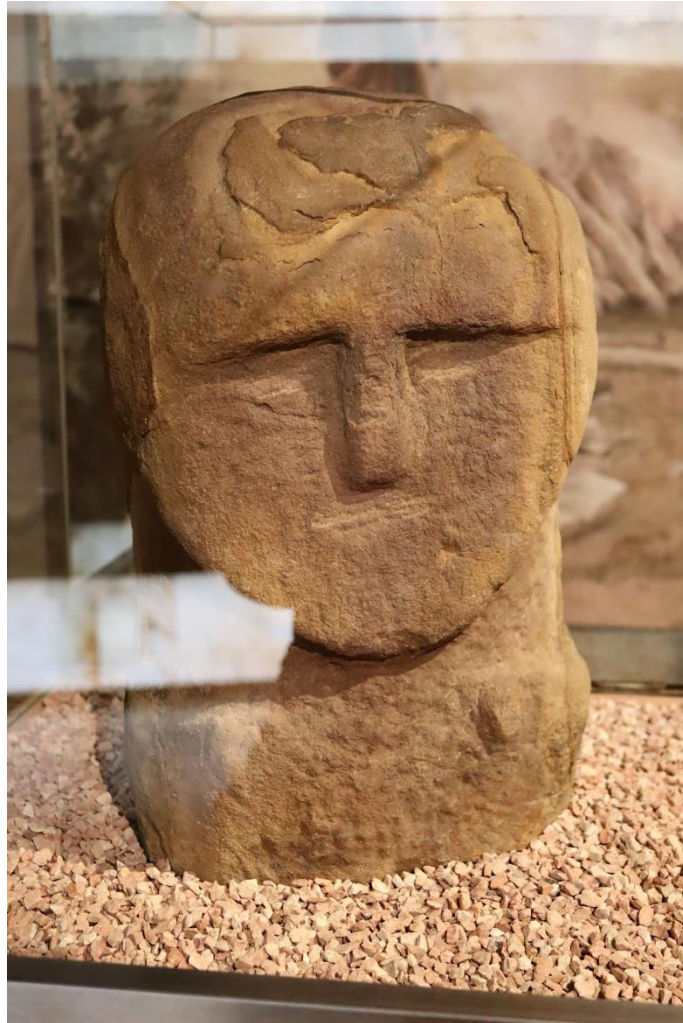


Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.

