


History of Georgia

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The history of [Georgia](#) (Georgian: საქართველო, transliterated: Sakartvelo) began with the rise of the early Georgian states of [Colchis](#) and [Iberia](#), which c. 1000 BC formed the Georgian civilization and achieved its renaissance^{[1][2][3]} and golden age in the twelfth through thirteenth centuries. The history of Georgia has been marked by a series of invasions and subjugation by several empires (such as [Rome](#), [Persia](#), [Arabian Caliphate](#), [Mongol Empire](#), the [Ottoman Empire](#) and the [Russian Empire](#)).

 Antiquity

Prehistoric period

Main article: [Prehistoric Georgia](#)

Evidence for the earliest occupation of the territory of present day Georgia goes back to ca. 1.8 million years ago, as evident from the excavations of [Dmanisi](#) in the south-eastern part of the country. Later prehistoric remains ([Acheulian](#), [Mousterian](#) and the [Upper Palaeolithic](#)) are known from numerous cave and open-air sites in Georgia. The earliest agricultural [Neolithic](#) occupation is dated sometime between 6000 and 5000 B.C.^{[4][5][6]} known as the [Shulaveri-Shomu culture](#), where people used local [obsidian](#) for tools, raised animals such as cattle and pigs, and grow crops, including grapes.^[7]

Numerous excavations in tell settlements of the "Sulaveri-Somutepe-Group" have been conducted since the 1960s.^[4]

In the 1970s, archaeological excavations revealed a number of ancient settlements that included houses with galleries, carbon-dated to the [5th millennium BC](#) in the [Imiris-gora](#) region of Eastern Georgia. These dwellings were circular or oval in plan, a characteristic feature being the central pier and chimney. These features were used and further developed in building Georgian dwellings and houses of the '[Darbazi](#)' type. In the [Chalcolithic](#) period of the fourth and third millennia B.C., Georgia and [Asia Minor](#) were home to the [Kura-Araxes culture](#), giving way in the second millennium BC. to the [Trialeti culture](#). Archaeological excavations have brought to light the remains of settlements at [Beshtasheni](#) and [Ozni](#) ([4th](#) - [3rd millennium BC](#)), and barrow burials

(carbon dated to the [2nd millennium BC](#)) in the province of [Trialeti](#), at [Tsalka](#) (Eastern Georgia). Together, they testify to an advanced and well-developed culture of building and architecture.

[Georgians](#)

ქართველები



Between 2100 and 750 B.C., the area survived the invasions by the [Hittites](#), [Urartians](#), [Medes](#), Proto-Persians and [Cimmerians](#). At the same period, the ethnic unity of Proto-Kartvelians broke up into several branches, among them Svans, [Zans/Chans](#) and East-Kartvelians. That finally led to the formation of modern [Kartvelian languages](#): Georgian (originating from East Kartvelian vernaculars), Svan, [Megrelian](#) and [Laz](#) (the latter two originating from Zan dialects). By that time Svans were dominant in modern [Svanetia](#) and [Abkhazia](#), Zans inhabited modern Georgian province of Samegrelo, while East-Kartvelians formed the majority in modern eastern Georgia. As a result of cultural and geographic delimitation, two core areas of future Georgian culture and statehood formed in western and eastern Georgia by the end of the 8th century B.C. The first two Georgian states emerged in the west known as the Kingdom of [Colchis](#) and in the east as the Kingdom of [Iberia](#).

Early Georgian kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia

A second Georgian tribal union emerged in the 13th century BC on the Black Sea coast under the Kingdom of [Colchis](#) in western Georgia.[\[8\]\[9\]](#) The kingdom of Colchis, which existed from the sixth to the first centuries BCE is regarded as the first early Georgian state formation and the term Colchians was used as the collective term for early Georgian-Kartvelian tribes such as Mingrelians, Lazs and Chans who populated the eastern coast of the black sea. [\[10\]\[11\]](#) [\[12\]\[13\]\[14\]](#) [\[15\]](#) [\[16\]\[17\]](#)

According to the scholar of the Caucasian studies [Cyril Toumanoff](#):

Colchis appears as the first Caucasian State to have achieved the coalescence of the newcomer, Colchis can be justly regarded as not a proto-Georgian, but a Georgian (West Georgian) kingdom....It would seem natural to seek the beginnings of Georgian social history in Colchis, the earliest Georgian formation. [\[18\]](#)

The [ancient Greeks](#) knew of Colchis, and it featured in the Greek legend of [Jason](#) and the [Argonauts](#), who travelled there in search of the [Golden Fleece](#). Starting around 2000 BC, northwestern Colchis was inhabited by the [Svan](#) and [Zan](#) peoples of the Kartvelian tribes. Another important ethnic element of ancient Colchis were Greeks who between 1000 and 550 BC established many trading colonies in the coastal area, among them [Naessus](#), [Pitiys](#), [Dioscurias](#), [Guenos](#), [Phasis](#) (modern Poti), [Apsaros](#), and [Rhizos](#) (modern Rize in Turkey). In the eastern part of Georgia there was a struggle for the leadership among the various Georgian confederations during the 6th – 4th centuries BC which was finally won by the Kartlian tribes from the region of Mtskheta. According to the Georgian tradition, the Kingdom of Kartli (known as [Iberia](#) in the Greek-Roman literature) was founded around 300 BC by [Parnavaz I](#), the first ruler of the [Parnavazid dynasty](#). [19]

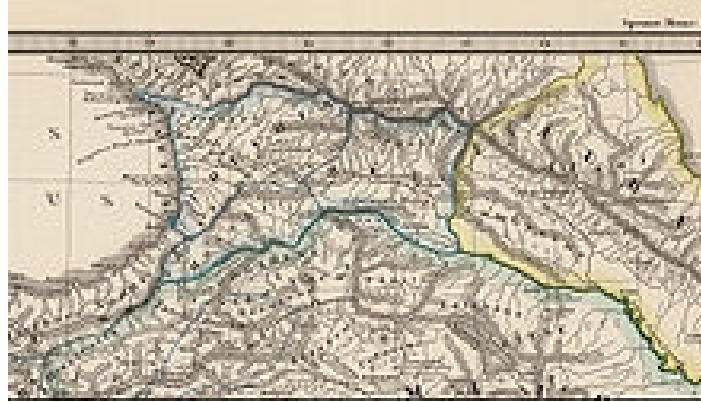
Between 653 and 333 BC, both Colchis and Iberia survived successive invasions by the [Median Empire](#), and later the [Persian Empire](#). At the end of the 3rd century B.C southern [Iberia](#) witnessed the invading armies of [Alexander the Great](#), who established a vast Greco-Macedonian empire to the south of the Caucasus. Neither Iberia nor Colchis was incorporated into the empire of Alexander or any of the successor Hellenistic states of the Middle East. However, the culture of ancient Greece still had a considerable influence on the region, and Greek was widely spoken in the cities of Colchis. In Iberia Greek influence was less noticeable and [Aramaic](#) was widely spoken.

Between the early 2nd century BC and the late 2nd century A.D. both Colchis and Iberia, together with the neighboring countries, became an arena of long and devastating conflicts between major and local powers such as [Rome](#), [Armenia](#) and the short-lived Kingdom of [Pontus](#). In 189 BC the rapidly growing [Kingdom of Armenia](#) took over more than half of Iberia, conquering the southern and southeastern provinces of [Gogarene](#), [Taokhia](#) and [Genyokhiaas](#), as well as some other territories. Between 120 and 63 BC, Armenia's ally [Mithridate VI Eupator](#) of Pontus conquered all of Colchis and incorporated it into his kingdom, embracing almost all of Asia Minor as well as the eastern and northern Black Sea coastal areas.

The Roman Conquest of Iberia and Colchis



Ancient Georgian Kingdoms of Iberia, Copyright©2004 Andrew Andersen



Kingdoms of Colchis and Ber [Iber(ia)]; "Atlas Antiquus", 1865

This close association with Armenia brought upon the country an invasion (65 BC) by the Roman general [Pompey](#), who was then at war with [Mithradates VI of Pontus](#), and Armenia; but Rome did not establish her power permanently over Iberia. Nineteen years later, the Romans again marched (36 BC) on Iberia forcing King [Pharnavaz II](#) to join their campaign against [Albania](#). [20]



[Ashot Kurapalates](#), first [Bagrationi](#) King of Georgia, 829 AD

During this time Armenia and Pontus were actively expanding at the expense of Rome, taking over its Eastern Mediterranean possessions. However, the success of the anti-Roman alliance did not last long. As a result of the brilliant Roman campaigns of Pompey and [Lucullus](#) from the west, and the [Parthian](#) invasion from the south, Armenia lost a significant part of its conquests by 65 BC, devolving into a Roman-Parthian dependency. At the same time, the [Kingdom of Pontus](#) was completely destroyed by the Romans and all its territory including Colchis were incorporated into the [Roman Empire](#) as her provinces. The former Kingdom of Colchis became the Roman province of [Lazicum](#) ruled by Roman [legati](#). The following 600 years of Georgian history were marked by struggle between Rome and Persia (Iran) including [Parthians](#) and [Sassanids](#) who were

fighting long wars against each other for the domination in the Middle East including Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, [Albania](#), and Iberia. In the 2nd century AD, Iberia strengthened her position in the area, especially during the reign of King [Pharsman II](#) who achieved full independence from Rome and reconquered some of the previously lost territories from declining Armenia. In the early 3rd century, Rome had to give up Albania and most of Armenia to [Sassanid Persia](#). The province of Lazicum was given a degree of autonomy that by the end of the century developed into full independence with the formation of a new Kingdom of Lazica-Egrisi on the territories of smaller principalities of the Zans, Svans, Apsyls, and Sanyghs. This new Western Georgian state survived more than 250 years until 562 when it was absorbed by the [Byzantine Empire](#).
Adoption of Christianity



[David III of Tao](#), a Georgian prince of the Bagratid family, 10th century



Iberian King [Mirian III](#) established Christianity in Georgia as the official state religion in 327 AD

Before adoption of Christianity, the cult of [Mithras](#) and [Zoroastrianism](#) were commonly practiced in Iberia from the first centuries AD. The cult of Mithras, distinguished by its syncretic character and thus complementary to local cults, especially the cult of the Sun, gradually came to merge with ancient Georgian beliefs.[\[21\]](#) The western Georgian Kingdom of Iberia became one of the first states in the world to convert to [Christianity](#) in [327](#)[\[22\]](#)[\[23\]](#)[\[24\]](#) AD, when the King of Iberia [Mirian III](#) established it as the official state religion. However, the date varies based on numerous accounts and historical documents, which indicate Iberia adopting Christianity as a state religion in AD 317,[\[25\]](#) 324,[\[26\]](#) etc. According to [The Georgian Chronicles](#), [St. Nino](#) of [Cappadocia](#) converted Georgia to Christianity in AD 330 during the time of [Constantine the Great](#). By the middle of the 4th century though, both Lazica (formerly the Kingdom of Colchis) and Iberia adopted Christianity as their official religion. During the 4th and most of the 5th centuries, Iberia (known also as the Kingdom of Kartli) was under Persian control. The Kingdom was abolished and the country was ruled by the governors appointed by the [Shahs](#). At the end of the 5th century though, Prince [Vakhtang I Gorgasali](#) orchestrated an anti-Persian uprising and restored Iberian statehood, proclaiming himself the King. After this, the armies of Vakhtang launched several campaigns against both Persia and the [Byzantine Empire](#). However, his struggle for the independence and unity of the Georgian state did not have lasting success. After Vakhtang's death in 502, and the short reign of his son [Dachi](#) (502-514), Iberia was reincorporated into Persia as a province once again. However this time the Iberian nobility were granted the privilege of electing the governors, who in Georgian were called erismtavari. By the late 7th century, the

Byzantine-Persian rivalry for the [Middle East](#) had given way to Arab conquest of the region.

Medieval Georgia

Unification of the Georgian State



First King of United Georgia [Bagrat III](#) from the Royal House of [Bagrationi](#)



Bedia Cup of King [Bagrat III](#) of Georgia, 999 AD

The first decades of the 9th century saw the rise of a new Georgian state in [Tao-Klarjeti](#). [Ashot Courapalate](#) of the royal family of [Bagrationi](#) liberated from the [Arabs](#) the territories of former southern Iberia. These included the Principalities of Tao and Klarjeti,

and the Earldoms of [Shavsheti](#), Khikhata, Samtskhe, [Trialeti](#), [Javakheti](#) and Ashotsi, which were formally a part of the [Byzantine Empire](#), under the name of "Curopalatinat of Iberia". In practice, however, the region functioned as a fully independent country with its capital in [Artanuji](#). The hereditary title of [Curopalates](#) was kept by the Bagrationi family, whose representatives ruled Tao-Klarjeti for almost a century. Curopalate David Bagrationi expanded his domain by annexing the city of Theodosiopolis (Karin, Karnukalaki) and the Armenian province of [Basiani](#), and by imposing a protectorate over the Armenian provinces of Kharqi, Apakhuni, Mantsikert, and Khlat, formerly controlled by the [Kaysithe](#) Arab Emirs.



Georgia during the Byzantine Empire, 1045 AD

The first united Georgian monarchy was formed at the end of the 10th century when [Curopalate David](#) invaded the Earldom of Kartli-Iberia. Three years later, after the death of his uncle [Theodosius the Blind](#), King of Egrisi-Abkhazia, [Bagrat III](#) inherited the Abkhazian throne. In 1001 Bagrat added Tao-Klarjeti (Curopalatinat of Iberia) to his domain as a result of David's death. In 1008-1010, Bagrat annexed [Kakheti](#) and Ereti, thus becoming the first king of a united Georgia in both the east and west.

The second half of the 11th century was marked by the strategically significant invasion of the [Seljuk Turks](#), who by the end of the 1040s had succeeded in building a vast nomadic empire including most of Central Asia and Persia. In 1071, the Seljuk army destroyed the united Byzantine-Armenian and Georgian forces in the [Battle of Manzikert](#). By 1081, all of Armenia, [Anatolia](#), [Mesopotamia](#), [Syria](#), and most of Georgia had been conquered and devastated by the Seljuks. In Georgia, only the mountainous areas of [Abkhazia](#), [Svanetia](#), [Racha](#), and [Khevi-Khevsureti](#) remained out of Seljuk control and served as a relatively safe havens for numerous refugees. The rest of the country was dominated by the conquerors who destroyed the cities and fortresses, looted the villages, and massacred both the aristocracy and the farming population. In fact, by the end of the 1080s, Georgians were outnumbered in the region by the invaders.

King David IV the Builder and Georgian Reconquista



King David the Builder, Shio-Mghvime monastery

The struggle against the [Seljuk](#) invaders in Georgia was led by the young [King David IV](#) of the Bagrationi royal family, who inherited the throne in 1089 at the age of 16 after the abdication of his father George II Bagrationi. Soon after coming to power, David created the regular army and peasant militia in order to be able to resist Seljuk colonization of his country. The First Crusade (1096-1099) and the Crusaders' offensive against the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia and Syria favored David's successful campaigns in Georgia. By the end of 1099 David had stopped paying tribute to the Seljuks and had liberated most of the Georgian lands, with the exception of [Tbilisi](#) and [Hereti](#). In 1103 he reorganized the [Georgian Orthodox Church](#) and closely linked it with the state by appointing as [Catholicos](#) (Archbishop) a Crown Chancellor (Mtsihnobart Ukhutsesi) of Georgia. In 1103–1105 the Georgian army took over Hereti and made successful raids into still Seljuk-controlled [Shirvan](#). Between 1110 and 1118 David took Lori, Samshvilde, Rustavi and other fortresses of lower Kartli and Tashiri, thus turning Tbilisi into an isolated Seljuk enclave.



Flag of Georgia during the reign of David the Builder

In 1118-1119, having considerable amounts of free, unsettled land as a result of the withdrawal of Turkish nomads, and desperately needing qualified manpower for the army, King David invited some 40,000 [Kipchak](#) warriors from [North Caucasus](#) to settle in Georgia with their families. In 1120 the ruler of Alania recognized himself as King David's vassal and afterwards sent thousands of Alans (allegedly modern day Ossetians) to cross the main Caucasus range into Georgia, where they settled in Kartli. The Georgian Royal army also welcomed mercenaries from Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia (all those westerners were defined in Georgia as "the Franks") as well as from Kievan Rus.



Queen Tamar and her father King [George III](#) (restored fresco from the [Betania monastery](#))

In 1121, the Seljuk Sultan Mahmud declared [Jihad](#) on Georgia and sent a strong army under one of his famous generals [Ilgazi](#) to fight the Georgians. Although significantly outnumbered by the Turks, the Georgians managed to defeat the invaders at the [Battle of Didgori](#), and in 1122 they took over Tbilisi, making it Georgia's capital. Three years later the Georgians conquered Shirvan. As a result, the mostly Christian-populated [Ghishi-Kabala](#) area in western Shirvan (a relic of the once prosperous Albanian Kingdom) was annexed by Georgia while the rest of already Islamicized Shirvan became Georgia's client-state. In the same year a large portion of Armenia was liberated by David's troops and fell into Georgian hands as well. Thus in 1124 David also became the King of Armenians, incorporating Northern Armenia into the lands of the Georgian Crown. In 1125 King David died, leaving Georgia with the status of a strong regional power. In Georgia, King David is called Agmashenebeli (English: the builder).

David Agmashenebeli's successors (Kings Demeter I, David V and George III) continued the policy of Georgia's expansion by subordinating most of the mountain clans and tribes of North Caucasia and further securing Georgian positions in Shirvan. However, the most glorious sovereign of Georgia of that period was definitely Queen Tamar (David's great-granddaughter).

Queen Tamar the Great and the Golden Age 1184-1213



Queen Tamar of Georgia

The reign of [Queen Tamar](#) represented the peak of Georgia's might in the whole history of the nation. In 1194-1204 Tamar's armies crushed new Turkish invasions from the south-east and south and launched several successful campaigns into Turkish-controlled Southern Armenia. As a result, most of Southern Armenia, including the cities of [Karin](#), [Erzinjan](#), [Khelat](#), [Mush](#) and [Van](#), came under Georgian control. Although it was not included in the lands of the Georgian Crown, and was left under the nominal rule of local Turkish Emirs and Sultans, Southern Armenia became a protectorate of the Kingdom of Georgia.



Kingdom of Georgia at peak of its military dominance, 1184-1225

The temporary fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204 to the Crusaders left Georgia as the strongest Christian state in the whole East Mediterranean area. The same year Queen Tamar sent her troops to take over the former Byzantine Lazica and Paphlagonia with the cities of Atina, [Riza](#), [Trebizond](#), [Kerasunt](#), [Amysos](#), [Cotyora](#), [Heraclea](#) and [Sinopa](#). In 1205, the occupied territory was transformed into the [Empire of Trebizond](#) which was dependent on Georgia. Tamar's relative Prince [Alexios Komnenos](#) was crowned as its Emperor. In 1210 Georgian armies invaded northern Persia (modern day Iranian Azerbaijan) and took the cities of [Marand](#), [Tabriz](#), [Ardabil](#), [Zanjan](#) and [Qazvin](#), placing part of the conquered territory under a Georgian protectorate. This was the maximum territorial extent of Georgia throughout her history. Queen Tamar was addressed as "The Queen of Abkhazians, Kartvels, Rans, Kakhs and Armenians, Shirvan-Shakhine and

Shakh-in-Shakhine, The Sovereign of the East and West". Georgian historians often refer to her as "Queen Tamar the Great".

The period between the early 12th and the early 13th centuries, and especially the era of Tamar the Great, can truly be considered as the golden age of Georgia. Besides the political and military achievements, it was marked by the development of Georgian culture, including architecture, literature, philosophy and sciences.

Mongol invasion and decline of the Georgian Kingdom

Main article: [Mongol invasions of Georgia](#)

Main article: [Timur's invasions of Georgia](#)

In the 1220s, the South Caucasus and [Asia Minor](#) faced the invasion of the [Mongols](#). In spite of fierce resistance by Georgian-Armenian forces and their allies, the whole area including most of Georgia, all Armenian lands and Central Anatolia eventually fell to the Mongols.



Luarsab II, Martyr King of Eastern Georgia

In 1243, Queen [Rusudan of Georgia](#) signed a peace treaty with the Mongols in accordance with which Georgia lost her client-states, ceded western Shirvan, [Nakhichevan](#) and some other territories and agreed to pay tribute to the Mongols as well as to let them occupy and de-facto rule more than half of the remaining territory.

Although Mongol-occupied Tbilisi remained an official capital of the kingdom, the Queen refused to return there and stayed in [Kutaisi](#) until her death in 1245. In addition to all the above hardships, even the part of the kingdom that remained free of the Mongols started disintegrating: The Crown started losing control over the warlords of [Samtskhe](#) (southern provinces of Georgia) who established their own relations with the Mongols and by the year 1266 practically seceded from Georgia.

The period between 1259 and 1330 was marked by the struggle of the Georgians against the Mongol [Ilkhanate](#) for full independence. The first anti-Mongol uprising started in 1259 under the leadership of [King David Narin](#) who in fact waged his war for almost thirty years. The Anti-Mongol strife went on under the Kings Demeter II (1270 - 1289) and David VIII (1293 - 1311). Finally, it was [King George the Brilliant](#) (1314 - 1346) who managed to play on the decline of the Ilkhanate, stopped paying tribute to the Mongols, restored the pre-1220 state borders of Georgia, and returned the [Empire of Trebizond](#) into Georgia's sphere of influence.

In 1386-1403 the Kingdom of Georgia faced eight Turco-Mongolic invasions under the leadership of [Tamerlane](#). Except in [Abkhazia](#) and [Svanetia](#), the invasions devastated Georgia's economy, population, and urban centers.

Ottoman and Persian domination

In 15th century the whole area changed dramatically in all possible aspects: linguistic, cultural, political, etc. During that period the Kingdom of Georgia turned into an isolated, fractured Christian enclave, a relic of the faded East Roman epoch surrounded by Muslim, predominantly Turco-Iranian-Arabic world.

By the middle of the 15th century, most of Georgia's old neighbor-states disappeared from the map within less than a hundred years. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 sealed the Black Sea and cut the remnants of Christian states of the area from Europe and the rest of the Christian world. Georgia remained connected to the West through contact with the [Genoese](#) colonies of the [Crimea](#).

As a result of these changes, Georgia suffered economic and political decline and in the 1460s the kingdom fractured into several states: the [Kingdom of Kartli](#), the [Kingdom of Imereti](#) and the saatabago ([atabegdom](#)) of Samtskhe. [27]

By the late 15th century the [Ottoman Empire](#) was encroaching on the Georgian states from the west and in 1501 a new Muslim power, [Safavid Persia](#), arose to the east. For the next few centuries, Georgia would become a battleground between these two great rival powers and the Georgian states would struggle to maintain their independence. In 1555, the Ottomans and the Safavids signed the Peace of Amasa, defining spheres of influence in Georgia, assigning Imereti in the west to the Turks and Kartli-Kakheti in the east to the Persians. The campaigns of the most powerful Safavid ruler, [Shah Abbas](#), to bring eastern Georgia under his sway were particularly devastating. Tens of thousands of Georgians were killed or deported to Persia and the shah had the queen mother, [Ketevan](#), tortured to death.[28] By the 17th century, both eastern and western Georgia had sunk into poverty as the result of the constant warfare. The economy was so bad that barter replaced the use of money and the populations of the cities declined markedly. The French traveller [Jean Chardin](#), who visited the region of [Mingrelia](#) in 1671, noted the wretchedness of the peasants, the arrogance of the nobles and the ignorance of the clergy.[29] The rulers were split between acknowledging Ottoman or Persian overlordship (which often entailed nominal conversion to Islam) or making a bid for independence. The emergence of a third imperial power to the north, Christian Russia, made the latter an increasingly tempting choice.

The 18th century and Russian annexation



King Erekle II of Kartli and Kakheti

In the early 18th century, Kartli saw a partial recovery under [Vakhtang VI](#), who instituted a new law code and tried to improve the economy. His reign saw the establishment of the first Georgian-language printing press in 1709.[\[30\]](#)

[Erekle II](#), king of Kartli-Kakheti from 1762 to 1798, turned towards Russia for protection against Ottoman and Persian attacks. The Russian empress [Catherine the Great](#) was keen to have the Georgians as allies in her wars against the Turks, but sent only meagre forces to help them.[\[31\]](#) In 1769–1772, a handful of Russian troops under General Totleben "battled" against Turkish invaders in Imereti and Kartl-Kakheti. The Russian troops retreated before a clash against the Turks. In 1783 Erekle signed the [Treaty of Georgievsk](#) with Russia, according to which Kartli-Kakheti was to receive Russian protection. But when another Russo-Turkish War broke out in 1787, the Russians withdrew their troops from the region for use elsewhere, leaving Erekle's kingdom unprotected. In 1795, the Persian shah, [Agha Mohammed Khan](#), invaded the country and burnt the capital, Tbilisi, to the ground.[\[32\]](#)



Solomon I, King of Imeretia

In spite of Russia's failure to honour the terms of the Treaty of Georgievsk, Georgian rulers felt they had nobody else to turn to. After Erekle's death, a civil war broke out over

the succession to the throne of Kartli-Kakheti and one of the rival candidates called on Russia to intervene and decide matters. On January 8, 1801 Tsar [Paul I of Russia](#) signed a decree on the incorporation of Georgia (Kartli-Kakheti) within the Russian Empire[33][34] which was confirmed by Tsar [Alexander I](#) on September 12, 1801.[35][36] The Georgian envoy in Saint Petersburg, [Garsevan Chavchavadze](#), reacted with a note of protest that was presented to the Russian vice-chancellor [Alexander Kurakin](#). [37] In May 1801 Russian General Carl Heinrich Knorring dethroned the Georgian heir to the throne David [Batonishvili](#) and deployed a government headed by General Ivan Petrovich Lasarev.[38]

A part of the Georgian nobility didn't accept the decree until April 1802 when General Knorring compassed the nobility in Tbilisi's Sioni Cathedral and forced them to take an oath on the imperial crown of Russia. Those who disagreed were arrested temporarily. [39]

In the summer of 1805 Russian troops on the river Askerani and near Zagam defeated the Persian army, saving Tbilisi from its attack. In 1810, the kingdom of [Imereti](#) (Western Georgia) was annexed by the [Russian Empire](#) after the suppression of King [Solomon II](#)'s resistance.[40] From 1803 to 1878, as a result of numerous Russian wars against Turkey and Persia, several formerly Georgian territories were annexed to the Russian Empire. These areas ([Batumi](#), [Artvin](#), [Akhaltsikhe](#), [Poti](#), and [Abkhazia](#)) now represent the majority of the territory of the present state of Georgia. Georgia was reunified for the first time in centuries but had lost its independence.

Russian rule

Main article: [Georgia under the Russian Empire](#)



Georgian Prince Iakob [Chavchavadze](#) and Prince [Bagrationi-Mukhraneli](#)

Russian and Georgian society had much in common: the main religion was Orthodox Christianity and in both countries a land-owning aristocracy ruled over a population of serfs. The Russian authorities aimed to integrate Georgia into the rest of their empire, but at first Russian rule proved high-handed, arbitrary and insensitive to local law and customs, leading to a conspiracy by Georgian nobles in 1832 and a revolt by peasants and nobles in 1841.[41] Things changed with the appointment of [Mikhail Vorontsov](#) as [Viceroy of the Caucasus](#) in 1845. Count Vorontsov's new policies successfully won over the Georgian nobility, who became increasingly Europeanised. Life for Georgian serfs was very different, however, since the rural economy remained seriously depressed. Georgian serfs lived in dire poverty, subject to the frequent threat of starvation. Few of them lived in the towns, where what little trade and industry there was, was in the hands of Armenians, whose ancestors had migrated to Georgia in the Middle Ages.

Serfdom was abolished in Russian lands in 1861. The tsar also wanted to emancipate the serfs of Georgia, but without losing the loyalty of the nobility whose revenues depended on peasant labour. This called for delicate negotiations before serfdom was gradually phased out in the Georgian provinces from 1864 onwards.

The growth of the Georgian national movement



Prince [Iliia Chavchavadze](#), leader of the Georgian national revival in 1860s

The emancipation of the serfs pleased neither the serfs nor the nobles. The poverty of the serfs had not been alleviated while the nobles had lost some of their privileges. The nobles in particular also felt threatened by the growing power of the urban, Armenian middle class in Georgia, who prospered as [capitalism](#) came to the region. Georgian dissatisfaction with [Tsarist autocracy](#) and Armenian economic domination [\[42\]](#) led to the development of a national liberation movement in the second half of the 19th century.

A large-scale peasant revolt occurred in 1905, which led to political reforms that eased the tensions for a period. During this time, the Marxist [Social Democratic Party](#) became the dominant political movement in Georgia, being elected to all the Georgian seats in the Russian [State Duma](#) established after 1905. Josef Vissarionovich Djughashvili (more famously known as [Joseph Stalin](#)), a Georgian [Bolshevik](#), became a leader of the revolutionary (and anti-[Menshevik](#)) movement in Georgia. He went on to control the Soviet Union.

Many Georgians were upset by the loss of independence of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Russian clergy took control of Georgian churches and monasteries, prohibiting use of the Georgian liturgy and desecrating medieval Georgian frescos on various churches all across Georgia.[\[43\]](#)



Ilia Chavchavadze (l) & Akaki Tsereteli (r) monument, [Tbilisi](#)

Between the years of 1855 to 1907, the Georgian patriotic movement was launched under the leadership of Prince [Ilia Chavchavadze](#), world-renowned poet, novelist and orator. Chavchavadze financed new Georgian schools and supported the Georgian national theatre. In 1877 he launched the newspaper [Iveria](#) which played an important part in reviving Georgian national consciousness. His struggle for national awakening was welcomed by the leading Georgian intellectuals of that time such as [Giorgi Tsereteli](#), [Ivane Machabeli](#), [Akaki Tsereteli](#), [Niko Nikoladze](#), [Alexander Kazbegi](#) and [Iakob Gogebashvili](#).

The Georgian intelligentsia's support for Prince Chavchavadze and Georgian independence is shown in this declaration:

"Our patriotism is of course of an entire different kind: it consists solely in a sacred feeling towards our mother land: ... in it there is no hate for other nations, no desire to enslave anybody, no urge to impoverish anybody. Our patriots' desire to restore Georgia's right to self-government and their own civic rights, to preserve their national characteristics and culture, without which no people can exist as a society of human beings." [\[44\]](#)

The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a Georgian literary revival in which writers emerged of a stature unequalled since the Golden Age of [Rustaveli](#) seven hundred years before. Ilia Chavchavadze himself excelled alike in lyric and ballad poetry, in the novel, the short story and the essay. Apart from Chavchavadze, the most universal literary genius of the age was [Akaki Tsereteli](#), known as "the immortal nightingale of the Georgian people." Along with Niko Nikoladze and Iakob Gogebashvili, these literary figures contributed significantly to the national cultural revival and were therefore known as the founding fathers of modern Georgia.

The Democratic Republic of Georgia, 1918-1921

Main article: [Democratic Republic of Georgia](#)



The [11th Red Army](#) occupies [Tbilisi](#). 25 February 1921

The [Russian Revolution](#) of October 1917 plunged Russia into a bloody [civil war](#) during which several outlying Russian territories declared independence. Georgia was one of them, proclaiming the establishment of the independent [Democratic Republic of Georgia](#) (DRG) on May 26, 1918. The new country was ruled by the [Menshevik](#) faction of the [Social Democratic Party](#), which established a [multi-party system](#) in sharp contrast with the "[dictatorship of the proletariat](#)" established by the [Bolsheviks](#) in Russia. It was recognised by [Soviet Russia](#) ([Treaty of Moscow \(1920\)](#)) and the major Western powers in 1921

In February, 1921 the [Red Army](#) invaded Georgia and after a [short war](#) occupied the country. The Georgian government was forced to flee. [Guerrilla](#) resistance in 1921–1924 was followed by a large-scale patriotic uprising in August 1924. Colonel [Kakutsa Cholokashvili](#) was one of the most prominent guerrilla leaders in this phase.

Georgia under the Soviet Union, 1921-1990

During the [Georgian Affair](#) of 1922, Georgia was forcibly incorporated into the [Transcaucasian SFSR](#) comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (including [Abkhazia](#) and [South Ossetia](#)). The Soviet Government forced Georgia to cede several areas to [Turkey](#) (the province of [Tao-Klarjeti](#) and part of [Batumi](#) province), [Azerbaijan](#) (the province of [Hereti/Saingilo](#)), [Armenia](#) (the [Lore](#) region) and Russia (northeastern corner of [Khevi](#), eastern Georgia). Soviet rule was harsh: about 50,000 people were executed and killed in 1921–1924, more than 150,000 were purged under Stalin and his secret police chief, the Georgian [Lavrenty Beria](#) in 1935–1938, 1942 and 1945–1951. In 1936, the TFSSR was dissolved and Georgia became the [Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic](#). Reaching the [Caucasus](#) oilfields was one of the main objectives of [Hitler's invasion of the USSR](#) in June 1941, but the armies of the [Axis powers](#) did not get as far as Georgia. The country contributed almost 700,000 fighters (350,000 were killed) to the Red Army, and was a vital source of textiles and munitions. However, a number of Georgians fought on the side of the German armed forces, forming the [Georgian Legion](#).

During this period Stalin ordered the deportation of the [Chechen](#), [Ingush](#), [Karachay](#) and the [Balkarian](#) peoples from the Northern [Caucasus](#); they were [transported](#) to [Siberia](#) and [Central Asia](#) for alleged collaboration with the [Nazis](#). He abolished their respective autonomous republics. The [Georgian SSR](#) was briefly granted some of their territory until 1957.^[45]

Stalin's successful appeal for patriotic unity eclipsed Georgian nationalism during the war and diffused it in the years following. On March 9, 1956, [about a hundred Georgian students were killed](#) when they demonstrated against [Khrushchev's](#) policy of de-

Stalinization that was accompanied by general criticism of the whole Georgian people and culture.[\[citation needed\]](#)

The decentralisation program introduced by Khrushchev in the mid-1950s was soon exploited by Georgian [Communist Party](#) officials to build their own regional power base. A thriving pseudo-capitalist shadow economy emerged alongside the official state-owned economy. While the official growth rate of the economy of the Georgia was among the lowest in the USSR, such indicators as savings level, rates of car and house ownership were the highest in the Union,[\[46\]](#) making Georgia one of the most economically successful Soviet republics. Corruption was at a high level. Among all the union republics, Georgia had the highest number of residents with high or special secondary education.[\[47\]](#)

Although corruption was hardly unknown in the Soviet Union, it became so widespread and blatant in Georgia that it came to be an embarrassment to the authorities in Moscow. [Eduard Shevardnadze](#), the country's interior minister between 1964 and 1972, gained a reputation as a fighter of corruption and engineered the removal of [Vasil Mzhavanadze](#), the corrupt First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party. Shevardnadze ascended to the post of First Secretary with the blessings of Moscow. He was an effective and able ruler of Georgia from 1972 to 1985, improving the official economy and dismissing hundreds of corrupt officials. Soviet power and Georgian nationalism clashed in 1978 when Moscow ordered revision of the constitutional status of the Georgian language as Georgia's official state language. Bowing to pressure from [mass street demonstrations](#) on April 14, 1978, Moscow approved Shevardnadze's reinstatement of the constitutional guarantee the same year. April 14 was established as a Day of the Georgian Language. Shevardnadze's appointment as Soviet Foreign Minister in 1985 brought his replacement in Georgia by [Jumber Patiashvili](#), a conservative and generally ineffective Communist who coped poorly with the challenges of [perestroika](#). Towards the end of the late 1980s, increasingly violent clashes occurred between the Communist authorities, the resurgent Georgian nationalist movement and nationalist movements in Georgia's minority-populated regions (notably [South Ossetia](#)). On April 9, 1989, Soviet troops were used to break up a peaceful demonstration at the government building in Tbilisi. Twenty Georgians were killed and hundreds wounded and poisoned. The event radicalised Georgian politics, prompting many - even some Georgian communists - to conclude that independence was preferable to continued Soviet rule.