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### To study the issue of epidemic history in feudal Georgia

(Epidemics and diseases common in western Georgia)

Mankind has endured dozens of plagues and epidemics throughout the long history of its existence. Accurate information about the common diseases and the damage caused by them has certainly not been preserved. The nature and causes of diseases are closely related to the socio-political and economic development of society and are an integral part of it. Based on historical materials, this essay introduces to the readers those diseases which were spread in western Georgia in the feudal age, as well as the combating methods and ways, and their impact on the state of society and its consequences.

The extremely humid climate of western Georgia created favourable conditions for the spread of various diseases. The authors of the ancient period unanimously mentioned the harmful effects of climate on human health. The locals, who were naturally adapted to living in humid and swampy environments, more easily tolerated the peculiarities of the climate. However, adapting was very difficult for newcomers. Travelers, Catholic missionaries, merchants, ambassadors, military personnel and all the other authors who came to Samegrelo pointed out the bad impact of the humid climate on human health, which often caused the local diseases. It should also be noted that different diseases were spread by foreign travelers and merchants, who brought various goods by sea, and in eastern Georgia by caravan.

A relatively rich historiographical base for the study of this problem dates back to the seventeenth century. These are separate surveys, written documents of foreign travelers, missionary reports, and other historically significant documents.

When discussing the diseases prevalent in western Georgia and the methods of combating them, there should especially be mentioned the great merit of the representatives of the St. Congregation ( Sacra Congregazione De Propaganfa Fide) in this direction. This organization was founded in Rome in 1622 and its main purpose was to propagate and defend Catholicism in the post-Reformation world. This organization trained missionaries for propaganda service. Missionaries were sent to work in various countries, including Eastern countries to work and preach Catholicism. Except Ecclesiastical knowledge, the missionaries were highly educated in secular affairs like medicine, art, writing etc. Arcangelo Lamberti, Giuseppe Judici, Cristoforo de Castelli, Pietro Avitabile, Antonio Giardina, Maria Majio and Clemente Galano were missionaries working in Georgia who have made special contribution to the preservation of the history and culture of our country through their work. In their records,

along with social and political issues, they described the diseases spread in the Georgian kingdoms and principalities of that age, and the ways to combat them. The grateful people called them „Ghorontishkochi" (the man of God Z.K.) for their great service.

Because of the enemy invasions and wars, there were different epidemics in a country and there were no doctors. In this situation, the European missionaries treated the sick as much as possible not only at the royal court (principality) but also among the population. Theatin missionaries in Georgia appeared not only as clergymen, but also as healers (**Kortua Z. From the History of the Foreign Policy of Georgian Principalities. Odishi Principality in the I half of XVII century, Tbilisi 2012. p82**).

We know from their written documents that the situation in the medical field not only in western Georgia but all over the country was very difficult. There were almost no educated local healers. Due to this fact it was impossible to treat and save the sick. Things were getting complicated when the population was infected with foreign imported diseases. In the essay, we do not describe deliberately those methods of local healers which were used in complete ignorance of the population.

We cannot say that the means and methods of treatment with folk remedies in Medea's homeland were fully ignored. It seems that in an economically and politically weakened country, the medical knowledge was forgotten or it was available to only a few people.

In 1614-1615 cholera appeared in the village of Mokvi in Samegrelo (Now Ochamchire district Z.K) according to „Zhami" by M. Tamarashvili. Cholera led to the death Etienne Vio, a French clergyman working there. Another French missionary, Louis Grange, also became ill. He decided to get away from there and went to Constantinople and there he died on May 22, 1615 (**M. Tamarashvili, p. 173**). We do not have information about the area of the epidemic spread and the number of victims. However, the possible spread of this incurable disease could likely have caused great casualties among the population.

In 1629, the Dominican missionary Giovanni Giuliano and Luca traveled to Abkhazia, Circassia and Samegrelo. He met Levan II Dadiani, the head of Odishi principality (1611-1657). Levan II Dadiani expressed his great wish to invite Italian missionaries in Samegrelo and he noted „Because the people of this tribe I consider the most numerous and educated...I wish we had them because I know they are educated and they know medicine too... and we need doctors..." (**M. Tamarashvili, p.147**) Giovanni and Luca cured Levan Dadiani, who was suffering from a lung disease. He also treated his sick wife and healed her. Puto, headman of Abkhazia invited Giovanni and Luka to treat his wife. After some time the patient recovered. (**M. Tamarashvili, p.145**). Giovanni and Luca used Mithridates (A kind of plant Z.K.) and prepared Reobarbaro for healing (**Tamarashvili 1902. 145**).

It is noteworthy that the newly arrived Italian missionaries became ill because of the local air. Many of them died, some of the newcomers, after some time, got used to the climate here and were cured. Malaria and other diseases caused the death of some missionaries: Antonio Jardina, Gaetano D, Alessandro, Giovanni Monti, Giacomo Marzi. Andrew Borome also fell ill (**M. Tamarashvili. p195**).

Famous Italian missionary Antonio Jardina, who was the author of Georgian grammar, was working in Guria. Despite the unbearable headaches caused by various diseases, he actively served the local population.

According to Don Pietro Avitabile, a Hungarian doctor took care of the health of the population of Guria. The doctor “studied not only all the illnesses, but also the use of all necessary medicines in a short time period. (**Avitabile 1977. p72**).

When the political authorities of the country realized the poor state of health care, they tried to put this field as a range of the policy and were directly involved in the treatment of the sick. Arcangelo Lamberti who spent 18 years in Georgia (2 years - in Kartli, 16 - in Samegrelo Z.K.) was well acquainted along with other medics in the state of medicine and the challenges in this field. He notes that the chief of Odishi, Levan II Dadiani, was a knowledgeable ruler and was also a great supporter of the field of medicine. Lambert writes: „In ancient times, it was the duty of the principal to take care of the nourishment, clothing and medicine of his people. This custom is completely banished in our countries (Lambert here refers to Western European countries of his time Z.K.). But Dadiani in his country firmly follows this custom. Indeed, in order to heal his people, he reads various medical books, which are translated from Latin into their language. He studies many spices, medicinal herbs, plant roots and makes many ointments and potions. He has boxes full of such medicines and carries them with him and distributes them to everyone as needed. This medicine is requested as if Galen (Ancient Greek physician I AD, Z.K) himself distributes it for them.” (**Arcangelo Lambert. Description of Samegrelo. 1990. p29**). According to Tamarashvili, Archangelo Lambert and Giuseppe Judiche were excellent healers. They healed the principal from multiple physical injuries. The grateful principal handed over the Tsipuria Church and estate to the missionaries for service. (present-day village of Tagiloni, Gali district) (**Tamarashvili 1902. p174**). The missionaries used quinine against malaria, which was very effective for treating the sick. Supposedly, they brought this medicine from abroad to treat the population.

Due to the shortage of local doctors, people with some knowledge in this case arrived from Turkey, Iran, Italy, France etc. These people were met with great respect from the population. They also taught local students medicinal plants and drug preparation rules. According to Lambert, laxatives were often used in Samegrelo.

The most common diseases in this area were:

(Geo.) Tkirpi – (Enlargement of the spleen, disruption of the stomach (According to Niko Chubinishvili Z.K.)), abnormal redness of the skin.

(Geo.) Tskalmanki - (Accumulation of water in the subcutaneous tissue, in various organs and cavities, pleura and abdominal cavity, etc.)

Cough - (May have been expressed in various forms, including tuberculosis, etc.)

Fever - Caused for a variety of reasons, often expressed in the form of malaria or typhoid.

Lambert's information clearly shows the poor state of medical care in Samegrelo. Supposedly, the situation was similar in the neighboring kingdoms and principalities.

When it was impossible to fight against the diseases with local forces, Levan II Dadiani, the clever principal of Odishi, tried to connect with Europe in order to receive help to improve the health condition of the people. He wrote a letter and gave to Archangelo Lamberti, who was returning to his homeland after living in Georgia for a long time, in order to bring it to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in Italy, Ferdinand II. Dadiani wrote to the great Duke:

„To his Excellency, the great Duke of Tuscany.

Your Excellency!

The glory of your palace is known for our country. This glory is also the merit of your subordinates, who are experienced in arts. They make such medicine with your help that can't be found in any other country. My son became very ill and so far no one was able to cure him. I thought it would be appropriate to entrust Theatine father Archangelo Lamberti ...in order to explain how much I need the help of your Excellency. I hope for your diligence and help. I promise any support to your Excellency...” (**Bernadette Majorana, La gloriosa Impresa, Palermo 1990, p.135**)

Despite the fact that Levan Dadiani had European cultural-political and economic orientation, this course was ineffectual due to the difficult political situation in the country. It is not surprising that Tuscan doctors did not arrive in Samegrelo. Most information about this issue dates back to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when European researchers, writers and representatives of the Russian Empire arrived in Georgia for different missions and our country became an integral periphery of the empire.

Russian General Sukhotin, who replaced the malicious general Totleben in 1771, noted in his report to the military leadership that in Poti, „poor drinking water caused contagious

diseases in the Russian army (Talking about malaria Z.K.). As a result, many people died“ (**De Gray de Fois's Notes on Georgia. 1985. p59**).

While travelling in Imereti and Samegrelo, ”the severe symptoms of malaria, which followed me throughout August, were repeated: swollen glands and moisture on the skin. The constant humidity and the hot weather made my companions suffer from cold, headaches, bruises on their bodies and unbearable nervous itching, the furuncles also came out ... “. Famous German scientist Johann Guldenstedt, who travelled in Georgia in 1771-1772, writes this in his travel report. (**Guldenstedt's Journey to Georgia. 1962. p173**).

All the foreign authors, who had been in Samegrelo in the first half of the 19th century, describe the climate of Samegrelo and malaria almost in the same way. Malaria pitilessly killed newcomers or locals. „Bad steam that’s deadly to Russians is devastating to all foreigners and even weakens the health of the locals. It ages people earlier than in the neighboring healthy highlands. By the age of twenty, the effects of the weather on Samegrelo will probably be noticeable to most individuals. " (**Maurice Wagner on Georgia, Tbilisi, 2002, p. 140; German text translated, introduction, comments and searches by Gia Gelashvili**) While describing Redut-Kale (Kulevi Z.K.), Wagner describes the soldiers of the Russian garrison standing there as follows: "Neither side of the Greater Russian Empire is as deadly to the northern settlers as this coastal place at the confluence of Khobi and Phasis. A quarter of Russian garrisons are killed in July-August-September. Due to this fact, the number of warriors is greatly reduced. Other soldiers, who survived death after many years of service, look like the walking dead... They guard with trembling legs, barely dragging the guns to the seashore. The number of sick people is less in a small settlement than in the garrison. The reason behind is that people from the small settlement are less influenced by swamp evaporation... Nevertheless, they also have enough contingent for settling the large cemetery, which is twelve versts south of Redut-kale. "(**Wagner on Georgia 2002: 139**).

Jacques François Gamba, Consul of the King of France in Georgia, who traveled to the Transcaucasia and Georgia in 1820-1824, describes Redout-Calais as follows: "The weather in Redut-Kale is bad, the climate here will definitely improve, If... the swamp is drained ... There we often find the cases of malaria that cannot be treated with quinine" ... (**Gamba 1987. p97**). He describes the hospitals located on the left bank of the Khobi River. There, presumably, patients with colds were treated.

German professor Karl Koch, traveled to Samegrelo (Megrelia Z.K.) and Abkhazia in the 30s of the XIX century. He notes when describes Sokhumi fortress: „There was a horrific death in Sukhumi-Kale. Along with malaria, the soldiers also got sick with Suravand.” (**Information by K. Koch and O. Spencer about Georgia and the Caucasus; translated from German, introduction and comments by Londa Mamatsashvili; Tb. 1981, p. 132**) He continues: “Poti is an even more sad place compared to Redut Kale. The wind blows from the sea, which releases moist air with harmful vapors. We often could not understand what was it - Epilepsy or chills from fever, because the limbs were tingling. Even those who

do not have an acute form of the disease gradually died. You will often meet swollen, pale, yellowed faces that are completely indifferent to the outside world, their hands are shaking and have difficulty with walking” (**Koch 1981. p168**). Russian officer asked Koch who arrived in Guria: "What do you want in this country of death? Here the human body gradually decays. Only such an unfortunate person arrives here, who has earned the fair or unjust mercy of a superior, and pays his sentence” (**Koch 1981. p180**).

The German scientist talks about the goals of Russian imperial policy in the Caucasus and particularly, in Georgia. He writes that "the Caucasus costs Russia 300,000 lives a year" (**Koch 1981. p122**).

Corresponding member of the Russian Academy, Ivan Bartolomey, traveled to Svaneti in 1853 on a certain mission and described the life and culture in Svaneti. He notes that "from the mineral source containing iron or from other sources, there is a terrible disease - cretinism, which results in sore throats, which are common in the communities of Muzhal and bordering Adishi. (**Colonel Bartholomey's trip to Free Svaneti 2018. p67**) As it is known, Goitre was very common among the population of Svaneti, which was caused by the lack of local iodine. Perhaps this is what the traveler meant when describing Cretinism. It was generally a disease of the mountain population because mountain water and food did not contain enough iodine and the locals were also completely vulnerable to this disease. Bartholomey, walking from Tsvirmi to Yale, records in his records "the ruins of a village destroyed by the plague"(**Colonel Bartolomey's trip to Free Svaneti 2018. p43**).

The last head of Samegrelo, David Dadiani (1813-1853) tried in every way to restore the principality and strengthen the economy through reforms. He wanted to develop healthcare as well. In 1840, David Dadiani gave the following suggestion to the Mdivanbegi (Senior Judge) of Samegrelo: „If anyone gets sick, let me know immediately. I order that the sick people must be separated from the healthy individuals in order to avoid the spread of the disease“ (**I.Meunargia. David Dadiani and his period. 2002. p 66**). He demanded the same to the Natsvali (Representative of the state government) of Khobi, Bechuna Jorjikia (**I.Meunargia 2002. p70**).

He tried to strictly control the whole principality and did not allow even the smallest number of cases of the epidemic. In the late 1840s, a plague broke out in Sephieti and David Dadiani had an immediate reaction: „If there is a real plague, I will go there immediately. We must take actions. Do you see how Russians work? They send us pricked books from the post office. (**I.Meunargia 2002. p23**).

It seems that the representatives of the Russian government were also checking the postal parcels due to the sanitary security measures.

In 1847 plague was common in Samegrelo. The cholera epidemic broke out there. From June 26, 1847 to November 1, 1885, in this principality, 1385 people became ill with

Cholera. In the same year, 8,012 typhus (Presumably typhus Z. K. ) cases were confirmed. Died 4032 people. ( I. Meunargia. 2002. p25)

Smallpox was widespread, which was severe due to the lack of common vaccination in the population. Head of Samegrelo David Dadiani himself became ill in Tbilisi with smallpox, although he was vaccinated. He had a severe form of this disease and barely escaped death. Even a poet from Tbilisi Laradze wrote a poem about him.

Considerate principal noted in a letter to Platon Ioseliani written on December 29, 1851: „We were greatly hurt by the cattle illness. A lot of people died. Even groceries might be uneatable." (I. Meunargia 2002. p25)

Cattle illness continued into the following year as well. Principal wrote to Platon Ioseliani in July 1852: "Cattle died in Megrelia. My herds, cows and bulls died. There was a big loss in three weeks for lords and serfs. One peasant from Tsaishi in the surname Gegechkori, lost ninety-seven cows and bulls in two weeks. Others lost fifty, forty, and so on. We took appropriate measures, but could not help it..... Abkhazian innkeepers' bullies brought the illnesses. These bullies were the source of our living" (Meunargia 2002: 121).

People feared that the disease could spread from cattle to the population and cause great casualties as it happened before. This is why the principal was worried, when he mentioned that „ Even groceries might be uneatable”.

In the 19th century, the health of students in educational institutions in western Georgia was deplorable. To create a general picture, we have a table reflecting the health condition of the students of Ozurgeti Theological School, which shows the number of sick and outpatient students in the hospital in 1898-1899.

The hospital was not near to Ozurgeti Theological School. Medical care was provided to the students by the school feldsher, in case of serious diseases –they invited the doctor. The medicines were distributed to the students at the pharmacy with the money assigned by the clergy of Ozurgeti district.

As we see in the table, fever is the most common disease in students (Abdaladze 2014 :40)

Russian Imperial Government, from Tsarist and Post-Period, tried to utilize the Transcaucasian coastline of the Black Sea in a short period of time. They created safe and comfortable living conditions for the military outposts stationed there and their inhabitants. For this purpose, they launched hydro-reclamation works along the Transcaucasian Black Sea coast. They began to dry up swampy areas, utilize them and actively fight malaria. They introduced new plant eucalyptus and other plants and opened medical facilities. This process

began intensively in the 1930s and lasted until the 1980s. From the second half of the XX century, these diseases literally disappeared on the territory of the Black Sea coast of Georgia.

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