Georgia - A story of encounters

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This autumn, europalia dedicates its festival to Georgia. From 4 October 2023, a comprehensive programme, teeming with exhibitions, performances, concerts, films, dance shows, theatre pieces and literary encounters, rolls out across Belgium. In this context, the Art & History Museum hosts a heritage exhibition focussing on the culture, history, and art of Georgia since the Neolithic period.

At the crossroads of East and West, traversed by trade routes linked to the Silk Roads, and always the object of ambition of the great powers surrounding it, Georgia has been a place of encounters and exchanges from which it has drawn cultural nourishment. The result is a heritage of unparalleled richness.

Wine has been produced in Georgia for at least 8000 years. It accompanies a ritualised art of dining with refined cuisine, an integral part of the country's heritage. As the oldest cultural asset in Georgia, wine will be the starting point for the exhibition. Metalwork – gold and bronze – will also pay a central role. From the Bronze Age onwards, Georgian metalworkers produced pieces of unprecedented delicacy and sumptuousness. The myth of the Golden Fleece has its roots in Georgia: the region was known to the Greeks for its wealth in gold.

After the Greeks, who established trading posts there, numerous other powers would meet and confront each other on this small, coveted territory of the Caucasus: Romans, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, Mongols, and Ottomans contributed to a unique intermingling of cultures, but also sowed destruction in their wake. A Christian country since the 4th century, Georgia struggled to assert itself in the midst of the great powers around it. It succeeded brilliantly between the 11th and 13th centuries, the golden age of Georgian unification, which shone economically and culturally throughout the Middle East under the reign of its emblematic sovereign, Queen Tamar.