

THE CONCEPT OF "ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM" IN SULKHAN-SABA ORBELIANI'S *THE WISDOM OF FICTION*

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Abstract. Due to its geopolitical positioning, Georgia has historically served not merely as a cultural crossroads but as an intersection where Eastern-Western and Christian-Muslim civilizations converge. The sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries were characterized by pronounced diversity within the Georgian cultural sphere. This heterogeneity intellectually disrupted the stagnation caused by political inertia, thereby catalyzing new cultural dimensions. In this regard, the oeuvre of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani is of particular scholarly interest. Through his lexicographical work *Sityvis Kona* (The Bouquet of Words), Orbeliani aligns with the traditions of Enlightenment encyclopedists, while his governance concepts synthesize traditional paradigms with innovative ideologies. Ideologically, Orbeliani operates as a Christian humanist who maintains fidelity to the monarchical model of state-building while concurrently advocating for reform. His linguistic repertoire and stylistic approach reflect the same synthesis and intersection of Eastern and Western cultures that defined the contemporary Georgian societal epoch. This study focuses on Orbeliani's statecraft vision as articulated in his collection of fables. In his narrative framework, pseudo-virtue is contrasted with genuine virtue, and superficial action is juxtaposed with meaningful agency. Mirroring the European Enlightenment, Orbeliani conceptualizes a harmonious society anchored by the citizenry and their ethical-political consciousness. The ethical dilemmas of the era are manifested through character archetypes and reflected at the intersection of ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The ethical dilemmas of the era are manifested through character archetypes and reflected at the intersection of ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The dissemination of knowledge among the masses, the introduction of transformative ideologies to the citizenry, and the moralistic pathos that characterize the European Enlightenment are equally observable in Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's literary prose. Within *The Wisdom of Fiction*, the author utilizes allegory, satire, humor, irony, and paradox—literary devices intrinsically tied to Enlightenment discourse. Orbeliani's socio-political concepts closely align with the paradigm of so-called "enlightened absolutism," which asserts the supremacy of state interests and posits that all actions must be executed for the benefit of the state. This exact principle serves as the axis that contrasts reality with the ideal within *The Wisdom of Fiction*. In this conflict, the text ensures the triumph of the state ideal, wherein every societal component possesses a distinct function, enabling the nation to claim its rightful position upon the "Eastern-Western Divan" (Kotetishvili).

Key words: Enlightenment; enlightened absolutism; Georgian culture; Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani; cultural intersection.

Due to its geopolitical positioning, Georgia has historically served not merely as a cultural crossroads but as a vital intersection where Eastern-Western and Christian-Muslim civilizations converge. The sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries were characterized by pronounced diversity within the Georgian cultural sphere. This heterogeneity intellectually disrupted the stagnation caused by political inertia, thereby

catalyzing new cultural dimensions. In this regard, the oeuvre of Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani is of particular scholarly interest. Through his lexicographical work *Sityvis Kona* (The Bouquet of Words), Orbeliani aligns with the traditions of Enlightenment encyclopedists, while his governance concepts synthesize traditional paradigms with innovative ideologies. Ideologically, Orbeliani operates as a Christian humanist who maintains fidelity to the monarchical model of state-building while concurrently advocating for reform. His linguistic repertoire and stylistic approach reflect the same synthesis and intersection of Eastern and Western cultures that defined the contemporary Georgian societal epoch.

This study focuses on Orbeliani's statecraft vision as articulated in his collection of fables. Although Orbeliani composed *The Wisdom of Fiction* during "the days of his youth" (as indicated by historical records, presumably prior to taking monastic vows in 1698)—a period when Enlightenment ideals were just beginning to establish a foothold in Europe—this paper specifically examines those cultural intersections and dimensions whose integration and adaptation onto indigenous soil forged the distinctive profile of Georgian culture.

It is noteworthy that this partially autobiographical text functions allegorically not only through its constituent fables but also through the very configuration of its ideological construct. Influenced by European intellectual currents on the one hand, and driven by a desire to optimize traditional systems via reform on the other, Orbeliani employs an allegorical narrative framework to present the ultimate triumph of virtue over malice. In his view, state efficacy is contingent upon a functional state structure, the synthesis of divine providence and human agency, a deep cognizance of institutional responsibility, and timely, strategic responsiveness.

Within Orbeliani's conceptual framework, pseudo-virtue is juxtaposed with genuine virtue, and superficial action is contrasted with meaningful agency. Mirroring the core tenets of the European Enlightenment, Orbeliani envisions a harmonious society anchored by the concept of the "citizen" and their ethico-political consciousness. The cardinal objective of this allegorical text can be formulated in a single inquiry: what mechanism can neutralize the inherent human propensity toward malice and degradation? The manifest resolution is education and upbringing, which cultivate an enlightened, tolerant, empathetic, just, and consummate monarch—a ruler who serves as the ultimate guarantor of societal harmony and the mitigation of evil. Consequently, Orbeliani delineates both the fundamental tenets and the socioeconomic outcomes of civic education. In his theoretical model, the educational framework represents the most reliable paradigm for the stabilization and harmonization of society. The ethical dilemmas of the era are manifested through character archetypes and reflected at the intersection of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The dissemination of knowledge among the masses, the introduction of transformative ideologies to the citizenry, and the moralistic pathos that characterize the European Enlightenment also constitute the conceptual axis of Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani's literary texts. Within *The Wisdom of Fiction*, the author utilizes allegory, satire, humor, irony, and paradox—literary devices intrinsically tied to Enlightenment discourse.

Orbeliani's socio-political concepts closely align with the paradigm of so-called "enlightened absolutism," which asserts the supremacy of state interests and posits that all actions must be executed for the benefit of the state. This exact principle serves as the axis that contrasts reality with the ideal within *The Wisdom of Fiction*. In this conflict, the narrative ensures the triumph of the state ideal, wherein every societal component possesses a distinct function, enabling the nation to claim its rightful position upon the "Eastern-Western Divan" (Kotetishvili, as cited in Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature, 2010, p. 9). Sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Georgia constituted a distinctive geopolitical and cultural space, perpetually situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western influences. During this era, the nation's political structure frequently experienced stagnation due to various systemic factors, including the fractured organization of

central authority and intense external geopolitical pressure. Nevertheless, these very complexities Engendered an intellectual milieu that fostered a rich diversity in the development of literary and philosophical thought. This environment provided a fertile ground for the emergence of Georgian scholars who sought to integrate the foundational principles of the European Enlightenment with indigenous realities and traditions. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani serves as a prominent exponent of this intellectual movement; however, he concurrently operates through a framework of universalization. He conceptualizes the nation's specific domestic dilemmas within a broader macro-historical trajectory, framing local challenges within a shared nexus of systemic problems that necessitate universal solutions—a paradigm most palpably manifested in his seminal collection *The Wisdom of Fiction*. This collection of fables is distinguished not only by its artistic significance but also by its embedded political, ethical, and philosophical dimensions. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani writes from the perspective of a Christian humanist who simultaneously defends the institution of monarchy while advancing a reformatory vision aimed at optimizing the state apparatus. Infused with allegorical parables and socio-political commentary, his work generates a distinct intellectual dynamic wherein conceptual architecture and practical statecraft are integrally synthesized.

To investigate the Enlightenment worldview of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, this study establishes a methodological framework that integrates structural-semantic, comparative, and sociological approaches to literature. The primary empirical foundation of the research is *The Wisdom of Fiction*, which is conceptualized not merely as a specimen of short prose, but as a multidisciplinary philosophical-pedagogical treatise from the early Enlightenment epoch. The allegorical narrative and parabolic structure inherent in the text are analyzed through a hermeneutic method, facilitating the decoding of deep semantic strata, such as the cult of the supremacy of reason, the socio-political critique of feudal governance, and anthropocentrism. A comparative examination of the characters' ideological positionings within the context of Western European rationalism reveals Orbeliani's humanist paradigm, wherein didactic principles are oriented toward the moral and intellectual transformation of society. Consequently, the synthesis of these structural and contextual approaches ensures a scientific evaluation of the work's ideological architectonics within contemporary academic discourse. This article aims to analyze Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's statecraft vision and the concept of "enlightened absolutism." The study seeks to elucidate how the author articulates the synthesis of European intellectual currents with indigenous Georgian traditions of statehood, as well as how allegory, humor, irony, and social critique shape the text's political and ethical aesthetic. Methodologically, the research further relies on textual analysis, the socio-historical and cultural context, and philosophical comparisons with the European Enlightenment, particularly regarding the perception of the concept of enlightened absolutism. The article encompasses the following primary thematic directions: a contextual framework anchored by a concise socio-historical and cultural background; Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's intellectual profile; a detailed analysis of the text's conceptualization of statecraft; an interpretation of the influence of European "enlightened absolutism"; an examination of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of the era; and a definitive conclusion highlighting Orbeliani's role in the development of Georgian political thought and the process of cultural integration.

I. Socio-Historical and Cultural Context

Enlightened absolutism, predominant in the eighteenth century, represents a form of governance wherein monarchs—such as Frederick II and Joseph II—utilized Enlightenment philosophies to modernize the state apparatus, enact socio-economic reforms, and disseminate education, while concurrently maintaining absolute sovereign authority. This paradigm aimed to govern through "rational" principles, frequently utilizing a paternalistic approach. The modernization of this ideology entails the systematic reformation of the state apparatus, legal institutions, and public administration based on principles of rationality. The syste-

matization of the educational sphere constitutes a crucial trajectory, the development of which encompasses expanding access to schooling, institutionalizing religious tolerance, and mitigating superstition. From an economic perspective, these reforms encouraged manufacturing and advanced agricultural productivity, heavily influenced by Physiocratic thought. Regarding the dynamics of power, Enlightenment thinkers conceptualized the monarch as an absolute ruler who acts exclusively "for the benefit of the people," yet fundamentally without popular political participation. Concurrently, the element of paternalism must be highlighted: the ruler is cast in the role of the "first servant of the state," bearing the ultimate responsibility to care for their subjects. Enlightened absolutism was most characteristically manifested within Central and Eastern Europe, specifically in Prussia, Austria (the Habsburg Monarchy), and Russia.

The political and cultural landscape of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Georgia was characterized by unique heterogeneity. Due to its geopolitical positioning, the nation was perpetually situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western spheres of influence. Intensive interactions with both the Christian and Muslim worlds engendered an intellectual milieu in which Georgian society had to concurrently navigate the dual processes of cultural synthesis and civilization-level confrontation. The political structures of this epoch were frequently volatile; the fragmented organization of central authority and unremitting external pressure created conditions that paradoxically stimulated innovative thought within society. It was precisely this environment that enabled intellectual circles to formulate novel political and ethical paradigms. During this period, Georgian culture was uniquely distinguished by elite education and encyclopedic scholarly interests, which facilitated the organic integration of European thought with indigenous traditions.

Within this macro-historical context, the oeuvre of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani acquires exceptional significance, as it concurrently engages with Eastern traditions and Western European Enlightenment philosophy to forge a synthetic vision concerning the triad of state, society, and the individual—the potential citizen. His writings constitute not merely literary compositions, but a robust intellectual and statecraft discourse that establishes a fundamental baseline for contemporary scholarly research.

II. The Intellectual Profile of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658–1725) emerges as a preeminent figure within the Georgian intellectual landscape, whose oeuvre synthesizes humanist Christian ideals with pragmatically oriented statecraft paradigms. His writings—most notably the collection *The Wisdom of Fiction*—function as a distinct Georgian iteration of Enlightenment discourse. However, it remains a complex hermeneutic inquiry whether the author deliberately embraced European Enlightenment tendencies to align with Western principles, or if he independently arrived at conceptual models analogous to those of the European Enlightenment. This phenomenon mirrors the trajectory of the later Georgian Romantics, for whom indigenous sociocultural foundations and external realities—imported via translation and specific political contexts—converged to crystallize into a unified romantic worldview. Nevertheless, Orbeliani's literary output remains intrinsically saturated with elements of vernacular Christian ethics and local tradition.

The intellectual profile of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani is distinguished by several fundamental dimensions: Encyclopedic Approach; Humanist Paradigm; Reformatory Monarchism; Stylistic Synthesis.

III. The Concept of "Enlightened Absolutism" and Orbeliani's Vision

Orbeliani's *The Wisdom of Fiction* closely aligns with the paradigm of so-called enlightened absolutism, whose European configurations functioned as political systems designed to consolidate monarchical authority through the integration of educational and humanist frameworks, thereby ensuring civic welfare. For instance, Frederick II of Prussia emphasizes the necessity of an enlightened sovereign, while Voltaire and Montesquieu posit that jurisprudence and ethical standards are indispensable for societal synchronization. However, chronologically and conceptually, Orbeliani exhibits the most significant structural convergence

with Francis Bacon (1561–1626). Because Bacon's intellectual activities antedate Orbeliani's literary tenure, Baconian philosophy had sufficient temporal opportunity to undergo historical dissemination and institutionalization. Consequently, this study suggests that Orbeliani's ideological architecture demonstrates its profoundest commonalities precisely with the Baconian paradigm.

Bacon's Fundamental Imperatives Regarding Monarchy

Francis Bacon maintained a distinctive philosophical paradigm regarding the institution of monarchy. Serving under Elizabeth I and James I, Bacon posited that robust centralized authority was imperative for state stability; nevertheless, the sovereign was simultaneously obligated to pursue the "common good" and manifest structural rationality in governance. For comparative analysis, several key imperatives are delineated below:

Thus, from a Baconian perspective, monarchy constituted an indispensable form of governance, provided that the sovereign remained prudent and dedicated to the promotion of the collective welfare. According to his doctrine, the monarch is under no obligation to render an account of their executive actions to any earthly authority, but to God alone. The sovereign is conceptualized as a mortal god on earth, upon whom the living God has bestowed His own name as a token of majestic honor; yet, should the king fail to execute his constitutional and moral duties, he betrays that divine trust and degenerates into a predatory, bloodthirsty ruler. The primary teleological function of monarchs is to govern for the benefit of the populace rather than for the aggrandizement of personal ambitions.

It represents a desperate state of mind when few objectives are desirable and numerous factors are perilous; nevertheless, this remains the historical destiny of most sovereigns. Monarchs are analogous to celestial bodies, which act as the catalysts for either fortuitous or adverse eras; they command immense veneration, yet are perpetually denied tranquility. Sovereigns must continuously navigate complex institutional relations with neighboring states, consorts, progeny, ecclesiastical hierarchies, the nobility, the middle class, merchants, the common citizenry, and the military. It is an existential paradox to actively pursue supreme authority while concurrently relinquishing personal liberty, or to seek systemic dominion over others while losing governance over oneself. Ultimately, Bacon posits that only an enlightened monarch is capable of institutionalizing structural harmony within the state. From this analytical standpoint, Orbeliani's paradigm is characterized by an allegorical and parabolic architecture designed to facilitate the institutionalization of fundamental statecraft principles. For instance, the fables "The King and His Three Sons," "The King of Khorasan," and "The Unjust Shirvanshah" demonstrate how the absence of justice, integrity, and foundational knowledge inherently disrupts the state mechanism. A direct parallel emerges here with the philosophy of Frederick II, who posited that a monarch must be highly educated to ensure the institutional efficacy of the state apparatus through their executive actions. This narrative framework also functions as a literary manifestation of the aforementioned Baconian maxims.

Nevertheless, it must be reiterated that because this treatise was composed during "the days of his youth"—predating his diplomatic mission to Western Europe—it cannot be definitively linked to a direct reception of European texts. Instead, this study hypothesizes either the oral dissemination of prevailing European intellectual currents or an autonomous crystallization of analogous ideas ripened by the indigenous sociocultural soil. Within Orbeliani's theoretical model, civic education is directly intertwined with structural state interests. Consequently, he focuses primary analytical attention on the sovereign. Through his narrative framework, he not only depicts the archetype of a just, robust, rational, and prudent monarch who actively serves the collective good and protects all societal strata, but also theoretically delineates the exact conditions required to achieve this ideal outcome, as illustrated by the didactic prompts: "Three types of kings are beloved by God..." and "Do you wish your son to be a king or a shepherd?..." The educational frame-

work and subsequent empirical evaluation of the crown prince serve this exact purpose (exemplified by Jumber's arrival riding an elephant and his programmatic articulation: "The hubut is a great creature..."), culminating in the definitive conclusion: "The king witnessed an active word and a verbalized action." Orbeliani's ideological construct is configured as follows: Phinez is depicted as a benevolent monarch, yet he lacks ultimate perfection. His sovereign character is overshadowed by the internal structure of his court, as this specific institutional setup breeds systemic injustice, envy, vengeance, and ultimately, homicide (manifested through the machinations of Ruka). The structural pathology of Phinez's court stems from the concurrent service of Sedrak and Ruka. Were it not for Ruka, Sedrak's counsel would have obstructed the king from seeking Leon (as seen in the parable "The Pauper and the Jar of Ghee"); however, Ruka immediately adopts a hostile stance toward Leon upon their initial encounter. Despite Phinez recognizing Leon's divine providence and seemingly executing the divine will, Ruka's antagonism ultimately exposes the preceptor to mortal peril.

What, then, constitutes a consummate monarch capable of consolidating and reinforcing the state through structural order according to Orbeliani? Active faith (evinced by prayer and philanthropy to secure an heir), divine election (manifested in the king's vision), adherence to the divine will (the discovery of Leon), experiential knowledge, awareness of vernacular wisdom and systemic societal dilemmas (cultivated through pedagogical perambulation), absolute truth (in relation to Ruka), the synthesis of word and action (efficacious benevolence), and an uncompromising stance against all forms of malice and deceit. The ultimate realization of this model—Phinez's enlightenment and the triumph of virtue over vice—serves as the foundational baseline for a successful state within Orbeliani's theoretical framework. His primary scholarly emphasis is oriented toward divine faith, the active engagement of human reason, functional benevolence, and a compassionate yet fundamentally just and uncompromisingly equitable style of governance characterized by timely administrative responsiveness. Orbeliani's primary emphasis is oriented toward divine faith, the active engagement of human reason, functional benevolence, and a compassionate yet fundamentally just and uncompromisingly equitable style of governance characterized by timely administrative responsiveness. This dynamic constitutes a model that exhibits structural convergence with the philosophies of European Enlightenment thinkers. It mirrors, for instance, Voltaire's conviction that an enlightened populace establishes the baseline for a harmonious state system, within which the monarch operates as the pivotal figure of institutional execution.

Consequently, the Georgian author synthesizes the allegorical traditions of Eastern monarchical discourse with the moral education of the citizenry and Western European humanist paradigms characteristic of enlightened absolutism: the state is conceptualized as an institution directed toward elevated teleological objectives, whereas the education and intellectual enlightenment of the citizen serve as the ultimate prerequisite for its systemic consummation.

IV. The Ethical and Aesthetic Dimensions

Orbeliani's *The Wisdom of Fiction* is not merely a vehicle for political and statecraft discourse, but a treatise possessing profound ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The allegorical structure of the text enables the author to mirror the confrontation between virtue and malice, and between pseudo-virtue and genuine agency, all of which are configured to preserve societal synchronization.

Characters as Ethical Axiological Vehicles

Allegorical archetypes embodying intrinsic human attributes alongside moral or immoral agency. Direct narrative demonstrations of how civic ethical consciousness dictates the quality of state stability. Structural employment of tales like "The Sighted and the Blind," "The Lantern Brought From Behind," and "The Unjust Shirvanshah." Characters functioning as instruments of social pathos to facilitate the localization of European

humanist paradigms. Allegory and Conceptual Architecture: Holistic deployment of the allegorical system to synthesize moral, political, and social paradigms. Rhetorical employment of parables, irony, satire, and paradox to construct a multidimensional discourse. Literary dissemination of enlightened absolutism frameworks through advanced aesthetic forms. Methodological alignment with European Enlightenment traditions where state optimization and civic education intersect. Intersection of the Ethical and Aesthetic Dimensions: Structural convergence of ethical imperatives and aesthetic configurations within the narrative space. Tactical utilization of literary devices—allegory, humor, and irony—to subordinate political theories to moral functions. Pedagogical focus directed toward systematic civic socialization and character development. reservation of classical artistic traditions while generating a novel intellectual baseline for the vernacular culture. Pedagogy, Epistemic Frameworks, and Societal Synchronization: Inherent reliance of structural state equilibrium and societal harmony upon civic enlightenment. Systematic mass dissemination of knowledge alongside the cultivation of civic ethical responsibility. Direct alignment with European Enlightenment macro-tendencies regarding civic consciousness as a vector of political stability. Analytical grounding of secular educational paradigms within an indigenous, Christian-ethical substrate. Synthetic Aesthetic and Geopolitical Governance Axioms: Conceptual prioritization of the sovereign operating as the "first servant of the state." Historical transition of enlightened monarchs—such as Frederick II or Catherine II—away from purely divine-right absolutism.

Theoretical re-legitimization of autocratic governance based on the active promotion of public welfare. Socio-political reforms were conceptualized as strictly top-down initiatives, grounded in the axiomatic principle that a pristine source guarantees the purity of the stream; thus, structural transformations were enacted not via revolutionary upheaval, but through imperial or monarchical decree. These initiatives encompassed the modernization of educational frameworks, the institutionalization of religious pluralism, and the prohibition of judicial torture. Concurrently, administrative centralization became a primary trajectory, emphasizing the consolidation of the state apparatus and the systematization of bureaucracy to optimize governance efficacy. Macroeconomic development entailed the systematic promotion of commerce and industrial manufacturing aimed at amplifying state wealth.

The Enlightenment Model of Frederick II (The Great) of Prussia

Conceptual self-identification as the "first servant of the state". Intellectual alignment and sustained correspondence with Voltaire. Judicial modernization through the abolition of judicial torture. Structural implementation of the principle of quasi-equality before the law. Institutionalization of universal religious toleration for persecuted Protestants and Catholics. Enforcement of mandatory primary education as a revolutionary pedagogical vector.

The Radical Enlightenment Paradigm of Joseph II (Hapsburg Monarchy)

Historical conceptualization of his governance model as "Josephinism." Structural abolition of serfdom alongside peasant landownership initiatives. Systemic subordination of ecclesiastical institutions to state authority. Dissolution of monasteries lacking measurable public utility. Legislative institutionalization of religious toleration for minority confessions. Entrenchment of intense aristocratic opposition due to rapid execution. Self-authored epitaph acknowledging unfulfilled yet noble teleological ambitions.

The Imperial Governance Context of Catherine II (Russia)

Historiographical characterization of her reign as a "Golden Age." Intellectual alignment and epistemic correspondence with Voltaire and Diderot. Codification of the Nakaz (Instruction) leveraging Montesquieu's legal theories. Legislative consolidation of equality before the law and anti-torture measures. Practical containment of Enlightenment liberties exclusively to the nobility. Systematic advancement of early modern public education and healthcare. Foundational sponsorship of women's academic schooling via the Smolny

Institute. Personal inoculation against smallpox to establish a public health precedent. The pragmatic limitations of Catherine II's "liberalism" became evident precisely where systemic threats to her autocratic power emerged. In the wake of the Pugachev Rebellion, she further marginalized the peasantry and structurally intensified the institution of serfdom. Conversely, while monarchs in Prussia, Austria, and Russia implemented structural adjustments via a strictly top-down approach, Louis XVI in France resisted systemic transformation. This institutional failure ultimately triggered a revolutionary explosion from below. The philosophical doctrines of Enlightenment thinkers—most notably Rousseau and Voltaire—convinced the demos that legitimate political sovereignty resided within the nation rather than the monarch. Consequently, when the citizenry perceived that absolutism was structurally incapable of, or indifferent to, addressing their socio-economic needs, they resorted to violence to reshape the political apparatus. As a structural outcome, while enlightened absolutism sought to preserve the monarchical institution through reform, the French Revolution completely dismantled it, thereby clearing the historical path for modern democratic systems.

A segment of Enlightenment philosophers maintained that a robust yet rational sovereign represented the most accelerated vehicle for total societal transformation. They operated under the assumption that the popular masses remained too uneducated to independently enact socio-political reforms. Consequently, several philosophers actively defended various iterations of monarchical governance. Prominent among them was Voltaire, the most celebrated proponent of enlightened absolutism. Voltaire maintained an explicit skepticism toward democratic governance, arguing that an "enlightened despot"—conceived as a philosopher-king—served as the optimal structural guarantor against the proliferation of religious fanaticism and systemic ignorance. In Voltaire's view, the monarch was obligated to protect jurisprudence and individual liberty, yet retain sovereign executive authority. Conversely, Montesquieu did not advocate for absolute rule; instead, he conceptualized constitutional monarchy as the optimal governance model. His seminal theory on the separation of powers—delineated into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches—was engineered precisely to ensure that monarchical authority was legally constrained by constitutional parameters rather than entirely dismantled. Thomas Hobbes, despite operating during an earlier historical epoch, provided the foundational ideological framework for subsequent intellectual discourse surrounding monarchism. Hobbes posited that to prevent an anarchic state of nature characterized by a "war of all against all," society required a singular, robust sovereign—the "Leviathan"—to whom the populace would surrender their natural rights in exchange for structural security.

Monarchical rule was similarly endorsed by the school of French economists known as the Physiocrats, most notably François Quesnay. This group argued that only an absolute monarch possessed the institutional capacity to execute systemic economic reforms and eradicate feudal impediments to free trade. In radical opposition to these paradigms, Jean-Jacques Rousseau vehemently rejected the institution of monarchy, advancing instead the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" and direct democracy.

Within *The Wisdom of Fiction*, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's political vision generates a compelling parallel with European enlightened absolutism, yet it remains intrinsically bounded by the specific sociopolitical realities of early modern Georgia. To elucidate these structural dynamics, the paradigms of Orbeliani and European Enlightenment thinkers are comparatively analyzed across several fundamental dimensions below:

The Role of the Sovereign and the "Enlightened Ruler"

European Enlightenment Paradigm (e.g., Voltaire): Conceptualization of the monarch as a "philosopher on the throne" executing top-down rational reforms for collective public welfare. Orbeliani's Paradigm: Establishment of Leon as a divinely ordained preceptor whose ultimate teleological function is to cultivate an ideal, rational ruler in the character of Jumber. Epistemic Foundation of Statecraft: Rejection of monarchy as a purely hereditary privilege; statecraft is reframed as an objective art and science requiring systematic

education and empirical experience. Pedagogical Execution: Reliance on rigorous education, literacy, and scholarly wisdom as the primary mechanisms for engineering a wise sovereign.

The Institution of Council and Internal Critique

European Enlightenment Paradigm: Prioritization of the intellectual philosopher acting as the sovereign's counselor to ensure the executive apparatus responds directly to the "voice of reason." Orbeliani's Paradigm: Bifurcation of counsel through the structural juxtaposition of Sedrak (representing experiential wisdom and traditional integrity) and Ruka (representing malice and systemic ignorance). Institutional Dependency: Analytical emphasis on the premise that a sovereign's administrative efficacy is strictly contingent upon the quality of intellectual counsel they receive. Critique of Arbitrary Absolute Rule: Structural depiction of King Phineas's executive paralysis in the absence of sound counsel, indicating that unconstrained autocratic power degenerates into systemic decay unless guided by philosophical wisdom.

Jurisprudence versus Arbitrary Will: European Enlightenment Paradigm (e.g., Montesquieu, Voltaire): Strict emphasis on the supremacy of the rule of law, requiring the sovereign to govern via established codifications rather than subjective disposition. Orbeliani's Paradigm: Explicit critique of systemic injustice, despotic tyranny, and autocratic whim through instructive tales like "The Clever Arab" and "The King and the Painter." Axiological Framework of Justice: Conceptualization of justice as a profound ethico-moral category rather than a detached, clinical legal mechanism. Socio-Historical Context: Methodological alignment of Orbeliani's moral-legal framework with the contemporary legislative spirit of the Georgian Dasturlamali (King Vakhtang VI's legal code). Pragmatism and Realism: European Physiocratic Paradigm: Instrumental view of the monarchy as a structural vehicle for socio-economic modernization and macroscopic financial progress. Orbeliani's Paradigm: Primacy of a didactic, pedagogical approach, positing that a nation's prosperity is intrinsically contingent upon the moral and intellectual enlightenment of its sovereign. Systemic Stance: Rejection of radical institutional upheaval or republican transformation; advocacy focuses exclusively on the moral refinement of the existing state apparatus via targeted education.

Epistemic Divergences and Analytical Syntheses: The Core Divergence: Ethical and Institutional Orientations; European Enlightenment: Methodological prioritization of institutional secularization, structural legal checks, and systemic administrative modifications. Orbeliani's Enlightenment: Epistemic reliance upon Christian morality, deontological principles, and individual cardinal virtues. Systemic vs. Anthropocentric Models: The late European model engineered automated structural checks to prevent bad actors from damaging the state, whereas Orbeliani maintained that the ethical cultivation of the ruler dictates the quality of governance. The Axiological Model of "The King and the Painter": Practical literary manifestation of Orbeliani's overarching political philosophy. Direct narrative dialogue with the core tenant of enlightened absolutism regarding sovereign accountability before truth and natural law. The painter's realistic depiction of the monarch's physical defects serving as a symbolic imperative for self-critique.

Structural warning against internal courtly sycophancy, demanding that the sovereign actively cultivate self-awareness regarding imperial administrative errors. This concept directly converges with the Voltairean doctrine that an enlightened sovereign must ground their authority in empirical truth and rationality. Consequently, this comparative matrix delineates the structural symmetries and divergences between Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani and Western European political thinkers across four core epistemological axes: Pedagogy as the Operational Substrate of Statecraft (Pedagogical Optimism). Mirroring European Enlightenment thinkers, Orbeliani operates under a framework of pedagogical optimism, positing that human nature—specifically that of a sovereign—can be fundamentally transformed through rigorous, structured upbringing. Within this narrative trajectory, the character of Crown Prince Jumber functions as a literal tabula rasa (clean slate) upon

which his preceptor, Leon, systematically imprints philosophical wisdom. This paradigm exhibits direct convergence with John Locke's empirical doctrine that education unilaterally constructs the individual persona.

For Orbeliani, the monarch must not merely be a hereditary successor, but a highly qualified administrative executive. It is a highly significant thematic trend that despite Orbeliani's ecclesiastical status, the operational mechanism for resolving systemic crises within his fables is invariably human reason and pragmatic intellect rather than divine mysticism or supernatural intervention. Both Leon and Jumber resolve complex judicial and administrative disputes by utilizing foresight, dialectical logic, systemic observation, and acute intellect. This methodology represents an early manifestation of rationalism—a paradigm grounded in the conviction that the physical cosmos and state structures must conform to immutable rational laws. This concept is logically intertwined with a rigorous critique of tyranny and an emphasis on moderation as a structural mechanism for societal harmonization, which is itself impossible without the rule of law. Enlightened absolutism fundamentally predicated a sovereign who was subordinated to jurisprudence. Within his parables, Orbeliani frequently satirizes monarchs who operate exclusively on arbitrary whim and personal impulse. For instance, the fable "The Clever Servant" demonstrates that the sovereign remains inherently fallible as a human actor and requires a counselor dedicated to uncompromised truth. This narrative device functions as an implicit critique of the contemporary feudal anarchy that fragmented early modern Georgia.

Linguistic Democratization and Lexicographical Emancipation

A defining hallmark of the European Enlightenment was the systematic democratisation of knowledge accessibility. A corresponding trajectory is palpably manifested within Orbeliani's framework: *The Wisdom of Fiction* is intentionally composed in an accessible, vernacular, and dynamic idiom. Rejecting the convoluted, high-flown, and ornate rhetoric that dominated prior literary epochs, Orbeliani elected a linguistic register universally accessible to the populace. This stylistic shift constitutes an explicit attempt at intellectual emancipation. Consequently, it is highly indicative that Orbeliani stands as the foundational thinker who bequeathed to Georgian lexicography a monumental work saturated with encyclopedic articles. Serving concurrently as an explanatory dictionary, a translational index, and a general encyclopedia, his *Sityvis Kona* (*The Bouquet of Words*) shares a profound qualitative and epistemic affinity with the holistic vision of the Western European Encyclopedists.

Within Orbeliani's framework, civic ethics explicitly equate virtue with public utility. A clear thematic trajectory emerges: the narrative praises industriousness, fidelity, and pragmatism. His protagonists achieve success not through supernatural intervention or mysticism, but via acute intellect and practical discernment. These dynamics represent the nascent elements of a bourgeois Enlightenment ethic emerging within a deeply entrenched feudal environment.

The parable "The King and the Painter" constitutes the cornerstone of Orbeliani's political philosophy. It most palpably manifests the Enlightenment trajectory that Western European thinkers subsequently termed "speaking truth to power." When analyzed through the analytical lens of enlightened absolutism, this parable reveals two core components: Truth as the Sovereign's Speculum. The Narrative Context: The depiction of a physically defective and unjust monarch. The Enlightenment Connection: The painter operating as the archetype of the "rational counselor." The Institutional Imperative: The core tenet of enlightened absolutism dictates that while the sovereign must confront objective reality, this truth must ultimately serve state interests and preserve the institutional dignity of the crown. Critical Inquiry versus Blind Obedience: The Rejection of Flattery: An explicit warning against enveloping the monarchical court in sycophancy. The Epistemic Act: The painter's refusal to conform to illusion, even under the structural threat of capital

punishment. The Practical Outcome: A sovereign who succumbs to self-delusion is structurally incapable of maintaining administrative efficiency.

Faced with a socio-political backdrop of total and institutionalized injustice, the text poses a fundamental question: where lies systemic salvation? The definitive resolution is found in the "golden mean"—the ultimate institutionalization of rationalism. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's "The Book of Wisdom and Lies" portrays the painter's resolution as a rationalist, pragmatic approach that aligns with enlightened absolutism, serving the state without undermining monarchical authority. This political pragmatism is further systemized through the character of Leon, who champions knowledge as a tool for administrative efficacy and statecraft, favoring calculated wisdom over brute force. Strategic Adaptability and Analytical Sagacity. The Pedagogy of Contextual Truth: Leon instructs the crown prince that truth is not invariably unidimensional or direct. The Temporal Alignment Requirement: Imperative adjustment to specific historical epochs and shifting administrative circumstances.

The Geopolitical Connection: Direct conceptual convergence with the "political prudence" that European Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Frederick II) operationalized as *raison d'État* (state necessity).

The Implementation of Empirical Pedagogical Methods

Rejection of Rote Memorization: Absolute dismissal of mechanical learning and dogmatic recitation within Leon's instructional design. Cultivation of Autonomous Problem-Solving: Enforced intellectual engagement demanding that the pupil formulate independent resolutions to complex systemic crises. The Epistemic Foundation: Early manifestations of progressive Enlightenment pedagogy characterized by learning via direct empirical experience and proto-empiricism.

The Analytical Bifurcation: Leon's Pragmatism versus Ruka's Duplicity. The Teleological Orientation of Leon: Strategic pragmatism deployed exclusively to advance the common good, state structural consolidation, and absolute justice. The Machinations of Ruka: Egoistic duplicity and systemic falsehood exploited solely for localized personal aggrandizement, targeted subversion, and structural destabilization. The Anti-Enlightenment Archetype: Erudition detached from ethico-moral foundations, weaponizing political intrigue strictly as a vector of institutional destruction. The Symbolism of "Functional Sterility": Structural employment of Ruka's physical status as a eunuch to allegorically embody the ultimate philosophical fruitlessness of malicious governance. Thus, Leon operates as the ideologue of that specific iteration of enlightened absolutism which Orbeliani envisioned for Georgia: a sovereign whose governance is anchored in human reason rather than baseline instincts. Within this framework, aesthetics serve not merely as an artistic device, but as a strategic political instrument. The integration of allegorical archetypes, parables, and sarcastic rhetorical approaches constructs an intellectual narrative through which the reader internalizes both ethico-moral values and foundational statecraft principles. This trajectory delineates the definitive paradigm established by Orbeliani: civic education, state structural harmony, a deontological approach, and an elevated cultural profile.

Ultimately, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's *The Wisdom of Fiction* stands as one of the most profound intellectual texts in the history of Georgian political and cultural thought, synthesizing indigenous traditions with the core tenets of the Western European Enlightenment. Through its allegorical architecture, didactic parables, and moral exemplars, Orbeliani's statecraft vision delivers a localized adaptation of enlightened absolutism—a paradigm wherein the monarch is enlightened, the citizenry is educated, and state interest remains supreme, yet ethically and humanistically legitimized. Examined alongside European parallels, the evidence demonstrates that Orbeliani converges monarchical authority, the moral socialization of the citizen, and the functional efficacy of state institutions into a synthetic, harmonious model uniquely adapted to the Georgian cultural milieu. The tactical deployment of allegory, humor, irony, and paradox within the narrative

framework facilitates an analytical visualization of both conceptual and pragmatic perils, thereby illuminating the pathways toward systematic state harmonization. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani operated not merely as a creative writer or a traditional scholar, but as an acute philosopher, a visionary reformer, and a political theorist whose writings contribute a foundational cornerstone to the evolution of Georgian statecraft paradigms. His oeuvre innovatively integrates Western European intellectual currents, generating a unique cultural hybrid through the organic synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions.

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