



XÄMIÇ

XÄMIÇ (XÄMIC), one of the prominent figures of the Ossetian Nart epics, son of Äxšärtäg, grandson of Uärxäg, twin-brother of Uïrïzmäg, father of Batradz (q.v.), and, through his mother's relatives, a nephew (*xäräfir*) of the family of Donbettir —the ruler of the water realm.

The origin of a hero like Xämïç is believed to go back to the Indo-European twin-myth, cognate to the Latin Romulus and Remus, Greek Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux), and Old Indian Ashvins (Abaev, 1990, pp. 158-59, 196-97). Together with his twin-brother, he was supposed to spend the entire night carefully safeguarding the vault in the cemetery where his mother, Dzeraššä (relentlessly pursued by Uaštirdži), was buried. Unlike his brother, who fully accomplished his duty, Xämïç, on the contrary, left his post as soon as he heard the sounds of music and joyful agitation of a wedding from the nearest Nart village. In general, he is an embodiment of sensual pleasures. One of his peculiar features is the possession of a wonderful tooth, *arqizï dändag*, which makes his masculine charms irresistible for the Nart women. His long moustache, believed to be made of steel, is one more peculiar trait and is used to denote a feather grass (i.e., *Stipa pennata*). He has also committed an outstanding act, when he gave birth to his son, whose embryo was blown by his wife in between his shoulder blades, where, as a result, a blister appeared. In due time, his son was born from this blister. His wife divorced him and returned to her relatives, insulted by Širdon (q.v.), who noticed that her husband brought her to the Narts' ritual prayers in his pocket. In fact, in the daytime she used to turn into the shape of a frog (the Melusine motif), while at



night she would turn into a beautiful woman. She belonged to the family of the dwarfs (Bıcentä), who lived beneath the earth. Xämıç got the chance for revenge when his cow was stolen in the year of famine by Şırdon. Though the latter lived beneath the earth and there was a tricky labyrinth that led to his dwelling, Xämıç managed to get there and killed all his sons. This episode accounts for the appearance of the Narts' famous twelve-stringed harp (*fändır*).

In addition to his undeniable archaic mythological traits, from a historical point of view, the name of this epic hero is derived from Mongolian title *Xabiçi*, which was widespread in the 13-14th centuries CE. In a Chinese chronicle of the Mongols (*Yuanshi*) of the same period, this name belongs to a warlord who participated in a campaign together with the Alan commander, and it is documented in the form of *Xa-bi-ši*. The personal name of Xämıç is still common in everyday use in Ossetian society; it even served as a patronymic of one of the existing families of the Xämıcatä. The personal name itself, together with the corresponding epic cycles, was borrowed by the neighboring peoples of the Ossetians. Thus, in Balkar we have *Xamič*, *Xabič*; in Kabardian, *Xəməş*; in Abaza, *Xëməş*; in the Ingush language, *Xamč*; in Svan language, *Xäbəž*, *Xəbžə* (Abaev, 1989, pp. 172-73).

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