



# GEORGIA IV. LITERARY CONTACTS WITH PERSIA

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### iv. LITERARY CONTACTS WITH PERSIA

The tribes of Georgia had a well-established and vast literary tradition and folklore long before the Christian era. None of the pre-Christian Georgian literary works have survived, however. Christianity became established in Georgia as an official religion at the beginning of the 4th century, and in the 5th century the first surviving literary work, *Tsamebay tsmidisa Shushanikisi* (The martyrdom of Shushanik) by Jacob Tsurtaveli (ed. M. Malazonia and I. Lolavili, Tbilisi, 1986), which laid the foundation of Georgian clerical literature, was created. By that time some biblical texts, such as the Psalms and the New Testament, had been already translated. Hagiographic literature (e.g., martyrology and lives of the saints), although serving primarily the interests of the Church, contained elements of fiction and historiography. Georgian hagiographical works on the passions of St. Shushanik, St. Evstate Mtskheteli (6th cent.), and St. Abo Tbileli (8th cent.), as well as lives of St. Nino (9th cent.), and St. Grigol Khandzteli (10th cent.), testify to the development of literary style and to the high artistic level of Georgian hagiographers and hymnographers. These literary activities finally led to the appearance of Georgian secular literature in the 11th cent.



The familiarity of Georgian authors with the Persian classics also played a significant role in the development of Georgian literature. Such works as the epic romance *Amirandarejaniani* ascribed to Mose Khoneli (12th century; N. Marr, 1895), *Tamariani* by Grigol Chakhrukhadze (12th century), *Abdulmesiani* by Iovane Shavteli and, finally, the masterpiece of Georgian poetry *Vepkhistqaosani* (The man in the panther skin; ARTABAZUS, ARTAVASDES), the foster-brother of king Vakhtang Gorgaslan (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 92; Huysse, 23a). Not only is the Iranian origin of their names interesting, but also their connection with Iranian epic traditions. Parnavaz is associated with the creation of a Zoroastrian sanctuary at Armazi (q.v.), the ancient capital of Georgia near the present-day Mtskheta, where a bilingual inscription in Greek and Middle Iranian has been found (Metzger). Some scholars (e.g., Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 40; Lang, 1966, pp. 88, 152-53; Andronikashvili) trace the term Armazi, which is also the name of a deity in the Georgian pantheon, to Ahura Mazdā (q.v.).

Stories about Artavasdes, Bēvarasp/Aži Dahaka (Aždahāg), Ardašīr, Afrāsīāb (qq.v.), and other heroes of ancient Iranian legends were widespread in Georgia. The *Kartlis tskhovreba* contains a passage referring to a well-known episode in the *Šāh-nāma* that seems to indicate that the author was familiar with a Persian literary work similar to the *Xwadāy-nāmag*. The passage reads: “And then Iranians from the side of the sunrise, the kin of Nebrot, became strong. And there appeared among them one man, a hero named Afridon [Afrīdōn, see FERĒDŪN], who put Bevarasp, the master of snakes, in chains and tied him to a mountain inaccessible to human beings. All this is written in *The History of the Persians*.”

There are two noteworthy points in this short passage: “the side of the sunrise” is obviously a Georgian translation of X<sup>v</sup>arāsān “the place whence the sun rises,” and “Bevarasp, the master of snakes” is no doubt Bēvarasp Aži Dahāka (for him in Iranian mythology see Christensen, pp. 20-24). The first part of Bēvarasp is left without translation (in Ancient Georgian *bevri*, as the Av. *baēvar*– and the Mid. Pers. *bēwar*, means “ten thousand,” in Modern Georgian it means “many”), while the phrase “the master of snakes” is a literal translation of Aždahāg (see AŽDAHĀ). The meaning of *aži*– “snake, dragon,” is well known, while different interpretations have been suggested for *dahāg*. According to the Georgian source it stands for “master, lord.”

The conversion of Georgians to Christianity in the 4th century, and then the conquest of Persia and parts of Georgia by the Arabs three centuries later,



temporarily interrupted the cultural contacts between the two countries. At that time (7th-9th centuries) Georgian-Arab literary connections were developed, some works were translated from Arabic into Georgian, among them the world-famous novel of Buddhist origins about Barlaam and Joasaph (Pers. *Belawhar o Būdāsaf*, q.v.), known in Georgian as the *Balavariani*.

With the rise of the New Persian literature during the 9th-10th centuries, literary contacts between the two cultures resumed and even became much stronger than before. It appears that Georgians became familiar with Persian literary classics quite early. In the 9th-century work *Moktsevai Kartlisai* (The conversion of Georgia), a whole phrase in Persian, transcribed in Georgian letters, is put into the mouth of the Georgian king Mirian. This corrupted text (*raïtmeboï khodzhat stabanug rasul psar zad*) was restored by Nikolai Yakovlevich Marr (1897, p. 72) with the help of a Georgian translation given in a 10th-century manuscript: “*rāst mīgūi kojasta bānū wa rasūl-e pesar-e izad*” (You are speaking the truth, blessed lady and the messenger of the Son of God). This passage is important for several reasons: the presence of the Arabic word *rasūl* shows that this Georgian literary work can be dated no earlier than the 7th century; its transliteration and translation are interesting from the point of view of historical linguistics; and finally, it suggests that Georgian contacts with Persia (and hence with New Persian literature) may have been established much earlier than suspected before.

The cultural and political renaissance of Georgia is connected with the name of King David II, surnamed Aghmashenebeli (the Builder; r. 1089-1125). A well-educated man, poet, and philosopher, he maintained relations both with the Christian world and with Islamic countries. During his reign, relations were especially close with the state of Šarvān, where a Persian school of poetry flourished, continuing the classical traditions of Rūdakī, Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma*, the epic and lyrical heritage of ‘Onṣorī, Farroḳī Sīstānī, Manūčehrī, Faḳr-al-Dīn Gorgānī’s *Vīs o Rāmīn*, etc. The familiarity of Georgian society with the works of these classical masters and with the master poets of Šarvān, including Nežāmī Ganjavī, Ḳāqānī Šarvānī, Falakī Šarvānī, etc., helped further literary contacts between Georgia and Persia.

The growth of cities set the necessary condition for the revival of cultural activities. Frequent receptions and feasts at the royal and feudal courts attracted panegyrists, story-tellers (*qeṣṣaḳvān*), and singers not only from all parts of Georgia but also from neighboring countries as well as from distant lands. Chakhrukhadze, the historian of Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1212), describes



the arrival of the Šarvānšāh at the head of a large retinue, undoubtedly including poets, since Kāqānī Šarvānī alludes to such an occasion in the description of his journey to Tbilisi in his *Maṭnawī*. He mentions a number of Georgian place-names: Mukhrani, Nacharmagevi, the summer-palaces of the royal Bagrationi family (eg., *Dīvān*, pp. 25, 53, 438, 512, 742). He also indicates his knowledge of Georgian (*gorjīgūy*) and use a Georgian word (*mui*, “come”) in one of his rhymes (Y. Marr). The poet Falakī wrote an elegy (*martīya*) on the death of Dmitri I (r. 1125-1156), the king of Georgia. Nežāmī Ganjavī often mentions and describes Georgia (Abk̄az, which then referred to all of Georgia) in his poems *Ḳosrow o Šīrīn* and *Eskandar-nāma* (Y. Marr).

Almost every page of Georgian literary works and chronicles (e.g., the verse collection *Tamariani*, the poem *Abdulmesiani*, Rustaveli’s *Vepkhistqaosani*, etc.) contains names of Iranian heroes borrowed from the *Šāh-nāma* (e.g., Rostam, Kai-Khosrow, Zāl, Tūr), from *Yūsof o Zolaykā* (Ioseb [Yūsof], Zelikha/Bazika), from *Vīs o Rāmīn* (Vis, Ramin, Mobad), from *Salāmān o Absāl* (Salaman), from Nežāmī’s *Laylī o Majnūn* (Leili, Kais, Majnun), and from ‘Onšorī’s *Vāmeq o ‘Adrā* (Vamek), *Šādbahr*, and *‘Ayn-al-Ḥayāt* (Shatbiar, Analat), etc. It seems that Georgian readers of the classical period either had Georgian versions of the poems by Ferdowsī, ‘Onšorī, Gorgānī, Nežāmī, and of works like the *Kalīla wa Demna*, *Ḥātem Ṭayy*, and the *Qābūs-nāma*, or were quite well acquainted with the original texts.

Of this long list, however, only one Georgian version of *Visramiani* has survived, a complete prose translation of the poem *Vīs o Rāmīn* by Faḵr-al-Dīn Gorgānī (Abuladze, 1935; Mamatsashvili, 1967; Kobidze, 1967; idem, 1969). Traditionally this translation is ascribed to Sargis Tmogveli, a 12th-century statesman and writer. This Georgian version of the medieval Persian romance, which fully retained the spirit of the original, considerably influenced all further development of Georgian prose. Its proximity to the Persian original made it possible to use the Persian text when preparing the critical edition of *Visramiani* (eds. A. Gvakharia and M. Todua, Tbilisi, 1962). This Georgian translation, being the oldest known manuscript of the work and preserving a more complete version than the few known manuscripts of the Persian text, helps restore corrupted lines and determine the more reliable variants found in different Persian manuscripts that generally are of later origin (17th-18th cent.) and have many lacunae and corrupted parts. The Georgian Iranologists Magali Todua and Alexandre Gvakharia produced a critical edition of *Vīs o Rāmīn* (Tehran, 1970), which for the first time contains variants of the text



found in different manuscripts. The edition was based on the Georgian translation of the poem, the surviving Persian manuscripts, and the three earlier editions (1864, 1935, and 1959;

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