



## ŠATANĀ AND UÏRİZMÄG

**ŠATANĀ AND UÏRİZMÄG**, the famous couple of the Ossetian Nart epics, comprised of a sister and brother who came through various trials and adventures to ultimately be respected for their perseverance, wisdom, and hospitality.

They have a common mother, Dzeraššä, who is a mermaid and a daughter of the Lord of the Water Kingdom, Donbettir. The father of Šatanä is the hero of the solar myth, Uaštirdži (q.v.), and she was born after her mother was already dead. UÏrizmäg is the son of Äxšärtäg, the younger twin-son of Uärxäg. To become a wife of her half-brother, who was already married by that time, Šatanä deceived him. She entered UÏrizmäg's bedroom, pretending to be his wife, and the latter had no other choice but to accede, as she had failed to prepare the ritual pies that were necessary for her husband to perform prayers. Moreover, Šatanä used her magic, and for several days the bedroom stayed dark, as if it were only one long night that they stayed together. After the deception was revealed, she told UÏrizmäg to sit on an ass and ride three times by the place where the Narts gathered to solve the problems of their everyday life and of war and peace—Nïxaš. First, they laughed at him, but in the long run no one paid any attention to him. Convinced by Šatanä that their marriage would be generally approved, he had nothing left to do but to accept the new reality. This kind of mythological marriage of brother and sister goes back to the Proto-Indo-European period, resembling couples known in Vedic, Iranian, and Greek traditions.

This myth also serves as an introduction into the cycle of the primordial



theogonic, anthropogonic, and ethnogonic myths (Abaev, pp. 161-63). While performing traditional dancing, the Ossetians used to sing songs in which they would mention both UİRİZMĀG and ŠATANĀ, calling them “our Lord and our Lady” (Tuganov, p. 63).

Šatanā is regarded as a mother of the epic people, as the center of the epic world, a hospitable lady, careful protector of the younger generation, and even — when Nart society finds itself in difficult circumstances — a resourceful and powerful sorceress. No wonder that until today, in everyday speech, in order to praise an Ossetian woman for her hospitality and good manners, one is expected to compare her to Šatanā. Sometimes, Šatanā is even called “the cunning and magic of the Earth” (*zäxxi xin ämä kälän*). She is immortal, because as long as she is alive, the Nart world would never cease to exist.

UİRİZMĀG behaves like a wise ruler of the society, who remains its leader both in every day peaceful life, when the ritual prayers are conducted, and in times of war, when he leads troops in battle. He often turns to his wife for advice. In general, they are regarded as an ideal married couple.

From a historical point of view, the name of Šatanā is an Alanian one and was first documented by the Armenian historian [Movsēs Xorenac’i](#) (q.v.) in the 5th century CE in the form of Satenik. This Alanian princess participated in an Alano-Armenian war at the beginning of the 2nd century CE and helped her brother to escape the enemy’s captivity. In this case, the ancient myths contaminated the memory of events of early medieval history.

The name of Šatanā’s husband, UİRİZMĀG, also has historical precedents and is believed to belong to the Alan royal dynasty. His historical prototype is probably the Alan *sevast* and *exusiocrator* Rosmik, who lived in the late-11th to early 12th centuries CE. In these years, the title of “*sevast*” (*sebastós*) had a high status in the Byzantine “Table of Ranks,” and it denoted not only a privileged position, but also kinship with the imperial family. In his anthroponym, *razman* ‘military row; a line standing in one battle order’, is of Iranian origin, and it allows us to identify him with the Nart leader UİRİZMĀG (Malakhov pp. 68-72). Harold Walter Bailey (q.v.) derived his name from *\*ava-razmka-* ‘director, ruler, leader’ (Bailey, p. 239).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

V. I. Abaev, “Nartovskiï èpos osetin” (The Nart epic of the Ossetians), in *Izbrannye trudy: Religiya. Fol’klor. Literatura* (Selected works: Religion. Folklore. Literature), vol. I, Vladikavkaz, 1990, pp. 142-242.

H. W. Bailey, “Ossetic (Nartä),” in A. T. Hatto, ed., *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry I: The Traditions*, London, 1980, pp. 236-67.

S. N. Malakhov, “Pravoslavnye vlastoderzhtsy Alanii: antroponimy i nebesnye pokroviteli” (Orthodox rulers of Alania: anthroponyms and empyrean patrons), in *Alanskoe pravoslavie: istoriya i kul’tura (sbornik materialov VII Svyato-Georgievskikh chteniï)* (Alan Orthodoxy: history and culture (proceedings of the 7th St.-Georgian conference), Vladikavkaz, 2019, pp. 55-82 (available at [https://blagos.ru/sites/default/files/sbornik\\_pravoslavie\\_vii\\_chteniya\\_copy.pdf](https://blagos.ru/sites/default/files/sbornik_pravoslavie_vii_chteniya_copy.pdf)).

M. S. Tuganov, “Osetinskie tantsy,” in D. Gireev and E. M. Tuganov, eds., *Makharbek Tuganov: Literaturnoe nasledie* (Makharbek Tuganov: literary heritage), Ordzhonikidze, 1977, pp. 68-94.