



## ŠIRDON

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**ŠIRDON (SIRDON)**, one of the most popular characters of the Ossetian Nart sagas, whose name became a household one, used in relation to a person distinguished for his cunningness, resourcefulness, and wit, but who is also inclined to slander and gossip.

The poisonous tongue of Širdon is the cause of enmity and discord in every place where he appears. Despite the services that he continuously provides to the Narts when they find themselves in a tight corner—generally because of his *espris mal tourné*—he cannot resist the temptation of playing evil jokes on them. Therefore, in the Nart sagas he is often called *Nartī fidbīlīž* ('Malicious genius of the Narts'). As a type of folkloric hero, he can be identified as a trickster. His behavior causes damage to others and is antisocial in its nature. Yet sometimes he bears the features of a cultural hero.

His name can be interpreted from modern Ossetic, derived from the noun *šird/sird* ('animal, beast'). To this is added the patronymic suffix -on, and it is thus one of the rather numerous zoomorphic mythological names. Širdon is a shape-shifter and can take different appearances, including that of an old man, a woman, or young girl. Once, he even turns into a hat. He is the son of Bätäg or Gätäg, a water spirit who forced one of the Nart beauties to cohabit with him, blackmailing her and giving her no access to fresh water. For many years, the Narts treated him as an illegitimate bastard, and they prevented him from joining their society. Things changed and he was no longer an outcast only after his invention of a miraculous twelve-stringed harp, which he made of bones, hair, and veins of his beloved sons, treacherously killed by Xämīç



(q.v.). His house is hidden beneath the earth, and no one knows where because the way leading to it is a labyrinth. The most famous of his domestic animals is his dog, which is a good match for him due to her habits and behavior.

Though Širdon is present in many epic stories, he typically plays a secondary role. He is a mortal foe of Šošlan (q.v.), whose death was the result of his intrigues. In this respect, Georges Dumézil compared him to Loki and the role that the latter played in the death of Baldr in Norse mythology (pp. 86-89, 111-17). He also has commonalities with the malicious and cunning Irish hero Bricriu (Bricne), whose words often led to hostilities and feuds between the main heroes. Though not rich in its mythological traits, his image is very convincing from a psychological point of view, particularly his demonstration of outstanding vitality in everyday life.

Both the hero himself and his name are also known in other Nart epic traditions of Caucasian peoples. Thus, for example, in the Balkar version, he is called Šərdan or Širdan; in Kabardian, Šərtan; in Ingush, (Botoqo) Širtta or Šertuqo. In Balkaria, there is even a toponym bearing his name—Šerdan-aiaq-əzə “The footstep of Širdan” (Abaev, 1979, pp. 207-208; Abaev, 1990, pp. 192-98).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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