



ŠOŠLAN

ŠOŠLAN, SOSLAN (ŠOZIRIŦO, ŠOZRUŦO), one of the most prominent figures of the Ossetian Nart epics, known also in other national variants, such as the Kabardian, Balkar, Chechen, etc.

Šošlan's father was a shepherd, and he was born in a miraculous way from stone. Later, wolf's milk was used to temper him, similar to the German hero Sigfried, who used dragon's blood for this purpose. As the result of the intrigues of his future mortal foe Širdon (q.v.), the vessel that was used for this purpose proved to be a bit shorter than required and his knees remained vulnerable — a parallel to the Greek story of Achilles and his heel. In the long run, this shortcoming led to his death, when a Balšäg's—or Ojnon's—wheel cut off his knees. In his honor as a cultural hero, the rainbow is called *Soslani ändurä* 'Soslani's bow' in the Ossetian language (Digor dialect). This phrase is similar to the Persian *kam ā n-e Rostam* 'bow of Rostam'. In Digoria many old graves are connected by oral tradition with his name, to say nothing of the stones that he is believed to have sat upon. Unlike Batradz (q.v.), when fighting his enemies, he is inclined to use cunning and treachery, while in relation to those who are defeated, he can be cruel and ruthless. One of his famous feats is the journey to the world of the dead, where he became witness to the picturesque scenes in which its inhabitants participated. To get back, he has to turn the horseshoes backwards, so that the footprints would not be directed outwards.

According to Georges Dumézil (q.v.), from a mythological point of view, Šošlan can be defined as a solar deity (Dumézil, pp. 68-70), belonging to



the Scythian (q.v.) pantheon as described by Herodotus. One of his characteristic attributes is the fur-coat made of the skulls of his enemies, which was believed to be a common custom among the Scythians. Being open to external influence, the epic tradition did borrow from the cultures of the people with whom the Ossetians had contact. Therefore, though he possesses traits of the archaic period, there are no methodological objections to considering his name of late origin and to deriving it from the Nogay *suslan* ‘to have a menacing look’, with adjective *suslā* ‘frowning, gloomy’. A well-known epithet of Šošlan in the oral tradition is *nārāmon* ‘unrestrained, indomitable’, which can also render this particular meaning. The other recorded variants of his name bear traces of its adaptation in Adyghe languages, where the phoneme *-l* was lacking, and as the result gives the form *Sosran*, to which a very popular suffix *-ko* (from *qwä* ‘son’) was added. Later on, according to Vasilii I. Abaev (q.v.), it returned back to the Ossetian source as a phonetic variant from Adyghe already having this suffix (Abaev, 1973, p. 170).

As an Ossetian personal name it was first recorded in the 12th century in connection with the second husband of the Georgian queen Tamar (ca. 1160-1213) in the form of David-Soslan (d. 1207). In July, as V.F. Miller noted (pp. 357-58), around the feast day of nativity of John the Baptist, the inhabitants of the Nar village in Digoria, near the place where he is supposed to be buried, conduct a special ceremonial prayer, asking him for good weather (Abaev, 1990, pp. 171-82).

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