

# Georgian Literature

## POETRY

### ANTIQUITY

*Pre-Christian poetry* Pre-Christian Georgian poetry is informed by a pagan pantheon which includes a supreme deity (*morige ghmerti*) and a number of subordinate gods. Many of these subordinate deities have been merged with Christian saints, such as St. George (Giorgi), often depicted as a knight on horseback and a slayer of dragons, St. Barbara, who is (re)configured as a goddess of fertility and a healer of illnesses, St. Mary, a protector of women, and Jesus Christ, who presides over the world of the dead. All of these figures feature in Georgian folk poetry.

*Pagan deities: Dali* Coexisting with these reconfigured Christian saints are traditional heroes of the pre-Christian pagan pantheon, including the Svanetian hunter goddess Dali. Dali is most frequently encountered in folk poetry as a seducer of hunters, whom she destroys due to jealousy. It was believed that a hunter's luck depended on whether or not Dali wished him to succeed. Some scholars have interpreted the predominance of Dali within the Georgian folk pantheon as evidence of the matriarchal origins of pre-Christian Georgian culture. Yet another type of creature who features in Georgian folk poetry are the *kajis*, a race of demons with magical powers. *Kajis* are often depicted as enemies of St. George, who battles and defeats them in order to protect humanity from their malign influence.

*Historical figures* In addition to pagan deities and Christian saints reconfigured as pagan deities, historical figures from Georgia's past are also incorporated into the pantheon of Georgian folk poetry. The best known such figures are Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1213), who presided over Georgia's so-called Golden Age, and her son Giorgi IV (1191-1223), who is known in Georgian folk poetry as Lasha Giorgi.

*Folk poetry* Although early Georgian folk poetry lacks full rhyme, it abounds in slant rhyme, in which words that have similar, but not identical, sounds are repeated according to a pattern. It is distinct from much written poetry in Georgian in that it is composed to be performed with music, often an instrumental accompaniment, and sometimes as part of a dance. The epic ballads of the Khevsurs and Pshavs of northern Georgia were performed with a traditional Georgian three-string plucked instrument called the *pandori*. Another aspect of Georgian folk poetry that is a function of its oral status and which connects it to the *ashuq/gusan* tradition found throughout the Caucasus is improvisation. The fixed form of ballads and other poems was mediated by the performance context, in which new improvised compositions were composed by individuals engaged in poetry competitions called *shairoba*, after the Arabo-Persian word for verse, *shi'r*.

*Majama* One device used by both Georgian oral folk poetry and written Georgian poetry is *majama*, whereby homophonous words or phrases occur in the rhyming portion of the line like a refrain. This device would later be described by the early modern poet Teimuraz I as "that which is conjoined / selected orthographies brought together as one." A simpler rendering of the term would be "pun," in which the same sound is used in different ways to signify different things. Often, in the folkloric tradition in particular, it was not so much specific words that were repeated as sounds and sound clusters.

*Written Poetry* The exact beginnings of written poetry have not been established for any literature of the Caucasus. The inscriptions on the walls of the Ateni Sioni Church near the city of Gori in eastern Georgia at the confluence of the Mtkvari and the Liakhvi River are the oldest known examples of rhymed verse in Georgian. They have been dated to the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Early Georgian religious poetry is influenced by Byzantine hymnography, among other sources. It was only towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century that rhymed poetry became commonplace in Georgian literature. Although rhyme became a ubiquitous feature of subsequent Georgian folk poetry, the folk poetry of Svan continues to lack rhyme.

### Further Reading

Zaza Alexsidze, ატენის სიონის ოთახი წარწერა ["Four Inscriptions of the Ateni Sioni"] (Tbilisi, 1983).  
Kevin Tuite, ed. and translated. *Violet on the Mountain: An Anthology of Georgian Folk Poetry* (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994).

Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; 3<sup>rd</sup> edition: London: Curzon Press, 2010).

## Discussion Questions

- 1) What are the earliest extant examples of poetry in ancient Georgian?
- 2) What were the most popular genres of poetry in ancient Georgian?
- 3) How did religion interact with culture in fostering the development of written poetry in Georgian?

## POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

*Growth in Georgian literature* The weakening of the Byzantine empire during the 10<sup>th</sup> provided an opportunity for smaller literatures like Georgian and Armenian to flourish. King David IV, known as the Builder (r. 1089–1125), and his great-granddaughter Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1213) two centuries later, presided over a period of remarkable growth in Georgian literature, particularly in the domain of poetry. Persian had by this time become the dominant influence on all literatures of the Caucasus, including Georgian and Armenian. If one specific work of Persian literature among the many that influenced the development of Georgian and Armenian poetry had to be named, it would be Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings* (*Shahnama*), a work composed in the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century that was to become a source for narrative poetry across the Persianate world.

*Rustaveli's Knight in the Panther's Skin* Among the works that bear the clearest imprint of Ferdowsi's epic is Shota Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin* (*Vepkhvistqaosani*), composed circa 1220 in southeastern Georgia. Rustaveli's epic is remarkable on many levels, from its complex plot, which guides the characters across India and beyond, to its distinctive language and prosody, which introduced a new meter, the *shairi* (from the Perso-Arabic *shī'r*, meaning poetry), into Georgian poetry. Although *Knight in the Panther's Skin* was written to be read, it also shares features in common with Georgian folk poetry, including the use of slant rhyme, a fact that enables us to think of oral and written Georgian literature as comprising a single tradition.

*Rustaveli's predecessors* Every Georgian poet who came after Rustaveli inevitably wrote in his shadow, and many poets explicitly named him as their progenitor. *Knight in the Panther's Skin* has also impacted Georgian culture beyond the Georgian language, and has been translated into non-Georgian languages of Georgia, such as Svan, Laz, and Mingrelian, as well as into countless other languages of the world. *Knight in the Panther's Skin* was not created in a vacuum. Among the works Rustaveli mentions as predecessors are the prose translation of Fakhr al-Din Gurgani's Persian *Vis and Ramin* by Sergis Tmogveli, known as *Visramiani*, and the romance *Amiran-Darejaniani* by Moses Khoneli. Notably, both of these works are in prose, even though the first is based on a Persian verse romance.

## EARLY MODERN

The most prominent early modern Georgian poet is without question Teimuraz I (1589-1661), who was also king of Kakheti and Kartli in eastern Georgia. Teimuraz's mother Ketevan was martyred in Shiraz in 1624 on the order of Shah Abbas for refusing to convert to Christianity. Teimuraz wrote a poem narrating her branding and execution, entitled *The Book of the Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan* (წიგნი და წამება ქეთევან დედოფლისა/ *ts'igni da ts'ameba ketevan dedoplisa*), seven months after his mother's death. Unbeknown to Teimuraz, the German Baroque poet Gryphius would later dedicate one of his most famous mourning plays (*Trauerspiel*), *Katharina von Georgien* (1657), to his mother's tragic death.

*Teimuraz I's masnavis* In addition to the narrative poem of his mother's martyrdom, Teimuraz I composed four more long poems modeled after the Persian *masnavi* form that was most closely associated with Nizami Ganjevi: *Layla and Majnun* (ლეილაჯუნუნიანი/ *leilmajnuniani*), *Yusuf and Zulaikha* (იოსებზილიხანიანი/ *iosebzilikhaniani*), *The Rose and the Nightingale* (ვარდბულბულიანი/ *vardbulbuliani*), and *The Candle and the Moth* (შამიფარვანიანი/ *shamiparvaniani*). The first two works are so clearly modelled on the *masnavis* of Nizami and the Timurid Persian poet Jami (d. 1492), that they could be considered translations, in the broad sense of the term. The second of these two works are Teimuraz's own creations, yet they also draw heavily on Persian tropes and imagery.

*Archil of Imereti* To cite just one example of the influence of Chaghatay literature on Georgian literary culture: Archil of Imereti's (1647-1713) *Bahramguri*, also known by the title *Seven Planets* (შვიდი მთიები/ *Shvidi mtiebi*), is a Georgian retelling of a Persian story that had earlier been told by Nizami Ganjevi, Amir Khusrow of India, and Nava'i of Turkic Central Asia. According to Archil's editor, it was the

latter version, and not the versions of his Persian predecessors, that exerted the greatest influence on the structure and plot of Archili's version.

**Mamuka Avtandili Baratashvili** Although Georgian poetry dates back to antiquity, theorization about Georgian poetry and poetics is a relatively modern phenomenon. The first extended reflection on Georgian poetics was composed by cwho followed his king and patron Vakhtang VI (r. 1716-1724) into exile in Russia after the Ottoman invasion of Safavid Persia. Baratashvili's treatise, entitled *Book of the Study of Poetry* (*Chashniki anu leksis stsavlis tsigni*), was composed in 1731 while he was residing in Moscow. In this work, Baratashvili distinguishes between word and verse in Georgian poetics and proposes verse as "the main thing in this world." He also discusses the relationship between form and content and clarifies the structure of Georgian verse. His vision of poetry as primarily didactic in function and his emphasis on utilitarian values marks a departure from the Persianate tradition that had hitherto dominated Georgian literature. Related to this, it also inaugurates an approach to literature that reflected the values of the European Enlightenment which was beginning to impact Russian intellectual life.

**Story of Queen Rusudan** In 1732, Baratashvili published, on the order of Vakhtang VI, a versified version of the anonymous *Story of Queen Rusudan* (რუსუდის ცხოვრება/ *Rusudaniani*), a 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. prose collection of didactic tales that borrows extensively from Arab sources. The collection concerns the life of Rusudan, the queen of an imaginary country called Iamaneti located "on the border of the East and West." Although the poem is a work of the imagination rather than of history, Rusudan may be a fictionalized version of the historical Queen Rusudan (c. 1194–1245), daughter of Queen Tamar by David Soslan, who awaited her son's return from Mongol captivity for decades.

**Teimuraz I and Mamuka Baratashvili** Although their styles and literary orientations differed radically, both Teimuraz I and Mamuka Baratashvili shared in common the experience of exile. Both writers passed much of their lives far from the land of their birth. Teimuraz I died in Astarabad, Iran, while a prisoner of the shah. After the death of Vakhtang VI in 1737, Baratashvili became a subject of the Russian state.

### Further Reading

Z. Avalishvili, "Teimuraz and his poem: The Martyrdom of Queen K'et'evan," *Georgica* (1937): 17-42.

Rebecca Ruth Gould, "Sweetening the Heavy Georgian Tongue: Jāmī in the Georgian-Persianate World," *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī's Works in the Islamic World, ca. 9th/15th-14th/20th Century*, eds. Thibaut d'Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, Handbuch der Orientalistik series, 2018), 798-829.

Charles Dowsett, *Sayat'-Nova: An 18th-century Troubadour: a Biographical and Literary Study* (Peeters Publishers, 1997).

Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

### Discussion Question

How did Georgian poets express the originality and uniqueness of their respective traditions?

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Georgian.** By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian poets had shifted their allegiances almost entirely from Persia to Russia. Even though certain genres of Persian poetry continued to function as models for Georgian poets, European Romanticism—for the most part mediated by Russia—exerted a more decisive influence on the new generation of Georgian poets. The Romanticism of Pushkin and Lermontov was paradigmatic for Georgian poets like Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817-1845), who is most famous for his epic poem on Georgia's defeat by Agha Muhammad Khan, "Georgia's Fate" (1839).

**Solomon Dodashvili** Baratashvili's teacher was the famous Solomon Dodashvili (1805–1836). Dodashvili was an intellectual and reformer who was inspired by the Decembrist movement that aimed to overthrow the Russia monarchy during his studies at St. Petersburg University, from which he obtained a master's degree in philosophy. On receiving his degree, Dodashvili returned to Tbilisi, where he worked as a teacher at a local gymnasium (high school) for members of the Georgian nobility, including Baratashvili. Baratashvili's exposure to Dodashvili was cut short when the latter was expelled from Georgia in 1832, following a failed plot to bring Russian rule over Georgia to an end. Although Dodashvili's co-conspirators favored the restoration of the Georgian monarchy, Dodashvili was invested in establishing a republican form of

government—that was neither colonial nor autocratic—in Georgia. He was instead arrested and deported to Vyatka in central Russia, where he died of tuberculosis.

*Nikoloz Baratashvili* Alongside his famous long poem, Baratashvili was also a pioneer in the lyric genre, which he introduced to Georgian literature on the model of European genre norms. Although he left only forty lyric poems behind and died of malaria while still in his twenties, Baratashvili is widely considered the most outstanding Georgian lyric poet during his lifetime.

*Grigol Orbeliani* Another influential Georgian poet who was heavily influenced by European Romanticism was Grigol Orbeliani (1804-1884). The two poets were in fact related: Baratashvili was the nephew of Orbeliani's sister. In the struggle between Iran and Russia for control of the Caucasus, both poets clearly favored Russia. Their political loyalties shaped their aesthetic preferences. Orbeliani even served as a general in the imperial Russian army, and wrote odes such as "A Toast, or A Night Feast after War near Yerevan [სადღეგრძელო ანუ, ომის შემდგომ ღამე ლხინი, ერევნის სიახლოვეს]," on the Caucasus wars. While Baratashvili wrote primarily in a lyric mode, Orbeliani preferred the epic grandeur of the martial ode, which he refashioned to suit his Romantic ethos.

*Erekle II* Also like Baratashvili, Orbeliani was born into an aristocratic Georgian family. His father served at the court of the last Georgian king Erekle II, and his mother was a granddaughter of Erekle II, whose decision to place Georgia under Russian protection in 1783 was memorialized in Baratashvili's "Georgia's Fate." Orbeliani also played a role in canonizing the figure of Erekle II for posterity. Grigol Orbeliani published under the name Qaplanishvili, in order to distinguish himself from two of his cousins who were also poets and who shared his last name: Alexander and Vakhtang Orbeliani.

*Plot of 1832* Orbeliani was educated, like Baratashvili, at a local gymnasium for the nobility. He became involved in the same revolutionary plans that led to the exile of Dodashvili, the plot of 1832 to bring an end to Russian rule over Georgia and to reestablish Georgia as an independent country. He was briefly imprisoned in Tbilisi, but not punished after his release, since his involvement in the attempted coup had been limited and he had been absent from Georgia. Orbeliani's main contribution to the failed coup were translations from Decembrist writings and a poem entitled "The Weapon."

*Orbeliani to Qazbegi* Notwithstanding his early support for a Georgian uprising against Russia, Orbeliani spent the remainder of his life serving in the tsar's army. The liberal reforms of Vorontsov, the Russian-appointed Viceroy of the Caucasus from 1844-1853, went some distance towards resolving this seeming contradiction. Yet it was a contradiction that characterized the literary output of many early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian poets, divided as their work was between a fascination with European learning and reforms that reached them through Russian channels and their desire for Georgian independence and sense of solidarity with the colonized peoples of the North Caucasus. (Another poet whose life and work were shaped by a similarly contradictory set of allegiances is Alexandre Chavchavadze.) Georgian writers such as Titsian Tabidze were to adopt positions quite different from—and critical of—Orbeliani in the subsequent century. Another Georgian writer whose attitude towards Russian rule was diametrically opposed to that of Orbeliani's was Alexandre Qazbegi. Ironically, Orbeliani was the first major writer of the older generation to recognize Qazbegi's talent, and hailed his novel *Elguja* (ელგუჯა, 1881) as a masterpiece.

*Fathers and Sons* Towards the end of his life, Orbeliani became entangled in a conflict between the "fathers" and "sons" of Georgian literature. Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli were the leaders of this new movement, who opposed Russian rule and the Russian monarchy and criticized the older generation for its service to the tsar. In 1874, he authored a caustic attack in verse against the literary style this new generation used in their writing.

### Further Reading

Harsha Ram and Zaza Shatirishvili, "Romantic topography and the dilemma of empire: the Caucasus in the dialogue of Georgian and Russian poetry," *The Russian Review* 63.1 (2004): 1-25.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What influence did European Romanticism exert on the development of poetry in the southern Caucasus?
- 2) What were the attitudes of Georgian poets towards Russian rule in the Caucasus?

The intertwining of Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri literatures throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century was further intensified during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of the Soviet Union that unified these different countries and cultures into a single whole. During this period, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia was now part of the same Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Each had their own literature that was taught in school and recognized as the language of the state, alongside Russian, yet the uniform modes of governance that were imposed on them brought their literatures into closer alignment.

The trajectory of Georgian poetry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century parallels that of Armenian poetry in many respects, particularly with regards to the encounter with European literary modernism. Like their Armenian counterparts, Georgian poets born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were inspired by the Russian, French, and German avant-garde. Titsian Tabidze, Paolo Iashvili, Galaktion Tabidze, and Giorgi Leonidze among others coalesced into a literary group who called themselves the Tsisperqantsebi (ცისპერყანწელები; “The Blue Horns”). Although this group would later be centered around Tbilisi, many of the poets involved came from western Georgia, and the movement got its first start in the western Georgian city of Kutaisi. In 1918, the Blue Horns relocated to Tbilisi, and held regular meetings at the Cafe Kimerioni.

*The Blue Horns* Many of the poets involved in this movement would develop distinctive literary styles, yet they shared in common a fascination with the European avant-garde and a desire to participate in this cutting-edge literary movement. The poets of the Blue Horns movement also broadly rejected the realistic aesthetic and the civic orientation of the earlier generation, as exemplified by poets such as Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli. (These generational dynamics simply repeated in many respects the conflict between fathers and sons that shaped the prior era of Georgian literature.) They aligned themselves with the Symbolist and Decadent movements within European poetry and published a magazine entitled *Blue Horns*, after their movement. Notwithstanding their rejection of civic poetry, Blue Horn poets also shared in common a desire for Georgia’s political independence.

*Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze* When the Soviet regime established itself in Georgia in 1921, Blue Horn poets did not align well with the new government. They left the official Union of Writers and formed their own group, which was not destined to last long. The most talented poets from the Blue Horns circle were either executed by the Soviet regime during the Stalinist purges, or faded into obscurity. In 1937, at the height of Stalin’s purges, Paolo Iashvili killed himself with a hunting rifle during a meeting of the Writers’ Union, having refused to denounce his friend and fellow poet, Titsian Tabidze. For his part, Titsian Tabidze only lived four months longer. He was expelled from the Writers Union in October 1937 and soon thereafter arrested by the NKVD (the Soviet Interior Ministry, an agency tasked with police work and overseeing prisons and labor camps). Titsian was executed in two months later. His death remained a secret for many years. His family was falsely informed by the Soviet state that he had been exiled to Siberia.

*Galaktion Tabidze* Like Paolo Iashvili, Titsian’s cousin Galaktion Tabidze killed himself when the pressure of living in an oppressive regime became too heavy for him to bear. His wife Olga Okudzhava had been arrested and executed in 1941. Her death, along with that of Titsian, filled Galaktion with despair. Galaktion spent the last decades of his life alone, and addicted to alcohol. Prior to the establishment of Soviet power in the 1920s, Galaktion had achieved recognition for his Symbolist sensibility and his lyrical voice. His *Crâne aux fleurs artistiques* (1919) established him as the preeminent poet of his generation, according to many critics. Although equally original, the poems of Titsian and Iashvili were more austere and demanding of the reader. Galaktion by contrast entered immediately into the imagination of everyday Georgians as the greatest poet of the twentieth century. His funeral attracted tens of thousands of people even in the context of Soviet oppression. He is buried in Tbilisi’s Mtatsminda Pantheon, alongside other major Georgian poets such as Ilia Chavchavadze, Alexander Griboyedov, Ioseb Grishashvili, Vazha-Pshavela, Baratashvili’s teacher Solomon Dodashvili, and the Blue Horn painter Lado Gudziashvili.

### Further Reading

Harsha Ram, “Introducing Georgian Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 21.1 (2014): 283-288.

Rebecca Ruth Gould, “Georgian Literary Modernism: Poems by Titsian Tabidze, Paolo Iashvili and Galaktion Tabidze,” *Metamorphosis: A Journal of Literary Translation* 17.1 (2009): 66–103.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What was the relationship between the Soviet state and modernist poets?
- 2) What kinds of formal innovations characterize the literary output of 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgian poets?
- 3) How did modernist poets of the South Caucasus conceptualize literary modernism?

## ESSAYS AND LEARNED PROSE (Antiquity to the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

### ANTIQUITY

**Georgian learned prose** The trajectory of Georgian learned prose mirrors that of Armenian in many respects. Like Armenian, classical Georgian was established through the translation of religious texts from Greek, Armenian, and Syriac. The earliest extant texts in Georgian are lives of Christian Georgian martyrs such as *The Passion of Saint Queen Shushanik* (წამებაჲ წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისაჲ/ *tsameba tsmidisa Shushanikisi dedoplisa*, c. 470), a work attributed to Iakob Tsurtaveli. The 10<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the composition of numerous biographies of Church Father, discussed in the article on life writing.

**Georgian historiography** Alongside religious writings, historiography was another genre in which both Georgian and Armenian writers excelled. Among the major works of early Georgian historiography are *The Life of Georgia* (ქართლის ცხოვრება/ *kartlis tskhovreba*), compiled in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Leonti Mroveli, and the anonymous *Conversion of Georgia* (*moktseva kartlisa*), which is dated to 950. This latter work focuses in particular on the activity of Alexander the Great's in the Caucasus and the foundation of the kingdom of eastern Georgia up to its conversion to Christianity. A third important work is *Life of King Vakhtang Gorgasali* (ცხოვრება და მოქალაქეობა ვახტანგ გორგასლისა/ *tskhovreba da mokalakeoba vakhtang gorgaslisa*), attributed to Juansher Juansheriani. The authorship of all of these works is highly disputed, since they were redacted over the centuries, and different portions of them made their way into other chronicles, and little is known about the authors. Hence, these works are regarded as sources that provide insight into particular eras and which often mix mythological and history, rather than as precise chronicles of specific events.

**Translation** Even amid the production of original literature in Georgian and Armenian, translation continued to play a vital and even central role. Both Georgian and Armenian performed a role similar to what Arabic did on a larger scale, as the medium through which Greek and Syriac texts for which the original is no longer extant were preserved in translation. Hippolytus' *Commentaries on the Benediction of Moses*, the first part of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, which is the primary source for the history of early Christianity from the Age of the Apostles to 324, and Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alexander Romance*, all fall into this category.

#### Further Reading

Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1963).

#### Discussion Questions

- 1) What were the most important influences on the development of Georgian written literature?
- 2) What were the most significant genres of early Georgian prose?

### POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

While the tradition of Armenian historiography was becoming ever richer and more complex, a multifaceted work entitled the *Life of Kartli* went through many different iterations in Georgian. *Life of Kartli* is a compilation of a series of chronicles of Georgian history composed between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. The canonical text of this work was established only in the beginning of the eighteenth century, following a commission appointed by King Vakhtang VI. The chronicles have been attributed to two specific authors—Leonti Mroveli and Juansheriani—but there were likely other authors as well. Leonti is believed to have been bishop of the diocese of Ruisi Ruisi in Georgia's east-central Shida Kartli region. Juansheriani was a Georgian prince who was descended from the Chosroid dynasty of (Caucasian) Iberia.

**Life of Kartli** Although the term Kartli denotes western Georgia, the *Life of Kartli* also narrates Georgia's eastern territories (Kakheti). The chronicles collectively narrate the history of Georgia, from its creation by the mythical Targamos, father of Kartlos and Kavkaz, to the reign of David IV the Builder (1089-1125). The reign of David marked a rare moment in Georgian history: the country had attained military ascendancy over its neighbors, including Saljuq Turks, and was able to incorporate much of Armenia, the northern Caucasus, northern Iran, and eastern Anatolia into its territory. The security of Georgian borders facilitated the flourishing of Georgian writing and learning, and enabled chroniclers to successively produce the work that became the most important source for Georgian history and for the history of the Near East in general.

**Life of Kartli's Structure** The first six books of *Life of Kartli* mix legend and history. They tell of Alexander the Great's legendary invasion of the Caucasus, the conversion of Georgia to Christianity by St. Nino in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, including the role of Jews in bringing Christianity to Georgia, Vakhtang Gorgasali's (r. 452–502) reign amid Sasanian invasions from the south, the death of Vakhtang's descendant Archil in 786,

and the destruction of the Georgian monarchy in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining books narrate the history of the Georgian Bagratid dynasty and the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213). This entire corpus of chronicles and narratives was composed over a period of five hundred years, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Among the earliest of extant manuscripts of *Life of Kartli* is the Queen Anna (Anaseuli) codex and the Queen Mariam (Mariamiseuli) of 1633-1645.

*Life of Kartli Abridged* Before these manuscripts were created, the *Life of Kartli* was abridged into Armenian in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in a work entitled *The History of Georgians*. This abridgement, which closely follows the Georgian text, focuses on the early period, and heavily condenses the events of later centuries. The earliest extant version of the Armenian abridgement was copied in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the Venice edition of the Armenian abridgement (published in 1884), the entire work is attributed to Juansheriani, who in fact only authored one of its part.

*Divan of the Abkhazian Kings* A somewhat later Georgian historiographic document is the *Divan of the Abkhazian Kings*, which is dated to the late 10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> century, although it is attributed to Bagrat III (1008–1014), the first king of a united Georgia (comprising Kartli to the west and Kakheti to the east), who ruled as king of Abkhazia 978. This work is considered a valuable source for the family relationships among the various Georgian kings as well as for the duration of their reigns, if not for their precise chronology.

### Further Reading

Robert William Thompson, *Rewriting Caucasian History. The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles. The Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation*, Translated with Introduction and Commentary by Robert W. Thomson. Oxford Oriental Monographs. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Stephen H. Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2003).

D. M. Lang, "Georgia in the Reign of Giorgi the Brilliant: 1314-1346," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 17.1 (1955): 74-91.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What use did Armenian authors make of Georgian historiography?
- 2) How did Georgian authors depict their Muslim enemies?
- 3) What role did historiography play in the formation of Georgian identity?
- 4) What were the main disciplines of intellectual activity in medieval Georgia and surrounding areas?

## EARLY MODERN

*Vakhtang VI* Meanwhile in Georgia, although Persianate literary traditions and manuscript culture continued to dominate literary culture, a gradual political and cultural turn towards Russia was discernable. The life and legacy of the Georgian king Vakhtang VI, who ruled the east Georgian kingdom of Kartli as a vassal of Safavid Persia from 1716-1724, epitomizes this tendency. Vakhtang organized numerous cultural and educational projects with the aim of revitalizing Georgian intellectual life and literature during a period when Safavid power was eroding Georgians' political autonomy and sense of independence. In 1709, he established the first Georgian printing press in coordination with the archbishop of Wallachia. Vakhtang arranged for the publication of seventeen books in all, from 1709 to 1723, until it was closed down by a Turkish invasion. This press was the first printing press in the entire Caucasus, since printing in Armenian was at that time concentrated in Venice and Isfahan.

*Georgian Bible* Among the highlights of Vakhtang's publishing activities are Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin* (1712), with commentaries by Vakhtang himself. (As noted above, this is also the period when the formal text of the Georgian chronicle *Life of Kartli* was first codified.) The publication of Rustaveli's epic by Vakhtang made the work available to a wider audience and helped to consolidate Rustaveli's canonical status for future generations of readers and writers. Although Vakhtang was nominally Muslim like other Georgian kings who served as vassals of the Safavids, he placed a special emphasis on printing Georgian Christian texts. These included an edition of the Georgian Bible, which had been translated from Greek in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and further edited by Georgian monks on Mt. Athos throughout the medieval period, as well as prayer books and liturgies.

*Lights of Canopus* In addition to being a publisher, Vakhtang was a poet and translator. His poetic compositions include lyric poetry and odes for his country. His most significant translation into Georgian is of

Husain Wa'iz Kashefi's 15<sup>th</sup> century *Lights of Canopus (Anvar-e Sohayli)*, a Persian retelling of the *Kalila and Dimna* story, which Vakhtang worked on from 1714 to 1716. With this translation, Vakhtang solidified Georgia's role as a mediator in literary exchanges between East and West. The anonymous *Balavariani* was a Georgian retelling of an ancient Buddhist narrative translated from Arabic. The version of *Kalila va Dimna* which Vakhtang translated was a Persian retelling of an Arabic translation from Pahlavi (Middle Persian). This Arabic version was completed at the Abbasid court by Ibn al-Muqaffa, a Persian scholar who wrote in Arabic.

*Panchatantra* The Pahlavi version, which is no longer extant, was itself a translation from Sanskrit of the Indian story cycle known as the *Panchatantra* (meaning "five treatises") that had been commissioned by the Sasanian king Khusraw I Anushirvan and carried out by the physician Borzuya, who travelled to India specifically in order to obtain a copy of the book. Across its many versions in different languages, this work belongs to the mirror-for-princes genre in which a prince is instructed on how to be a king through fables and other literary devices. As a king who perpetually struggled to maintain his hold on power, it is unsurprising that Vakhtang chose a political text that offers an allegorical treatment of kingship for his greatest feat of literary translation. So impressed was Vakhtang by this work that he produced three different translations of it. Vakhtang put his political ideals into practice by drafting an innovative legal code.

*Treatise on Cosmology* In 1721, Vakhtang translated and reworked for a Georgian audience the Persian-language *Treatise on Cosmology (Risala fi'l Hay'a)* by Timurid theologian and astronomer Ali Qushji of Samarqand (d. 1474). He called it the *Book of Knowledge and Creation (Kmnulebis tsodnis tsigni)*. In his preface, Vakhtang explains that his translation of Ali Qushji's work was carried out with the assistance of Mirza Abduriza Tavrizeli, who was presumably a Persian scholar based in Tbilisi. In addition, he has explained the use of the astrolabe in Georgian. He opens by introducing the fundamental concepts of geometry and the shifting to the movement of the planets and the cycles of the moon. This complex work introduced many new words into the Georgian language, including terminology from Arabic, Persian, Latin, Italian, and Russian. The preponderance of Italian terms and transliterations suggests that Vakhtang collaborated closely with the Capuchin missionaries who were based in Tbilisi during this period.

*Vakhtang's Cosmology* Vakhtang also dedicated his energies to producing the first Georgian-language work of astronomy intended for a wide readership, entitled *Translations and revelations of heaven and earth, useful for students of astronomy (Targmani da gamotsxadebani tsisa da kveqnisa varsklavisani mostsavletatvis shvenieri)*. This treatise was based on Vakhtang's wide reading and translations of key works of astronomy and cosmology, including, in addition to Ali Qushji's work, the *zij* (astronomical table and star catalogue) of Timurid sultan and astronomer Ulughbeg and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's *Treatise in Twenty Chapters on the Knowledge of the Astrolabe (Risala-i bist bab dar ma'rifet-i asturlab)*. Although his translational activity was focused mostly on treatises in Persian and Arabic, Vakhtang was also widely read in European science, as evidenced by his ample citations from and allusions to St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, and Archimedes. The fact that this work contains many transliterations of Italian terms suggests that it was produced with the close collaboration of Italian missionaries who were then residing in Georgia.

*Book of Wisdom and Lies* Vakhtang's achievements can be measured, not just by his own writings and political legacy, but also by the company he kept and whose work he supported. The scholar, writer, thinker, and diplomat Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725) was, in intellectual terms, the most remarkable person at Vakhtang's court. Orbeliani was born into a royal family with close ties to Bagrationi dynasty in the village of Tandzia near Bolnisi in the Kvemo Kartli region of southeastern Georgia. He was raised at the court of Giorgi XI, ruler of Kartli under Safavid rule (1676-1688 and 1703-1709), and his education was based on the books held by the palace library. While still in his twenties, Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani began composing his famous *Book of Wisdom and Lies* (სიბრძნე სიცრუისა/ *sibrdzne sitsruisa*, written between 1686 and 1695). Like Vakhtang's translation of *Kalila and Dimna*, the *Book of Wisdom and Lies* belongs to the genre of mirror-for-princes literature, but it is innovative in that it has an autobiographical dimension and includes the author's observations about his own life and experience.

*Bouquet of Words* Another major achievement of Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani is his Georgian dictionary, *Bouquet of Words* (სიტყვის კონა/ *Sitqvis kona*, 1685-1716), which is both a lexicon and an encyclopedia. As the first such composition of its kind in Georgian and an invaluable repository for information about the Georgian lexicon, *Bouquet of Words* played a major role in forming the Georgian literary language. Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani may have modeled his work on the example of the *Essays Concerning a Universal Dictionary (Essais d'un Dictionnaire universel, 1685)* by Antoine Furetière, or by his posthumously published *Universal Dictionary, containing all of the words of the French language (Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots François, 1690)*. Alternatively, Orbeliani may have drawn inspiration from centuries of Persian and Arabic lexicography. Most likely, his methodology was informed by all of these traditions. The first volume of *Bouquet of Words* was published posthumously in 1754.



### *Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's Conversion*

Alongside his written output, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani exerted significant influence on the events of his time through his diplomatic activities and pedagogy. He was a teacher of Vakhtang VI, and the inspiration behind many of the king's reforms. In political affairs, he played a role in establishing peaceful relations with the Ottomans. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani retreated into religious life in 1698, when he became a monk at the Monastery of David Gareji, which was renamed in his honor. Six years before he became a monk, Orbeliani had already left the Eastern Orthodox Church into which he was born and secretly converted to Catholicism. When King Vakhtang VI adopted a policy of spreading the Catholic faith to Georgians, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani began openly propagating his religion and travelled to the Holy See of Rome.

Scholarly production in Azerbaijan continued to transpire mostly in Persian, and occasionally in Arabic. Historiography was among the most vibrant fields of activity, specifically relating to the history of Qarabagh, a Turkic-ruled khanate that was the subject of frequent contestation by Russia and Iran. (The word *qarabagh* itself is a Turco-Persian compound meaning "great meadows" which came into use after the Mongol invasion.) At least three authors composed a history of Qarabagh in Persian: Mirza Jamal Javanshir Qarabaghi (1773-1853), author of the *Story of Qarabagh (Qarabaghnama)*, and Mirza Adigozal Beg (1780-1848), author of the *History of Qarabagh (Tarikh-i Qarabagh)*. Ahmad Beg Javanshir (1828-1903) additionally composed an account of this history in Russian entitled *On the Political Existence of the Qarabagh Khanate*. Finally, mention should be made of Abbas Quli Agha's Bakikhanov's (1794-1847) *Heavenly Paradise (Gulistan-i Iram)*, named after a mythical garden in the Quran, which situates this period in Azerbaijani history within a wider framework.

**Mirza Jamal Javanshir** Mirza Jamal Javanshir's work was commissioned in 1847 by the first Russian Viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov (r. 1803-1856), although the majority of the text appears to have been written years prior to the commission. The history spans the years 1740 to 1806, at which point the Khanate was annexed by Russia, a process formalized by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. Mirza Jamal Javanshir worked for both the Qarabakh khans and Russian military rule during his career. For Mirza Jamal Javanshir, the Turkic Muslims of Qarabakh and Armenian elites shared more in common than set them apart, in that their wartime activities are driven more by strategic tactics than innate loyalty. Although he wrote in Persian, Mirza Jamal regarded Iranians as foreigners to Qarabagh, without a legitimate claim to this territory.

### **Further Reading**

Sulxan-Saba Orbeliani, *A Book of Wisdom and Lies*, translated by Katharine Vivian (London: Octagon Press, 1982).

*Le Code de Vakhtang VI*, ed. Josef Karst (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1934) Series: Corpus juris ibero-caucasici. Première section, Droit national géorgien codifié,

Timothy Paul Grove, *Christ Came Forth from India: Georgian Astrological Texts of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

Irakli Simonia, "Little Known Aspects of the History of Georgian Astronomy," *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 4.1 (2001): 59-73.

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1) What role did the invention of printing play in the development of early modern Georgian literatures?
- 2) How did translations into Georgian shape world literature during the early modern period?
- 3) How do the scientific and scholarly writings of Vakhtang demonstrate the cosmopolitan influences that were circulating in Georgia during the early modern period?

## **19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

Parallel to the discovery of criticism in modern Azeri—and Persian—literature, Georgian writers such as Ilya Chavchavadze were imbibing the new literary currents from Russia and across Europe. Although best known as a poet, Chavchavadze also made his mark in nonfiction prose. His impact on Georgian culture parallels that of Akhundzadeh in many ways; both were engaged with various strategies to modernize their respective literatures, including through alphabet reform. (Only Chavchavadze was successful in reforming

the alphabet during his lifetime.) Like many intellectuals of his generation from the Caucasus, Chavchavadze's intellectually formative years were passed during his time at St. Petersburg University, where he studied from 1857-1861.

*Tergdaleulebi* Chavchavadze was at the lead of a group of young Georgian intellectuals who called themselves *Tergdaleulebi*, literally meaning "those who have drunk from the Terek River," which divides Georgia from Russia. The term referred to the Russian-educated Georgian gentry class to which Chavchavadze belonged, and indicated that they had crossed the Terek on their journey to study in Russia. It was in 1861, the year that he left St. Petersburg University and returned to Georgia, that Chavchavadze penned what has been called "the single most important piece of political writing of the Georgian generation of the 1860s" (Manning 2019): *Letters of a Traveler* (1864).

*Iveria* Alongside his own writing, Chavchavadze played a crucial role in the formation of 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian literary culture, particularly in the domain of journalism. In 1877, while Daghestanis and Chechens to Georgia's north were engaged in a rebellion against tsarist rule, Chavchavadze founded the newspaper *Iveria*, on the model of the Russian newspapers that he had encountered while studying in St. Petersburg. The only rival to *Iveria* during Chavchavadze's lifetime was *Droeba* (Times), a newspaper that was published from 1866 to 1885. Both newspapers published the best Georgian prose of that period, but *Iveria* had a much longer lifespan. Chavchavadze edited this newspaper, until 1902. Alongside his literary activities, Chavchavadze was Vice President of the Imperial Agricultural Society and President of the Georgian Dramatic Society, and President of the Board of Georgia's first bank. In short, Chavchavadze was a statesman and a polymath who is widely regarded as the most important and influential Georgian writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Aleksandre Qazbegi Another Georgian writer of fiction who also contributed to Georgian nonfictional prose is Aleksandre Qazbegi. Qazbegi's "Notes of a Shepherd" (ნამწყემსარის მოგონებანი/*namtqemsaris mogonebani*, 1883) offers a landmark combination of ethnography and autobiography in order to shed light on the mountaineers of Khevsuretia. Qazbegi's writing is notable for its empathy with impoverished shepherds as well as his first-hand knowledge of their everyday life. Ultimately, he uses his experience with the shepherd-mountaineers to develop a critique of industrialized civilization, and, by implication, of the Russian imperial administration that facilitated Georgia's modernization.

### Further Reading

Paul Manning, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Occidental Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Georgian Imaginaries* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2019).

Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze. "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," *Kritika Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3.1 (2002): 27-49.

### Discussion/Questions

- 3) What kind of control did the tsarist state exert over literary production in the southern Caucasus?
- 4) How did serial publications contribute to the formation of national identity in Georgian?
- 5) How did social class and economic status impact the horizons of writers from the Caucasus during the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

## 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**Georgian-Armenian Connections.** While Salman Mumtaz dedicated his life to Azerbaijan's rich literary heritage, the Georgian-born scholar Nikolai Marr (1864-1934) occupied himself with Georgian and Armenian literary legacies. Marr was born in Kutaisi to a Scottish botanist who founded Kutaisi's botanic gardens and a Georgian mother. His parents had difficulty communicating due to their different linguistic

backgrounds. Marr graduated from the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University, of which he became dean in 1911.

*Nikolai Marr* Marr worked equally on ancient Georgian and Armenian literature. He was first and foremost a linguist and historian of languages, and carried out yearly excavations at the site of the ruins of the medieval capital of the Armenian Kingdom, Ani. In 1902 in Jerusalem, Marr discovered a Georgian-language biography of Georgi Xandzteli by Georgi Merchuli dating to 951, ninety years after the death of its subject, and translated it into Russian. Merchuli's biography is distinguished by its simple and vivid prose style and by its cosmopolitan world view. Alongside its biography of Georgi Xandzteli, best known as the founder of the Georgian monastery of Xandzta in Tao-Klarjeti, a region now part of modern Turkey, the work also includes a great deal of local history pertaining to the southern Georgian kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti (fl. 888-1034).

*Marr as Philologist* While Marr is best known for his discredited Japhetic theory of languages, it is arguably his work as a philologist, his discovery of ancient manuscripts, and his editions of specific texts that contributed most substantively and permanently to the study of the Caucasus. For example, Marr's edition of the Armenian fables of Vardan of Aygak (published from 1895-1899) remain a definitive source to this day. Marr's son Yuri Marr became an Orientalist and a futurist poet, who he also impacted many students during his long teaching career.

**Armenian.** Marr's student Ashxarbek Andreevich-Loris Kalantar (1897-1941) was born three years after Mumtaz, and he faced the same tragic fate a few years later. Kalantar was born in the Borchali region of the Russian empire, in which is now modern Georgia, and studied at the famous Nersessian School in Tbilisi. He graduated from St. Petersburg University in 1907, with Marr as his supervisor. In 1914, he was appointed curator of the Oriental Museum in the ancient Armenian city of Ani. He taught at the Asian Museum (now the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in St. Petersburg throughout the 1920s. Along with six other scholars, Kalantar was involved in the founding of Yerevan State University, where he taught archeology and history. He founded the department of Oriental History and Archeology in Yerevan State University in 1922. In 1938, a year after Mumtaz had been arrested, he too was arrested, and also labelled an "enemy of the people." Kalantar died in 1941 while still in state custody.

*I. A. Orbeli* Another student of Marr, Iosif Abgarovich Orbeli (1887-1961) managed to avoid persecution by the Soviet state. Orbeli was also born the same year as Kalantar, in 1887, and, like Marr, in Kutaisi. He attended the Tbilisi Gymnasium and entered the Historical-Philological Faculty of St. Petersburg University in 1904, majoring in Latin and Greek. He participated alongside Kalantar in the excavations led by Marr in the city of Ani. With Marr's encouragement, Orbeli became immersed in a range of disciplines relating to Orientalist philology, including archaeology, literature, lithography and linguistics. Orbeli conducted extensive research in the medieval Armenian Principality of Khachen in the Soviet Nagorno-Karabakh region. He studied the historical monuments of the Kingdom of Armenia, the Saljuq Empire, and the ancient empire of Urartu, thereby becoming the world's foremost authority on Armenian antiquities. He was appointed to teach in the Faculty of Armenian and Georgian languages at the University of St. Petersburg in 1911, and taught both Armenian and Kurdish there. He also taught at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. In 1916, during an archeological expedition in the region around Lake Van, Orbeli discovered an inscription attributed to the Urartian king Sarduri II (764–735 BCE).

*I. A. Orbeli and the Hermitage* Among Orbeli's many publications are a catalog of what had been discovered during the excavations at Ani, and studies on Armenian art, archeology, and history. Orbeli's scholarly renown led to his appointment as the director of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia's greatest art museum. During the Siege of Leningrad in 1941, Orbeli managed to organize a celebration in honor of the Chaghatay poet Ali-Shir Navai, who is regarded as the founder of Uzbek literature. During his tenure, Orbeli added significantly to the Hermitage's collection of Oriental art. In 1934, the year of the death of his teacher Nikolai Marr, Orbeli travelled to Iran to participate in the millennial celebrations of Ferdowsi. During the 1950s, Orbeli co-edited with S. Taronian an influential edition of Armenian folk tales based on Armenian dialects. In 1955, Orbeli was appointed director of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Leningrad State University (formerly St. Petersburg University), a position he held for six years, until his death in 1961.

*Georgian nonfictional prose* Georgian nonfictional prose flourished throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with writers such as the mountaineer poet Vazha Pshavela reflecting on various themes in world literature, including the challenges of cosmopolitanism and patriotism in 1905, and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia presenting his vision of world literature in countless essays throughout the Soviet period.

## Further Reading

Marcello Cherchi and H. Paul Manning, "Disciplines and Nations: Niko Marr vs. His Georgian Students on Tbilisi State University and Japhetidology/Caucasology Schism," *The Carl Beck Papers, Center for Russian and East European Studies* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2002).

Aleksei Asvaturov "Between the 'Language of Humanity' and Latinizatsiia: Nikolai Marr and the Oriental Department of the State Public Library in Leningrad" and Altay Goyushov, Naomi Caffee and Robert Denis, "The Transformation of Azerbaijani Orientalists into Islamic Thinkers after 1991," in *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, edited by Michael Kemper, Stephan Conermann (New York: Routledge, 2011), 58-67; 306-319.

Vazha Pshavela (Georgian poet), "Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism," translated by Rebecca Ruth Gould, *Asymptote* 23 (2016, originally published in 1905). Available at <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/vazha-pshavela-cosmopolitanism-and-patriotism/>.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What role did 20<sup>th</sup> century Orientalists from the Caucasus play in the rediscovery of ancient and medieval Caucasus cultures?
- 2) What kind of control did the Soviet state exert over literary and scholarly production?
- 3) What role did the St. Petersburg State University (later Leningrad State University) play in shaping the development of disciplines in the South Caucasus?

## FICTION, LEGENDS, MYTHS (Antiquity to the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

### ANTIQUITY

**Comparisons.** Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan all have rich oral traditions that long preceded written beginnings in these languages, even though Armenian and Georgian pre-Christian literary heritage was deliberately erased by the Christian church. Legends overlap considerably with drama and the performative arts as well as with poetry, which can make it difficult to erect firm and clear boundaries around these categories. Some of the texts and narratives mentioned elsewhere in this study guide will be presented here from a different point of view.

**Georgian.** Although all literatures and cultures of the Caucasus region influenced each other, Georgian folklore and mythology are most closely intertwined with the folkloric traditions of the northern Caucasus. Georgian is an Ibero-Caucasian language, while Armenian is Indo-European and Azeri is a Turkic language. This genealogy partly explains why Georgian folklore is so heavily engaged with the traditions relating to mythological giants known as *narts* that abound in Chechen and Circassian folkloric traditions but which are not found in Armenian or Azeri folklore. These mythological *nart* legends point to a common pantheon that Georgians shared with Caucasus peoples to the north. Georgia's conversion to Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the conversion of northern Caucasus peoples to Islam in later centuries has contributed to the fracturing of these shared traditions, yet the shared origins are evident to anyone who inquires into the history of these cultures.

### Further Reading

*Nart Sagas*, ed. Naira Bepieva and Nino Popiashvili (Tbilisi, 2020).

John Latham, "Sun-Gods and Soviets: Historicising a North Caucasian Nart Saga," *Iran & the Caucasus* 20.2 (2016): 159-178.

### Discussion Question

- 1) What aspects of Caucasus mythology do southern Caucasus peoples (such as Georgians) share in common with the peoples of the northern Caucasus?

## POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

**Comparisons.** There is no straightforward division between the legends of antiquity in the Caucasus and the legends of the post-classical period. While the themes and tropes that featured in the legends of

antiquity were reimagined during the post-classical period and adapted to new circumstances, the basic features of these tales remained constant. As in antiquity, the Caucasus served as an intermediary between literatures further east and European literatures. Since the Caucasus' role as the crossroads of empires greatly impacted its literary culture, the works that combined different cultures are a logical place to begin.

**The Georgian Balavariani.** Georgian is the language in which the ancient Indian story of Barlaam and Josaphat (Bilawhar and Josaphat), originally linked to the life of Gautama Buddha, reached Europe during the medieval period. The anonymous Georgian version appears to be a translation of an 8<sup>th</sup> century Arabic version, *Kitab Bilawhar wa-Budhasaf*, which was itself a translation of a Central Asian Manichean version of a Sanskrit Mahayana Buddhist text. The existence of a Georgian version of this work demonstrates that there was a well-developed literary tradition in Georgian throughout the middle ages and that this tradition was in contact with literary developments elsewhere in the world. It also attests to the close links between Georgian Christianity and other Middle Eastern and African early Christianities, since versions of the Barlaam and Josaphat story exist in Persian, Armenian, and Ethiopian version as well as in Georgian. The Georgian version has been preserved in two texts; the long version dates to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries and the short one dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Both versions are included in D.M. Lang's landmark translation (1966). By making use of the Georgian version of the Barlaam and Josaphat story, called *Balavariani*, Lang and other scholars were able to reconstruct the Barlaam and Josaphat tale to its Indian origins. Josaphat's Georgian name, Iodasaph, is traceable back to the Sanskrit term Bodhisattva, via the Persian Bodisav and subsequently the Arabic form Yudhasaf/ Budhasaf.

**Indian connections** The Georgian story of Balavar belongs to a wider tradition of ancient and medieval Georgian life-writing and hagiography. Whereas the original Indian version tells of the persecution faced by Gautama Buddha in starting his new religion, in the Christian versions, an Indian king persecutes his son, who converts to Christianity, along with his son's teacher Barlaam, who is responsible for his conversion. The king imprisons his son Josaphat when his court astrologers predict that he will one day convert to Christianity. Ironically, it is while he is in prison that his son meets Saint Barlaam, who persuades him to convert to Christianity. In the end, the king himself finally converts to Christianity. He then appoints his son as successor to the throne and takes up residence as a hermit in the desert. In the end, Josaphat abdicates the throne and also becomes a hermit accompanied by Barlaam.

**Barlaam and Josaphat as saints** Both Barlaam and Josaphat were canonized as saints in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, and later in the Latin Church. The Georgian version is regarded as the first Christianized version of this eastern tale, and it was translated into Greek by the Georgian monk Euthymius of Athos (955–1028). It was through this Greek translation that the Barlaam and Josaphat story was translated into Latin in 1048. From Latin, it entered European literature, and was rendered into Catalan, Provençal, Italian, Portuguese, Old French, Anglo-Norman, Middle High German, Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, Old Norse, Middle English, and Hebrew. Across its many versions, the core story became spiritualized as an allegory for freedom the will and the pursuit of inner peace.

### Further Reading

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E.A. Wallis Budge, *Baralâm and Yëwâsëf. Baralam and Yewasef: the Ethiopic version of a Christianized recension of the Buddhist legend of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

Sergis Tmogveli, *Visramiani, the Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin*, translated from Georgian by Oliver Wardrop (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1914 [reprint 1966]).

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the role of the Georgian version of the story of Barlaam and Josaphat in within world literary culture?
- 2) How were ancient histories reimagined during the post-classical period across the literatures of the Caucasus?
- 3) How did post-classical Georgian authors express their Christian identities in a world ruled by Islamic dynasties?

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Georgian.** The Romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became aligned with liberation movements in each of the Caucasus literatures. In Georgia, Ilya Chavchavadze composed works in major genres, including fiction. His most famous work of fiction, the novella *Is That a Man?! (კაცია-ადამიანი?! / katsi adamianisa?!, 1858-1863)* marked a new era in Georgian literary fiction, and was later produced on the Georgian stage. Set just prior to the emancipation of serfs throughout the Russian empire, this work tells of a landowner named Luarsab and his wife Darejan who pass their days exploiting their serfs. The story offers a thoroughgoing satire, in the spirit of Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, of the idleness and ignorance of the feudal landed gentry. Even when urgent matters need to be dealt with, Luarsab cares first and foremost for what he will eat that evening, and responds to all inquiries with the question: “what are we eating for supper tonight?” Rather than simply mock these characters for their foibles, Chavchavadze advises the reader that those who laugh at them are also laughing at themselves. Two decades later, Ilya Chavchavadze published his second major work of fiction: *The Otarani Widow (ოთარანთ ქვრივი/otaraant kvrivi, 1888)*. This work portrays a heroic and selfless woman and her son. The son falls in love with the daughter of a Georgian prince, but has no hopes of marrying her due to his poverty. Eventually he falls off a haystack, is mortally wounded, and tragically dies, just after revealing his love for the princess. His mother freezes to death while mourning for her loss on his grave.

**Alexandre Qazbegi** Another Georgian novelist who learned a great deal from Chavchavadze but took Georgian prose fiction in a very different direction is Alexandre Qazbegi (1848-1890). After publishing a lesser known novel, *Georgia's Beau Monde (საქართველოს ბომონდი/sarkartvelos bomondi, 1869–70)*, Qazbegi authored four novels in a quick succession: *Elguja (ელგუჯა, 1881)*, *The Parricide (მამის მკვლეელი, 1882)*, and *The Teacher (მომღვარი, 1885)*. Each was written in a realistic style which had yet to be encountered in Georgian literature. The protagonist Koba of *The Parricide* becomes a bandit who steals from the rich to give to the poor, like many famous figures in the literatures and cultures of the Caucasus, from the Turkish Koroghlu to the Chechen Zelimkhan. Qazbegi is also notable for chronicling the lives of the non-elite, and of Georgia's rural population. He passed most of his life in Stepantsminda, near the border with Chechnya, and wrote about this mountainous region extensively. His work displays profound sympathy with the Muslims mountaineers who were harshly affected by Russian colonial policies, including through forced displacement. Qazbegi's works might be said to have formed the social conscience of 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian literature.

### **Akaki Tsereteli**

Although somewhat better known as a poet, Akaki Tsereteli (1863–1915) also composed several major works of Georgian fiction. His significant prose works include “Devils” (1868), set in a village near St. Petersburg, and “Bashi-Achuk” (ბაში-აჩუკი, 1898), which tells the story of the 17<sup>th</sup> century rebellion against Persian rule in Kakheti (Western Georgian) organized by Bidzina Cholokashvili. The protagonist of the story is a young man from Imereti (Eastern Georgia) who goes by the name nicknamed as Bashi-Achuk. Bashi-Achuk attacks the Persian envoy and sets free the Georgian women who were held captive in the shah's harem, including his sisters, who had been abducted by the armies of the shah. At this point, an Iranian soldier fighting on the side of the shah falls in love with Bashi-Achuk's sister. She brings the soldier to the Georgian's side, and he realizes that he is himself Georgian, having been kidnapped while a child by Iranian armies and raised in Persia. The regiment led by the soldier surrenders to the Georgian, who win that battle.

### **Further Reading**

Ilya Chavchavadze, *Works*, ed. by Guram Sharadze and translated by Marjory and Oliver Wardrops (Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1987). Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20120223231724/http://www.nplg.gov.ge/dlibrary/collect/0001/000099/Ilia%20works.pdf>.

Alexander Qazbegi, *The Prose of the Mountains: Three Tales of the Caucasus*, translated by Rebecca Ruth Gould (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

### **Discussion Questions**

What new prose genres appear in the literatures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Caucasus?

How was the Russo-Persian War represented in the literatures of the South Caucasus?

What were the dominant themes of 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian fiction and how did these change over the course of the century?

## 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a succession of many major works of fiction by the authors Grigol Robakidze (1880-1962), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (1893-1975), and Mikheil Javakhishvili (1880-1937), each of whom pioneered a distinctive style in Georgian prose. Like Nussimbaum, with whom he was personally acquainted, Robakidze died far from the Caucasus, in Geneva. Both authors also wrote mostly in German after migrating from the Caucasus. Robakidze's novel *The Snake Skin* (გველის პერანგი, 1926) was a source of inspiration for *Ali and Nino*, and some of the latter work's descriptions of Tbilisi and Iran were lifted from this work.

**Konstantine Gamsakhurdia** Konstantine Gamsakhurdia is arguably the most prolific and influential novelist of Soviet-era Georgian literature. His first major novel was *The Smile of Dionysus* (დიონისოს ღიმილი, 1925), on which he worked for eight years. Set in Paris, the novel concerns a Georgian intellectual who feels alienated from the land of his birth. Gamsakhurdia's subsequent novels turned away from purely literary milieus and embraced historical topics. His magnum opus *The Right Hand of the Grand Master* (დიდოსტატის მარჯვენა/ *didostatis marjvena*, 1939), was composed during the most repressive period of the Stalinist terror, at a time when the best Georgian writers were being actively persecuted and even assassinated. It chronicles the era of David the Builder (1089-1125), and delves memorably into the conflicts and romance that was associated with his reign. Often, the novelist looks beyond the ruling elite and explores the lives of the lower classes, who are erased in historical sources. Although Gamsakhurdia was critical of the Soviet state, he managed to avoid persecution and was even awarded the Shota Rustaveli State Prize in 1962.

**Mikheil Javakhishvili** Javakhishvili was an equally talented writer who met with a much darker fate. He began publishing at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as early as 1903. *Jaqo's Dispossessed* (ჯაყოს ხიზნები/ *jaqos xiznebi*, 1924) was his first major extended work of prose, and it has remained a classic ever since its initial publication. Javakhishvili's later novels continued in the tradition of Qazbegi with their focus on mountaineers who were engaged in rebellion against the tsar. *Kvachi Kvachantiradze* (კვაჭი კვაჭანტირაძე, 1924) deals with the fate of Khevsur mountaineers under the Soviet dispensation. His final novel *Arsena of Marabda* (არსენა მარაბდელი, 1933), over which he labored for seven years, concerns the 18<sup>th</sup> century noble bandit Arsena Odzelashvili, who like so many literary and historical figures of the Caucasus, was known for stealing from the ruling class in order to distribute his proceeds with the poor. The novel's wide popularity may have proved fatal to Javakhishvili, for the work was criticized by Soviet leaders who suspected it of being a surreptitious critique of Soviet rule. When Paolo Iashvili shot himself in a session of the Union of Soviet Writers, Javakhishvili was alone in praising the poet for bravery. Soon enough the animus of the Union of Writers turned directly on him, and Javakhishvili was declared, four days after the death of Iashvili, an enemy of the people, who should be expelled from the Union of Writers and physically annihilated. Javakhishvili was arrested in August, tortured until he signed a confession, and executed at gunpoint in September of that same year. Javakhishvili's status as enemy of the people was a danger not only to himself, but also to those close to him and to his literary legacy. His brother was executed and his wife was exiled from Georgia. His manuscripts were destroyed and much of his unpublished work remains lost to this day. Although Javakhishvili was rehabilitated in the 1950s, which meant that his work was no longer banned, his legacy continued—and continues—to be obscured as a result of the destruction that was visited on his writings by the Soviet state.

### Further Reading

Mikheil Javakhishvili, *Kvachi*, translated by Donald Rayfield (Urbana, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015).

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What were the channels for literary exchange among Armenian, Azeri, and Georgian writers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- 2) What were the dominant literary movements in the southern Caucasus during this period and how were they shaped by parallel developments in European literatures?
- 3) What impact did Soviet terror have on the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgian fiction?

## ANTIQUITY

Biographical and autobiographical literature has been part of Georgian literature from its earliest beginnings. This is due in part to the role of the church, which encouraged hagiographies and martyrologies of Christian saints who died in conflict with pagan rulers, or while refusing to obey foreign invaders' demands that they convert to Islam. With biographical and life writing traditions also developed in Armenian, such compositions flourished later in the evolution of its literature. Since Turkic does not have a developed written literature until the later medieval period, examples of life writing in Azeri during antiquity are similarly absent. Needless to say, oral literature covered some of these gaps through dastans, songs, and other oral narratives which are covered in the sections on poetry, fiction, and performance.

**The Life of St. Nino.** Arguably the earliest example of Georgian life writing is the biography of St. Nino, who is responsible for the conversion of Georgia to Christianity. Nino's biography is incorporated into the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century historical compendium, *The Conversion of Kartli* (მოქცევაჲ ქართლისაჲ *moktsevey kartlisay*) as *The Life of St. Nino* (ცხოვრება წმიდა ნინოსი, *ts'xovreba ts'mida ninosi*). In the story of St. Nino's conversion of Georgians to Christianity, the stimulus is a miracle performed on a child. Nino was an immigrant to pagan Georgia from Cappadocia in east-central Anatolia (present-day Turkey). She settled among Georgians as a Christian missionary with the intention of converting the Georgian people to Christianity. One day, a Georgian mother was carrying her sick son through town, hoping to find someone who could heal her child. She knocked on Nino's door during this search. Nino informed her that, although no human could cure her son, Jesus could restore him to health. By way of proving her claim, Nino picked up the boy, laid him down on the hair shirt on which she had been sitting, and recited a prayer over him. The boy was miraculously healed.

**Nino's Reputation Grows** The news of the healing spread through town, and Georgians began to look on Nino with awe. Nino quickly acquired a reputation throughout Georgia as a healer. When the Georgian Queen Nana fell sick, she learned about Nino's reputation as a miracle-working healer and requested that Nino come and pray for her just as she had done for the Georgian mother's son. Nino followed the same procedure that she followed to heal the queen as she had done for the child. She laid the queen down on a hair shirt, prayed to Jesus Christ, and the queen's health was suddenly restored. This miracle persuaded the queen to convert to Christianity. Christianity was adopted by King Mirian and Queen Nana as the state religion of their Eastern Georgian kingdom in 337. In 523, Christianity was officially embraced by the Western Georgian kingdom. The Georgian church achieved autocephaly in between these events during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the leader of the Georgian church held the title of Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia. Some time did pass of course before the religion was fully accepted by the Georgian people.

**The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik.** The Armenian noblewoman Queen Shushanik, whose martyrdom at the hands of her Zoroastrian husband was first narrated in Georgian, is yet another figure in Georgian hagiography who is distinguished by her love for children. Purporting to have been written between 476 and 483 and attributed to Iakob Tsertaveli, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik* (წამებაჲ წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისაჲ / *Tsameba tsmidisa Shushanikisi dedoplisa*) was for a long time regarded as the earliest surviving work of Georgian literature. Scholars have recently begun to question whether the text is as old as it claims to be, since the oldest manuscript of this text dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The 10<sup>th</sup> century version was copied in Parkhali (Turkish Barhal), a village built by Davit III Kurapalat (c. 961–965), located in the territory of modern Turkey's Artvin Province, and contains a medieval Georgian monastery and cathedral church. In the narrative of her life, Shushanik becomes known for her abilities to give children to the barren, to heal the sick, and to restore sight to the blind.

**Genre** Some scholars have categorized *The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik* as a novel; such a classification is arguably anachronistic. This label also elides the fact that the text purports to be a historical report, and the claim to bearing witness is central to its authenticity. It does however usefully register the innovativeness of this text from the point of view of genre, for it appears that no text like this had ever before been composed in the Georgian language.

**Armenian Translation** At the same time as this earliest extant manuscript was copied, the martyrdom narrative was translated into Armenian. It is unsurprising that the text was of interest to an Armenian audience, since it dealt with an Armenian noblewoman who was killed by her husband for refusing to renounce Christianity and convert to Zoroastrianism, a religion that at that time was the state religion of the Sasanians. Shushanik was the daughter of the Armenian military leader Vardan Mamikonian, who also died a martyr, and she inherited his courage. She was tortured and imprisoned for years for refusing to renounce her Christian convictions. A quarter century prior to her death (c. 475) her father had been killed at the Battle of Avarayr (451), which ensured Armenians' freedom of religion.



**The Passion of Gobron.** Several centuries later, 10th-century Georgian Orthodox church hierarch Stepane Mtbevari (also known as Stephen of T'beti) composed a biography entitled *The Passion of Gobron, Who Was Abducted from Q'veli Fortress* (წამებაჲ წმიდისა მოწამისა გობრონისი, რომელი განიყვანეს ყუელის ციხით/ *ts'amebaჲ ts'midisa mots'amisa gobronisi, romeli ganiqvanes quelis tsikhit*). Other works are attributed to Stepane Mtbevari, including *The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*, but only *Passion of Gobron* is extant. This work was commissioned by the Georgian Bagratid archduke Ashot Kukhi (d. 918). It tells the story of the Georgian general Gobron's role in the Siege of Q'veli (914). This was a military engagement during which the Saljuq ruler Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj (also known as Abu'l Qasim) besieged the Q'veli fortress, conquered the Georgian army, and executed Gobron who led the resistance. Just prior to this battle, Abu'l Qasim had captured and executed King Smbat of Armenia (r. 890-914). However, Abu'l Qasim's victory was short-lived. He was ultimately forced to retreat in the face of stiff resistance from local Georgians. From a literary perspective, the *Passion of Gobron* is somewhat formulaic in nature. The work also reflects the emergent sectarianism of Christianity in the Caucasus: Armenians are condemned for following the Monophysite teaching, and the author claims that they deserved their cruel fate. (Stephane calls the Monophysite teaching a heresy, even though most Georgians had subscribed to it during the sixth century.) In his narrative, Stephane tells of how the conquerors initially offered Gobron the chance to convert to Islam in order to avoid execution. Far from abandoning Christianity, Gobron welcomes martyrdom for loyalty to his faith. He refuses to convert and rejoices that he was chosen to become a martyr. He is then beheaded.

**Translation** The life writing tradition in Georgian literature was also stimulated by translation. One translation of particular importance, for which the Arabic original is no longer extant, is *The Passion of Mikael of Mar Saba* (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries). This narrative reports on a tense meeting between monk Mikael and the wife of the local *amir* (ruler) in Jerusalem. The woman orders the monk to be bound and tortured with whips.

**Biographies** Alongside the above-named martyrologies, there were also numerous biographies of leaders in the Georgian church who did not face martyrdom but lead pious lives. *The Lives of the Thirteen Assyrian Fathers* is one such work, which gathers together. This collection tells of nineteen missionaries who travelled from Assyria to Georgia in order to spread the Christian faith. Among these individuals were missionaries who would establish Georgia's most famous early monasteries, including David Garesjeli and Shio Mghvimeli. Other works in this biographical tradition include *The Life of Shio Mghvimeli*, *The Life of Davit Garesjeli*, *The Achievements and Passion of Saint Abibos, Bishop of Nekres*, and *The Life of Ioane Zedazneli*. These works are all dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In the biography of Abibos, the Christian saint vocally denounces the fire worshipping practices of the Zoroastrians. As a result of his criticisms, Iranian Zoroastrians attack him with stones.

**The Life of Davit Garesjeli.** *The Life of Davit Garesjeli* tells of a Syrian Church Father from the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century who established asceticism in Georgia. Composed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Catholicos Arsenius II, the work abounds in vivid descriptions of the natural world. In the forest where David resides with his disciples, deer and their fawn share milk with the hermit. David rescues a deer attacked by a dragon and saves a partridge being attacked by a pagan hunter. The hunter initially threatens to kill the saint, but when he is overcome by the saint's power and incapacitated, he is struck by the presence of God and begins to believe in the saint's teachings and in his holiness. He asks Davit Garesjeli to heal his son, who is unable to walk. Davit Garesjeli agrees and the hunter returns home. He is greeted by his son, who formerly had only been able to move by crawling on four legs. This time, the son greets his father by happily walking. The hunter is overwhelmed with joy and gratitude to God and to the saint. He loads his donkeys with bread and vegetables and takes his entire family to Davit Garesjeli to receive his blessing. In the end, the hunter's entire family is baptized and converts to Christianity. As with the story of St. Nino's conversion of Georgia to Christianity, the trigger for this conversion is the miracle of healing performed by a Christian saint on a child.

**The animal world** Other saints are depicted as having a uniquely symbiotic relationship to the animal world, including to animals typically classified as dangerous to humans. Shio Mghvimeli uses a domesticated wolf to herd his donkeys. Ioane Zedazneli is on good terms with bears. Basil Zarzmeli's *The Life and Achievement of Our Divinely Inspired Blessed Father Serapion (Tskhovreba Seraapionisi, c. 910)* is another important example of Georgian biographical literature, composed by the subject's nephew. The work abounds in references to many other works in the Georgian hagiographic tradition, and it is notable for its evocative descriptions of the natural beauty of the Samtskhe–Javakheti region in southern Georgia.

**The Lives of the Children of Kola.** Alongside animals and saints' symbiotic relationship with them, the innocence and miracle-performing powers of children is an important theme in Georgian hagiography. *The Lives of the Children of Kola*, set in the region of western Georgia known as Colchis in antiquity and from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards as Lazica, is entirely focused on children. *The Lives of the Children of Kola* describes an event that occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when nine children were martyred. Even to this day, the site where the children are buried, near a spring called Aiazma, is a sacred site. Georgian Orientalist Nikolai Marr published a brief summary of *The Lives of the Children of Kola* in 1903. As recorded in this narrative, nine pagan children were drawn to convert to Christianity in order to participate in the Christian liturgy

alongside their Christian playmates. They were baptized on a cold winter night, away from public view. After they were baptized, these formerly pagan children moved into Christian homes. When they learned what had happened, the parents hurried to the Christian houses where their children were staying, and angrily beat them “black and blue” (as the text records). In desperation, the parents tried to compel their children to eat food sacrificed to idols. The pagan parents then approached the local governor, who assured them that they as parents had the right to do whatever they wanted with their children. The parents then decided to toss their children into a hole until their skulls broke open. Some of the parents also stoned their children.

**Martyrdom of Eustace of Mtskheta.** The anonymous 6<sup>th</sup> century work *Martyrdom of Eustace of Mtskheta* (also known as *Martyrdom of Eustace the Cobbler*) is an extraordinary short text that reveals a great deal concerning ancient attitudes to religious conversion, as well as tensions between Christian Georgia and Sasanian Persia during this period. It tells the story of a young man named Eustace who is born to a Zoroastrian family in a province of Sasanian Persia but decides to convert to Christianity. The story is set during the reign of Khusrow Anushirvan (531-579), at a time when the Caucasus was an outpost of the Sasanian empire.

Eustace arrived in Mtskheta, a city regarded as the birthplace of Georgian Christianity, at the age of thirty with the intention of becoming a shoemaker. While residing in Georgia, he becomes fond of the Christian faith and enjoys watching Christians celebrate. He decides to convert to Christianity, marries a Christian woman, and receives baptism. One year, the Persians living in Mtskheta invite Eustace to celebrate in their Zoroastrian festival. Eustace refuses and insists on the superiority of his Christian identity. His fellow Iranians then report on Eustace to the Sasanian commandant of Mtskheta fortress, complaining that he lacks respect for the sacred fire that Zoroastrians worship and derides their religion in favor of his own Christianity.

**Marzban** Eustace and seven other Christian converts from Iranian lands who were now residing in Georgia were brought before the *marzban* (leader) of the Zoroastrian faith in Georgia, who at that time was Arvand Gushnasp. The *marzban* was effectively the local judge and ruler, and it was up to him to decide the punishment that awaited these apostates. He gave them the chance to renounce Christianity and return to Zoroastrianism, the faith of their fathers, and thereby avoid punishment. Two of the eight accepted this offer. The remaining six, including Eustace, stayed faithful to Christianity. They were imprisoned and sentenced to death until the Catholicos of Georgia and several Georgian princes requested their release. Their request was granted, and the six Christian converts returned home.

When the new *marzban*, Vezhan Buzmir, replaced Arvand Gushnasp, the same Persians who had earlier denounced Eustace complained about him again. They reminded the *marzban* that he had the authority to determine their fates. Buzmir summoned the two converts of the original group who were still living: Eustace and Stephan the Assyrian. Stephan’s Assyrian acquaintance attested that he came from a Christian family, and his father, mother, brothers, and sisters were all Christian. This attestation saved Stephan from persecution, since he couldn’t be blamed for adhering to the religion into which he was born. Eustace had a different fate. During the meeting with the *marzban*, he recounted in detail the story of his conversion, and his search for an alternative to Zoroastrianism. Eustace includes an important speech from a Christian archdeacon whom he met in his hometown and who recounted to him the principals and history of the Christian faith as well as of Judaism. After recounting this speech and all he learned about Christianity, Eustace expresses shame for the faith of his fathers, into which he was born.

**Opportunity to recant** Even after this denunciation of Zoroastrianism, the *marzban* urged Eustace to recant, for the sake of his wife and children. Eustace points out that he has endured torture for the sake of his Christian faith and says that he will not be dissuaded from his faith. The *marzban* then orders that Eustace be taken to prison and his head be cut off in the middle of the night, when no one is watching, in order to avoid the risk of Christian observers later attempting to sanctify Eustace’s martyred body. The *marzban* then instructs that Eustace’s corpse should be carried outside the city, to be consumed by beasts and birds. The subordinates of the *marzban* initially hesitate to carry out his orders. However, fear overtakes them. They realize that if they refuse to execute Eustace, they themselves will be killed. So they strike his neck with a sword and cut off his head. Before he was taken away to prison, Eustace had already made arrangements with Stephan the Assyrian to have his body carried back to Mtskheta, where he would be buried. When Eustace’s corpse was taken outside to be eaten by animals, local Christians retrieved it and carried it to Mtskheta, where it was buried in the holy church. Ever since, the sick visit the grave of St. Eustace’s in order to be healed of their maladies.

### Further Reading

Cornelia B. Horn, “The Lives and Literary Roles of Children in Advancing Conversion to Christianity: Hagiography from the Caucasus in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” *Church History* 76.2 (2007): 262-297.

Marjory Wardrop and Oliver Wardrop, *The Life of Saint Nino* (London: Clarendon Press, 1900).

Zakaria Machitadze, *Lives of the Georgian Saints* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006).

David Marshall Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976). Second edition, revised.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What role did biographies of women saints play in the development of Georgian life writing?
- 2) How did autobiographical and biographical texts and their associated stylistic conventions reflect tensions among the religions of the premodern Caucasus?
- 3) What role did miracles performed on children play in establishing the credentials of Georgian saints within the hagiographic tradition?

### POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

**Georgia.** The Georgian hagiographic tradition continued to be the dominant strand of life writing in the Caucasus throughout the post-classical and medieval period. During this period, Islam replaced Zoroastrianism as the politically dominant religion alongside Christianity. Beginning in 633, the Arabs began to attack Persian. While the Persian empire declined in power, Tbilisi was briefly placed under Byzantine rule. Between 642 and 651, Arab armies crushed Persian forces. In 655, Tbilisi—referred to as Tiflis by Arabs and Persians, and subsequently by Russians—fell under Arab ruler. Arab-Muslim sovereignty was to remain in place in Georgia for the next five centuries, albeit with significant interludes of Georgian rule.

**The Martyrdom of Saint Abo.** Abo, a perfumer from Baghdad, is among the best-known Christian martyrs from the early period of Arab-Muslim rule in Tbilisi. He was an Arab by birth who, like Eustace, converted to Christianity while residing in Tbilisi. The narrative of his life and martyrdom by John, son of Saban, is considered a literary masterpiece and has been widely cited in subsequent Georgian literature. Abo was executed by the Arab governor of Tbilisi in 786. The narrative of his martyrdom in Georgian is preceded by a prologue in which John laments the fate of the Georgians under Arab rule. According to John, the caliphs in Baghdad were actively engaged in seeking to convert the peoples of the Caucasus to Islam. John explains that he composed the narrative of the martyrdom of St. Abo in order to encourage his fellow Georgians to remain steadfast in their loyalty to their religion and their country. As John relates, Abo entered into the service of duke Nersus, then the ruler of Georgia, due to his skill in the arts of perfumery. John reports that Abo was also well versed in the "literature of the Saracens," meaning Arabic. Abo travelled to Georgia with duke Nerses, and initially resided with him. He learned to read and write and speak fluently in Georgian. He then began to read the Old and New Testaments, whether in Georgian translation or in Arabic is not specified. He started attending church and listened to the writings of the prophets and apostles, as they were read aloud in church. He also began consulting with Christian theologians on doctrinal matters. As a result of all these activities, Abo became estranged from Islam and devoted to Christianity. He began fasting and praying to Jesus Christ secretly, and sought for ways of being baptized that would not be noticed by the Muslim rulers, since he feared severe punishment for converting to Christianity.

**Arab armies invade the Caucasus** In 779, seven years after Abo's arrival in Georgia, Arab armies invaded the Caucasus. Nersus and his retinue, including Abu, fled north, through the Darial Gorge, and into the land of the Khazars. John describes the Khazars in pejorative terms as wild and savage drinkers of blood, who do not adhere to any religion other than a basic monotheism. Although John classifies them as barbarians, he also reports that the King of the Khazars (whom he also calls the "King of the North") welcomed Duke Nerses and his retinue with food and drink and extended to him all the hospitality that local cultural customs required. Grateful to have successfully escaped from the invading Arabs, Abo was baptized and officially became Christian.

**Among the Abkhazians** After staying in the land of the Khazars for a while, Duke Nerses requests the king's permission to depart for the land of the Abkhazians, which was at that time part of the Byzantine empire. The King of the Khazars agree to the request and the retinue depart on their three-month journey to Abkhazia. In narrating this journey, John contrasts and compares different empires and reveals a pronounced preference for Byzantine rule. Once he is surrounded by the devout Christians of Abkhazia, Abo is further inspired to pursue the path of sanctity. He undertakes a lifestyle that emulates that of St. Anthony the Anchorite (d. 356), a Christian monk from Egypt, who is known for developing an ascetic way of life in the desert. For three months, he prays and fasts intensively, and ceases to speak with other humans. Following this spiritual transformation, Abo has the opportunity to return at long last to Tbilisi. The Arabs have conquered Georgia and replace Duke Nerses with his nephew as the prince of Georgia. Nerses then asks the caliph's representatives in Georgia whether he could safely return to Tbilisi, and they promised to protect him and his retinue on their journey. Abo makes preparations to return to Tbilisi in the company of Nerses.

Just before he leaves, the prince of Abkhazia pulls him aside and warns him that his Arab origins will make him a target for persecution.

***The Uniqueness of Christian Hagiography.*** The prince predicts, in other words, that Abo's renunciation of the religion of his forefathers will attract opprobrium that Christians not born to Muslim families might not have faced. We have already seen this theme manifested in *Martyrdom of Eustace of Mtskheta*, in which Eustace's Assyrian friend Stephan escapes persecution for his Christianity because witnessed attested that he had been born into the Christian faith. In both ancient and medieval hagiographies, the riskiest—and, for some outside observers, most treacherous—act is betrayal of the faith of one's forefathers. This insight is unique to Christian hagiography. For the first time in world literature—and world history—betrayal of one's native faith was regarded as a noble act. Partly due to its unique celebration of those who break with the religion of their ancestors, Christian life writing initiated a radical break with earlier biographical traditions, and also became distinguished from much Jewish and Muslim biography. The space that Christianity created for the individual as a locus of meaning, agency, and action is what distinguishes the Christian life writing tradition from its predecessors. As Abo memorably proclaimed when he was warned that his fellow Arabs might persecute him: "I am not afraid of death, since I look for the kingdom of Christ." Abo's insistence on a higher standard that transcends and contradicts general public opinion is a manifestation of his distinctively Christian vision.

***Secret conversion*** When Abo returned to Tbilisi, as predicted, his fellow Arabs were suspicious of his Christian ways. When he had previously resided in Tbilisi, Abo had kept his attraction to Christianity a secret; this time his faith was on full public display. Some Muslim Arabs cursed him. Others threatened him. Yet others gently tried to persuade him to return to the Muslim faith. Abo ignored all of these suggestions and demands. For three years, he went about openly professing Christianity, and no one attacked him. Then, in 785, Abo was arrested and brought before the Arab ruler of Tbilisi due to his Christian beliefs. Duke Stephen intervened on his behalf and soon afterwards he was released. The persecutions did not end there, however. When the Arab rulers appointed a new magistrate for Tbilisi, Abo's denouncers approached him with a complaint. They pointed out that, although Abo was Arab by birth and brought up in the Islamic faith, he boldly declared himself Christian, and goes about the city, instructing Arab Muslims in how to convert to Christianity. The complainers insisted that Abo should be arrested and compelled to return to the Muslim faith in order to avoid the further spread of the Christian religion.

***Abo prepares for death*** The Christians get wind of these complaints and warn Abo that a mob is hunting for him, in order to arrest, torture and beat him. Abo stoically repeats his early declaration that he is ready to face death for the sake of Christ. He does not change his behavior, and continues to instruct his fellow Arabs in the Christian faith. Finally, Abo is arrested. The magistrate visits him in prison and asks why he has abandoned his native religion and embraced Christianity, since he was born Muslim. Abo explains that he rejected the human-created creed into which he was born in order to embrace the "true faith of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed to him by Jesus Christ." Abo's universalist convictions are historically significant, inasmuch as they reflect aspects of the Christian ethos that are alien to both Islam and Zoroastrianism.

***Abo's Martyrdom.*** Even after his arrest, Abo rejoices. He knows that he will be killed on 27 December, the feast day for St. Stephen, who is venerated as the first martyr of the Christian church. Abo is killed on the day he predicted, by a sword that strikes him three times. His corpse is burned by the Arabs who had complained about him. Abo's relics survive the fire intact. They are stuffed into sheepskin by Christian observers and thrown into the Aragvi River which runs through Tbilisi. As his Georgian biographer writes poetically: "the river became a winding sheet for those sacred relics and the depths of the water a sepulcher for the holy martyr." That night, a torch burns in the spot where Abo's body had been incinerated by his persecutors. It is visible from far away, and attracts Christians from many different corners of the world. Even the attendants of the amir who ordered Abo's assassination are stunned by the light's brilliance. On the following night, the same light shines even more brightly. A light stands like a pillar over the bridge beneath which Abo's relics have been thrown, and both banks of the river are illuminated by this light. All of Tbilisi's inhabitants witness the miracle of the light. The ground on which Abo was killed also became a sacred pilgrimage site, in which Christian mothers could find remedies to heal their children and the elderly could rest in peace. St Abo of Tbilisi's church, named in his honor, now stands on the banks of the Kura River in central Tbilisi, commemorating his martyrdom and securing his status as patron of the city. While the narrative of Abo is largely devoid of miraculous details, the conclusion includes theological interpretation. We are told that, on the day of Abo's martyrdom, God inserted a flaming star that resembled a torch on fire. The torch hovered in the sky for at least three nights. Everyone in the vicinity could see this fire for miles. From a literary perspective, the story of Abo's martyrdom is significant, not only for the story it tells, but for the considerable degree of historical detail and ethnographic depth that it introduces into the narrative. Events are narrated in realistic fashion, with only occasional references to miracles. These realistic features set the work apart from earlier hagiographies, such as the life of St. Nino and of Davit Garesjeli.

**Armenian.** Meanwhile, in Armenia, a secular autobiographical tradition developed alongside these religious texts. The Armenian polymath scientist and mathematician Anania Shirakatsi (610-685) composed his autobiography as a preface to his scholarly work. In his autobiography, which reads like a curriculum vitae in narrative form, Shirakatsi commemorates the Armenia military leader and teacher Tychicus, who introduced him to Armenian literature and eventually established a school in Trebizond. Tychicus also turned Shirakatsi onto mathematics, and it was in his library that Shirakatsi first became acquainted with Greek authors and scientists.

### Further Reading

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Gaga Shurgaia, "Ioane Sabanisdze," *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*. Volume 1 (600-900), edited by David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 334-337.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) What innovations did Christian conversion narratives introduce into the biographical tradition of Georgian literature?
- 2) What are the range of literary styles that shaped Georgian biographical narratives?
- 3) What are the most common tropes and themes of Georgian Christian hagiography?

## EARLY MODERN

**Safavid Threats to Georgia.** Christianity continued to grow throughout the medieval and early modern period. Adherence to this faith often came to signify resistance to foreign domination. During the early modern period, the greatest threat to Georgia was posed by the Safavid empire. While some Georgian kings, such as Luarsab of Kartli, made peace with their Iranian overlords, others resisted to the bitter end. Teimuraz I of Kakheti preferred to align with Russians and Turks rather than submitting to Safavid hegemony.

**Georgian martyrs.** Teimuraz's mother Ketevan shared in common with her son a strong commitment to Christianity and to Georgian independence from Safavid sovereignty. In 1605, she successfully led a rebellion against the Georgian ruler Constantine who converted to Islam, which had the effect of installing Teimuraz as king of Kakheti, with her as regent. She departed for Iran on a mission to Shah Abbas with Teimuraz's two sons in 1613 in the hopes of seeking clemency from him and persuading him not to invade Georgia. Shah Abbas initially acceded to Ketevan's requests and permitted her to return to Georgia. He changed his mind suddenly however before she had left Iran when he was provided with new information which suggested that Teimuraz had different plans for Georgia than the ones Ketevan had presented to Shah Abbas. Shah Abbas had the entourage from Georgia arrested, castrated Teimuraz's two sons, and placed Ketevan in captivity. She remained imprisoned in Shiraz for eleven years.

**Ketevan's impossible choice** In 1624, Shah Abbas decided to put an end to this stalemate. Motivated by his deep hatred of Teimuraz, he sent his ministers to Ketevan to present her with an impossible choice: either she would convert to Islam and to his haram or she would be tortured and executed. It did not take Ketevan long to decide. She told the Shah's emissaries that she would never renounce her faith or her chastity. In the tradition of Eustace and Abo of Tbilisi, she proclaimed that she was ready to die for the sake of the Christian faith. The Shah's ministers at first tried to persuade her to rethink her decision and become Muslim and promised that the Shah would bestow many favors on her and treat her with respect as a Queen. According to one source, the governor of Shiraz promised that the Shah would shower on her mountains of gold if she would agree to renounce Christianity. The Shia belief in the legitimacy of *taqiyya* (dissimulation) meant that there was no actual requirement that Ketevan renounce Christianity in her heart; all she had to do was go through the motions of accepting Islam, and marry the Shah.

**Ketevan becomes a martyr** The Queen could not be persuaded. In becoming a martyr in Shiraz, Ketevan entered a long lineage of Georgian saints who died for remaining steadfast to their religion. After everyone understood that she was unwavering in her faith, the Shah's torturers brought forth two braziers filled with burning coals and two pairs of tongs. Her Georgian retinue was ordered to depart. First, her hands were tied and a heated copper bowl was placed on her head. As her body burned, the executioners ripped off pieces of her flesh. Her breasts were burned and cut off. She was then stripped naked and mutilated until she collapsed on the floor. Her body was covered with burning coals, but she continued to writhe on the ground, so the torturers strangled her until she died. Ketevan was buried in secret in a nearby field, after which the

soldiers of the Shah falsely claimed to the Russian ambassador that the Georgian queen had died from natural causes.

**Ketevan's Body.** Soon thereafter, the Portuguese missionary Ambrósio dos Anjos located the site where Ketevan was buried, dug up her body, and brought her remains to an Augustinian Catholic church in Shiraz, where he placed it in a small urn. The fate of Ketevan's body after her death is almost as engaging as her life. Her bones, hands, and feet—which were all that remained of her body—were then transported to a church in Isfahan, that was seen to provide greater security. Her remains were then taken from Iran to Goa, a center of Catholic missionary activity in South India. Although she adhered to the Georgian Orthodox branch of Eastern Orthodoxy and never became Catholic, Ketevan was eventually canonized by the Catholic Church as a saint. Ultimately, Ketevan's martyrdom provided the impetus for the establishment of an Augustinian mission in Georgia. The story of Ketevan's martyrdom is recorded in numerous documentary and literary genres from different points of view, including in Teimuraz I's famous poem: *The Book of the Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan* (წიგნი და წამება ქეთევან დედოფლისა/ *ts'igni da ts'ameba ketevan dedoplisa*). Alongside this long poem, a report on her martyrdom from the Augustine mission in Iran compiled for the Papal See is one of the most important sources for our knowledge of this event.

**Ottoman Travel Narratives.** Alongside hagiographic biographical texts in Georgian, narratives composed by early modern travellers from Europe and the Islamic world flourished throughout this period. Among the best-informed travel narratives is the detailed account of Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi. Çelebi documented in detail his journeys throughout the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan and Georgia, during 1645-1647 and 1655. Çelebi described the oil in Baku which “bubbles up out of the ground” and the pools of oil that “congeal on the surface like cream.” He also provided insight into the local economy, in which merchants collecting the bubbling oil with ladles, fill goatskins with the liquid, and sell them in different areas. The money earned from these transactions went directly to the Safavid shah. Çelebi also remarked on the popularity of alcohol among the rulers of Nakhchivan. Çelebi traveled through Georgia en route to Russia. He also exhibited familiarity with the Armenian language in one of the twenty-six glossaries included in his ten-volume travel narrative. In this work, he claims that the Armenian language is comprised of seven dialects, and that the dialects correspond to seven different Christian sects.

**Georgian Secular Literature.** While earlier Georgian poets borrowed from narrative tropes current in Persian literature, Georgian poet Davit Guramishvili (1705-1792) made his adventurous life the subject of his poetry. His autobiographical epic in verse, *Davitiani* (the name itself derives from his own name) was written from Ukraine in 1787. The poem recounts how Guramishvili entered adulthood fighting against Daghestani tribes and Turkic invaders to defend Georgia's sovereignty.

*Davit Guramishvili's Davitiani* In the section of *Davitiani* called “Kartli's Afflictions” (*kartlis chiri*), Guramishvili narrates the forced exile of king Vakhtang VI. In 1727, at the age of twenty-two, Davit was kidnapped by Daghestani mountaineers in the region of Mtskheta. He managed to escape and followed Vakhtang VI into exile in Russia. A large proportion of *Davitiani* is given over to the poet's captivity, his escape, and his extended journey across the Caucasus mountains, until he finally reached a Cossack settlement. In another, later war, Guramishvili served in the Russian army and was captured by the Prussians. He married a Russian woman and settled down on an estate granted to him by the Russian monarchy in Myrhorod, the same Ukrainian town that Gogol would make famous with the short story collection *Mirgorod* (1835). While the first book of *Davitiani* is filled with Georgian hymns, the second book is filled with allusions to Russian folklore. Even while writing in Georgian, Guramishvili inserts Russian subtitles. Elsewhere in the long poem, in verses that borrow the lineations and meters of Rustaveli, King Archil, and Mamuka Baratashvili, Guramishvili makes of himself the hero of his narratives.

*Sayat Nova* Another poet from this same period whose verse has a strong autobiographical dimension in Sayat Nova. Sayat Nova had an entire collection of poems in Georgian, only a few autobiographical fragments of which have survived, including the lyric poems “Oh, My Wretched Self” and “Be Just to Me.” He is discussed in more detail in the article on early modern poetry.

### Further Reading

Evliya Çelebi, *Travels in Iran & The Caucasus in 1647 & 1654*. Trans. Hasan Javadi and Willem M. Floor (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2010).

Davit Guramishvili, *Davitiani: t'k'muli Davit' Guramishvilis mier* [Davitiani, as told by David Guramishvili]. (Stamba M.D. Rotinianc'isa, 1894)

John Flannery, “The Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan and the Augustinian Mission to Georgia,” *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and Beyond (1602-1747)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 197-238.

Robert Dankoff, "Evliya Çelebi on the Armenian Language of Sivas in 1650," in *From Mahmud Kaşgari to Evliya Çelebi* (Gorgias Press, 2009).

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) How were ancient and medieval narratives of martyrdom transmuted to the early modern period?
- 2) How were tensions between Persian Shiism and Georgian Christianity manifested in early modern biographical literature?
- 3) How did early modern travellers perceive the growth of mercantile culture in the southern Caucasus?

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Akaki Tsereteli.** Published two decades after Akhundzadeh's death, Georgian poet Akaki Tsereteli's autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (ჩემი თავგადასავალი/ *chemi tavgadasavali*, 1894-1909) evokes the rather different world of upper-class rural Georgia, on a landed estate that evokes the pastoral novels of Tolstoy and Turgenev. Tsereteli uses his own experience as a basis for reflecting on the Georgian national character. Although he had glowing memories of his rural childhood, Tsereteli describes the Kutaisi school where he began his formal education in more pejorative terms. During this era, Kutaisi rivalled Tbilisi as a cultural center, and many other Georgian writers were educated here.

**Niko Nikoladze.** Georgian revolutionary Niko Nikoladze was also born in Western Georgia. In his memoirs, he describes studying history, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, rhetoric, and Russian, Georgian, Turkish, and French at the same Kutaisi Gymnasium. As he recalls, any student who wished to continue on to university had to study Latin as well. The writer Giorgi Tsereteli also reflected on the time passed in the Kutaisi school in his fictionalized autobiography, *The Flower of Our Lives* (ჩვენი ცხოვრების ყვავილი/ *chveni tskhovrebis qvavili*, 1872). Both Akaki Tsereteli and Nikoladze would go on to matriculate to St. Petersburg State University. Nikoladze's memoirs mark a new era in the autobiographical traditions of the Caucasus, for his life and work traverse the break between the Caucasus that was ruled by the Russian empire and the Soviet Caucasus that emerged from the 1917 revolutions and the establishment of Marxist-Leninism as the state ideology. Nikoladze was a strong supporter of the revolution, particularly when it was aligned with Georgian nationalism. He initially was inspired by Ilia Chavchavadze's nationalism, and then affiliated himself with the more radical movement called Second Group (*meore dasi*), and soon became one of its leaders. Nikoladze would become the first Georgian to receive a degree from a European university. His PhD "On the Social and Economic Consequences of Disarmament," was defended at the University of Zurich's Faculty of Law in 1868. It was in Zurich that Nikoladze met Karl Marx, who invited him to become the Transcaucasian representative of the International, a political organization that was at the forefront of revolutionary communism. Although Nikoladze did not take Marx up on his offer, this did not mark the end of his political career. Instead, he became mayor of the city of Poti, on the coast of the Black Sea. He held this position from 1894 to 1912. During the 1880s, Nikoladze was directly involved in negotiations with the Russian tsar Alexander III, whose father had been assassinated by Russian revolutionaries.

### Further Reading

Niko Nikoladze, *niko nikoladze: mogonebebi* [Niko Nikoladze: Memoirs] (Tbilisi: Tbilisis universitetis gamomtsemloba, 1984).

Akaki Tsereteli, *The Story of My Life* [1894-1909], translated by Donald Rayfield; with a preface by Shukia Apridonidze (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2013).

Giorgi Tsereteli, *ჩვენი ცხოვრების ყვავილი* [A Flower of our Life] [1872] (Tbilisi: Tbilisis universitetis gamomtsemloba, 1991).

### Discussion Questions

How was the growing importance of Russian imperialism reflected in the autobiographies of writers from the Caucasus?

What were the attitudes of Caucasus authors towards the complexities of their native alphabets and how did they conceive of the future prospects of these writing systems?

What light does autobiography shed on the experience of modernity in the southern Caucasus?

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Georgian Revolutionaries.** Another kind of response to the Soviet revolution is revealed in the autobiographical writings of Georgian Menshevik leader Noe Zhordania. Like many other major writers of his generation, Zhordania was born near Kutaisi, in western Georgia. After graduating from Ozurgeti Orthodox Theological Academy, he moved to Tbilisi, where he enrolled in the same Georgian Orthodox Theological Seminary that Stalin would enter a few years later. Although his parents dreamed of him becoming a priest, around this time Zhordania was losing his faith in God. Zhordania began reading forbidden books, such as the writings of Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Alexander Herzen. His writings from this period show the influence of materialist thought on his intellectual development. He moved to Warsaw in 1891, where he studied to become a veterinarian and began to educate himself in Marxist theory. By the time he returned to Georgia in 1892, he had been transformed and inspired by his engagements with Marxism, his correspondence with fellow radical Georgian intellectuals, and his exposure to the Polish nationalist movement which exhibited many parallels with the Georgian nationalist movement, specifically a shared opposition to Russian rule. Back in Tbilisi, Zhordania became the leader of the first legal Marxist group in Georgia, called the Third Group (*mesame dasi*). He was forced to leave Georgia in 1893, fearing arrest for a political manifesto he published in the journal *Moambe* (Messenger). He reached Geneva on this escape journey, where he met other leading Marxist revolutionaries, such as Georgi Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich. He then relocated to Paris for several months, where he met Paul Lafargue and other French socialists. The next step in Zhordania's peregrinations was Stuttgart, where he met Czech-Austrian philosopher and Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky. After enrolling at Stuttgart University and attending lectures by Franz Brentano, Zhordania moved to Munich and the Berlin. During his travels throughout Europe, Zhordania steadily contributed to the Georgian newspaper *Kvali* (Track), one of the first formally Marxist papers within the Russian empire.

**Metekhi prison** By 1901, Zhordania was back in Georgia and engaged in revolutionary agitation. He was arrested in Kutaisi and transferred to Metekhi prison in Tbilisi. This period of imprisonment was to prove particularly fruitful, for he passed the time reading literary classics, such as Shakespeare and Hugo. He was released in 1902, and soon thereafter arrested again, after which he was forcibly exiled to Ganje in Azerbaijan and placed under police custody. When he was sentenced to three years of exile in Vitki province, Zhordania escaped to England on a boat. When Soviet Russian armies invaded Georgia in 1921 and toppled the local Menshevik government, Zhordania and his colleagues fled to France. From Leuville-sur-Orge, a commune just south of Paris, Zhordania helped to prepare for a Georgian revolt against Soviet power in 1924. The revolt was unsuccessful. Zhordania spent the rest of his life in Leuville-sur-Orge, where he lies buried. Like other dissidents from the Caucasus who settled in Europe such as the Chechen intellectual and historian Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, Zhordania was highly critical of the Soviet Union, which he called "the revolution under the mask of imperialism." Zhordania's memoirs were published posthumously, in 1968. They are a major source of information concerning late tsarist and early Soviet revolutionary activities, including conflicts between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and the role of the struggle for national self-determination within Marxist movements.

### Further Reading

Noi Nikolaevich Zhordania, *My Life* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1968). Preface in English, text in Russian.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How did the political turmoil of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century shape Georgians' literary horizons?
- 2) How was the pre-revolutionary Caucasus recollected by writers after the 1917 revolution?



## DRAMA & THE PERFORMING ARTS (Antiquity to the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

**Georgian Theatre: Berikaoba.** Georgian theatre has similarly ancient origins. The ancient Georgian cave town of Uplistsikhe has theatrical spaces that date to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Theatrical traditions are also manifested in many performance contexts, including in the masquerade folk theatre known as *berikaoba*, which is performed during the winter solstice. *Berikaoba* coincides with the beginning of the new year. While the root word for this practice, *beri*, means child, it is also the epithet of the fertility deity who was seen to preside over the festival. This deity is often represented as a goat engaged in ritual plowing. This form of folk theatre is closely tied to pagan festivals of fertility and rebirth. The *berikaoba* performance has been compared by Georgian scholars to the cult of Dionysus. The villagers select the actors for the *berikaoba* performance, all of whom are men. The men then disguise themselves as animals and dress in skins made of animal hide, as well as tails, feathers, horns, ribbons, and bells. The animals they represent are totems with deep significance in pagan Georgian culture, such as bears, boars, goats, and wolves. Sometimes the actors also cover their faces in coal or smear themselves with mud. They go from house to house, plundering villagers' homes. Since this is part of a ritual, the attacks are not actually menacing, and the actors are treated at each home with bread, wine, honey, money, meat, and other food.

***Berikaoba's plot*** During each performance, a young man tries to persuade a young woman (whose role is played by a man) to marry him. The woman agrees. The couple arrange to get married. Their wedding is accompanied by a feast which is interrupted by a Tatar or Arab invader who attacks the groom and kidnaps the bride. As they try to bring the groom back to life, the villagers spread the news that the bride has been kidnapped. The groom is suddenly revived by the news. He searches for the kidnapper and rescues his bride. Eggs are thrown at the defeated enemy and the food which they plundered is taken from them. The performance concludes with a celebratory feast, known as *saberiko supra*, which lasts several days. The culture of feasting has great importance in Georgian culture beyond this specific festival as well, and Georgian toasts are an elaborate art form in themselves.

***Woman-Led Berikaoba.*** In Eastern Georgia (Kakheti), the *berikaoba* tradition is connected with the story of a female Georgian folk hero named Maia Tskneteli, who, according to legend, killed a local land owner who was making unwelcome advances on her. Hoping to evade detection and therefore punishment, Maia cut her braids off after killing the man. She became the leader of a group of outlaws who, in classic Robin Hood style fashion, stole from feudal landlords and gave what they gained to the poor. In the eponymous Soviet film (1959, directed by Rezo Chkheidze) which is based on Maia Tskneteli's story, a young girl disguises herself as a boy in order to defend her country from foreign invasions. Alongside its debt to the *berikaoba* tradition, Maia Tskneteli can be seen as a female counterpart of the noble bandit (*abragi/abrek*), a figure discussed throughout this study guide and particularly in the section on fiction, in connection with Koroghlu and Arsena Odzelashvili.

***Qeeonoba.*** While the *berikaoba* tradition emerges from a world in which the Muslim Tatars were seen as the main invaders, another tradition, called *qeeonoba*, alludes to Russians as the unwelcome invaders, and was widely performed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Tbilisi. The term is derived from a Georgianized version of the word for khan (Turkic for "ruler"), who both presides over the ritual and collects money from the population.

***Lipnali.*** In another, even more mysterious ritual, called *lipnali* or *sulebis gadabrdzaneba* ("sending off the spirits"), tables are covered for the *berikas*, while the head of the family would serve them with his head uncovered in a sign of humility. The ritual is performed in silence. Prayers are said for dead ancestors, who briefly surface from the underworld to pay a visit to their living relatives. In preparation for seeing off these dead ancestors, the head of the family prepares a glass of wine, meat, and a slice of bread. He guides the dead ancestors out the door, while pouring wine on the ground as a libation, until the glass is empty. He then hurries inside without looking back. Such rituals formed an important part of premodern Georgia's theatrical culture.

### Readings

Nino Abakelia, "The Spaciotemporal Patterns of Georgian Winter Solstice Festivals," *Folklore* 40 (2008): 101-116.

S. Amaglobeli, *Gruzinskii teatr: osnovnye etapy razvitiia* [Georgian Theatre: The Main Stages of Development] (Moscow: 1930).

Djaba Ioseliani, *The Comic and Georgian Mask Comedy* (Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1982).

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How were historical events and the experiences of foreign invasions transmuted into Georgian theatrical culture?
- 2) What is the evidence for the earliest beginnings of Georgian theatrical culture?

### POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

**Georgian Ecclesiastical Traditions.** Alongside the *berikaoba* festivities, a cult developed around the Christian St. George, which exhibits clear links with pagan practices. On the day preceding St. George's feast, villagers would gather in front of a church, and the women would sing. After the singing was finished, everyone present would bring either a sheep, a bottle of wine, a pastry, or money to the wall, as an offering to St. George. The deacon of the church would sing the wool on the sheep's forehead with a candle, before taking it away to be killed. Meanwhile, men and women would dance, and some women would fall into a trance and utter curses. Although Armenian and Georgian musical culture are influenced by Byzantine hymnography, there are significant differences, particularly on the Georgian side. Whereas Georgian music is polyphonic, meaning that it consists of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, the music of the Greek Orthodox church is unisonal, meaning that it consists of only one line of melody. This divergence is explained by the influence of pagan and pre-Christian musical culture on Georgian church music.

#### Readings:

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### EARLY MODERN

During the 1790s, the first professional Georgian theatre was established at the court of Erekle II, the last Georgian king. Giorgi Avalishvili and Gabriel Maiori were its directors. The theatre played a significant role in introducing the Georgian public to European dramaturgy. Maiori perished, along with the entire troupe, during the Battle of Krtsanisi (1795), when Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, invaded Georgia and destroyed much of Tbilisi, in response to the news of Erekle II's alliance with Russia.

**Arsena Odzelashvili** While the new trends in drama across the Caucasus were largely inspired by developments in European theatre, oral performances continued to across the Caucasus circulate in the form of genres such as ballads, as they had done for centuries. During this as in earlier and later periods, ballads tended to focus on noble bandits, who acquired a reputation for stealing from the rich in order to distribute their goods to the poor. The Georgian folk hero Arsenia Odzelashvili (1797–1842) is one such figure. His ballad, called "Arsena's Song," was recited through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and ultimately provided the inspiration for Mikhail Javakhishvili's landmark novel, *Arsena of Marabda* (1933).

#### Discussion Questions

- 1) How did oral performative traditions interact with and influence written drama traditions in the Caucasus?

### 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**Giorgi Eristavi and Dimitri Qipiani.** Although Azeri and Armenian playwrights contributed to most of the dramatic repertoire of the Caucasus during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the plays that they wrote were most often performed in Tbilisi. Georgians also however contributed Georgian plays to this repertoire. When poet and playwright Giorgi Eristavi returned from exile in 1850—he had been banished due to his participation in the 1832 Georgian conspiracy to end Russia's rule over Georgia and to establish Georgia as a sovereign country—and reached out to writer and political activist Dimitri Qipiani. Together, they arranged the production of Eristavi's play *Divorce (Gakra)*, 1850) at the Assembly Hall of the Tbilisi Gymnasium. January 2, the first day of this production, is considered to mark the beginnings of modern Georgian theatre. Every year since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a day in January is celebrated as Georgian Theater Day in memory of this production. Eristavi is often credited with creating a new Georgian literary language in drama that incorporated dialect and other vernacular forms of expression. Ilya Chavchavadze credits the older generation of Georgian writers represented by Eristavi and Solomon Dodashvili with forging a path that would be followed by the next generation.

#### Further Reading

S. Amaglobeli, "Revolutions in Drama: As Seen in the Contemporary Georgian Theatre," *Pacific Affairs* 3.7 (1930): 661-667.

**Discussion Question**

What European and Russian playwrights exerted the greatest influence on theatre in 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcaucasia?