

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## Southern Caucasus Literatures –Ancient Period

### Contents

Poetry  
Drama  
Fiction  
Life Writing  
Essay

### POETRY

**Persian.** As during the post-classical period, Persian was the dominant literary and cultural influence on literature in the Caucasus throughout the early modern period. While this was the era of Safavid power, when Iran exerted more control over the Caucasus than did Russia, Persian influence extended well beyond Iran; it also provided the channel through which the works of Central Asian poets such as Jami and Chaghatay Turkic poets such as Nava'i reached the Caucasus.

**Georgian.** 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* (ლეილაჯუნჯიანი/ *leilmajnuniani*), *Yusuf and Zulaikha* (იუსუფიზულიხანიანი/ *iosebzilikhiani*), *The Rose and the Nightingale* (ვარდბულბულიანი/ *vardbulbuliani*), and *The Candle and the Moth* (შამიპარვანიანი/ *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) *Bahramguriani*, 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 Archil'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 Mamuka Avtandili Baratashvili, who 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* (რუსუდანიანი/ *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.

*Sayat Nova* While early modern Georgian poets continued to write in Georgian even as they suffused their verse with Persian themes and lexicons, early modern Armenian and Azeri poets wrote extensively in Persian. The Georgian-born poet who called himself Sayat Nova (Aruthin Sayadian, 1712–1795) is the best known early modern Armenian poet. The exact origins of Sayat Nova's name are unknown but it has been suggested that it is derived from the Arabic *sayyid* meaning "Lord" and Persian *nava*, meaning "song." Others have proposed that his name means "new time," and combines the Arabic *sa'at* (time) and Russian *nova* (new). Sayat Nova was associated with the royal court until he fell in love with the king's sister and became an itinerate bard, in the tradition of the Armenian *gusan* and the Azeri *ashuq* who performed poetry in public spaces.

*Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar's invasion* In 1759, Sayat Nova became a priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church. He was killed in Tbilisi in 1795 by the invading army of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, an event that marked a significant turning point in Georgia's literary, cultural, and political orientation. The violence of the invasion caused a permanent break with Persian literary legacies and led the leaders of Georgia to turn to Russia for support. Initially, Mohammad Khan gave Sayat Nova a chance to live, on the condition that he convert to Christianity. But like Ketevan at the court of Shah Abbas, Sayat Nova refused to renounce his faith in order to appease the sultan. In return for his steadfastness, he was summarily beheaded.

*Sayat Nova's Languages* Over two hundred poems by Sayat Nova are extant in three languages: Armenian, Georgian, Persian. In addition to his skill as a poet and reciter of poetry, Sayat Nova was also a skilled player of the *kamancheh*, a bowed string instrument, and two related instruments widely used throughout the Caucasus and West Asia but particularly in Georgia, the *chonguri* and *tambur*.

*Sergei Parajanov* Sayat Nova's profile was further increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Sergei Parajanov's surrealist film *The Color of Pomegranates* (*Nran Guyne*, 1969). Rather than trying to reconstruct Sayat Nova's life in all of its historical detail, Parajanov presents a tableau vivant of scenes from Armenian life and culture; his experimental style has made this film a masterpiece of Armenian cinema. Sayat Nova's work and legacy were further popularized in Georgia by the poet and scholar Ioseb Grishashvili (1889-1965), who translated Sayat Nova's poems and helped to popularize them.

**Azeri.** Like Georgian literature, Azeri poetry also has its share of poet kings. Shah Esmail (1487-1524) was the founder of the Safavid dynasty and, ironically given his role in promoting the Persian empire, among the best-known poets of early modern Azeri.

*Shah Esmail* He chose for himself the name Khata'i meaning "the wrongful one." Around fourteen hundred verses by Shah Esmail in Azeri and forty verses in Persian are extant. The impact of Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings* was so heavily on his consciousness that he chose to name his own children after characters in that epic. Following his defeat of the Uzbeks at Battle of Merv in 1510, which established Safavid control over the region of Khorasan, Shah Esmail commissioned the poet Hatefi to compose a poem in the style of the *Book of Kings* celebrating his victory and the newly-established Safavid dynasty. Shah Esmail's own poems, however, dealt more often with love than with battles and war.

**Hurufi tradition** After his defeat of the Ottomans at Caldiran in 1514, Shah Esmail abandoned the pursuit of empire and dedicated himself to poetry. Alongside Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, the Hurufi tradition as articulated by Nesimi exerted a great influence on Shah Esmail's poetics. Many of his poems engage with Hurufi alongside Sufi and Alevi (Anatolian Shi'a) themes. Alongside the ghazals for which he is most renowned, Shah Esmail composed a work called the *Dahnama* in *masnavi* (rhyming couplet) form, which is comprised of ten letters between the lover and beloved. The exchange of letters ultimately culminates in their union, and ends with a series of ghazals that have the same meter as the *masnavi*.

**Armenian.** The 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries are often considered to be among the least productive periods in Armenian culture, mostly due to the war that was fought on Armenian soil between the Safavids and the Ottomans. After 1639, with the end of the Ottoman-Safavid war, a new period in Armenian literature begins. Gradually, Armenian writers began to create a literature that was entirely independent of the church. For a tradition in which most earlier writers had some kind of clerical affiliation, this heralded a major change. Secular poetry began to reflect the experience of laypeople, and genres such as satire and comedy increased in popularity. The poets Khasbek, Tavit Saltoretzi, and Galoust Gayzag played a leading role in developing this new secular sensibility. For example, Saltoretzi's poem "In Praise of Flowers" is a compendium of poems on one hundred different kinds of flowers, each of which is celebrated for its color, scent, provenance, and use.

**Clerical and secular literature** Tensions between clerical and secular literature were reflected in the Armenian language itself, with those affiliated to the church preferring more classical idioms, and those more committed to secular literature preferring vernacular forms of expression. Although early modern Armenian literature was dominated by secular poets, there were also poets more aligned with the church, such as Galouste Amassiatzi, whose poetry reacted against these secularizing tendencies.

#### Further Reading

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#### Discussion Questions

- 1) In what contexts was the influence of Persian literature most evident in the poetry of the southern Caucasus?
- 2) How did poets from the southern Caucasus express the originality and uniqueness of their respective traditions?
- 3) In what ways was the tension between the Armenian church and secularizing poets manifested in early modern Armenian literature?

## DRAMA

**Armenian.** New theatrical traditions were introduced to the Caucasus by Jesuit missionary schools. Among the first examples of these new theatrical trends was a neoclassical tragicomedy about the Roman martyr Hripsime, who is venerated as one of Armenia's earliest Christian martyrs. Hripsime belonged to a community of virgins residing in Rome, a city she escaped in order to avoid sexual advances from the Roman emperor Diocletian (284-305). She first moved to Alexandria,

before settling in Vagharshapat, the seat of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral and Mother See of Etchmiadzin, the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. According to one version of the story, the Arsacid Armenian king King Tiridates III was also struck by her beauty and tried to pursue her. She refused to have sex with him, and was burned alive. According to a different version of her story, Diocletian has discovered where she had gone into hiding and decided to enlist Tiridates in getting her back. The king's servants found Hripsime and conveyed to her the king's offer of marriage. Hripsime replied that marriage was impossible for her since she was already betrothed to Jesus Christ. When she uttered this refusal, Tiridates ordered that she be tortured. Inspired by her example, the community of which Hripsime was a part similarly offered themselves up for martyrdom. They were all either beheaded and killed with swords, and their bodies became food for animals. According to this version, King Tiridates and his soldiers who had killed Hripsime and her companions were attacked by demons. They lost control of themselves and started tearing their clothes. King Tiridates was transformed into a boar in retribution for his crimes against Hripsime. Although these different versions are hard to reconcile, the exact date of Hripsime's martyrdom is historically established: 9 October 290. She is venerated not only by the Armenian Apostolic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church but also by Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, in which tradition Hripsime is known as Arsema.

**Hripsime's martyrdom performed** The drama relating Hripsime's martyrdom was performed in all its gruesome detail in one of the first Armenian-language plays, staged at Lvov's Papal Academy in Ukraine in 1668. The new theatrical tradition that was heralded by this drama was supported throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Armenian Catholic Mkhitarist Brotherhood of San Lazzaro, Venice. The Mkhitarist Brotherhood funded performances of dramas on biblical and ecclesiastical subjects, as well as on secular history, during special holidays, such as Mardi Gras. These were performed alongside Armenian translations from world theatre, including the 17<sup>th</sup> century French tragedian Corneille, and the 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian dramatists Metastasio and Alfieri.

**Comedy** Comedy is a longstanding tradition within Armenian theatre. It involves a set of stock figures including a scantily clothed dancing girl (known as *vardzak*), a male juggler, acrobats, lion-tamers, tight-rope walkers, and a clown who wears the mask of a fool. Unlike tragedy, which was performed in classical Armenian, comedy tended to be performed in the Armenian vernacular. Armenian comedies were performed alongside European comedies, including by 17<sup>th</sup> century French playwright Molière and the 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian playwright Goldoni. The French traveller and diplomat Jean Chardin witnessed a performance of the medieval Armenian theatrical tradition at the Armenian Mime Theatre during his visit to Yerevan in 1674, when Yerevan was under Safavid rule. Chardin attests to the intertwinement of the *gusan* tradition with mimes, music, singing, and dancing, all of which contributed to a multisensory experience that anticipates the experience of watching an opera.

**Georgian.** 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).

#### Further Reading

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### Discussion Questions

- 1) What ancient stories were revived in early modern Armenian drama?
- 2) Through what channels was European drama introduced to the Caucasus?
- 3) How did European travelers represent and describe theatre in the Caucasus?
- 4) How did oral performative traditions interact with and influence written drama traditions in the Caucasus?

## FICTION

**Azeri Epics.** The early modern period globally was marked by a rapid rise of vernacular literatures around the world, and Azeri, a branch of Oghuz Turkic, is no exception. Although Azeri oral traditions and legends long precede their written form, it is in the early modern period that we first find traces of this literature in writing. Azeri folk poetry reflects themes common to settled peoples. Two major Turkic epics influenced Azeri literature during this period: *The Book of Dede Korkut* consisting of twelve stories relating the exploits of the Oghuz Turks, and the *Epic of Koroghlu*, which tells of a noble bandit in the tradition of Robin Hood.

**The Book of Dede Korkut.** Dede Korkut, after whom the first of these epics is named, was a bard and oracle. He was reputed to be the inventor of the lute, which he played with great skill and charm. Although Dede Korkut is a legendary figure, he is also an historical person, mentioned by the Mongol court historian Rashid al-Din, who claims that he lived for two hundred and ninety-five years. Correspondences between the events and characters described in the epic and actual historical events are notoriously difficult to pin down. Many of the stories have been traced to the struggle of the Oghuz Turks during the 11<sup>th</sup> century against non-Muslims Pechenegs and Kipchaks, who later converted to Islam. A later set of narratives relates to later battles, including the Aq Qoyunlu's struggle against Georgians and Abkhaz, as revealed by a reference in one of the stories to Dadian, the 16<sup>th</sup> century ruler of Imeretia in western Georgia, known as Barehead. (This same reference mentions the Georgian city of Akhaltsikhe, which is called Aksaka.)  
*Aq Qoyunlu*

The focus on the Aq Qoyunlu is unsurprising given that *The Book of Dede Korkut* is believed to have been composed under Aq Qoyunlu patronage (1378-1503), most likely during the early phase of their reign and at the latest during the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that the Aq Qoyunlu Sultans claimed descent from Bayindir Khan, leader of the Oghuz Turks, and that he frequently features in the epic's stories suggests the mutual influences of epic literature and court politics on each other. The embeddedness of the epic in Aq Qoyunlu empire building has contributed to the status of *The Book of Dede Korkut* as an inaugural work of Azeri Turkish literature.

**Tepegöz** In terms of dating, Arabic sources indicate that some version of this work, under the name *Oghuznama*, was in circulation by the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. In his *Durar al-Tijan*, Mamluk historian Sayf al-Din al-Dawadari attests that this work was passed "from hand to hand." Al-Dawadari then goes on to describe a figure who resembles the one-eyed ogre Tepegöz, who also appears in the Armenian tale, "King Zarand's Daughter." Tepegöz's name is etymologically linked to the Greek *sarandapekhos*, meaning "forty cubits," and hence denoting a giant. According to al-Dawadari, the tales that circulate about this ogre are performed by wise Turkish bards who are skilled in playing the lute.

**Earliest manuscript** The earliest extant, albeit partial, manuscript of *The Book of Dede Korkut* dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This manuscript, consisting of twelve stories from the epic, was found in a library in Dresden in 1815 by German Orientalist H.F. von Diez. Soon after making this discovery, Diez published a German translation from this epic of the story of Tepegöz. Further intriguing comparisons between Tepegöz and the cyclops figure Polyphemus in Homer's *Odyssey* have been posited by later scholars, such as C. S. Mundy.

**Soylama** The stories that make up *The Book of Dede Korkut* are in prose. They are interspersed with declamatory passages in alliterative prose called *soylama*. The work presents itself as being narrated by a bard (*ozan*) who tells tales in the tradition of the greatest of all bards, Dede Korkut. Internal contradictions within the text and its plot—certain characters die twice, for example—suggest that it was the work of many individuals over a long period, each of whom made additions and alterations to their version of the narrative. The 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscript discovered by Diez begins with a five-part composition, called “The Wisdom of Dede Korkut.” This consists of an introduction to Dede Korkut, a selection of proverbs attributed to him, a series of sayings asking the audience to be generous to the storyteller, a list of beautiful creatures and objects, and, finally, a typology of four kinds of wives. In Lewis’ translation of *The Book of Dede Korkut* into English, this introductory material appears at the end, in recognition of its ancillary status and of the apparently late date of its composition.

**Epic of Koroghlu.** Alongside the *Book of Dede Korkut*, the epic of Koroghlu, literally, “the blind man’s son,” is the other major epic of the early modern Turkic world. As such, this account of the exploits of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Turkish *ashuq* is regarded as a foundational work of Azeri Turkish literature, though versions have also been found in Georgian, Armenian, Kurdish, Lezgi, Avar, Turkmen, Tajik, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Arabic. Across these different versions, prose narrative is interspersed with a widely varying repertoire of poetry. Koroghlu is a Robin Hood-like figure, a noble bandit before the concept had been formalized.

**Jelali rebellions** The epic reflects the economic tensions of the early modern period, with Ottoman rulers disproportionately taxing the poor. It was a time of political upheaval, as reflected in the Jelali rebellions, in which noble bandits and local leaders organized to overthrow Ottoman rulers throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. The initial revolt occurred in the province of Toqat in 1518 under the reign of Shah Selim I, and enabled the rebellion leader Shaykh Jalal to come to power. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Armenian historian Arakel of Tabriz lists Koroghlu among the leaders of the Jelali uprising, and specifies that it is the same Koroghlu who recited the songs performed by *ashuqs*. It has been suggested that one of the participants in the rebellion must have adopted the name of the already-famous bard Koroghlu. Possibly, the early modern Koroghlu took his name from a more ancient, even mythical predecessor.

**Koroghlu as bard** Koroghlu is a charismatic figure. He is at once a bard, a bandit, and a trickster who cleverly adapts to the exigencies of the moment in order to avoid getting caught. The epic claims that he led a group of three to seven hundred fighters, and that he managed to live as a bandit, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor, for the duration of his life. Reciters of the Koroghlu epic have traditionally been drawn from the ranks of the poor. In modern times, this group includes tenant farmers seeking to supplement their existing income with the tips they receive from storytelling, often to the accompaniment of a lute or stringed instrument.  
*Shah Abbas*

The story begins with a magic horse who emerges from the sea and impregnates one of the mares of the king, who in several versions is the Safavid Shah Abbas (1588-1629). The royal stable master Ali informs the king of the circumstances of the impregnation, and predicts that the colt resulting from the union of the two horses will be the greatest horse in the world. The king awaits the birth of the baby horse with excitement. When it is born, however, the colt turns out to be less magnificent than the shah had expected. The Shah orders the colt to be destroyed and has Ali the stable master blinded.

**Rowshan** Even after he has been blinded, Ali manages to save the colt. He tells his son Rowshan, whose name significantly means “light,” to sequester it for forty days. When Rowshan grows up, he escapes with his father to Ottoman lands. According to some versions, Koroghlu receives the gift of poetry on this journey while bathing in a magical spring. At the crossroads of routes leading to

Baghdad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Istanbul, they set up a fortress called Jamlibel, meaning “misty mountain.” His father soon dies, and Rowshan takes on the name Koroghlu, in recognition of his father’s blindness. Rowshan’s retinue of outlaws and bandits bear the epithet *dali*, meaning “crazy.” Like Mahmud of Ghazna, Rowshan has a young companion named Ayvaz. While building this realm, he carefully watches over his horse Kirat, whom Shah Abbas had ordered to be killed.

*Koroghlu as ashuq* While living in this region, Koroghlu develops a reputation for robbing the rich and giving to the poor, as well as for his musical skills, which earn him the title *ashuq*. As the story reports, his sense of enmity towards the ruling class is informed by his father’s having been blinded by the ruler, and the son’s desire to avenge this injustice. The stories he tells are often narrated in the first person, with himself as protagonists, but sometimes they are told in the third person, as when he is taken captive and eulogizes Koroghlu as if he were not himself Koroghlu.

*Reception* Although filled with Turkic and Persian names, this work has enjoyed great popularity among Armenians and Georgians as well as Azeris. Several versions of this epic exist in Armenian, all of which are transcriptions from oral recitations. The first printed Armenian version, dating to 1897, is a translation from Azeri Turkish into Eastern Armenian, by the *ashuq* Jamali. Alongside its Muslim—and particularly Shi’ite—influences, the work bears the traces of pre-Islamic Iran, including the Arsacids who ruled over the Armenian population in antiquity and to some extent merged with them. Elements of the story have even been found in more ancient traditions as well, including Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* (93-94 CE), which narrates a bandit epic featuring two brothers, Anilaeus and Asinaeus. Transcriptions of the Koroghlu epic predate those of the *Book of Dede Korkut*. The first was done in the 1840s in the region of Tabriz at the request of Orientalist Alexander Chodzko. This epic had a significant impact within modern Turkic literature, as evidenced Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s five-act opera *Koroghlu* (1937), based on a libretto by Habib Ismayilov, with poetry by Mammed Said Ordubadi. The latter is arguably the most influential work to premiere at the Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theater. Beyond Turkish literature, the Armenian writer and nationalist Joseph Emin (1726-1809) translated into Armenian a quatrain attributed to Koroghlu on the subject of courage. Even more significantly, the first modern Armenian novel, Khachatur Abovian’s *The Wounds of Armenia* (1841) describes Koroghlu in terms befitting an Armenian *ashuq*. Finally, the Armenian poet and revolutionary Raphael Patkanian created his own version of the Koroghlu epic, which remained unfinished at the time of his death. Patkanian’s Koroghlu is an Armenian Muslim patriot who has rejected Armenian Christianity. Outside the Caucasus, American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Leap of Roushan Beg,” (1878) memorialized this epic for Anglophone readers.

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#### Discussion Questions

- 1) What were the major Turkic epics of the early modern period and how did they develop in relation to neighboring literatures?
- 2) How can *The Book of Dede Korkut* be situated within world literature? What influences, parallels, and cross-overs may be detected?
- 3) What is the evidence for the cross-pollination of the epic of Koroghlu by other cultures of the Caucasus, including Armenian?
- 4) What was the impact of the Koroghlu epic on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century culture?

#### LIFE WRITING

**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.

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#### 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?

## ESSAYS

**Armenian.** Armenian learned prose during the early modern period was transformed by the invention of the printing press and by the dissemination of print-based technologies for book production across Europe. The first Armenian book to be published using the movable type that Johannes Gutenberg invented in Germany (circa 1439) was the *Book of Friday Prayers* (Ուրբաթագիրք/ *Urbatagirq*). The publisher was Hakob Meghapart and it was printed in Venice in 1512. The first Armenian printing press in Iran was established in Isfahan (in the Armenian neighborhood of New Julfa) in 1636. Khachatur Kesaratsi (1590-1646) played a leading role in these printing activities. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century overall, thirty-one books were published in Armenian using movable type. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this number increased to one-hundred sixty-four. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Armenian books rose to eight hundred and twenty-four. Initially, most printed books in Armenian were oriented to religious literature. As these dates suggest, printing culture was much more advanced in the case of Armenian written culture than in the literatures of neighboring cultures, including Georgia and Azerbaijan.

**Matenadaran** On the subject of Armenia's contribution to print culture and the technologies of reading, mention should also be made of the Matenadaran, a Soviet manuscript library founded in 1959 on the basis of the nationalized collection of the Armenian Church, formerly stored in Etchmiadzin, the seat of the head of the Armenian church. The institute is officially named the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, in honor of Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet. Its abbreviated name, Matenadaran, is a neologism combining the Armenian words for "book" and "repository." The Matenadaran is rich, not only in Armenian manuscripts, but also in manuscripts in Persian, Arabic, and other literatures of the Islamic world. It contains 23,000 manuscripts and scrolls. The manuscripts range from poetry to history to philosophy to geography, mathematics, astronomy, cosmology, astrology, to jurisprudence, medicine, alchemy, music, grammar, rhetoric, and philology. The best versions of the writings of major ancient and medieval Armenian writers such as Movses Khorenatsi, Yeghishe Koryun, Grigor Narekatsi, and Nerses Shnorhali are preserved at this institute.

#### Vakhtang VI

**Georgian.** 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.

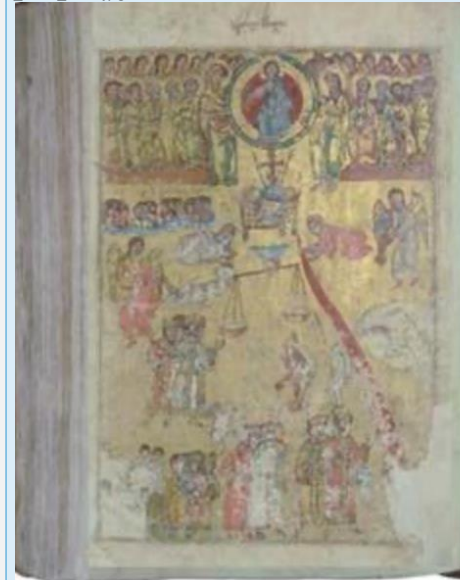
**Lights of Canopus** In addition to being a publisher, Vakhtang was a poet and translator. His poetic compositions include lyric poetry and odes for his country. His most significant translation into Georgian is of Husain Wa'iz Kashefi's 15<sup>th</sup> century *Lights of Canopus* (*Anvar-e Sohayli*), 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 motsavletatvis 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 *zīj* (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

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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 Sulkhan-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, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani began composing his famous *Book of Wisdom and Lies* (სიბრძნის სიგნულისა/ *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.

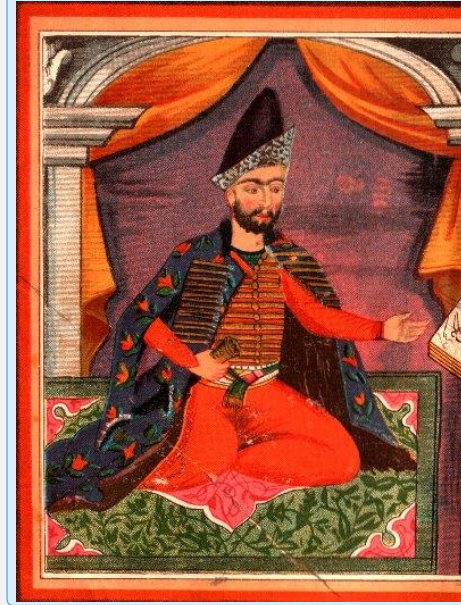
*Bouquet of Words* Another major achievement of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani is his Georgian dictionary, *Bouquet of Words* (სიტყვის კონა/ *Sitqvis kona*, 1685-1716), which is both a lexicon and an encyclopedia. As the first such composition of its kind in Georgian and an invaluable repository for information about the Georgian lexicon, *Bouquet of Words* played a major role in forming the Georgian literary language. Sulkhan-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.

*Persian in Azerbaijan.* 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

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Vakhtang VI of Kartli and Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (18th century miniature)



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.

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#### Discussion Questions

- 1) What role did the invention of printing play in the development of early modern Armenian and Georgian literatures?
- 2) What was the impact of the invention of the printing press on Armenian literature?
- 3) How did translations into Georgian shape world literature during the early modern period?
- 4) How do the scientific and scholarly writings of Vakhtang demonstrate the cosmopolitan influences that were circulating in Georgia during the early modern period?
- 5) What are the major historiographic works composed in Azerbaijan during this period, what region did they focus on and why?