

Armenian Literature

POETRY

ANTIQUITY

Beginnings The beginnings of written Armenian literary culture were closely linked to the role of the Church, which was the primary force behind the spread of literacy in this region. Scholars accept that pagan oral literature in Armenia predates the invention of the Armenian alphabet, but early Christian priests did their best to erase any traces of such a tradition.

Hayk and Bel The trajectory of ancient Armenian poetry mirrors that of Georgian in many respects, not least in terms of its mountainous provenance. In the Armenian highlands, the earliest poetry evolved around an epic narrative in verse called *Hayk and Bel*. This narrative has been traced back to historical events relating to the Kingdom of Urartu (9th–6th centuries BCE). Just as the protagonists of ancient Georgian folk poetry were also deities, so too was Hayk descended from the first gods according to Armenian mythology. These gods spawned a race of giants, who arrogantly set about constructing a tall tower (reminiscent of the Tower of Babel). Suddenly, a wind sent by the gods who were angry at the arrogance of these giants scattered the building into pieces. Languages multiplied and the giants lost the ability to understand each other.

Hayk the hero Hayk was among this group. He was famous as being the bravest and strongest, as the one most respectful of others' freedoms. His name is highly symbolic, since Hay is what Armenians call themselves. The country of Armenia is called Hayastan in the Armenian language. Hayk opposed the tyranny of Bel. When Hayk's son Aramanyak was born, he assembled a group of three hundred people, mostly from his own family and servants, and travelled to Mt. Ararat. Hayk built a residence at the foot of the mountain, which he gave to his grandson Cadmos. Hayk also built a village that he called after himself, Haykashen, and settled there. When Hayk refused to acknowledge Bel's sovereignty, Bel sent his infantry to the land of Ararat in order to attack Cadmos and his family and pressure them into submission. Cadmos fled before Bel reached Ararat and warned Hayk of Bel's approaching army. Hayk assembled his sons and grandsons together and instructed them in the art of war. Miraculously, they prevailed over Bel's army.

Hayots Dzor The battle ended when Hayk shot Bel with an arrow and killed him. It is believed that the village of Hayots Dzor ("valley of the Armenians") is named in honor of this event, for Hayk is said to have built a villa here, on the site of the battle. Hayots Dzor is currently part of the modern state of Turkey and is called Gürpınar. As a foundational figure in the creation of the Armenian people, Hayk is worshipped as a god in the area around Lake Van. Intriguingly, the constellation of Orion, which is named after a hunter in Greek mythology, is called Hayk in the fifth-century Armenian translation of the Bible. Hayk is also identified with the Urartian god Khaldi.

King Aram Related to the story of Hayk and Bel is the story of King Aram. Although mythical, this narrative document historical events and processes, such as the eastward expansion of the Armenian kingdom to the borders of the Medes, Assyria, and Cappadocia. Aram's story is also tied up with the fate of the Armenian language, since he ordered everyone in the lands over which he ruled to learn Armenian.

Artashes and Satenik A second cycle of epic poetry is based on historical events that transpired from the 6th century BCE under the Yervanduni dynasty to year 11 of the Common Era under the Artashesian dynasty. This cycle involves a number of protagonists who were involved in the conflict between Tigran and Azhdahak, the king of Media during the 6th century BCE. Among the featured characters are Artashes, king of Armenia, and Satenik, an Alan princess. The Alans were a nomadic people who lived in the steppe region of the northwestern Black Sea. They aligned with the mountaineers of the northern Caucasus as well as with half of the Georgian population and plundered the Armenian people.

Artashes In this second epic cycle, the Armenian king Artashes waged war on the Alans and captured the king's son. The king of the Alans was stricken by grief and offered peace with the Armenians and to stop all raids onto their territory, if his son would be returned. Artashes refused. The king's daughter Satenik then approached Artashes and requested that her brother be released from captivity. Artashes was overwhelmed by Satenik's beauty and decided to try to marry her. In exchange for her hand in marriage, he offered a peace treaty with the Alans and promised to free her brother from captivity. Her father agreed. Satenik

became Artashes' first wife and bore him many sons, including Artavazd. Unfortunately, their marriage ended tragically. Satenik fell in love with one of Artashes' rivals named Argavan, who was himself a descendent of the dragon Azhdahak.

Tork Angegh Non-human characters, such as the giant Tork Angegh, are also included in the second cycle, as is the tale of Sanatruk and Yervand, which tells of how an infant prince becomes king after he is saved by a nurse. The tale of Anushavan and Sosanever reveals much about pagan practices among pre-Christian Armenians. In this story, the rustling of leaves and the direction in which the leaves move when blown by the breeze is a form of divination.

Armenian lyric tradition Alongside oral epics, an ancient Armenian lyric tradition is extant only in fragments. Armenian epic poetry also includes many lyrical passages that celebrate the birth and marriage, and lament the death, of their protagonists. The tale of Artashes and Artavazd has for example preserved verbatim quotations from the songs sung by Armenian minstrels. In these poems-within-poems, nature plays an overwhelming role. During the birth of the god Vahagn for example we are told that "smoke curled out of the reed / a flame leaped out of the reed / and out of the flame, a fair child came forth." Alliteration, rhyme, and repetition are common featured of ancient Armenian lyric poetry.

Grigor Narekatsi, The Book of Lamentations Poetry was not a dominant genre of classical (written) Armenian until the 10th century, with the poetry of St. Grigor Narekatsi (also known as Gregory of Narek, 951-1003). This poet, monk, and theologian passed his life on the southern shores of Lake Van. His best-known work, *The Book of Lamentations* (Նարեկագրք), also known as *Narek*, consists of ten thousand lines divided into ninety-five chapters, all of which are addressed to God. It is a work of mystical poetry that has been described as a monologue, a personal lyric, and a confessional poem. The centrality of the *Book of Lamentations* to Armenian culture is reflected in the fact that it is a staple of many Armenian households, and is regarded as being the second most popular work of Armenian culture, after the Bible. Physical copies of the book are regarded as having miraculous properties, including the ability to cure diseases. Like the Georgian poet Rustaveli a few centuries later, Narekatsi inspired countless poets within his own tradition, including his most direct literary successor, Grigor Magistros (discussed below).

Further Reading

A. J. Hacikyan, Gabriel Basmajian, Edward S Franchuk, and Nourhan Ouzounian, *The heritage of Armenian literature. Volume 1. From the oral tradition to the Golden Age* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2000).

Discussion Questions

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

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

While Armenian poetry was as heavily influenced by the Persian tradition as was Georgian, this influence was manifested in different ways, that did not extend to recreating the *masnavi* form in that language, as Rustaveli did for Georgian.

Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (c. 990–1058) is, after Narekatsi, among the greatest classical Armenian poets. His major work is a long narrative poem called *Magnalia Dei* that is addressed to the Muslim, Abu Nasr al-Manazi. The poem summarizes the principal events recorded in the Bible. Grigor's aim was to show that the Bible could rival the Quran, and also adopt a versified form. (Although according to a strict interpretation the Quran is composed in rhymed prose called *saj'* rather than in verse.) It is believed that al-Manazi converted to Christianity soon after reading it. *Magnalia Dei* is important in literary terms for its use of Arabic rhyme (*qafiya*), a practice that initiated a new genre in Armenian literature and which parallels the uses Rustaveli made of Persian prosody in Georgian, albeit with more extensive polemical and theological implications. Grigor was also a translator of many important works of ancient Greek learning, including Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* and Euclid's *Geometry*.

Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia Soon after Grigor Magistros, Armenian literature split off into two branches: Western and Eastern. The emergence of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1080–1198) initiated this split, as the center of Armenian literary culture shifted southwards, to the region of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor

(modern day Adana, Turkey). The fact that Armenian writers of both branches wrote increasingly in their spoken dialects and gradually shifted away from the classical language further consolidated this split.

Hovhannes and Asha Armenian narrative poems, such as Hovhannes Tlgouratzi's (1360-1440) *Hovhannes and Asha*, depicting the love that develops between a Muslim woman and a Christian man, chronicle a world in which close proximity between Muslims and Christians was a feature of everyday life. (Called the poet of love "that is flesh and blood," Tlgouratzi is also the author of two epic poems, one dedicated to Armenian Cilician prince Libarid and another to Gregory of Narek, also known as Grigor Narekasti.) The Christian Qasida of Khaqani Shirvani similarly reveals the entanglement of Muslim and Christian religious traditions throughout the Caucasus.

Frik Alongside Hovhannes Tlgouratzi, other major Armenian poets from this period include Frik (1230-1310), Gostantin Yerzngatzi (1250-1310), and Krikoris of Akhtamar (1484-1544). Frik in particular is noted for his lyric voice, which makes ample use of vernacular speech. Frik was also bold in the object of his critiques, which extended to social inequality and injustice. Unlike most Armenian writers of his era, Frik was a layman without any formal affiliation with or position in the church. Frik's propensity for critique extends to God himself, whom he asks to justify human. Only twenty-seven of Gostantin Yerzngatzi's poems survive, and it is likely that a great many of his poems have been lost. His poems are filled with tropes from Persian poetry, including the nightingale and the rose.

Krikoris was an archbishop in the Armenian church, and he used his allegorical imagination to celebrate nature and praise love, while providing ethical instruction to his readers. He was also a scribe and painter of miniatures. His poetry is marked by a strong sense of subjectivity as well as a simple style. He led a difficult life, and was constantly escaping political upheaval and invasions.

Cross-Cultural Connections. In both Armenian and Georgian, literary production declined towards the end of the fourteenth century, due largely to the Mamluk and Timurid invasions of 1375 and 1387. This period and subsequent centuries also witnessed the beginnings of a classical Azeri literature, that was for the first time beginning to acquire written form.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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 20th 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.

Armenian. The 16th and early 17th 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

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

Discussion Question

- 1) In what ways was the tension between the Armenian church and secularizing poets manifested in early modern Armenian literature?

19TH CENTURY

Armenian. Many great Armenian poets came of age during the 19th century, at a time when Armenia and Armenians were divided between the Ottoman and Russian empires. Among the most prominent of poets during this century were Hovhannes Hovhannisyán (1864 –1929), Perch Proshian (1837– 1907), Smbat Shahaziz (1840-1908), Siamanto, born Atom Yarjanian (1878 –1915), Daniel Varoujan (1884-1915), Alexander Tsaturyan (1865-1917), Ruben Zardaryan (1874–1915), and Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869–1923), known as the national poet of Armenia. Siamanto, Zardaryan, and Varoujan were all killed during the Armenian genocide; since their works pertain mostly to the 20th century, they are discussed later. This is also the century during which Armenia's oral tradition began to be recorded as in the landmark collection of Ghewont Alishan (1888).

Shushanik Kurghinian While Georgian and Azeri poetry was dominated by men throughout the 19th century, women poets began to have a significant impact on Armenian during the 19th century. Outstanding Armenian women poets from this period include Shushanik Kurghinian (1876 –1927), and Zabel Sibil Asadour (1863-1934), and Heranush (Nargiz) Arshagian (1887-1905). Although she died at the young age of eighteen, Arshagian produced important work in many different genres. Kurghinian's ambition was to be a voice for the oppressed, and all of her poetry reflects this goal. She was born in Alexandropol (present-day Gyumri), which was then part of the Russian empire, to a poor cobbler. From early childhood, she worked as a weaver and potter while also pursuing her education. At the age of seventeen she joined the Armenian Social Democrat Hunchakian Party. Founded in Geneva in 1887, the party's primary aim was to secure

Armenia's independence from the Ottoman empire. It was through Kurghinian's involvement in this party that she met the Armenian writer Avetik Isahakyan. Kurghinian was heavily impacted by the Russian Revolution of 1905. In her autobiography, she recalls how it led to her awakening as a poet and inspired her to write poems about workers. Her first book of poetry *Ringing of the Dawn* (*Arshaluysi ghoghjanjner*, 1907), was a direct response to the 1905 revolution. Her second book of poetry was rejected by the censor. She settled in Yerevan in 1926, and died at the age of fifty-one.

Jivani Another important Armenian poet who belongs to the oral tradition of Armenian bards (*ashugh, gusan*) is Jivani, born under the name Serob Stepani Levonian (1846–1909), near Akhalkalaki in Georgia. Jivani first rose to fame in Tbilisi, a city that was the center of literary activity for all peoples of the Caucasus throughout the 19th century. He then moved to the Armenian city of Alexandropol, where he flourished for nearly three decades amid its vibrant musical culture, before returning to Tbilisi. All in all, Jivani authored over eight hundred songs, in different styles, ranging from the romantic to the satirical. His songs about friendship, poverty, lawlessness, and the impact of foreign invasions resonated with the concerns of everyday Armenians, who were far removed from the elite strata of society. Jivani's songs were influential on Armenian music, and on Russian authors such as Maxim Gorky and Valery Bryusov.

Further Reading

I Want to Live: Poems of Shushanik Kurghinian, Translated by Shushan Avagyan (Watertown, MA: Armenian International Women's Association, 2005).

Victoria Rowe, *A History of Armenian Women's Writing: 1880-1922* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2009).

Ghewond M. Alishan, *Armenian popular songs* (Venice: S. Lazarus, 1888).

Discussion Questions

- 1) What influence did European Romanticism exert on the development of poetry in the southern Caucasus?
- 2) What were the attitudes of Armenian poets towards Russian rule in the Caucasus?
- 3) What role did women writers play in Armenian poetry during this period?

20TH CENTURY

The intertwinement of Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri literatures throughout the 19th century was further intensified during the 20th 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 only missing link within this literary configuration were the parts of Armenia which remained part of the Ottoman empire until its collapse in 1922. The ethnic clashes during the late 19th century and early 20th radically changed the face of 20th century Armenian literature, and resulted in the displacement and the murder of many of the greatest Armenian writers.

Varoujan

In the domain of poetry, Armenian poets such as Varoujan, Siamanto, and Zardaryan. Varoujan was born Daniel Tchboukkiarian in Sivas in Central Turkey in 1884. He studied at the Mourad-Rafaelian school in Venice until 1905, when he entered Belgium's Ghent University, where he studied literature, sociology and economics. In 1914, he formed the literary group Mehian (Temple), which also included a magazine, with Hagop Oshagan and several other major Armenian writers (Aharon Parseghian, Gostan Zarian, and Kegham Parseghian). Varoujan published three volumes of poetry during his lifetime. Published posthumously in 1921, *The Song of the Bread* celebrates a world that had already vanished: the agricultural life of the Armenian peasant farmer of Anatolia.

Siamanto Siamanto was another innovator in Armenian poetry who was killed during the genocide. He was born Atom Yarjanian on the upper shores on the Euphrates in 1878. His teacher named him Siamanto after one of the characters in his stories and he used that name in his publications for the rest of his life. After the Hamidian massacres of 1896, during which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed, Siamanto fled to Egypt and then Paris, where he entered the Sorbonne and began studying Middle Eastern literature.

After completing his studies, Siamanto moved to Geneva, where he became a contributor to *Droshak* (“Banner”), the official newspaper of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun), a democratic socialist party founded in Tbilisi in 1890. He led a nomadic existence between Paris, Zurich, and Geneva, before returning to Constantinople after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Siamanto’s Innovations Siamanto was one of the first Armenian poets to engage extensively with European literary modernism. He is credited with introducing free verse into modern Armenian literature. Two of his poetry collections, *The Manner of a Hero* (1902) and *The Invitation from The Fatherland* (1903) particularly bear the imprint of European modernism. Even as he looked forward and developed a new literary aesthetic, Siamanto was also engaged by the literature of the past, in particular the legacy of medieval Armenian poetry. Like medieval Armenian poets, Siamanto avoids end rhyme but makes ample use of internal rhyme (assonance and consonance). Many of his poems follow the metrical patterns used by medieval Armenian poets, such as the iambic sixteen syllabic form of Nerses Shnorhali. Pioneering a new aesthetic while reworking past precedents, Siamanto’s poems combine subjects and themes from Armenia’s past alongside urgent contemporary issues. His poems are dedicated to ancient figures in Armenia’s past such as “Saint Mesrop.” Another theme that captured his imagination is the Armenian pagan pantheon, as seen in poems such as “The Prayer of Navasart for Goddess Anahid.”

Charents The poets of Soviet Armenia, such as Yeghishe Charents (1897–1937) and Avetik Isahakyan (1875–1957), were relatively more fortunate than their fellow Armenians born in Ottoman lands in that they avoided genocide, even though they too were persecuted. Charents was born Yeghishe Abgari Soghomonyan to a family of carpet dealers in Kars, then part of the Russian empire. He shared Siamanto’s passion for literary modernism and similarly created a reputation for himself as an innovator in poetic style. Charents served in World War One, and witnessed the aftermath of the Armenian genocide while on duty in Van. After witnessing the horrors of war, Charents’ support for the Bolsheviks was solidified; he came to see them as protectors of the Armenian people. In 1919, Charents was appointed director of the Art Department in the Soviet Ministry of Education. In 1921, he returned to Moscow to study at the Institute of Literature and Arts founded by Russian poet Valery Bryusov, who took a deep interest in Armenian literature. During this time, he composed the autobiographical *Charents-name*, the title of which adds a Persian suffix to his penname.

Charents and Avetik Isahakyan While travelling through Italy in 1924, Charents met Avetik Isahakyan. He founded a short-lived union of writers, called “November” after returning to Armenia in 1928. Charents’ writing have been translated by many great writers, including Valeri Bryusov, Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, Arseny Tarkovsky, Louis Aragon, into their respective literatures. Armenian-American writer William Saroyan met Charents in Moscow in 1934, and wrote a short story about him many decades later in his short story collection *Letters from 74 rue Taitbout or Don’t Go But if You Must Say Hello to Everybody* (1971).

Isahakyan’s Life Like Shushanik Kurghinian, Avetik Isahakyan was born in Alexandropol. He was educated at Gevorkian Theological Seminary in Etchmiadzin (Vagharshapat), where many Armenian poets and writers had studied in centuries past. Like Siamanto, Isahakyan joined the Armenian Revolutionary Federation which advocated for an independent Armenia and a democratic socialist political system. He was arrested in 1896 for his revolutionary activities and spent a year in prison in Yerevan. Isahakyan’s university education took place at the University of Zurich in literature and the history of philosophy, before returning to the Caucasus.

Isahakyan’s Migrations 1908 was another year of widespread imprisonment, not just for Isahakyan, but for over a hundred other Armenian writers and intellectuals who passed several months of that year in Tbilisi’s Metekhi Prison. As soon as he was released, Isahakyan realized that he had to leave the Caucasus. He migrated to Berlin, where he co-founded a German–Armenian Society that advocated for political autonomy for the Armenian people. Isahakyan was among those who had a foreboding of the Armenian genocide before it occurred. He never trusted the promises made by the Young Turks that Western Armenia would become independent once the Ottoman empire was overthrown. Isahakyan wrote about the genocide and its gruesome aftermath in his *White Book* (Յիշատակարան).

Isahakyan’s Poetry In addition to being a creator of new poetry, Isahakyan was a cultivator of poetry from times past. He spent seven years (1899-1906) working on *The Songs of Haiduks* (Հայդուկի երգեր), which was an anthology of poems dedicated to the Armenian struggle for freedom. Isahakyan also found inspiration in other world literatures, such as Arabic. One of his most famous poems is his verse narrative of the life of the eleventh century Arabic poet Abu Ala al-Maarri (1909-1911). Consisting of seven “suras”—Isahakyan borrowed the term for chapters within the Quran—the poem narrates the travails of the blind Syrian poet who is well known for his atheistic and heterodox views.

Further Reading

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Avetik Isahakyan, *Abu lala mahari: poem in seven suras*, translated by Zabelle C. Boyajian (Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House, 1975).

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 20th century Armenian poets?
- 3) How did modernist poets of the South Caucasus conceptualize literary modernism?

ESSAYS AND LEARNED PROSE (Antiquity to the 20th century)

ANTIQUITY

Like many literatures that are inaugurated by a people's religious conversion, Armenian literature begins as a scholarly enterprise, with translations and commentaries.

Translation of the Bible According to the chronicler Moses Khorenatsi, the oldest work of written Armenian literature is the translation of the Bible, which was done from Syriac by a certain Isaac in 411. Soon afterwards, John of Egheghiatz and Joseph of Baghin travelled to Edessa (modern day Urfa in southeastern Turkey) in order to produce a new translation of the Bible. They reached Constantinople, then the capital of the Byzantine empire, and acquired copies of the original Greek version of the Bible known as the Septuagint. They supplemented this with copies of the Bible from Alexandria, also in Greek, and produced a new translation into Armenian of the Greek version of the Bible. Interestingly, this translational activity occurred at a time when Armenia itself was under foreign domination, and divided between Persia and Byzantium.

Classical Armenian historians Alongside religious literature, Armenian historiography flourished soon after the invention of the Armenian alphabet. While it is impossible to list all of the major classical Armenian historians here, the ten most important names should be mentioned: 1) Agathangelos, 5th century author of a *History of the Armenians*, which tells the story of the conversion of King Trdat and the life of St. Gregory the Illuminator; 2) P'awstos Buwzand (also known as Faustus of Byzantium), author of a *History of Armenia*, covering the period 330-87; 3) Movses Xorenats'i, author of a *History of Armenia*, which begins with the pre-historic period and ends with the death of Mashtots in 440, and draws on a wide array of works in many languages, including the Alexander Romance, Josephus, and Gregory Nazianzen's *Orations* 4) Pseudo-Sebeos, author of a work called the *Primary History*, a short work comprising genealogies of kings, including those relating to the Parthians' assumption of Seleucid power; 5) Sebeos (Eusebius), whose history relates events from the beginning of Sassanian rule over Armenia to the Islamic conquest of 661, and whose date can be ascertained by his participation in the Ecclesiastical Council of Dvin in 645; 6) Movses Dasxurants'i, whose *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (Aluans, linked to the modern Udi people) is discussed below; 7) the theologian and translator Eznik of Kolb, whose work *Against the Sects* describes the religious practices of Zoroastrians belonging to the Zurvanist sect during the Sassanian period; 8) Łazar P'arbets'i, the first historian to report on conflicts he witnessed first-hand between Armenians and Sasanians, which was composed c. 500 CE and describes the years 387-448; 9) Eishe, whose 6th century hagiographical collection *On Vardan and the Armenian War* incorporates earlier writings by Abraham the Confessor on Armenian Christians martyred by Persians and a manifesto on the Zurvanist sect of

Zoroastrians attributed to an Armenian *marzpan* (military commander in charge of border provinces); 10) and Anania Shirakats'i, who compiled traditions relating to the Iranian calendar.

Historiographies

Like many works of premodern history, these historiographies combine memories of traditions with fictionalized legends. Of these above works, five are of particular importance for the early history of the Armenian church: Agathangelos, Łazar P'arbets'i, Elishe, Movses Xorenats'i, and Faustus of Byzantium. Yet many of them are unreliable when it comes to their chronological placement. Agathangelos claims to be a witness of the conversion of King Tiridates III to Christianity in 301, an event he narrates in detail—even claiming to be the King's Roman secretary—but scholars now believe that the work was not composed until the 5th century. Although Movses Xorenats'i work's purports to have been written by a pupil of Mashtots, scholars now believe that this work was composed in the 8th century.

Further Reading

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Discussion Questions

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

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

Armenian historical prose overlapped both literary and scholarly domains, combining influences from popular culture with learned ecclesiastical traditions. One of the most significant works within the post-classical Armenian historiographic tradition is the 10th century historiographical work on Caucasian Albania and eastern provinces of Armenia, known as *The History of the Country of Albania* (Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի/ *Patmowt'iwn Aghowanic ashxarhi*). This work is a major source of our knowledge concerning the Caucasian Albanian empire. It also provides important information concerning the Khazars. The text is attributed to both Movses Kaghankatvatsi and Movses Daskhurantsi because it is believed that Kaghankatvatsi authored books I and II of this work, while Daskhurantsi authored book III and edited Kaghankatvatsi's text for the other two books.

Łewond Łewond is among the most important Armenian historiographers of the 8th century. His history, spanning the years 632 to 789, was commissioned by the son of Smbat VII Bagratuni, the leader of Armenia from 761 to 775, a period during which it was under Arab rule. Łewond's biography is unknown, beyond the fact that he witnessed first-hand the events described after 774. His history is considered a valuable source for the early history of Arab rule over Armenia, and it also sheds light on the Arab–Byzantine wars of the 7th–8th centuries. Among the valuable aspects of the history is its inclusion of a defense of Christianity purportedly sent by the Byzantine emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717–741) to the Umayyad caliph Umar II (r. 717–720), which was later deemed to be a forgery from a later era.

Aristakes Lastivertsi Many more works of Armenian historiography appeared during the later medieval period. These include Aristakes Lastivertsi's 11th century *History: On the Sufferings Visited Upon by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us* (Պատմութիւն: մեր շրջապատի այլազեղ ազգերից մեզ հասած արհավիրքների մասին/ *Patmowt'yown: mer shrijapati aylacegh azgeric mez hasac' arhavirqneri masin*), which tells of Armenia's relations with the Byzantine empire and with Georgia, as well as the impact of the Saljuq invasions. This work contains a valuable account of the capture of Ani (1064) and the Battle of Manzikert (1071), both of which are major events in Saljuq history. The Armenian monk Mekhitar of Ayrivank of the Cave-Monastery of Geghard composed a history of the world during the 12th century, as well as sacred music.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi Another important post-classical Armenian historian is Kirakos Gandzaketsi, originally of Ganja just like the Persian poet Nizami Ganjevi. Kirakos Gandzaketsi authored a *History of Armenia* during the 13th century. Divided into two parts, this work narrates Armenian history from the 4th to the 12th centuries and includes detailed descriptions of events that took place during his lifetime. The first part opens with the life of Gregory the Illuminator, the first official head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The second part narrates the Mongol invasions from the point of view of the damage they inflicted on Armenians and other peoples of the Caucasus. Gandzaketsi's work is a key source for the Mongol invasions, and contains the first recorded word list of the Mongolian language. He was captured along with his teacher Vanakan Vardapet by Mongol forces in 1236. Both Gandzaketsi and Vanakan managed to survive during their captivity by working as secretaries for the Mongols. It was through this experience that Kirakos learned Mongolian. When a ransom was paid to free his teacher Vanakan, Kirakos also managed to escape and return to Getik. Following his teacher's death in 1251, Kirakos became the head of the school where he had studied as a child.

Stepanos Orbelian *History of the Province of Syunik* (1297) was one of three major works composed by Stepanos Orbelian. This work is remarkable for the wide variety of sources with which it engages, including sources in Georgian as well as Armenian, and colophons, speeches, and letters. It opens with the creation of the world and then narrates Armenian history from the reign of Armenian king Tiridates I (r. 52-88 CE) to the end of the thirteenth century.

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Discussion Questions

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

EARLY MODERN

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 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 16th century overall, thirty-one books were published in Armenian using movable type. In the 17th century, this number increased to one-hundred sixty-four. In the 18th 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.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What role did the invention of printing play in the development of early modern Armenian literature?
- 2) What was the impact of the invention of the printing press on Armenian literature?

19TH CENTURY

Armenian. Before the 19th century, Armenian literature was concentrated primarily in the southwestern regions which are now part of modern Turkey. As the center of literary activity shifted eastwards during the 19th century, the distinctions between Western and Eastern Armenian were further codified. Eastern Armenian was the literary language used by Armenians based in Tbilisi, Yerevan, and other parts of the Russian empire, as well as among Armenians of Iran. Western Armenian became codified as the language of the Armenians of the Ottoman empire. While the different dialects are mutually intelligible and share the same writing system, they follow different systems of pronunciation. The pronunciation of Eastern Armenian corresponds more closely to Classical Armenian (Grabar). Since Eastern Armenian was the dominant literary language of the parts of Armenia which were most closely linked to the Caucasus, writers who used this dialect are the focus of the present discussion.

Armenian Church Although historically, much of the literary and scholarly activity linked to Armenian was associated the Armenian Church, this was changing by the 19th century, with the increasingly secular orientation of Armenian authors. One of the most influential Eastern Armenian writers and scholars was Stepanos Nazarian (1812-1879). Nazarian was born in Tbilisi, and his father was a priest. He studied at the University of Tartu before becoming a specialist in Oriental languages. He began his academic career in Kazan University, where he taught in the newly established department of Armenian. Soon after completing his PhD on Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, he was appointed Professor of Persian and Arabic Literature at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. His work on the *Book of Kings* was among the first such works in the Russian language. From 1858-1864, Nazarian served as editor of the Armenian-language journal *Northern Illumination* (Հյուսիսափայլ/ *Hyusisapayl*), in which role he promoted the study of Classical Armenian and influenced the development of the Armenian literary language.

Ghazaros (Lazarus) Aghayan Ghazaros (Lazarus) Aghayan (1840-1911) is another important Armenian writer and educator who wrote in Eastern Armenian. Like many Armenian intellectuals of his generation, Aghayan attended the Nersisian School in Tbilisi. His family could only afford for him to attend for a year, however, after which he was compelled to leave school and make a living for himself. Among other jobs, he worked as a typesetter for *Northern Illumination*, the journal edited by Stepanos Nazarian. Because he had to support himself financially, Aghayan worked in many different professions, including that of factory worker and farm laborer. Eventually, he joined forces with Mikael Nalbandian (1829-1866), who aimed to revive Armenian culture and steer it in a more progressive direction. Aghayan passed much of his life teaching a younger generation of Armenians. He taught in many different cities of the Russian empire with large Armenian populations, including Akhaltsikhe, Alexandropol, Yerevan, and Shusha. He also authored textbooks for use in Armenian schools and translated a range of Russian authors, including Pushkin and Krylov, into Armenian.

Mikael Nalbandian The political activist and theorist Mikael Nalbandian set the political and intellectual agenda for literary activity in Eastern Armenian during the second half of the 19th century. He was born in the Armenian town of Nakhichevan-on-Don, and soon became a fierce critic of the Armenian Church. In 1851 Nalbandian began publishing in the weekly Tbilisi-based newspaper *Ararat*, edited by the poet Raphael Patkanian. From 1859, Nalbandian published in Nazarian's journal *Northern Illumination*. As a nationalist, Nalbandian was heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideals. His views were also shaped by Russian revolutionaries such as Chernyshevsky and Herzen. He was forcibly relocated by the tsar as punishment for his political activities, and died at the age of thirty-seven. According to the testimony of Aghayan, Nalbandian was particularly influential with students of the Nersisian School, who were inspired by his radical tone.

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Discussion/Questions

- 4) What kind of control did the tsarist state exert over literary production in the southern Caucasus?
- 5) How did serial publications contribute to the formation of national identity in Armenian?
- 6) How did social class and economic status impact the horizons of writers from the Caucasus during the 19th century?
- 7)

FICTION, LEGENDS, MYTHS (Antiquity to the 20th 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.

Armenian-Persian Connections. While ancient Georgian mythology looked northwards and engaged with the mountaineers of the Caucasus, Iranian mythology predominates in Armenian mythology. Other influences include Greek, Roman, Urartian, and Anatolian deities. The influence of Iranian mythology on Armenian mythology begins with Zoroastrianism which reaches Armenian peoples during the Achaemenid era. Although both Iranian and Armenians worshipped the god Mazda, they each considered the other to belong to a different religion. Some gods, such as Aramazd (Ahura Mazda), were superimposed onto Armenian gods, such as Vanatur. Yet these superimposed gods often retained features of the Armenian deities that they replaced. In other cases, such as that of Anahita, an Armenian and Persian god might be identically named yet wholly divergent in practice. When Armenia formed part of the wider Greek empire, Armenian and Greek gods merged. Aramazd was identified with Zeus; Artemis was aligned with Anahit; and Vahagn was connected to Heracles. After Armenia's conversion to Christianity, Christian saints were merged with popular Armenian gods. For example, St. John the Baptist acquired the features of Armenian gods such as Tir and Vahagn.

Hayk and Bel The oldest known oral Armenian epic, *Hayk and Bel*, has been dated to the 9th-7th centuries BCE. *Zruyts* are another important ancient Armenian literary genre, which Moses Khorenatsi drew on in his fifth century *History of the Armenians*. Moses Khorenatsi also relied on *araspels*, a genre of legends that he considered less reliable, although they sometimes confirmed the historical events he was recording. Finally, Moses drew on two more versified genres of legends: storytellers' songs (*yergk vipsanats*) and metrical songs (*tvelatsyn yergk*). Both of these versified genres include heroic poems and chronicles of kings and princes and were sung by minstrels to a musical accompaniment. Metrical songs were also performed through dancing.

Folktales Arguably the richest repository for Armenian legends, and certainly the one that provides the greatest insight into daily life, is folktales. Armenian folktales provide a rich source of insight into the daily lives of Armenians in antiquity, into their religious system, and their contacts with the wider world. These stories began to be committed to writing towards the end of the 19th century by scholars who travelled from village to village, recording the words of local storytellers. The tales offer poignant narrations of the lives of everyday Armenians, including peasants, as they navigate poverty, romantic love, family tensions, especially in connection with their parents-in-law, and face their own mortality and that of their loved ones.

Arabic, Persian, and Turkic names Many protagonists in Armenian tales have Arabic, Persian, and Turkic names, or use epithets taken from these languages. For example, one common refrain that occurs even in these Armenian-language tales is "By Allah!" Armenian folklore also shares in common with Persian folklore monstrous creatures called *devs* (*divs*). Also found in the Avesta, *devs* share a common origin with Indians *devas* (gods). The original *devs*, found in the Avesta, the sacred Zoroastrian scripture that influenced both Iranian and Armenian culture, were not evil or synonymous with demons, although they later acquired this association.

Devs In Armenian tales, *devs* have a quasi-evil and semi-divine status roughly analogous to their status in Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*. In physical terms, Armenian *devs* have humongous heads, and their eyes are the

size of bowls. They come in white and black varieties, and sometimes have only one eye. Modern Armenian writers have incorporated *devs* that appear in ancient Armenian tales into their modern reworkings of this genre. One such example is “The Flower of Paradise (Եղեմական Ծաղիկը)” by poet and translator Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869–1923), the title of which derives from the fact that the *dev* in this story serves as a guard to a flower garden. As in much ancient folklore, animals speak in these tales, sometimes guiding the hero and helping to solve their problems, including their battles against the *devs*.

King Zarzand’s Daughter. One of the longest stories in the Armenian folkloric repertoire, “King Zarzand’s Daughter,” features many of the classic tropes of this genre, as well as resonances with other works of world literature, such as the account of the kidnapping of Sita by the demon king Ravana in the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*. The hero of the story is an orphan named Zurab. When his mother dies during a plague, Zurab is adopted by a well-to-do neighbor and tasked with pasturing his sheep and cattle. While out in the fields watching over the sheep, a wolf creeps up as if from out of nowhere and seizes a lamb. As the wolf attempts to get away with a lamb, his exit is blocked by other shepherds and their dogs. Zurab confronts the wolf, presses on him with his knees, and grabs him by the throat. The wolf lies limp and prone on the ground. Everyone watching the scene is amazed by Zurab’s ability to subdue the wolf. They decide to call him Aslan, meaning lion, in recognition of his bravery.

Aslan becomes a man When Aslan became a man, his responsibilities as a shepherd increased. He was entrusted with herding the entire flock of sheep, and was often away for days as the flock travelled miles away from their village. After herding the sheep during the day, he would place them in a cave and sleep in front of the entrance with his water and bread hoisted above him, while the dogs kept watch. One morning, Aslan woke up with the sense that a visitor had covertly consumed his bread and water while he had been sleeping. This pattern repeated itself for several nights until one morning it was evident that half of his loaf had gone missing during the night. Aslan stayed awake the next night, anticipating his visitor’s return. The visitor turned out to be a vision: a beautiful girl stood before him like a *houri*, the story reports, using the Perso-Arabic term for the feminine creature who awaits devout Muslim men in paradise. Later we learn that her name is Simizar. Aslan wishes to embrace Simizar and to make her his wife, but she warns him that he will be cursed if he touches her. She then explains to him how she ended up in this state.

Simizar kidnapped Several years earlier, Simizar’s father King Zarzand became embroiled in a war with seven other kings. In the tumult of the conflict, she was kidnapped by a giant *dev* named Tepegöz, and transported to his realm. (The giant Tepegöz appears elsewhere in world literature, in the Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut*, as a cyclops and ogre.) A battle raged for several days, during which her brothers tried to rescue her, and ended by dying in the conflict. When the *devs* prevailed over those fighting on the side of King Zarzand, Simizar was taken to the castle of the giant Tepegöz and pressured to marry him. He promised her all the wealth of his kingdom if she would obey his wishes. She resisted him for forty days, while the eye at the top of his head expanded until it was the size of a watermelon. It was in this condition that Simizar escaped one night to locate Aslan and beg for his help in securing her release. After telling her story, Simizar disappears into the ether and Aslan vows to secure her freedom. Aslan sets off on his mission on the following morning, at the break of dawn. The sheep he has been shepherding return of their own accord to his master’s fields. He asked his master to pay the wages due to him and quits his job so that he can devote himself wholly and exclusively to rescuing Simizar. Then he sets off on his quest. After a long day of wandering, Aslan reaches a cottage with an elderly woman inside, who is lighting a candle. Aslan asks whether he can stay there for the night. The old woman agrees and prepares a couch for him to sleep on.

Speaking animals The story is filled with magic creatures and speaking animals. When Aslan awakens the next morning, he sees a nest of sparrows and prays to God that he be granted the power to understand the language of the birds. Suddenly, the birds begin chirping and, when he strains his ears, he can understand what they are saying. The birds recognize Aslan from the days when he gave them crumbs while herding sheep. The birds then impart the instructions Aslan needs in order to proceed with his journey: he must kiss the hand of the mistress of the cottage three times and say, “Thank you, good grandmother.” She would then tell him how to rescue Princess Simizar from the Tepegöz’s Castle.

Aslan’s journey The next morning, Aslan does exactly as he was instructed and received from the old woman what he needed for the next stage of his journey: fourteen hazelnuts, two walnuts, a water bottle, and a handful of flour. Each of these items has a specific role in his quest to defeat the one-eyed ogre Tepegöz. Aslan eats one hazelnut during every day of his journey, and each of them is as filling as an entire sheep. In this way his hunger is satiated without him needing to eat normal food. As soon as he cracks open the walnut, a horse appears, with a silver saddle on its back. When he cracks the second walnut, a steel spear emerges, along with a shield. After seven days journey on his horse, newly armed with a sword and shield, he arrives at the castle of the *devs*. Finally, he approaches the cave where Simizar is held captive. Before he can reach it, Tepegöz and Tepegöz’s mother hurl towards him. Aslan manages to cut off one of Tepegöz’s heads and thrusts a lance into his single eye. Tepegöz fell down dead, but his mother survives the

battle and tries to attack him. Just as she is approaching, forty bushels of wheat suddenly appear, blocking Aslan's escape path. His horse advises him to pluck three strands of hair from his mane. A bridge forms from the horse's hair on the surface of the lake, enabling Aslan to escape the wrath of Tepegöz's mother with Simizar intact. This horse also flies when this turns out to be the only reliable way of reaching King Zarzand in order to return to him his kidnapped daughter.

Happy Ending Like a classic fairy tale, the story ends happily, with King Zarzand's daughter rescued from the dev Tepegöz and married to her beloved Aslan. In the final scene, the old woman who had housed Aslan in her cottage observes a snake crawling along the ground towards the sleeping Zarzand. She strikes the creature dead with an iron weapon, piercing the top of its head, after which it is revealed to be Tepegöz's mother, making a last-ditch effort to prevent Aslan and Simizar from getting married. Once the snake has been killed, the couple marry. Soon after their marriage, King Zarzand abdicates his throne to Aslan, whom he calls King Orphan Aslan. Such tales emphasize that virtue is rewarded, courage honored, just kings rule the world, and goodness prevails.

The Tale of Salman and Rostom. Whereas "King Zarzand's Daughter" bears the imprint of Persian and Turkish culture through its names (Simizar, Tepegöz), the Armenian tale of Salman and Rostom overlaps significantly with a major work of Persian literature: Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*. We need not assume that the Armenian tale is borrowed from Ferdowsi, as it could be that both works emerge from a common mythological repository. Rostom is a major figure in the Persian epic and leads the battle against the Turanians who are sometimes aligned with modern Turks. Salman does not appear in the *Book of Kings*, and his Arabic name suggests non-Persian origins. Rostom's father is named Zal in the Persian version and Chal in the Armenian version. Interestingly, in the Armenian version, Rostom's father is referred to as a brigand rather than as a hero. The Armenian version claims out that the land ruled over by Chal is the only land in the realm which did not pay tribute to Salman.

Persian parallels Although the characters are familiar from Persian tradition, there is no known or extant precedent for the precise event narrated in the Armenian tale. In this story, Chal decides to find out what kind of man Salman is. He encounters Salman on the road, and the latter fails to recognize him. Keeping his identity to himself, he simply says that he is from the country of Chal. Not knowing that he is Rostom's father, Salman requests that he send the famous Rostom out to fight him in battle. Salman is convinced that he will emerge victorious from such a battle. Soon after Rostom's father explains to his son what happened, Rostom leaves for a fight with Salman, accompanied by his cousin Vyjhan.

Vyjhan Vyjhan is another mysterious character who appears in the Armenian tale with apparent—but not established—links to the Persian tradition. Vyjhan does not share the same family history as does Bijan in Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, in which he is the grandson of Rostom. Yet even in the *Book of Kings* Bijan is said to have Ashkanian origins, meaning that he belonged to the branch of the Arsacid Parthian dynasty that ruled over Armenia from 12 to 428 of the Common Era. This may explain the apparent congruence between the Persian Bijan and the Armenian Vyjhan. Further, the name of a Daylamite commander, Vihan, may help to account for the transformation of Bijan into Vyjhan. As they journey towards Salman's kingdom, Vyjhan and Rostom reach a meadow on the edge of the town ruled over by Salman. They set up camp and fall into a deep sleep. Vyjhan is awoken by a group of people running around lamenting that Salman has demanded seven years of tribute from them. They are unsure about who should deliver the tribute, since the one who delivers it may be killed by Salman. Vyjhan volunteers while Rostom is still sleeping. He hurries towards the city ruled over by Salman, carrying the tribute money. Suddenly, Rostom is awakened from his sleep by Vyjhan's screams. Vyjhan is pleading for help and explaining that Salman is carrying him away. Rostom hurries on his horse towards Salman's tent to save his cousin. The tale calls their clash the "most terrible duel that has ever been recorded in the history of the world." The two fighters become entangled in each other's hair. They keep fighting, and, according to the story, are still struggling. The storyteller explains that their clash is the origin of the word earthquake, since the earth quakes when they shake each other violently. The tale of Rostom and Salman reads like a tale without a clear beginning or end. It may be a fragment of a longer cycle, and was perhaps drawn from the same material that served as the basis for Ferdowsi's famous epic.

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Discussion Question

- 1) What features are shared between ancient Armenian and Iranian folklore and mythological systems?
- 2) How are the Armenian story of Rostom and Salman and Ferdowsi's Persian epic, the *Book of Kings*, related?
- 3) How do the themes and plot of "King Zarzand's Daughter" resonate with other works of world literature?

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 sole extant example of a medieval romance in Armenian is *History of Taron*, attributed to the otherwise unknown Yovhannes (John) Mamikonean. Its name notwithstanding, this work is not a history. Rather, it is a romance which narrates in fictional form the Byzantine-Iranian wars during the period when Khusraw II (590-628) was the Sassanian shah and the Armenian region of Taron often experienced invasions from his army. Taron is ruled over by the Mamikonean family, who defend their region from these invasions over five generations. The defenders span the full gamut of human behavior; they are courageous, deceptive, discerning, and wise. Each defender is supported by their patron, St. Karapet. They defend the Glak monastery as well as other Christian churches from destruction by Sasanian invaders. The warriors in *History of Taron* pray not to God or Jesus Christ, but to St. Karapet, who empowers them to prevail in their battles. This work, which the author claims to have compiled between 680 and 681, is considered by scholars to have actually been composed at some point during the 9th-12th centuries, making it contemporaneous with epics such as the Armenian *Daredevils of Sassoun*, Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, the Turkic epics the Turkish epics *Danishmendname* and *Book of Dede Korkut*, and the Byzantine Greek epic, *Diogenes Akrites*. *History of Taron* incorporates material from earlier works of Armenian literature, including the 5th century writer P'awstos Buzand and 7th century writer Sebeos.

Mamikonean's style Mamikonean's style is deliberately archaic, and appears to imitate the style of his ancient predecessors. Although the work is called a "history," it cannot be relied on for accurate reports of deaths in battle. Armenians' enemies are systematically demonized in this work, and their historical specificity is merged with mythic traits. Although the enemies are portrayed as Zoroastrian Iranians fighting in the service of Khusraw II, in fact the descriptions likely reflect the invaders of Mamikonean's own day: Arabs and Saljuqs.

Daredevils of Sassoun Armenian oral epics are in different ways similarly preoccupied by Armenian efforts to ward off various Muslim invaders. The most famous oral Armenian epic, the *Daredevils of Sassoun* (*Sasna Dzerer*), transpires across three areas of medieval Armenia (including regions that are now part of modern Turkey): Taron, Mokka, and Mush. Set in its current form between the 8th to the 12th centuries,

Daredevils of Sassoun was forgotten by the Armenian literary tradition (aside from a few scattered references to the epic in the writings of Portuguese travelers) until Garegin Srvandziantz, a bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church, rediscovered and transcribed it in 1873. Publication followed the next year in Constantinople. Prior to its modern transcription, *Daredevils of Sassoun* persisted in the oral storytelling culture of Eastern Armenia, while fading away from Western Armenian literature. Over the course of the 20th century, over one hundred and sixty versions have been recorded. The present form of the epic appears to have been inspired by a 9th century Armenian rebellion against Abbasid rule in Armenia. Yet scholars have argued that its roots are much more ancient, and date back to the earliest beginnings of the Armenian monarchy, even before writing was widely in use. According to such thinking, the conflicts between Armenian and ancient Mesopotamian rulers was projected onto later conflicts between Armenian and Muslim rulers, and the Baghdad Caliph substituted for the Pharaoh of Egypt. Orbeli, for example, suggests that all characters in the epic predate the 11th century.

Hovhannes Tumanyan's version In 1902, Armenian poet and translator Hovhannes Tumanyan retold the story of David of Sassoun in modern Armenian verse. In 1923, the famous Symbolist poet Valery Bryusov translated the epic into Russian. It was translated into English in 1964 by Leon Surmelian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide. Surmelian worked from multiple versions. *Daredevils of Sassoun* has also been translated into most major world literatures.

Four parts Most commonly associated with the name of its hero, David of Sassoun, the full story is comprised of four parts, each of which narrates a different chapter in the vicissitudes of the House of Sassoun across four generations. The origins of this family go back to Assyria and Iranian deity Mihr or Mithra, who is introduced as an ancestor of one branch of the family. The grandson of this deity, Little Mihr, kills a lion who is causing famine and thereby initiates an era of prosperity for the House of Sassoun. His important achievements notwithstanding, Little Mihr has a tragic fate: he slays David of the next generation of the House of Sassoun. Unable to die or to have children, Little Mihr passes his life in a cave known as Raven Rock (Agfawak'ar), where he awaits the end of the world on a talking horse armed with a sword that flashes lightning. (The figure of the talking horse occurs in Armenian folk tales, such as "King Zarzand's Daughter," described above.) Each of the four generations of this dynasty presents new heroes who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their people.

Further Reading

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Discussion Questions:

- 1) How was the Armenian epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* forgotten and then rediscovered in modern times?
- 2) How were ancient histories reimagined during the post-classical period across the literatures of the Caucasus?
- 3) How did post-classical Armenian authors express their Christian identities in a world ruled by Islamic dynasties?
- 4)

Like Georgian literature, Armenian literature of the 19th century was heavily influenced by contemporaneous developments in Russian literature. The novelist, poet, and educator Khachatur Abovian (1809-1848) is regarded as a father of modern Armenian literature. Abovian's best known and first major work, *The Wounds of Armenia* (Վերք Հայաստանի/ *Verk Hayastani*, written in 1841) is considered the first novel published in modern Armenian. Although it was written in 1841, *The Wounds of Armenia* was published only posthumously in 1858, and thanks to the efforts of Abovian's widow. The work was unknown during the author's lifetime. Whereas Classical Armenian (Grabar) literature is written in Western Armenian, Abovian wrote in Eastern Armenian, using the dialect spoken in Yerevan in order to produce a work that could be read by Armenians who lacked a formal education. *The Wounds of Armenia* inaugurated a tradition of Armenian novelistic writing about the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828 that was to prove highly consequential for Armenian history. In the case of this novel, a young Iranian girl is kidnapped by the army of the local Persian ruler. The kidnapping triggers an uprising by the courageous Agassi, who is the novel's protagonist. Symptomatically, the novel is subtitled "lamentation of the patriot."

Abovian Abovian was born in the village of Kanaker, now a district of Yerevan in the Republic of Armenia, but then part of the Qajar empire. This region was annexed by Russia in the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828) when Abovian was still in his teens. He began his formal education at the famous Armenian seminary of Echmiadzin, where he prepared to enter the priesthood. After five years of religious studies, he relocated to Tiflis in order to pursue a secular education in Armenian. The turning point in his education came eight years later, when Abovian was offered a Russian state scholarship to study at the University of Dorpat in Livonia (present-day Tartu, Estonia). It was here that Abovian became acquainted with German Romanticism. At the university, he acquired mastery of Russian, German, French, Latin. The first two literatures were to prove particularly relevant to his subsequent literary trajectory. Thanks to these studies, Abovian was able to produce the first translations of Homer, the Russian historian and fiction writer Nikolay Karamzin, the Russian fabulist Ivan Andreevich Krylov, and the German poets Goethe and Friedrich Schiller into Armenian. Like Ilya Chavchavadze, who is believed to have been assassinated in 1907 while serving as a member of the Russian Duma, Abovian died under mysterious circumstances. He left his home one day in April 1848 and never returned. It is not known whether he was kidnapped, the victim of an accidental death, or suicide. What is clear is that, having vanished from the world at the age of thirty-nine, the masterful works Abovian left behind are only a fraction of what he would have produced had he lived longer.

Hagop Melik-Hagopian (Raffi) Another influential 19th century Armenian writer is Hagop Melik-Hagopian (1835–1888), better known by his penname Raffi. Born in the village of Payajuk in the Salmast region of Iran's northwestern province of Azerbaijan, Raffi moved to Tiflis (modern-day Tbilisi) at the age of twelve, where he enrolled in an Armenian boarding school. His formal education ended when he was forced by his father's illness to return to Iran.

Raffi's Novels Raffi is the author of several novels, a novella called *Harem* (1874), and a translation of Platon Zubov's *Astronomer of Karabakh* (1834). The novella *Harem* is particularly striking, as a work of historical fiction set in the royal harem of Qajar Iran, soon after the Russo-Persian war. It was translated into Persian in 1876, and earned the author notoriety when the translation was shown to Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar, who was then serving as governor of Tabriz province, where Raffi was residing at the time. Mozaffar al-Din would later become Iran's fifth Qajar shah. This translation of a novel that explored in detail Iran's treatment of her prisoners of war—especially of Armenian men and women, who became slaves of the shah—was apparently the trigger that caused his banishment from Iran.

Harem Among the unique qualities of *Harem* is its commitment to documenting the experience of captive women and men, including women who are forced to reside in the prince's harem. Although melodramatic and somewhat unrealistic in its plot, the story memorably evokes the atmosphere of the Qajar harem, and develops an important critique of the ruling class's tyrannical ways. The novella also bears the traces of both Russian and Persian literary sources. In keeping with the conventions of Russian realist fiction (including the novels of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev) years and place names are given in dashes. This creates an effect of verisimilitude while also leaving open to the writer the opportunity to invent new historical details. A second feature of this novella that distinguishes it from Russian and other European fiction of the time is Raffi's copious use of footnotes. Such paratextual devices enable the author to convey the historical and cultural specificities of Iranian life and culture from a few generations prior. His notes indicate that he was writing for an audience that lacked deep knowledge about Islamic history and theology, yet which was nonetheless accustomed to living among Muslims.

Srpuhi Dussap In the following decade, the first known novel by an Armenian woman, Srpuhi Dussap, was published in Istanbul under the title *Mayda: Echoes of Protest* (1883). *Mayda* is an epistolary

novel comprised of letters between a young widow named Mayda and her wise older friend, who guides her in creating a place for herself in society as an independent woman. In contrast to the writings of Abovian and Raffi, Dussap wrote in Western Armenian.

Further Reading

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Khachatur Abovian, "Preface to *Wounds of Armenia*," Translated by G. M. Goshgarian. in Marc Nichanian, *Mourning Philology: Art and Religion at the Margins of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 244–250.

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Discussion Questions

- 5) What new prose genres appear in the literatures of the 19th century Caucasus?
- 6) What was Abovian's contribution to the formation of a modern Armenian literary language?

20TH CENTURY

The diasporic scope of Armenian literature increased dramatically during the 20th century, in part due to geopolitical transformations and the Soviet Revolution, but first and foremost due to the Armenian **genocide** of 1915-1916. Although the First Republic of Armenia was established as an independent country in 1918, most Armenians lived outside its domain. After the genocide, those Armenians who survived were dispersed throughout Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Hence, any account of 20th century Armenian literature is necessarily transnational in scope, and cannot be restricted to the borders of any single state.

Hagop Oshagan Among the towering figures within this transnational literary geography is Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948), born in the Western Anatolian region of Bursa into an impoverished family. His father was a basket weaver and his mother worked in a silk factory. Oshagan's father died when he was only four years old, which meant that his primary caretaker became his blind aunt, while his mother was tasked with the responsibility of earning enough money for the entire household. His formal education ended with elementary school, since he had decided against pursuing the seminary education.

"The First Tear" Oshagan's first publication, the short story "The First Tear" (1902), happened without his consent while he was working as a teacher. Oshagan's students had discovered the manuscript of the short story in their teacher's desk and sent it off to be published without first securing his agreement. Although the story was published under the penname Hovannissian (taken from the name of his deceased father, Hovhannes), the identity of the author became known to his employers. Once his identity was revealed, Oshagan was fired by the school board for this publication and forbidden from relocating to Istanbul.

Banishment from Istanbul As a result of this ordeal, Oshagan moved to Marmaracik in northwest Turkey, where he worked as a teacher for six years, from 1902-1908. According to his own testimony, he did not teach or even read books during this time. Instead, in his own words, he communed with "the great passions, suffering and anguish of humanity." Like Anton Chekhov who passed his life as a village doctor, healing the community, Oshagan was absorbed by the "pains, emotional and physical" of his pupils and their extended families. Oshagan's experiences during this period lay the foundation for his first collection of short stories, *The Humble Ones* (1921).

Influence of Dostoevsky In 1908, Sultan Abdulhamid II had been overthrown by the Committee of Union and Progress and Oshagan was finally able to relocate to Istanbul. Gradually he returned to writing. Within two years of his move to Istanbul, Oshagan discovered the writings of Dostoevsky. The first work by Dostoevsky that he encountered, *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* (1860), changed his life. This account

of Dostoevsky's nine years of exile in Siberia resonated profoundly with the trajectory of his own life. As Oshagan recalls in his memoirs, referring to himself in the third-person: "Oshagan experienced the supreme drama of his art as he faced the Russian novelist...he had felt clearly his unworthiness in a profession in which the possessed novelist had remained so true, so unequalled."

One Hundred and One Years of Imprisonment Alongside his unfinished magnum opus *The Remnants* (1928-1934), which focuses on Muslim-Christian relations within the Ottoman empire, Oshagan is best known from his three novels about imprisonment: *Haji Murad* (1933), *Haji Abdullah*, and *Süleyman Effendi*. Collectively, these three works comprise the trilogy *One Hundred and One Years of Imprisonment* (1933). The characters and events related in these fictional works are based on the author's experience in a Bursa prison, where he met the three inmates who later figured into these fictions.

LIFE-WRITING (Antiquity to the 20th century)

ANTIQUITY

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 Tsurtaveli, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik* (წამება წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისა / *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 10th century. The 10th century version was copied in Parkhali (Turkish Barhal), a village built by Davit III Kurapatat (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.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What innovations did Christian conversion narratives introduce into Armenian lifewriting?

EARLY MODERN

Ottoman Travel Narratives of Armenia. 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.

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

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

Discussion Question:

- 1) How did early modern travellers perceive the growth of mercantile culture in the southern Caucasus?

19TH CENTURY

Armenian Revolutionaries. Armenian writers were equally active in the revolutionary movement that would bring about the end the Russian monarchy and of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus. Tbilisi was a center of this revolutionary activity for Armenians and Azeris as well as for Georgians. Khanasora Vardan, also known as Sargis Mehrabian (1870-1943) was one of many Armenian revolutionaries during this period who fought for the independence of the Caucasus from Russian rule. His memoirs date from 1896.

Hovannes Yousofian Hovannes Yousofian, also known as Melik T. Vahanian (1850-1920), is another Armenian revolutionary who left behind extensive memoirs. After graduating from the Nersisian College in Tbilisi, he began teaching in Telavi, a city in eastern Georgia. He then moved to Trebizond, Turkey, where from 1890-1892, he set up a clandestine organization dedicated to the liberation of the Armenian people. His memoirs were first published in Cairo in 1956, although they date from an earlier era.

Further Reading

Voices from the Past: Excerpts from Writings of Armenian Revolutionaries, edited by Vahe Habeshian (Watertown, Massachusetts: Hairenik Association, 2014).

Discussion Questions

- 1) How was the growing importance of Russian imperialism reflected in the autobiographies of writers from the Caucasus?
- 2) 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?
- 3) What light does autobiography shed on the experience of modernity in the southern Caucasus?

20TH CENTURY

Armenian Survivors. The Armenian **genocide** (1915-1918) casts a heavy over Armenian life writing during the 20th century. Many **genocide** memoirs have been translated into English. One of the best known is Grigoris Balakian’s *Armenian Golgotha*, translated by the Armenian-American scholar and poet Peter Balakian. Balakian was a priest and later a bishop in the Armenian Apostolic Church. He was arrested in 1915, along with two hundred and fifty other cultural leaders based in Constantinople, and deported to a prison in northern Turkey. He was one of the few who survived the imprisonment, and managed to escape from Turkey before being executed. One interesting feature of his autobiography is the accounts it contains of **Turkish perpetrators**, many of whom were stricken by **guilt**. One such person with whom Balakian recorded an exchange was an Ottoman administrator named Asaf of Chankiri, who warned Balakian of the imminent genocide. Balakian had several advantages that enabled him to survive when so many Armenians died. As an influential member of the Armenian church, he had access to the patriarchate, and experience with negotiating with Ottoman officials. He also had been educated in Germany, first at Mittweida University in Saxony and later at the University of Berlin, and was fluent in German. This enabled him to pass himself off as a German under many different guises while escaping the genocide: first as a German railway worker, then as a German Jew, then as a German engineer, a German soldier, and finally as a Greek working in the vineyards. Alongside its literary significance and status as an eyewitness document, Balakian’s memoir is an importance source for details about how the genocide was implemented.

Aleksandr Shirvanzadeh

In Eastern Armenia, the memoir tradition also flourished, and within circumstances that were tumultuous for different reasons. Aleksandr Shirvanzadeh (Aleksandr Movsesian) is best known as a playwright (and is discussed in this capacity in the section on drama) spent the remaining years of his life on a two-volume autobiography entitled *Out of the crucible of life (Keanki povits, 1930-1932)*.

Ervant Negerditchian

No consideration of Armenian life-writing would be complete without a discussion of the Armenian literature of diaspora. One work that belongs to this tradition and which sheds much light on the trajectory of Armenian literature during the 20th century is Armenian translator Ervant Negerditchian's *The Life of an Armenian Emigrant* (1970). Negerditchian migrated from Tbilisi to the United States during World War I, and settled in Watertown, Massachusetts, where he used his experience as a typesetter to operate his own press.

DRAMA & THE PERFORMING ARTS (Antiquity to the 20th century)

Armenian Theatre. Armenian theatre is among the most ancient dramatic traditions in all of Eurasia. Its beginnings are linked to its contacts with ancient Greece. The prominence of theatre in ancient Armenian culture is also linked to its urban centers, for it was in the capital cities equipped with theatres, such as Artashat and Tigranocetra, that the dramatic arts flourished the most. Ancient Armenia had a range of different types of professional performers, including singers of laments (*voghbergus*) and comedians (*katakagusan*). In 69 BCE, the Armenian king Tigran the Great (95-55 BCE) built a public theatre in the city of Dikranagert (Diyarbakır).

King Artavazd II King Artavazd II (r. 55-34 BCE), who succeeded his father Tigran, was the first recognized Armenian playwright as well as a theatre director. He composed tragedies as well as histories in Greek, both of which were praised by Plutarch. These tragedies were lost in antiquity. Artavazd II built the second Armenian theatre in the city of Artashat, and also served as its director. Among the plays produced in this theatre were Menander's comedies and Euripides' *Bacchae*. The Roman statesman and historian Dio Cassius records a memorable performance of the *Bacchae* at the Artashat theatre in 53 BCE, which was supervised by King Artavazd II, in which the skull used when the Theban princess Agave enters the stage was in actuality that of the Roman general Crassus.

Further Reading

V. Arvanian and L. G. Murad, *Two Thousand Years of the Armenian Theater* (New York: The Armenian National Council of America, 1954).

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How was Armenian dramaturgy shaped by ancient Greek theatre?

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

Turkic-Armenian Connections: Shadow Plays. The Turkic shadow play tradition was influential across the Caucasus, and has particularly shaped Armenian theatrical culture. This is a form of storytelling that uses flat cut out figures; the movement of the figures and the light source to create effects that impact the narrative. Shadow puppets can be shown walking, running, dancing, or fighting, for example. In the Ottoman tradition, the best known characters are Karagöz ("black eye" in Turkish) and Hacivat. This storytelling tradition spread across the Balkans and into the Caucasus.

Armenians feature in the shadow plays centered on Karagöz and Hacivat, often in a stereotyped fashion, such as in the role of footman or money-changer. There was also a specific character named Ermeni (Armenian) who was known for his fine voice and talent as a musician. Another domain in which the Armenian theatrical tradition borrowed from Turkish theatre is *orta oyunu* (comic theatre or *commedia dell'arte*), in which certain Armenian playwrights such as Hagop Baronian (discussed later) excelled. Since theatre was not part of the literary repertoire of Islamic culture, the absorption of Armenia by Arab empires slowed down the development of Armenia's theatrical tradition. Archeological excavations have however shown that the Armenian theatrical tradition persisted on a smaller scale throughout the Islamic period. Specifically, statues of actors and animal masks have been discovered in the fort of Kaitzun Bert in the

Armenian province of Lori. From the 11th to the 14th centuries, theatre continued to be performed in the region of Cilicia.

Armenian Musical Performance. While the theatrical tradition receded in importance during the medieval period, other modes of performance grew in prominence. One example is the traveling minstrel tradition, which goes by many different names across the Caucasus, and has only recently become the subject of sustained scholarly analysis. The Armenian minstrel is known as a *gusan*, a word that is treated as an equivalent to the classical Greek word *mimos* (mime). Songs sung by *gusans* are known variously as *yergk vipsanats* (storytellers' songs) and *tvelatsyn yergk* (metrical songs). *Gusans* were drawn from two social classes: feudal lords who performed as professional musicians and illiterate bards who wandered through Armenia, singing popular songs. They recited legends of ancient heroes to instrumental accompaniment, often in opposition to the teachings of the church. Goghtn, now in the modern region of Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan, was a center for medieval *gusans*. During the late medieval period, *gusans* were replaced by other types of musicians, called *ashuq* (variously spelled *ashugh*, *ashik*, *ashek*, or *ashiq*, depending on language, time, and context), who specialized in playing the *kamancha* and *saz*. The *ashuq* tradition is shared equally by Azeris and includes such Armenian bards as Jivani, Sheram, Shirin, Shahan, Havasi, and Ashot.

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Folk music tradition of Azerbaijan. The folk music tradition of Azerbaijan expanded rapidly during the medieval period, and came to encompass forms such as *gerayly*, *qoshma*, *tajnis*. *Gerayly* involve three to four couplets that follow a strict rhyme scheme that varies from couplet to couplet. The *qoshma* form contains four hemistiches per couplet, and each couplet has eleven syllables. The name (or penname) of lyric's author is given in the last couplet, as in the *takhallus* that concludes the classical ghazal (here it is called *mohurband*). *Qoshma* are organized by content, and include stories (*dastan*), adornment (*gözəlləmə*), narratives extending from the birth until the death of the hero (*vucudnamə*), and questions and answers or riddle poems (*qifilbənd*), and displays of mastery (*ustadnamə*).

Armenian-Azeri Connections: The Ashuq Tradition. Performances by *ashiqs* (singers in the *ashuq* tradition) also involved musical forms such as *tasnif*, *ashik*, and *mugham*. The tradition has been active in Armenian and Azeri since the medieval period and, anticipates key features of modern drama. The main difference is the role of music and poetry in the *ashuq* performative tradition. The *ashuq* tradition originated in Azerbaijan towards the end of the 15th century. The word derives from 'ashq, the Arabo-Persian word for a "love" that is as much spiritual as physical, and has been linked to the Turkic poet and mystic, Ahmet Yassawi (1105–1166), who was called an *ashiq*. *Ashuq* songs were also affiliated with the wider narrative tradition of *hikayat*, and can be *Ashuqs* was held to high standards of conduct by their community. 19th century Ashiq Alasgar summarized the *ashiq's* ethical code of behavior in a famous poem, in which he indicated that the *ashik* should be knowledgeable, thoughtful, polite. The *ashiq* was expected to tell the truth, even when the audience or people in positions of power did not want to hear it. A single story (*hikaye*) would typically include one hundred or more or songs of three or more stanzas each. One such example is the story of Shah Ismail, founder of the Safavid dynasty, in which this political figure becomes a master of the art of poetry, and of a musical instrument called the *saz*. In this new guise, Shah Ismail became a folk hero.

Ashiqs as protagonists. Many *ashuq* narratives feature *ashiqs* in the story themselves, both as narrators and protagonists. For example, there is a story about an *ashiq* in 16th century Constantinople who overcomes political obstacles and marries his beloved Nur. Yet another important *ashuq* narrative is linked to Ashiq Qarib ("wandering *ashiq*"), an *ashiq* from the 16th or 17th century who wanders through the Caucasus,

initially in search of worldly love, but who attains to spiritual during the course of his wandering. This latter story has been the subject of many reenactments, including by Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, Azerbaijani opera composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov, and Armenian filmmaker Sergei Parajanov. Finally, the story (*hikaye*) of the debate between Ashiq Valeh and Ashiq Zərniyar tells of how Ashiq Zərniyar wins a debate with Ashiq Valeh after forty other *ashiqs* have already lost to him and gone to prison. When Ashiq Zərniyar wins the debate, he frees all the imprisoned *ashiqs* and marries Zərniyar.

Epic of Koroghlu The epic of Koroghlu also involves an *ashuq* figure in the person of Koroghlu, whose story circulated across the wider Ottoman and Turkic world. It is believed to have originated in Azerbaijan, since the oldest written versions are from the region of Tabriz, an Azerbaijani speaking area of modern Iran. Georgians and Armenians developed their own versions of this story. The Azeri version places a special emphasis on Koroghlu as a noble bandit who steals from the rich to give to the poor. This emphasis links the story to other noble bandit narratives in Georgia, Armenia, and elsewhere in the Caucasus, which are often associated with the *abrek*. Interestingly, Koroghlu is himself an *ashiq*, and interrupts the third person narrative by breaking into verse. The opera version of the Koroghlu epic composed by Hajibeyov (discussed below) highlights his talents as a singer.

Mugham Karabakh, Shirvan, and Baku each developed different mugham tradition, and the *mugham* was particularly popular in the areas around Baku, Lənkorən, Masallı, and Lerik. From the 16th century onwards, the mugham began to be performed using Persian and Turkic lyric poems (*ghazals*) by poets such as Fizuli, Habibi, and Khatai. Alexandre Dumas attended a *mugham* ceremony in 19th century Shemakhi and was greatly impressed by what he witnessed.

Further Readings

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Discussion Questions:

- 1) How was the *ashuq* tradition disseminated across the Caucasus and how did it bring together Azeri, Armenian, and Georgian cultures?
- 2) With what other genres and modes of literary and performative discourse is the *ashuq* tradition affiliated?
- 3) How did the *ashuq* tradition shape drama and performance culture in the Caucasus?

EARLY MODERN

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 17th 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 17th century French tragedian Corneille, and the 18th 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 17th century French playwright Molière and the 18th 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 Arseno Odzelashvili (1797–1842) is one such figure. His ballad, called "Arsena's Song," was recited through the 19th 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?

Hagop Baronian. Like Akhundzadeh in Azerbaijani theatre, Western Armenian writer Hagop Baronian (1843-1891) is regarded as the most outstanding satirist in 19th century Armenian drama. Also similarly to Akhundzadeh, Baronian was inspired by the French playwright Moliere. Baronian shared the belief of many Transcaucasia playwrights during this period that theatre could transform society by bringing together the aesthetically beautiful with the socially useful. He saw education as the foundation of progressive social reform and advocated for parliamentary democracy. Baronian's satirical plays, such as *Brother Balthazar* (*Baghdasar Aghbar*, 1886), which focuses on the subject of divorce, direct their critiques towards the civil servants of the Ottoman state. Other plays, such as *Eastern Dentist* (1869), satirize gender norms and the institution of marriage. *Eastern Dentist* features a dentist who cheats on his wife in his patients' homes. Baronian was critical of the Romantic repertoire that was popular in the theatre of his time, and preferred instead to dramatize topics with social relevance. *Brother Balthazar* depicts a wife who is bored by her boorish husband who begins an affair with a sophisticated family friend named Kibar, whose name ironically means "upright." The play pivots on the contrast between two visions of women's role in society. Baronian is viewed by critics as adhering to a traditional understanding of women's role, in contrast to the more radical playwrights of the following century, such as Shivanzadeh.

The Perils of Politeness *The Perils of Politeness* (*Kaghakavarutean vnasnere*, 1886-1888) was originally written as a work of prose and published serially in the Constantinople-based journal *Khigar*. Soon thereafter, it was transformed into a two-act satire for the stage. *Honorable Beggars* (*Մեծապատիվ մուրացկաններ/ Metsapativ Muratskanner*, 1887), often recognized as Baronian's masterpiece, focuses on human vanity and greed. In this play, a wealthy provincial landowner travels to Constantinople in the hopes of finding a wife for himself. The landowner is only interested things that display his name prominently. As he mocks the landowner's philistinism, Baronian deploys multiple satirical strategies, including incongruous juxtapositions that reveal a clash between the landowner's unsophisticated ways and his cosmopolitan urban environment, ridicule, and vaudeville. Baronian follows Moliere in his use of occasional one-word lines of dialogue that seem to reduce the speakers to automatons for comic effect. Baronian had difficulty getting *Honorable Beggars* and other plays staged due to a ban that Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) had imposed on all Armenian theatre.

Vaudevilles As it developed in the Ottoman empire, Western Armenian drama was shaped by influences quite different from the Russian and German trends that shaped Transcaucasia. Armenian playwrights Nikoghayos Pughinian and Mikayel Ter-Grigorian produced vaudevilles during the 1850s, which mocked the way in which Armenian was spoken in Tbilisi and making fun of the Armenian merchant class. Other Armenian comedies included Archbishop Khoren Kalfayan's (Khoren Narpey) *Alafranka* (1862), which was performed in Constantinople throughout the 1860s. Kalfayan criticized Armenians' worship of European mores.

Gabriel Sundukian. Alongside Baronian, Gabriel Sundukian (1825-1912), was the leading Eastern Armenian playwright of the 19th century. He was born in Tbilisi to a merchant family. His father died when he was only six years old. Sundukian began his education at a private school founded by Hakob Shahan Jrpetian, who would later become the first professor of Armenian at the Ecole Pratique des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris. During this period, Sundukian studied modern and classical Armenian, French, and Italian. He then improved his Russian language skills at a local school for the gentry, and finally entered a Russian gymnasium in 1840. When he finished this stage in his education, Sundukian was selected to attend St. Petersburg University on a government-funded scholarship. In order to become an official translator for the Vice-Regent of Transcaucasia. While in St. Petersburg, Sundukian focused on Oriental languages: Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. His final project was on Persian principles of versification. He also read widely in European literature; among his favorite writers were Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, and Friedrich Schiller. Like Akhundzadeh, Sundukian first became fascinated with drama while attending performances of Griboedov's *Wit from Woe*, Gogol's *Inspector General* (1842), and French plays that were part of the current repertoire. When he finished his studies in St. Petersburg and returned to Tbilisi, Sundukian entered the Russian civil service. In his spare time, he taught geometry on a volunteer basis at the Nersisian School, an institution that played a part in the education of many Armenian writers, including the playwright Derenik Demirchyan and the translator Ervant Megerditchian. Two years after he began working for the Russian colonial administration, Sundukian was relocated to Derbent and assigned the job of engineering and architectural inspector. Georgian poet Grigol Orbeliani arranged for Sundukian's relocation to Tbilisi and his transfer to the department of rail communications.

Sneezing at night's good luck In 1863, Sundukian's first play was staged at an Armenian theatre company. It was entitled *Sneezing at night's good luck* (*Gisheruan sabre kher e*), and was modeled on Nikoghayos Pughinian's vaudeville entitled *Dalal Ghalo*. Even in this early play, we can discern the major themes that were to preoccupy Sundukian for the rest of his career: marriage and money. Unfortunately, the play was harshly criticized in the local Armenian press. The next three plays— *Quandary* (*Khatabala*, 1866), *Oskan Petrovich in the Next World* (*Oskan Petrovich en kinkume*), and *Et cetera or the new Diogenes* (*Ev*

ayln kam nor Diogenese, 1869)—continue to engage with the issue of marriage and differences in class and wealth between the prospective bride and groom. A more serious phase in Sundukian's career began with the production of *Pepo* (1871), a play named for the main character, a thirty-five-year-old fisherman who dresses like a mountaineer. *Pepo's* father is cheated by a usurer while arranging for his daughter's dowry and Pepo decides to bring the usurer to court. The plot and themes are influenced by Moliere's *Marriage by Compulsion* (*Le Mariage force*, 1664). The play also reflects the growing importance of the capitalist economy and of the merchant class within Tbilisi society. *Pepo* has attained tremendous popularity in the Armenian dramatic repertoire.

Ruined family Sundukian's *Ruined family* (*Kanduats ochakhe*, 1873) is concerned like *Pepo* with the impact of capitalism on family norms. *Spouses* (*Amusinner*, 1893), was the only play Sundukian ever wrote in the new standard Eastern Armenian dialect. All other plays were written in the local dialect of Armenian spoken in Tbilisi. *Spouses* is also noteworthy for a plot twist which is reminiscent of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and anticipates Shirvanzade's *Did She Have the Right?* (discussed in the next section) in terms of the independence displayed by its female protagonist: the cheated-on wife leaves her husband, and he divorces her. *Spouses* is one of the first plays in the Armenian dramatic repertoire to insist on the importance of mutual love and equality within marriage. Alongside his advancement of Armenian theatre, Sundukian was also active in Georgian theatrical circles. When his plays were translated into Georgian, he would often direct these productions on the Tbilisi and Kutaisi stage. His plays were frequently performed in the Tbilisi State Theatre, and were popular with both Armenian and Georgian audiences. As a flexible artist always open to new media and new forms of creation, Sundukian became enthusiastically involved in adapting several of his plays for cinema, at a time when this art form was in its most incipient phase. Two decades after his death, *Pepo* was produced in 1935 as a movie in what was the first Armenian talking film. The director was the famous Hamo Beknazaryan.

Translation Translation played a huge role in introducing Armenian theatre-goers and playwrights to wider currents in world drama. Among the key works that were performed on the Armenian stage in Armenian translation during the 19th century were Griboedov's comedy *Wit from Woe* in 1827 and Racine's *Athalie* in 1834.

Further Reading

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Discussion Questions

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

What social groups and classes were the primary targets of satire by 19th century Transcaucasian playwrights?

Alongside drama, what other performance genres were popular in the 19th century Caucasus?

20TH CENTURY

Aleksandr Shirvanzadeh. For much of the 19th century, Tbilisi was the center of theatre. Yet, as Baku became a commercial and industrial hub during the second half of the 19th century, its cultural importance increased. By the early 20th century, Baku was also the center of many important dramatic productions. The growth of Baku, which was linked to the growth of the oil industry and the city's position on the edge of the Caspian Sea, facilitated the literary career of Aleksandr Shirvanzadeh (1858-1935), widely regarded as the greatest realist dramatist of Eastern Armenian literature. Shirvanzadeh's most notable play *For the Sake of Honor* (*Պատուի համար/Patui hamar*, 1904), brings feminism and capitalism into conflict. After a successful run in Baku, it was staged the following year in Tbilisi. Three years later it was staged in Constantinople, where it won great acclaim with a Western Armenian audience. Western Armenian critic Krikor Zohrab compared this play to Ibsen's "northern" dramas, which were at the time very popular across Transcaucasia. In the span of seven years, *For the Sake of Honor* was performed over three hundred times, vastly surpassing the record for any other Armenian-language drama. As his name indicates, Shirvanzadeh was born in the town of Shemakhi in the province of Shirvan, a cultural center of the Caucasus since the twelfth century, during the reign of the Shivanshahs. He was born Aleksandr Movsesian, but later changed his name to Shirvanzadeh, literally meaning "son of Shirvan." After first being educated at a local Protestant

Armenian school, he moved to a regional Russian school, following which he moved to Baku to take up a position as a bookkeeper. He found work in the offices of a petroleum company, and also worked as a librarian for the Armenian Benevolent Society, where he encountered the writings of French novelists such as Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, and Stendhal, as well as Shakespeare. Shirvanzadeh's aunt lived in Baku, and she introduced him to city's most progressive thinkers.

Shirvanzadeh as journalist Shirvanzadeh's initial publications were journalistic in nature, and appeared in the Armenian-language newspapers of Tbilisi. He turned two of his novels, *Honor (Namus, 1885)* and *The Epileptic (Tsawagare, 1894)*, into plays. Like Siamanto, Shirvanzadeh was strongly affected by the Hamidian massacres of 1896. He became a political activist for the revolutionary Social Democrat Party (Hunchakian), in which feminist poet Shushanik Kurghinian had also been active, and travelled to Russia in this capacity. It was during this trip that he was imprisoned in Tbilisi's Metekhi Prison. Two decades after his imprisonment, the Russian socialist realist writer Maxim Gorky would write him an admiring letter in 1916, alluding to this event. "I heard your name for the first time in 1892 in Tiflis, and then in 1897 when I was in the Metekhi prison," Gorky wrote, "You see! We're old acquaintances." A second imprisonment followed, this time in Odessa, from 1898-1899.

Shirvanzadeh released from prison When he was released, Shirvanzadeh returned to Baku and began to focus his writings on the struggle for gender equality, particularly in terms of voting rights. The suffragette movement was in full swing around the world, including in the Caucasus. Shirvanzadeh wrote two plays on this topic—*Evgine* (1901) and *Did she have the right? (Uner irawunk, 1902)*—as well as a novel, *Vardan Ahrumian*. Continuing his migratory existence, Shirvanzadeh relocated to Paris in 1905, and lived there for five years, during which time he wrote the political drama *Ruined (Kortsanwaste, 1909)*. When he returned to the Caucasus, he produced more plays on political themes, including *The charlatan (Sharlatane, 1912)* and *In the days of terror (Arhawirki Orerin, 1917)*, a work that coincided with the Bolshevik Revolution. Shirvanzadeh's final play—and the first political full-length comedy in Soviet Armenian literature—was composed in 1926, by which point he had returned to Armenia. Entitled *Morgan's in-law (Morgani khnamin)*, the play focuses on a group of wealthy expats in Paris who dream of claiming back the properties they used to own, which have been repossessed by the Soviet state.

Shirvanzadeh's plays as films No less than four of Shirvanzadeh's plays were turned into feature films. *Namus* was produced as a film in 1925 by Haykino studios, and it became the first Armenian silent feature film. In the next decade, the director Hamo Beknazaryan would produce Sundukian's *Pepo* as the first Armenian talking film. *Evil Spirit, For the Sake of Honor, Chaos*, and were turned into films in 1927, 1956, and 1972, respectively. In 1934, one year before he died, Shirvanzadeh was invited to the first Soviet Writers Conference and awarded the title of "People's Writer." Gorky noted in the above-cited letter that Shirvanzadeh's works were read from English to the Scandinavian peninsula to Italy.

Lewon Shant Shirvanzadeh's contemporary Lewon Shant (1869-1951) was born in Western Armenia, and first educated at the same school where Avetik Isahakyan attended: the Gevorkian Theological Seminary in Etchmiadzin (Vagharshapat). He then studied philosophy and psychology for six years in the German universities of Leipzig, Jena and Munich, before returning to Constantinople and resuming his job as a teacher. His play *Ancient Gods (Astvadsner, 1913)* was an epoch-making work. Four years after its initial debut the play was directed by the renowned director Konstantin Stanislavsky and translated into many languages. Alongside his playwrighting activities, Shant led an active life as a politician. He was a vice-president of the Armenian Parliament and negotiated with the newly-installed communist regime in Moscow in 1921. After Armenia was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920, Shant migrated from Armenia to Paris and then to Cairo and Beirut. His works were for the most part banned from publication throughout the Soviet period.

Further Reading

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Alexander Shirvanzade, *For the Sake of Honor and Evil Spirit*, translated by Nishan Parlakian (New York: St. Vartan's Press, 1976).

Discussion Questions

- 1) What new genres developed in Azeri dramaturgy during the 20th century?
- 2) How did minority voices and voices from marginalized communities make themselves heard in 20th century drama?
- 3) How was the struggle for gender equality in the Caucasus represented in 20th century drama?