

Southern Caucasus Fiction, Legends, Myths

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ANCIENT PERIOD

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

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

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.

Armenian. The oldest known oral Armenian epic, *Hayk and Bel*, has been dated to the 9th-7th centuries BCE. *Zruys* 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 (Եղեմսական 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 significant 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 awakened 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 Questions

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

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

Barlaam and Josaphat as saints Both Barlaam and Josaphat were canonized as saints in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, and later in the Latin, Church. The Georgian version is regarded as the first Christianized version of this eastern tale, and it was translated into Greek by the Georgian monk Euthymius of Athos (955–1028). It was through this Greek translation that the Barlaam and Josaphat story was translated into Latin in 1048. From Latin, it entered European literature, and was rendered into Catalan, Provençal, Italian, Portuguese, Old French, Anglo-Norman, Middle High German, Serbian,

Croatian, Hungarian, Old Norse, Middle English, and Hebrew. Across its many versions, the core story became spiritualized as an allegory for freedom the will and the pursuit of inner peace.

Armenian. 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 Srvandziants, 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. 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.

Georgian-Persian Connections. Medieval fiction and legends in the Caucasus followed the same pattern as poetry in that they were heavily influenced by Persian popular culture. Many masterpieces of Georgian literary prose during this period were adaptations of Persian originals. One such example is Sergis Tmogveli's *Visramiani*, a translation of Fakhr al-Din Gurgani's Persian romance *Vis and Ramin* which was carried out during the reign of Queen Tamar. Like other Georgian literary works of this period, Tmogveli reflects a secular turn within Georgian literature. The Georgian version of this Persian story is important for among other reasons preserving variants of the Persian text which are no longer extant in Persian. But it is also an important work in its own right, and is particularly highly regarded for its florid Georgian prose.

Visramiani Georgian poet Ilia Chavchavadze arranged for the first publication of *Visramiani* in 1884. *Visramiani* was among the first works of Georgian literature to be translated into English; the translation was done in 1914 by the scholar and diplomat Oliver Wardrop, who was the United Kingdom's first Chief Commissioner of Transcaucasia in Georgia from 1919-1921, and is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Georgian-British cultural relations. Sergis Tmogveli's work has been a popular subject for lavish manuscript illustrations in the Persianate tradition across the centuries.

Amiran-Darejaniani *Amiran-Darejaniani* by Moses Khoneli is another Georgian text dating to the twelfth century that traverses the Georgian and Persian literary tradition. It is the oldest extant original Georgian romance, and bears the imprint of Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*. Much like Armenian folk tales, the work contains many magical and mythical creatures, including monsters and *devs*. Khoneli's work served as a precedent for Rustaveli's epic poem *Knight in the Panther's Skin*, which was composed soon afterwards. In fact, the authorship of *Amiran-Darejaniani* is first mentioned by Rustaveli in his epilogue. As a work that work inspired many village storytellers throughout Georgia, Moses Khoneli's *Amiran-Darejaniani* exemplifies how written texts shape oral storytelling traditions. This work inspired many story telling cycles which were passed down by generations of storytellers across Georgia. Although Khoneli's version of *Amiran-Darejaniani* is in prose, his work inspired many later renditions in verse. Both the Armenian *Daredevils of Sassoun* and the Georgian *Amiran-Darejaniani* share in common features of ancient adventure tales from other literary traditions, such as the Arabic tale of the knight and poet Antarah ibn Shaddad.

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Discussion Questions:

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

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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

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

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

Tepegöz In terms of dating, Arabic sources indicate that some version of this work, under the name *Oghuznama*, was in circulation by the early 14th century. In his *Durar al-Tijan*, Mamluk historian Sayf al-

Din al-Dawadari attests that this work was passed “from hand to hand.” Al-Dawadari then goes on to describe a figure who resembles the one-eyed ogre Tepegöz, who also appears in the Armenian tale, “King Zarzand’s Daughter.” Tepegöz’s name is etymologically linked to the Greek *sarandapekhos*, meaning “forty cubits,” and hence denoting a giant. According to al-Dawadari, the tales that circulate about this ogre are performed by wise Turkish bards who are skilled in playing the lute.

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

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

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

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

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

Shah Abbas

The story begins with a magic horse who emerges from the sea and impregnates one of the mares of the king, who in several versions is the Safavid Shah Abbas (1588-1629). The royal stable master Ali informs the king of the circumstances of the impregnation, and predicts that the colt resulting from the union of the two horses will be the greatest horse in the world. The king awaits the birth of the

baby horse with excitement. When it is born, however, the colt turns out to be less magnificent than the shah had expected. The Shah orders the colt to be destroyed and has Ali the stable master blinded.

Rowshan Even after he has been blinded, Ali manages to save the colt. He tells his son Rowshan, whose name significantly means “light,” to sequester it for forty days. When Rowshan grows up, he escapes with his father to Ottoman lands. According to some versions, Koroghlu receives the gift of poetry on this journey while bathing in a magical spring. At the crossroads of routes leading to Baghdad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Istanbul, they set up a fortress called Jamlibel, meaning “misty mountain.” His father soon dies, and Rowshan takes on the name Koroghlu, in recognition of his father’s blindness. Rowshan’s retinue of outlaws and bandits bear the epithet *dali*, meaning “crazy.” Like Mahmud of Ghazna, Rowshan has a young companion named Ayvaz. While building this realm, he carefully watches over his horse Kirat, whom Shah Abbas had ordered to be killed.

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

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

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Discussion Questions

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

19TH CENTURY

The Shift from Persian to Russian. The 19th century was a watershed period for literatures across the South Caucasus, particularly in the domain of fiction. Although legends had been composed and recited for centuries in the literatures of this region, fiction in the modern sense—epitomized by the short story and novel—was by and large an importation from Europe, often via Russia, but sometimes directly from France. Major works of fiction were published in each of the region's major three literatures: Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri. This was a century that saw the boundaries of the Caucasus being significantly redrawn, particularly after the Treaty of Gulistan (1813), which followed the storming of Lankaran by Russian forces, and the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828). This latter treatise caused Qajar Iran to cede control over the Yerevan Khanate, the Nakhichevan Khanate, and the Talysh Khanate to the Russian empire. In addition, the boundary between Russia and Iran was newly drawn at the Aras River. As a result of these changes, many Armenian and Georgian writers grew up in geopolitical contexts that were radically unlike those into which they had been born. Often, they grew up speaking Persian alongside their native language, but by the time they reached adulthood, it was Russian, not Persian, that offered the greatest number of opportunities to ambitious writers.

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

Eventually he falls off a haystack, is mortally wounded, and tragically dies, just after revealing his love for the princes. His mother freezes to death while mourning for her loss on his grave.

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

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

Armenian. 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.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What new prose genres appear in the literatures of the 19th century Caucasus?
- 2) What was Abovian's contribution to the formation of a modern Armenian literary language?
- 3) How was the Russo-Persian War represented in the literatures of the South Caucasus?
- 4) What were the dominant themes of 19th century Georgian fiction and how did these change over the course of the century?

20TH CENTURY

Armenian.

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 Marmaracık 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.

Azerbaijan. While Armenians were facing genocide across the former Ottoman empire, in the regions of the former Russian empire, a new literature was being born. One of the most popular novels about the Caucasus written during the early decades of the Soviet period is *Ali and Nino* (1937). The novel was written in German and published by the Austrian publisher E.P. Tal. The author published under the pseudonym Kurban Said, meaning "fortunate sacrifice." Kurban Said's identity is disputed, although commentators accept that it is the Ukrainian-Jewish writer and journalist Lev Nussimbaum (1905-1942), who published under the penname Essad Bey. Other candidates for the novel's authorship include Azerbaijani statesman and writer Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli (1887-1943) and Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels von Bodmershof (1894–1982), who registered the copyright to the work with German authorities and claimed that the pseudonym Kurban Said was hers. Nussimbaum, although educated in Baku until the age of fourteen, was not well-versed in Azeri, and Chamanzaminli did not study German beyond high school. These limitations on both sides lend credence to the thesis that the novel is the result of composite authorship between these two.

Ali and Nino *Ali and Nino* tells of the longstanding love of Ali Khan Shirvanshir for the Georgian girl Nino Kipiani, whom he dreams of marrying. The uniqueness of this novel, and the primary reason for its wide appeal in the more than thirty languages into which it has been translated, is the way in which it brings into dialogue cultural strands of East and West, specifically Muslim Azerbaijani culture with Georgian Christianity. The work is also remembered for its striking evocations of Baku during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920).

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

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia

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

Mikheil Javakhishvili

Javakhishvili was an equally talented writer who met with a much darker fate. He began publishing at the turn of the 20th century, as early as 1903. *Jaqo's Dispossessed* (ჯაყოს ხიზნები/ *jaqos xiznebi*, 1924) was his first major extended work of prose, and it has remained a classic ever since its initial publication. Javakhishvili's later novels continued in the tradition of Qazbegi with their focus on mountaineers who were engaged in rebellion against the tsar. *Kvachi Kvachantiradze* (კვაჭი კვაჭანტირაძე, 1924) deals with the fate of Khevsur mountaineers under the Soviet dispensation. His final

novel *Arsena of Marabda* (არსენა მარაბდელი, 1933), over which he labored for seven years, concerns the 18th century noble bandit Arsena Odzelashvili, who like so many literary and historical figures of the Caucasus, was known for stealing from the ruling class in order to distribute his proceeds with the poor. The novel's wide popularity may have proved fatal to Javakhishvili, for the work was criticized by Soviet leaders who suspected it of being a surreptitious critique of Soviet rule. When Paolo Iashvili shot himself in a session of the Union of Soviet Writers, Javakhishvili was alone in praising the poet for bravery. Soon enough the animus of the Union of Writers turned directly on him, and Javakhishvili was declared, four days after the death of Iashvili, an enemy of the people, who should be expelled from the Union of Writers and physically annihilated. Javakhishvili was arrested in August, tortured until he signed a confession, and executed at gunpoint in September of that same year. Javakhishvili's status as enemy of the people was a danger not only to himself, but also to those close to him and to his literary legacy. His brother was executed and his wife was exiled from Georgia. His manuscripts were destroyed and much of his unpublished work remains lost to this day. Although Javakhishvili was rehabilitated in the 1950s, which meant that his work was no longer banned, his legacy continued—and continues—to be obscured as a result of the destruction that was visited on his writings by the Soviet state.

Further Reading

Kurban Said, *Ali and Nino*, translated by Jenia Graman (New York: Random House, 2000).

Carl Niekerk and Cori Crane, eds., *Approaches to Kurban Said's Ali and Nino: Love, Identity, and Intercultural Conflict* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2017).

Hagop Oshagan, *Remnants: The Way of the Womb*, translated by G. M. Goshgarian; introduction by Nanor Kebranian (Gomidas Institute, 2014).

Nanor Kebranian, "Another Pluralism: Reading Dostoevsky Across the Sea of Marmara," *Comparative Literature Studies* 55.1 (2018): 172-193.

Tom Reiss, *The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life* (New York: Random House, 2005).

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

Keith Hitchins, "Theme and Character in the Azerbaijani Novel, 1930-1957," *World Literature Today* 57.1 (1983): 30-35.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How did writers from Western and Eastern Armenia connect with and influence each other?
- 2) What were the channels for literary exchange among Armenian, Azeri, and Georgian writers during the 20th century?
- 3) What were the dominant literary movements in the southern Caucasus during this period and how were they shaped by parallel developments in European literatures?
- 4) What impact did Soviet terror have on the development of 20th century Georgian fiction?