

Southern Caucasus Literatures

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Introducing the Literatures of the Southern Caucasus (Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri)

Origins. The Caucasus is home to some of the oldest literary cultures on earth. As a result of the many different empires that have in one era or another exerted control over the Caucasus, it is also home to literatures that are among the most internally diverse in cultural, linguistic, and religious terms. In Sukhumi (on the Black Sea) alone, Greek and Roman geographers estimated that between seventy and three hundred languages were spoken there.

Whereas for ancient Greece and Rome the Caucasus was a distant geography at the borders of the known world, later empires including the Byzantines, the Timurids, the Ottomans, the Safavids, the Qajars, the Afsharids, and, finally, the Russian and Soviet empires, have claimed certain portions of the Caucasus as their own. Even when Georgia and Armenia were independent kingdoms, their cultural, economic, political, and religious horizons were heavily shaped by the dominant imperial power. The result of these heterogeneous influences is an extraordinarily rich and multilingual literary cultural milieu that bears the traces of the languages of all the empires that have at various times occupied it.

Comparisons. Although they have often been occupied by the same imperial powers, the three main literatures in the region that came to be known in the 19th century as the South Caucasus also evolved separately from each other. Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri Turkish belong to completely different language families (Indo-European, Ibero-Caucasian, and Turkic) and therefore do not share much in common in terms of their genetic origins. But what they lack in genetic affiliation they more than make up for in terms of cultural hybridity. Their shared history and culture, as evidenced by traditions such as the minstrel—variously called *ashuq*, *ashik*, *ashek*, or *aşiq*, depending on the linguistic system—create a common foundation for cultural and literary production. The remainder of this introduction attempts to map these cross-cultural influences and to trace their impact on the three major indigenous literatures of the southern Caucasus.

Antiquity. During antiquity, Greek was a major language of cosmopolitan literary culture throughout the southern Caucasus, and the Caucasus itself figures widely in Greek and Latin literature. Greeks have resided in the Caucasus since 1000 BCE, and were particularly concentrated in Pontus, on southern coast of the Black Sea. The colonization of the Caucasus by the Greeks provided a rich repository for the ample legends and epic narratives relating to the Caucasus in Greek literature. These include journey of Jason and the Argonauts, Odysseus' wanderings in the land of the nomadic Cimmerians (likely an Indo-Iranian people who migrated throughout the Caucasus and merged with the local populations) as recorded by Homer, Heracles' navigation of the Black Sea, and story of Zeus tying Prometheus to Mt. Elbrus as a punishment for violating the gods' mandate not to share fire with humans.

Following these beginnings recorded in ancient legend and epic, Greek was important as a language of learning for both Armenians and Georgians. When the Byzantine empire converted to Christianity under Constantine the Great (r. 306-337) this had the effect of further strengthening links between the Byzantine empire and Christian Armenia and Georgia. Indeed, western Armenia comprised part of the Byzantine empire from 387-536, while eastern Armenia was part of the Sasanian empire from 252-646. Georgia was an independent state for most of this period, but its

political fortunes and cultural horizons were heavily shaped by activities of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.

Between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE the Caucasus was divided between Caucasian Albania to the east and Kolchis to the west, Armenia in the southwest, and the Iranian kingdom of Atropatene in the southeast. Much of present-day Azerbaijan formed part of Caucasian Albania, an empire that was an important force in ancient Caucasus culture and history, even though it is largely forgotten today. Caucasian Albania encompassed what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan as well as Daghestan, particularly the area around Derbent. Caucasian Albanians are mentioned in Arrian's *Anabasis* (2nd century CE) as part of a contingent led by the satrap of Media, which indicates that they were part of this satrapy, and hence were part of the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE), even though his armies never reached the Caucasus. Inhabitants of Caucasian Albania converted to Christianity soon after Armenia adopted it as their state religion in 301. The Caucasian Albanian alphabet was invented by the same Mesrop Mashtots who invented the Armenian alphabet.

Compared to ancient Georgia and Armenia, which have left behind rich and sophisticated literary traditions, relatively little is known about Caucasian Albania. (The denomination "Albania" is taken from Latin for mountainous and does not imply any connection with the Albanians of Eastern Europe.) The contemporary Udi people of Daghestan and Azerbaijan regard themselves as descendants of the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. They call their homeland Aghwank and Aluank in the contemporary Udi language. The written language of Caucasian Albania was called Aghvank. Udi is a living language but it is also in immediate danger of extinction: as a people who today reside in Azerbaijan and other parts of the former Soviet Union and whose number around ten thousand, their population is greatly diminished. Although Udi has long since ceased to be a formative literary language, it is an important constituent of the political and literary landscape of the ancient Caucasus.

Medieval. The Persian poetic tradition permeated Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri Turkish during the post-classical/medieval and early modern periods more pervasively than any other literature or culture, although it does so differently for each of these three cultures. In the 19th and 20th century, Persian was supplanted by Russian as the most influential literary language. Both Persian and Russian literary influences linked authors from the South Caucasus to a wider world literature, even when imperial configurations placed the South Caucasus on their peripheries. The Arabic literary tradition exerted another layer of cultural influence, which only in the rarest of cases, such as that of Daghestan in the northern Caucasus, superseded that of Persian. Meanwhile, Turkic literary culture built on its existing foundations in the southern Caucasus; Turkic is also indigenous to the region from at least the eleventh century, most visibly in the case of Azerbaijan (currently divided between Iran and an independent former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan), in which Azeri, a branch of Oghuz Turkic, is spoken. During the medieval and early modern period, the Turkic orientation of certain peoples of the Caucasus mixed further with Persian. While in the beginning, Persian served as the primary medium for literary expression, from the early modern period onwards this role was usurped by Azeri Turkic.

Religions. The religious traditions of the southern Caucasus combine diversity and confluence in ways that mirror the trajectories of their literatures. Armenian and Georgia both belong to ancient Christian traditions, while Azeris follow the Shia branch of Islam. Yet all three peoples—Armenians and Azeris in particular—have been heavily influenced by Zoroastrian practices and belief systems. The traces of Zoroastrian ritual and belief are still visible throughout Azerbaijan, and many Zoroastrian temples still stand. Although, within the southern Caucasus, Islam was only adopted by the Saljuqs and their vassal states and was never the religion of Armenia or Georgia, it has nonetheless exerted tremendous influence on religious and cultural life in the Caucasus and helped to create a common foundation with the Muslim mountaineers of the northern Caucasus. Although Christianity provided a powerful bond between Armenian and Georgia, setting them apart from the Muslim-majority regions of the Caucasus, Armenian and Georgian Christianity have diverged theologically since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE. These religious divergences have not prevented the development of a shared literary ethos across the southern Caucasus—often encompassing the northern Caucasus as well—that partakes variously and successively in Byzantine, Persianate, and Russian aesthetics, as the dominant culture changed throughout history.

Scripts. Finally, in studying the literatures of the southern Caucasus it is worth bearing in mind the distinctive yet overlapping histories of the Armenian and Georgian scripts. The Armenian script was invented around 405 CE by Mashtots, soon after Armenia's adoption of Christianity as a state

religion. Although the Georgian alphabet predates the Christian era by most accounts and Roman grammarian Marcus Cornelius Fronto referred to a written Georgian language in the 2nd century CE, the Georgian script known as Asomtavruli was introduced at the same time as the invention of the Armenian alphabet. The alphabetic systems of Armenia and Georgia are distinct from each other, but their parallel development attests to the widespread impact of Christianity in the southern Caucasus. One indication of this convergence is the Armenian legend which holds that Mashtots invented not only the Armenian alphabet but also the Georgian alphabet. Although Georgian sources suggest a more ancient origin for the Georgian script, the legend itself attests to the shared trajectory of Georgian and Armenian Christianity and the mutual debt of their literatures to this religion.

Topographies. Place names reveal both how much Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri Turkish have in common alongside what separates them. For example, Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia, is regularly referred to as Tiflis in Armenian, Russian, and Turkic sources, which take their cue from the Arabic and Persian tradition. Istanbul, a center of Armenian literary activity throughout the centuries, is regularly referred to as Constantinople, in recognition of its Greek past. The versions of place names adopted in this study guide reflect local and indigenous usages, and consequently vary by context.

Terminologies. Although Georgian is an ancient culture, the exact perimeters of the Georgian nation have changed dramatically across the centuries. The same can be said for Armenian. For the purposes of this study guide, “Georgian” has been applied broadly to include peoples, such as Svans, who speak languages related to Georgian yet not entirely synonymous with it. Similarly, Azeri Turkic and Azerbaijani have been used interchangeably, with the latter more commonly used to refer to the Soviet period. The distinctions are of course modern, and not wholly relevant to premodern contexts. Every effort has been taken to respect local usage in terms of place names.

Titles. The titles of all works mentioned in this study guide are given in English translation. For Georgian and Armenian, this is followed in most cases by the title in the original script in the first mention, as well as by a transliteration in cases where such information is available and is not simply a proper name. Other literatures, such as Azeri, have been written in so many different scripts across time, that including the original script did not seem useful.

General overviews of the literatures of South Caucasus

Stephen H. Rapp, *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014).

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What major empires influenced literature and culture in the southern Caucasus?
- 2) What role did Udi literature and culture play in the ancient Caucasus?
- 3) How did Georgian and Armenian writing develop in relation to each other?
- 4) What is the role of Turkic literary culture in the literatures of the southern Caucasus?

1. POETRY (Antiquity to the 20th century)

ANTIQUITY

Comparisons. Prior to the invention of the Armenian alphabet in the 5th century, Armenians wrote in Greek, Latin, Middle Persian, and Pahlavi. Although it was arguably the first dominant language of written literary expression in the Caucasus, Greek existed alongside a flourishing oral tradition. Minstrel poets known as *gusans* kept the poetic tradition alive by traveling through Armenian lands, singing songs in many different genres. They performed at funerals, weddings, harvest festivals, and religious holidays. Meanwhile, in Georgia oral poetry flourished, particularly in the mountainous regions of Pshav-Khevsureti, Megrelian, Svan, and Racha. In Azerbaijan, a similar pattern can be observed; the figure of the *ashiq* is the Turkic counterpart to the Armenian *gusan*.

Georgian.

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

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

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

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

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

Written Poetry The exact beginnings of written poetry have not been established for any literature of the Caucasus. The inscriptions on the walls of the Ateni Sioni Church near the city of Gori in eastern Georgia at the confluence of the Mtkvari and the Liakhvi River are the oldest known examples

of rhymed verse in Georgian. They have been dated to the second half of the 9th century. Early Georgian religious poetry is influenced by Byzantine hymnography, among other sources. It was only towards the end of the 11th century that rhymed poetry became commonplace in Georgian literature. Although rhyme became a ubiquitous feature of subsequent Georgian folk poetry, the folk poetry of Svan continues to lack rhyme.

Armenian. Like written Georgian poetry, 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 Armenian 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 Bal 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* (Լարեկացի), 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).

Azerbaijan

Although there is no extant Turkic-language poetry from the ancient period, the region of Azerbaijan coincided with the territory of Caucasian Albania, which had a written literature and likely a vibrant oral tradition as well, practically none of which is extant. Poetry in Udi, the language of Caucasian Albania has not reached us.

Further Reading

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What are the earliest extant examples of poetry in ancient Georgian and Armenian?
- 2) What were the most popular genres of poetry in ancient Georgian and Armenian?

- 3) How did religion interact with culture in fostering the development of written poetry in Georgian and Armenian?
- 4) What was the written tradition of the region of modern Azerbaijan in antiquity?

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

Georgian.

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

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

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

Persian in Azerbaijan. Although Azeri was not regularly used for written literary expression until the 14th century, the region of Azerbaijan, which was then part of the wider Persian world, was the birthplace of many of the most important poets of the entire Persian tradition, including Nizami of Ganja (1141-1209) in northwestern Azerbaijan and Khaqani of Shirvan (1120-1199).

Khaqani Shirvani Khaqani's literary milieu of Shirvan, not far from the border with Daghestan, also included a number of lesser known poets including Falaki of Shirvan, Mujir al-Din Baylaqani, and Qatran Tabrizi. Nizami's father-in-law Abu'l 'Ala Ganjevi was also a poet of note, although the majority of his poetry is no longer extant. Although he left Shirvan for a pilgrimage that took him across Iraq and passed the final years of his life in Tabriz, where he died, Khaqani had deep roots in the Caucasus and often referred to it, mostly in negative terms, in his verse. His mother was a Christian convert to Islam—in the *Two Gifts from Iraq* (*Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn*), his autobiography in verse, he suggested that she was kidnapped, enslaved, and forcibly converted—and scholars have detected puns in his poems based on the Georgian language. Khaqani's Christian Qasida is a landmark work that reflected in poetic terms on the intertwinement of Islam and Christianity, while also using Christian theology as a means of criticizing the Muslim sultan. Khaqani wrote frequently about imprisonment in his poems, and is known for bringing the genre of Persian prison poetry (*habsiyyat*) to new level of poetic exigency.

Nizami Ganjevi Unlike Khaqani, Nizami never left the place of his birth (or at least he never wrote about any travelling he may have done). Yet the romances he composed, all of which were written from his home in Ganja, circulated across the Persianate world and inspired countless imitations in Turkic literatures (Azeri, Ottoman, Chaghatay, and others), Kurdish, Georgian, Pashto, Urdu, Judeo-

Persian, and in many other languages of West Asia. Nizami married a Kipchak slave girl sent to him by Fakhr al-Din Bahramshah, the ruler of Darband, who died soon after he completed the love story *Khusrow and Shirin*.

Nizami's romances Nizami's romances belong to a type of Persian verse called the *masnavi* (derived from the Arabic word for "two"), which consists of rhyming couplets. Although the term *masnavi* refers to prosody of a poem, *masnavi* denotes more than a poetic form; poems that conform to this structure tend to be lengthy narratives that follow a certain pattern in terms of their themes topics as well. More often than not, they deal with love in one way or another, although some *masnavis* (such as Nizami's own *Treasury of Mysteries* (*Makhzan al-Asrar*, c. 1163) are spiritual or didactic in their orientation. Nizami is the unrivaled master of the *masnavi* form not just for poets from the Caucasus, but for Persian literature as a whole. It could even be argued that his *hamsa*—literally, his quintet—made Persian literature into a world literature that could traverse continents, religions, and empires.

Khusraw and Shirin Nizami's *masnavis* were influential everywhere in the Persianate world, but for the Caucasus in particular it would be difficult to overstate their importance. His story of *Khusraw and Shirin* (c. 1177) draws on earlier legends concerning the Sasanian king Khusrow Parviz (r. 591-628) and his beloved Shirin. In Nizami's version, Shirin is depicted as Armenian, although Shirin is described in early historiographic sources as Aramean, meaning that she was from Aram in modern Syria and of Semitic background. In both the historical account of chronicles and the fictional account of Nizami, Shirin is a Christian woman in a world in which the ruling class was Zoroastrian. In addition to *Treasury of Mysteries* and *Khusraw and Shirin*, Nizami's quintet comprises *Layli and Majnun* (1192), which is a Persian remake of the Arabic tale of the 7th century poet Qays ibn al-Mulawwah, *The Book of Alexander* (1194), on the conquests of the Alexander the Great, founder of the Greek kingdom of Macedon, and *The Seven Beauties* (1197), which renders the life and exploits the Sassanian king Bahram V in fictional form.

Mijnuroba, love madness In terms of its subject matter as well as its form, Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin* is a Georgian counterpart to the *masnavis* of Nizami. The conceptualization of love as well as the plot structure are clearly borrowed from earlier Persian romances, including those of Nizami. Even the very word for Rustaveli's meter, *shairi*, reflects the influence of Persian, since it is a Georgian adaptation of the Persian and Arabic word for poetry. Similarly, the dominant theme of Rustaveli's story, *mijnuroba* (love madness) is inspired by Nizami's *Layli and Majnun*, in which the male protagonist is assigned a name that reflects his spiritual condition: driven mad by love (*majnun*). *Mijnuroba* is a Georgianized version of the Perso-Arabic word for someone who is driven to madness by his or her love (the *-oba* ending being a Georgian suffix). The word *mijnuroba* entered Georgian culture through Rustaveli's work, and is part of everyday Georgian language to this day. Georgian was one of the earliest literatures to vernacularize the Persian tradition, a process best known through Turkic and later Urdu translations of Persian narratives.

Armenian.

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.

Azeri literature Arguably, the growth of Azeri literature during this century was due in part to the same invasions that account for the decline of Armenian and Georgian. Azeri literature as such did not begin during this period, but the 13th century does mark its written beginnings, although Turkic literature from Central Asia and Kashgar had existed in writing for centuries by this point. The earliest written poems in Azeri are ascribed to Izzeddin Hasanoğlu (d. 1260), who was born in Khorasan. He took the nom-de-plume (*takhallus*) Pur-i Hasan, meaning "son of Hasan." Pur-i Hasan wrote in Persian as well as Azeri and his poems circulated across the Islamic world, including in Egypt.

Izzeddin Hasanoğlu Hasanoğlu was followed by poets such as Qazi Ahmad Boran al-Din of eastern Anatolia and Imad al-Din Nasimi (1369–1417), who was born in Shemakhi but died in Syria. Nasimi was the most famous Azeri follower of the school of antinomian mysticism known as Hurufism (the name refers to the Perso-Arabic term for letters, "*huruf*"). Hurufis engaged in numerological interpretations of the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet and incorporated these readings into their poems. Nasimi believed in the primacy of the divine word as a basis of creation, the deification of humanity, and the eventual manifestation of paradise on earth. He was executed for his beliefs in Aleppo. Among his disciples were Refi'î, who wrote two exegeses of Hurufism: *Beşâretnâme* and *Gencnâme*. Many Azeri works relating to Hurufism were translations of Azeri originals. These include Abdülmecid Firişteoğlu's Divine Book of Love (*Işknâme-i İllâhî*), which is an Azeri translation of the *Book of Eternity (Javdannama)* of Fazl-Allah Astarabadi, the founder of Hurufism.

Persian and Arabic Overall, post-classical poetry throughout the Caucasus operated under the shadow, first and foremost of Persian poetry, and, more indirectly, of Arabic literary norms and genres. Poetry was produced in Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri often independently of neighboring literatures, yet each of these literatures was responding to the same global trends.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the significance of Khaqani within medieval poetry in the Caucasus?
- 2) What impact did the church exert on the development of medieval Georgian and Armenian poetry?
- 3) What evidence is there of connections, overlaps, and/or parallels among the Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri poetic traditions?
- 4) How did medieval Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani poets negotiate the relationship between oral and written traditions?

EARLY MODERN

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

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

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

Archil of Imereti To cite just one example of the influence of Chaghatay literature on Georgian literary culture: Archil of Imereti's (1647-1713) *Bahramguriani*, also known by the title *Seven Planets* (შვიდი მთიები/ *Shvidi mtiebi*), is a Georgian retelling of a Persian story that had earlier been told by Nizami Ganjevi, Amir Khusrow of India, and Nava'i of Turkic Central Asia. According to Archil's editor, it was the latter version, and not the versions of his Persian predecessors, that exerted the greatest influence on the structure and plot of Archil's version.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sergei Parajanov Sayat Nova's profile was further increased in the 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.

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

Armenian. The 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 Galuste Amassiatzi, whose poetry reacted against these secularizing tendencies.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) In what contexts was the influence of Persian literature most evident in the poetry of the southern Caucasus?

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

19TH CENTURY

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

Solomon Dodashvili Baratashvili's teacher was the famous Solomon Dodashvili (1805–1836). Dodashvili was an intellectual and reformer who was inspired by the Decembrist movement that aimed to overthrow the Russia monarchy during his studies at St. Petersburg University, from which he obtained a master's degree in philosophy. On receiving his degree, Dodashvili returned to Tbilisi, where he worked as a teacher at a local gymnasium (high school) for members of the Georgian nobility, including Baratashvili. Baratashvili's exposure to Dodashvili was cut short when the latter was expelled from Georgia in 1832, following a failed plot to bring Russian rule over Georgia to an end. Although Dodashvili's co-conspirators favored the restoration of the Georgian monarchy, Dodashvili was invested in establishing a republican form of government—that was neither colonial nor autocratic—in Georgia. He was instead arrested and deported to Vyatka in central Russia, where he died of tuberculosis.

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

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

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

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

Orbeliani to Qazbegi Notwithstanding his early support for a Georgian uprising against Russia, Orbeliani spent the remainder of his life serving in the tsar's army. The liberal reforms of Vorontsov, the Russian-appointed Viceroy of the Caucasus from 1844-1853, went some distance towards resolving this seeming contradiction. Yet it was a contradiction that characterized the literary output of many early 19th century Georgian poets, divided as their work was between a fascination with European learning and reforms that reached them through Russian channels and their desire for

Georgian independence and sense of solidarity with the colonized peoples of the North Caucasus. (Another poet whose life and work were shaped by a similarly contradictory set of allegiances is Alexandre Chavchavadze.) Georgian writers such as Titsian Tabidze were to adopt positions quite different from—and critical of—Orbeliani in the subsequent century. Another Georgian writer whose attitude towards Russian rule was diametrically opposed to that of Orbeliani's was Alexandre Qazbegi. Ironically, Orbeliani was the first major writer of the older generation to recognize Qazbegi's talent, and hailed his novel *Elguja* (ელგუჯა, 1881) as a masterpiece.

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

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 *Ring of the Dawn (Arshaluysi ghoghanjner, 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.

Azerbaijan. Even before Tbilisi became a cultural mecca for Azeri and Armenia writers, the Karabakh Khanate was a center of Azeri literary culture throughout the 18th and early 19th century.

Vagif Molla Panah Vagif (1717-1797), an Azerbaijani poet who was also minister of foreign affairs (*vizier*) for the Karabakh khanate, played a leading role in shaping this literary culture during the 18th century. Vagif also helped to establish political relations between Russia and Georgia and the Karabakh Khanate. During the 19th century, the best-known Azeri poets were all born in Panahabad

(present day Shusha), then the capital of the Karabakh Khanate: Kasim bey Zakir (c. 1784-1857), the female poet Khurshidbanu Natavan (1832-1897), and Mir Movsum Navvab (1833-1918).

Kasim bey Zakir Kasim bey Zakir is regarded as the most outstanding Azeri poet of the early 19th century. He is known for his satirical verse, which led to his being banished to Baku for a brief period. Zakir's satirical poetry criticized the fanaticism of the Muslim clerical class and the corruption of the local aristocracy and the Russian administration it served. Another genre in which Zakir made his mark is the poem of complaint (*shekayat-nameh*). These poems were addressed to famous authors such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh and Ismail bek Kutkashensky, the first Azeri novelist. Zakir combined Persian and Russian influences in his versified animal fables, which bear traces of the Perso-Arabic story cycle *Kalila wa-Dimna* and the fabulist Ivan Krylov.

Natavan Khurshidbanu Natavan, the only daughter of the last ruler of the Karabakh khanate, was best known for her lyric poems, both ghazals and quatrains (*rubais*). She was instructed in European languages as well as music and painting during her childhood, and became an accomplished painter. After her son's death in 1885, she used the penname Natavan, meaning "powerless" in Persian.

Mir Movsum Navvab Mir Movsum Navvab is among the last representatives of classical Azeri literature and culture. He passed his entire life in Panahabad. Alongside poetry, his many talents included astronomy, carpentry, chemistry, math, music history, and the visual arts. Navvab established the first typography in the Karabakh khanate, which enabled him to run Azerbaijan's first printing press, as well as a literary group called Society of the Forgotten (*majlis-i-faramushan*) and the first music society in Azerbaijan, called Society of Singers (*majlis-i-khanende*). He wrote in the tradition of Molla Panah Vagif.

Vagif Although the literary histories of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have been narrated by and large as separate histories until the 19th century, they became increasingly intertwined when this region came under Russian rule. To give just one example, the Armenian historian, writer and translator Mirza Yusuf Nersesov was responsible for publishing Vagif's Azeri poems for the first time, half a century after Vagif's death, in Temir-Khan Shura, the provincial capital of the Russian imperial administration in Daghestan. This publication was followed a decade later by the hugely influential translation of Vagif's poetry into German by Adolf Berge with the assistance of Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh. The publication history of Vagif's work, which involved Armenians, Azeris, and Germans, provides a fitting testimony to the Caucasus' multilingual literatures.

Further Reading

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Discussion Questions

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

20TH CENTURY

Comparisons. The intertwining 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 were 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.

Armenian. The ethnic clashes between Christian Armenians and Russians and Moslem Turks and Kurds of the late 19th and early 20th century 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. A fourth volume, *The Song of the Bread*, was an unfinished manuscript. 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. 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. 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 (Dashnaktsutyun), 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) 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. 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 ethnic clashes 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 ethnic clashes 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* (Հայրուկի 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-Ma’arri (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.

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

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

Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze When the Soviet regime established itself in Georgia in 1921, Blue Horn poets did not align well with the new government. They left the official Union of Writers and formed their own group, which was not destined to last long. The most talented poets from the Blue

Horns circle were either executed by the Soviet regime during the Stalinist purges, or faded into obscurity. In 1937, at the height of Stalin's purges, Paolo Iashvili killed himself with a hunting rifle during a meeting of the Writers' Union, having refused to denounce his friend and fellow poet, Titsian Tabidze. For his part, Titsian Tabidze only lived four months longer. He was expelled from the Writers Union in October 1937 and soon thereafter arrested by the NKVD (the Soviet Interior Ministry, an agency tasked with police work and overseeing prisons and labor camps). Titsian was executed in two months later. His death remained a secret for many years. His family was falsely informed by the Soviet state that he had been exiled to Siberia.

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

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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 Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri poets?
- 3) How did modernist poets of the South Caucasus conceptualize literary modernism?

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

ANTIQUITY

Armenian. 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.

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

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

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

Caucasian Albania While literary culture in the Caucasus was dominated by Armenian and Georgian, there are traces of a written culture among high-ranking administrators of Caucasian Albania. The earliest evidence of written culture in Caucasian Albania dates to 65 BCE. Classical Greek and Latin sources (Plutarch, Dio Cassius, Paulus Orosius) refer to an exchange of letters between Ohod, the king of Caucasian Albania and the Roman general Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus that took place during this year. Four centuries later, the Armenian King Tiridates (Trdat) invited the king of Caucasian Albania and his retinue to his court to celebrate a Christian holiday. Notwithstanding this evidence for a written culture in Caucasian Albania, traces of writing from this empire has not survived. Scholars assume that this written culture used the Aramaic script, as was the case throughout the Near East, including Armenia.

Caucasian Albanian writing Although little is known concerning these early instances of Caucasian Albanian written culture, we have firmer knowledge for the beginnings of Caucasian Albanian writing in a 5th century script designed by the same Mashtots who invented the Armenian alphabet. Working alongside Albanian priest and translator Benjamin and with the support of the empire's King Aswahan and the Bishop Jeremy, Mashtots created an alphabet for the Caucasian Albanian language, that is called Gargarean by Armenian historians such as Xorenats'i. Albanians and Gargareans were two different but closely related peoples who spoke different dialects of the same language, not unlike Ingush and Chechens. According to Armenian sources, the Gargarean dialect was chosen as the basis for the Caucasian Albanian alphabet in the interest of imposing a unified literary culture across the multilingual and multinational geography of Caucasian Albania, which according to Strabo (citing Theophanes of Mytilene) had at least twenty-six different languages or dialects. Mashtots himself did not know Albanian but he worked closely with Benjamin, whom Xorenats'i refers to as a "gifted translator" and who communicated with Mashtots in Armenian.

Literacy Following the creation of the alphabet, schools were opened for teaching it, and religious texts, including the Bible, began to be translated into the Caucasian Albanian language using the new script. Mashtots' 5th century biographer Koryun reports in his *Life of Mashtots* that, as soon as the alphabet was created, King Aswahan and the Bishop Jeremy issued an order requiring that all children across the Caucasian Albanian empire be taught to read and write in it. In the past few decades, new religious texts have been discovered in Caucasian Albanian which support these accounts, including a lectionary (book containing portions of the Bible appointed to be read on particular days of the year) comprising passages from the Old and New Testaments.

Caucasian Albanian alphabet Caucasian Albanian writing fell into disuse following the collapse of the empire in the 8th century CE, which coincided with the Islamic conquest of Sasanian Persia in the mid-7th century. Hethum, a historian of Cilician Armenia, referred to it in 1307, but there are few traces after that. The script was "rediscovered" in 1937 by Georgian professor Ilia Abuladze in an Armenian manuscript at the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts dating to the 15th century.

The Caucasian Albanian alphabet was depicted in this manuscript alongside other ancient alphabets, including Georgian, Coptic, Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Syriac. According to Abuladze, the Caucasian Albanian alphabet was based on the Georgian alphabet. More examples of the Caucasian Albanian alphabet were discovered throughout the 1940s and 1950s on tiles, vessels, a stone altar, and candlesticks. Georgian scholars attribute the creation of the of the Caucasian Albanian alphabet not to Mashtots but to the Georgian King Pharnavaz I of Kartli (Iberia), in the late 4th or early 5th century CE. Since the 1950s, Azerbaijani academics and political leaders have replaced the names of Armenian historians, writers, and political leaders with names from Caucasian Albanian history. According to Russian historian and anthropologist Victor Schnirelmann, these replacements were part of a project to erase all traces of Armenian history and culture from Azerbaijani history. The trend of revisionist scholarship was initiated by Ziya Bunyadov in the 1950s and continued by his student Farida Mammadova.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What were the most important influences on the development of Armenian and Georgian written literature?
- 2) What were the most significant genres of early Armenian and Georgian prose?
- 3) What types of written culture from Caucasian Albania are extant and how were they discovered by later scholars?

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

Comparisons. The medieval period was marked by extraordinary growth in both Georgian and Armenian written culture and learning, as well as for Persian literature—poetry and prose—composed in the region of Azerbaijan. Both Georgian and Armenian were shaped by their location within the Persianate literary sphere, just as these literatures had earlier been shaped by their proximity to Greek and Syriac literary traditions. Disciplinary traditions in Persian and Arabic shaped the way in which these disciplines evolved across the southern Caucasus, sometimes in cosmopolitan languages such as Persian and Arabic, and sometimes in local languages like Georgian and Armenian.

Armenian in Azerbaijan. The flourishing of literary culture was accompanied by an efflorescence in other fields of inquiry, including mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, theology, literature, hymnology, and pedagogy. One polymath who excelled in all of these areas is Hovhannes Imastaser (c. 1047–1129) from the village of Pib in the district of Gardman in what is today Nagorno-Karabakh. Kirakos Gandzaketsi's *History of Armenia* contains an extended account of the life of this scholar,

who worked in the domains of mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, theology, literature, hymnology, and pedagogy.

Persian in Azerbaijan. Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274) developed an even more diverse set of skills in the domains of mathematics, engineering, logic, rhetoric, and mysticism. With over one-hundred and fifty works to his name, Tusi is among the most prolific scholars in the Islamic world. Although, like Ferdowsi, he was born in Tus, at a time when the city was part of the Khwarzamanian empire, Tusi persuaded the Mongol ruler Hulegu Khan to construct an observatory in the ancient city of Maragheh (now in eastern Iranian Azerbaijan). It was from this observatory that Tusi was able to produce the material for his book *Ilkhanic Tables*, the most accurate tables of planetary movements during his era.

Nasirean Ethics Among Tusi's most famous works is the *Nasirean Ethics*, in which Plato and Aristotle are defended and incorporated into Muslim thought. Alongside this ethical treatise, which attempts to synthesize ancient Greek teachings with Islamic ethics, Tusi composed works of Shi'a theology. He also contributed to the study of logic in the Avicennian tradition, and composed a commentary on Avicenna's theory of absolute propositions. In mathematics, Tusi composed a *Treatise on the Quadrilateral*, in which he introduced the science of spherical trigonometry to a Muslim readership.

Tusi in Azerbaijan Tusi's works are renowned throughout the Muslim world, yet Azeris take particular pride in them. He was the subject of a commemorative stamp issued by the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2009. The Soviet astronomer Nikolai Stepanovich Chernykh also named a planet he discovered in 1979 after Tusi. Two scientific institutes have been named in honor of Tusi: the Shamakhi Observatory in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the K. N. Tusi University of Technology in Iran (Tehran Province). Finally, it is believed that Tusi's astronomical research may have influenced Nicolaus Copernicus' theory of heliocentrism.

Armenian. 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.

Lewond Lewond 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. Lewond'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 արհաւիրքների մասին/ *Patmowt'yown: mer shrjapati 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.

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

Life of Kartli

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

Life of Kartli's Structure The first six books of *Life of Kartli* mix legend and history. They tell of Alexander the Great's legendary invasion of the Caucasus, the conversion of Georgia to Christianity by St. Nino in the 4th century, including the role of Jews in bringing Christianity to Georgia, Vakhtang Gorgasali's (r. 452–502) reign amid Sasanian invasions from the south, the death of Vakhtang's descendant Archil in 786, and the destruction of the Georgian monarchy in the 8th century. The remaining books narrate the history of the Georgian Bagratid dynasty and the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213). This entire corpus of chronicles and narratives was composed over a period of five hundred years, from the 9th to the 14th century. Among the earliest of extant manuscripts of *Life of Kartli* is the Queen Anna (Anaseuli) codex and the Queen Mariam (Mariamiseuli) of 1633-1645.

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

Divan of the Abkhazian Kings A somewhat later Georgian historiographic document is the *Divan of the Abkhazian Kings*, which is dated to the late 10th or early 11th century, although it is

attributed to Bagrat III (1008–1014), the first king of a united Georgia (comprising Kartli to the west and Kakheti to the east), who ruled as king of Abkhazia 978. This work is considered a valuable source for the family relationships among the various Georgian kings as well as for the duration of their reigns, if not for their precise chronology.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What use did Armenian authors make of Georgian historiography?
- 2) How did Armenian and Georgian authors depict their Muslim enemies?
- 3) What role did historiography play in the formation of Armenian and Georgian identity?
- 4) What were the main disciplines of intellectual activity in the medieval Caucasus and surrounding areas?
- 5) What major scientific advances did Tusi help to bring about?

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.

Vakhtang VI

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

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

Lights of Canopus In addition to being a publisher, Vakhtang was a poet and translator. His poetic compositions include lyric poetry and odes for his country. His most significant translation into Georgian is of Husain Wa'iz Kashefi's 15th century *Lights of Canopus* (*Anvar-e Sohayli*), a Persian retelling of the *Kalila and Dimna* story, which Vakhtang worked on from 1714 to 1716. With this translation, Vakhtang solidified Georgia's role as a mediator in literary exchanges between East and West. The anonymous *Balavariani* was a Georgian retelling of an ancient Buddhist narrative translated from Arabic. The version of *Kalila va Dimna* which Vakhtang translated was a Persian retelling of an Arabic translation from Pahlavi (Middle Persian). This Arabic version was completed at the Abbasid court by Ibn al-Muqaffa, a Persian scholar who wrote in Arabic.

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

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

Vakhtang's Cosmology Vakhtang also dedicated his energies to producing the first Georgian-language work of astronomy intended for a wide readership, entitled *Translations and revelations of heaven and earth, useful for students of astronomy* (*Targmani da gamotsxadebani tsisa da kveqnisa*

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

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

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

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

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

Mirza Jamal Javanshir Mirza Jamal Javanshir's work was commissioned in 1847 by the first Russian Viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince Mikhail Semenovitch Vorontsov (r. 1803-1856), although the

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

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Discussion Questions

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

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.

Azerbaijani Literature. Perhaps the most outstanding figure in 19th century learned prose in the Caucasus is Mirza Fath-'Ali Akhundzadeh, a polymath who was fluent in Persian and Russian, alongside his native Turkic. Akhundzadeh's output is remarkable for, among other things, the number of cultures, genres, and languages it traversed. Born in the town of Sheki in 1812, in what was at the time of his birth part of the Persian empire, Akhundzadeh came of age in the very different world of imperial Russia. The transformation came as a result of his geographical location: Sheki became a Russian vassal state as a result of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813.

Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh Although Akhundzadeh was also a playwright and fiction writer, it is arguably in the domain of criticism that he had the greatest impact. Sometimes for Akhundzadeh the boundaries between criticism and fiction were blurred. One such example is the work known simply as his *Letters of Kamal al-Dawleh* (*Maktubat-e-Kamal-al dawleh*, 1860-1864, first published in Baku in 1905), which contains the fictional correspondence of two imaginary princes, one from late Mughal India and one a scion of the Qajars. A reader conversant with European literature—as Akhundzadeh was—will inevitably draw comparisons between this work and Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721). Both works use satire to criticize the moral and cultural norms of their societies, and both authors take advantage of the allegorical form of the fictional epistolary exchange to say things that they might have been unable to say directly or in other genres.

Akhundzadeh’s Alphabet Akhundzadeh critical writings were wide-ranging. Although most of his essays, like his plays, were originally composed in Azeri Turkic, they were translated into Persian almost immediately after their composition, often with the author’s cooperation. By producing work that belonged simultaneously to the Persian and Turkic spheres, Akhundzadeh built a wide audience for himself, that extended across the Caucasus, and into the Ottoman empire, as well as Iran. He was in many respects the first writer from these regions to acerbically criticize tradition as such. Akhundzadeh’s desire to replace classical literary norms with modern influences led him to propose a modified and simplified alphabet which he had developed himself, and which he considered better suited to modern ways of thinking. To his lifelong disappointment, Akhundzadeh failed to persuade the Ottoman sultan to shift to his new alphabet, the idea of alphabet reform was to gain traction across the Soviet Union and Ottoman empire during the 20th century. Akhundzadeh was in this sense a harbinger of changes to come.

Georgian. Parallel to the discovery of criticism in modern Azeri—and Persian—literature, Georgian writers such as Ilya Chavchavadze were imbibing the new literary currents from Russia and across Europe. Although best known as a poet, Chavchavadze also made his mark in nonfiction prose. His impact on Georgian culture parallels that of Akhundzadeh in many ways; both were engaged with various strategies to modernize their respective literatures, including through alphabet reform. (Only Chavchavadze was successful in reforming the alphabet during his lifetime.) Like many intellectuals of his generation from the Caucasus, Chavchavadze’s intellectually formative years were passed during his time at St. Petersburg University, where he studied from 1857-1861.

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

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

Alexsandre Qazbegi Another Georgian writer of fiction who also contributed to Georgian nonfictional prose is Alexsandre Qazbegi. Qazbegi’s “Notes of a Shepherd” (ნამწყემსარის მოგონებანი/*namtqemsaris mogonebani*, 1883) offers a landmark combination of ethnography and autobiography in order to shed light on the mountaineers of Khevsuretia. Qazbegi’s writing is notable for its empathy with impoverished shepherds as well as his first-hand knowledge of their everyday life. Ultimately, he uses his experience with the shepherd-mountaineers to develop a critique of

industrialized civilization, and, by implication, of the Russian imperial administration that facilitated Georgia's modernization.

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Discussion/Questions

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

20TH CENTURY

Comparisons. The 20th century was an age of great achievements and cruel repressions for throughout the Caucasus. Nonetheless, during these difficult years, Orientalists such as Salman Mumtaz and Ziya Bunyadov in Azerbaijan, Georgi Tsereteli and Nikolai Marr in Georgia, and I.A. Orbeli and A.A. Kalantar in Armenia all played monumental roles in rediscovering the region's premodern literary culture.

Azerbaijan. Salman Mumtaz was, like Mirza Fath-'Ali Akhundzadeh, born in the same Shekhi that had witnessed a rebirth of Azeri literary culture throughout the 19th century. His father died while he was still a young child, and he moved in with his uncle, a rich man who owned land in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Salman attended primary school in Ashgabat, where he learned Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and the Turkic languages of Central Asia. (He later learned Russian in adulthood during his business travels to Russian.) At the age of nine, while still living in Central Asia, Mumtaz became acquainted with the Azeri poet Sabir. This encounter marked the beginning of his love for literature.

Mulla Nasreddin When the influential satirical journal *Mulla Nasreddin* (1906-1931), edited by Mirza Jalil Mahmedqulizadeh, began publishing in Tbilisi, Mumtaz became one of the regular contributors. He also began writing poetry in classical Azeri. His work attracted the attention of the Azeri critic Yavuz Akpınar. In 1908, he published, together with Abdurahim Akhverdov and Qurban-'Ali Sharifzadeh, the work *The Journey of Mosalan Bek (Puteshestvie Mosalana Beka)* in the pages of *Mulla Nasreddin*. Many of Mumtaz's contributions to *Mulla Nasreddin* were published under the pseudonym Khordan-bek. Mumtaz's first book-length publication, on eighteenth-century Persian-Azeri poet Sayyid Ahmad Hatf Isfahan, was published by the editor of *Mulla Nasreddin*, Mirza Jalil

Mahmedqulizadeh. In 1916, Mumtaz attempted to arrange for a performance of Mirza Jalil's play "The Dead," but the local authorities would not permit it to be staged. Alongside his contributions to the journal, Mumtaz contributed to the dissemination of *Mulla Nasreddin* across Central Asia while he was still residing in Ashgabat.

Salman Mumtaz When the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was founded in 1918, Mumtaz was among the many Azeris who returned to their homeland to help build this new state. He served as editor of the newspaper *Communist (Kommunist)* and worked at Azerneshr publishing house. He maintained a regular column for *Communist* entitled "Forgotten Leaves" (*Zabitiye list'ya*) in which he regularly published articles about Azeri literature. During these years, he actively grew his collection of Oriental manuscripts, which he sourced while journeying throughout Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Central Asia. This collection impressed Orientalists of the previous generation, such as Vassily Bartold and Sergei Oldenburg. On the basis of his private manuscript collection, Mumtaz was able to conduct groundbreaking research into modern and premodern Azeri poetry. Among his many achievements was the discovery of many hitherto unknown manuscripts of Azeri poets and *ashuqs*. From 1920 onwards, Mumtaz chaired a commission dedicated to the revival of the Azeri literary language.

Editorial Work Mumtaz presented his collection to the first Turkological Congress in Baku (1926), where he spoke on the Azeri poet Nasimi (discussed in the article on post-classical/medieval poetry). He published a short study of Akhunzadeh's Persian poem (composed in 1837) on the death of Pushkin, and single-handedly discovered the forgotten tomb of Nizami Ganjevi in a Ganja cemetery. In total, Mumtaz published over a hundred essays, only twenty of which are still extant, and fifteen books on Azeri literature. His remaining works were destroyed during the Soviet terror, or are yet to be located. Mumtaz also published critical editions of classical Azeri poets such as Fizuli (in three volumes), Waqif, and Zakir. He also edited book-length collections of recollections of Mizra Alekper Sabir and Abbas Saxxat by their contemporaries. His two-volume anthology *National Poets (El' shairlari, 1927-1928)* was comprised of examples of *ashuq* poetry as well as of the widely popular genre of Azeri folk poetry called *bayati*.

Maxim Gorky In 1929, Mumtaz was appointed Director of the Department of Azeri Literature before Capitalism in Azerbaijan's State Scientific Institute. In 1933, he was appointed as a research in the literary heritage department of the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences, of which he was appointed director in 1937. In 1934, Mumtaz attended the First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow, where he met Maxim Gorky. Gorky later obtained a home for Mumtaz and his family in Moscow. While in Moscow, Mumtaz also participated in the millennial celebration of Ferdowsi's epic, the *Shahnama*.
Repression

Along with countless other intellectuals of the Caucasus and beyond, Mumtaz became a target for repression by the Soviet state beginning in 1937. In this year the newspaper *Baku Worker (Bakinskii rabochii)* ran a story criticizing him, along with the Azerbaijani writers Hussain Javid, Sayyid Hussain, and Atababa Musakhanli, for their "ideological errors." In June of that same year, Mumtaz was expelled from the Union of Azerbaijani writers, and during the next meeting the association officially declared him an "enemy of the people." Nine days after his expulsion from the Union of Writers, Mumtaz was released from all of his work responsibilities and accused of pan-Turkism and nationalism. Even during these difficult months, Mumtaz persisted with his manuscript collecting activities, and conducted research in his private library. He was arrested in his home in October 1937. Among the accusations made against him were that, through his work on the Koroghlu epic, he had called people to struggle for independence from the Soviet Union. He was also incriminated for his role in preparing a critical edition of the works of 11th century medieval lexicographer Mahmud al-Kashgari. Mumtaz's rich library of manuscripts was confiscated by the Soviet state. Post-Soviet research has attempted to reconstruct the contents of this lost library.

Georgian-Armenian Connections. While Mumtaz dedicated his life to Azerbaijan's rich literary heritage, the Georgian-born scholar Nikolai Marr (1864-1934) occupied himself with Georgian and Armenian literary legacies. Marr was born in Kutaisi to a Scottish botanist who founded Kutaisi's botanic gardens and a Georgian mother. His parents had difficulty communicating due to their different linguistic backgrounds. Marr graduated from the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University, of which he became dean in 1911.

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

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

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

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

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

Georgian nonfictional prose Georgian nonfictional prose flourished throughout the 20th century, with writers such as the mountaineer poet Vazha Pshavela reflecting on various themes in world literature, including the challenges of cosmopolitanism and patriotism in 1905, and Konstantine

Gamsakhurdia presenting his vision of world literature in countless essays throughout the Soviet period.

Discussion Questions

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

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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.

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. *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 (Եղեմակահ 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

awaken 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, Moks, 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 rules, 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 (Ag'awak'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 devils. 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 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

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 princess. His mother freezes to death while mourning for her loss on his grave.

Alexandre Qazbegi Another Georgian novelist who learned a great deal from Chavchavadze but took Georgian prose fiction in a very different direction is Alexandre Qazbegi (1848-1890). After publishing a lesser known novel, *Georgia's Beau Monde (საქართველოს ბომონდი/sarkartvelos bomondi, 1869–70)*, Qazbegi authored four novels in a quick succession: *Elguja (ელგუჯა, 1881)*, *The Parricide (მამის მკვლეელი, 1882)*, and *The Teacher (მოდღვარი, 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 Salmas 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. 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 ethnic clashes between Christian Armenians and Russians on the one hand and Moslem Turks and Kurds on the other hand. Although the First Republic of Armenia was established as an independent country in 1918, most Armenians lived outside its domain. After the ethnic clashes, 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.

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 მარაბდელო, 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.

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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?

LIFE-WRITING (Antiquity to the 20th century)

ANTIQUITY

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

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

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

The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik. The Armenian noblewoman Queen Shushanik, whose martyrdom at the hands of her Zoroastrian husband was first narrated in Georgian, is yet another figure in Georgian hagiography who is distinguished by her love for children. Purporting to have been written between 476 and 483 and attributed to Iakob Tsurtaveli, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik* (წამებაჲ წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისაჲ / *Tsameba tsmidisa Shushanikisi dedoplisa*) was for a long time regarded as the earliest surviving work of Georgian literature. Scholars have recently begun to question whether the text is as old as it claims to be, since the oldest manuscript of this text dates back to the 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.

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

Translation

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

Biographies

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

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

and converts to Christianity. As with the story of St. Nino's conversion of Georgia to Christianity, the trigger for this conversion is the miracle of healing performed by a Christian saint on a child.

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

The Lives of the Children of Kola. Alongside animals and saints' symbiotic relationship with them, the innocence and miracle-performing powers of children is an important theme in Georgian hagiography. *The Lives of the Children of Kola*, set in the region of western Georgia known as Colchis in antiquity and from the 11th century onwards as Lazica, is entirely focused on children. *The Lives of the Children of Kola* describes an event that occurred in the 4th century, when nine children were martyred. Even to this day, the site where the children are buried, near a spring called Aiazma, is a sacred site. Georgian Orientalist Nikolai Marr published a brief summary of *The Lives of the Children of Kola* in 1903. As recorded in this narrative, nine pagan children were drawn to convert to Christianity in order to participate in the Christian liturgy alongside their Christian playmates. They were baptized on a cold winter night, away from public view. After they were baptized, these formerly pagan children moved into Christian homes. When they learned what had happened, the parents hurried to the Christian houses where their children were staying, and angrily beat them "black and blue" (as the text records). In desperation, the parents tried to compel their children to eat food sacrificed to idols. The pagan parents then approached the local governor, who assured them that they as parents had the right to do whatever they wanted with their children. The parents then decided to toss their children into a hole until their skulls broke open. Some of the parents also stoned their children.

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

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

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

When the new *marzban*, Vezhan Buzmir, replaced Arvand Gushnasp, the same Persians who had earlier denounced Eustace complained about him again. They reminded the *marzban* that he had the authority to determine their fates. Buzmir summoned the two converts of the original group who were still living: Eustace and Stephan the Assyrian. Stephan's Assyrian acquaintance attested that he came from a Christian family, and his father, mother, brothers, and sisters were all Christian. This

attestation saved Stephan from persecution, since he couldn't be blamed for adhering to the religion into which he was born. Eustace had a different fate. During the meeting with the *marzban*, he recounted in detail the story of his conversion, and his search for an alternative to Zoroastrianism. Eustace includes an important speech from a Christian archdeacon whom he met in his hometown and who recounted to him the principals and history of the Christian faith as well as of Judaism. After recounting this speech and all he learned about Christianity, Eustace expresses shame for the faith of his fathers, into which he was born.

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

Further Reading

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

POST-CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL

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

The Martyrdom of Saint Abo. Abo, a perfumer from Baghdad, is among the best-known Christian martyrs from the early period of Arab-Muslim rule in Tbilisi. He was an Arab by birth who, like Eustace, converted to Christianity while residing in Tbilisi. The narrative of his life and martyrdom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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31.2 (1977): 247-259.

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Discussion Questions:

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

EARLY MODERN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sayat Nova Another poet from this same period whose verse has a strong autobiographical dimension is 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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Discussion Questions:

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

19TH CENTURY

Comparisons. The 19th century abounds with autobiographical narratives by Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri writers. These writings are of particular relevance to understanding relationships with and attitudes to the new imperial power, which had by now almost entirely replaced Persian influence in the Caucasus: Russia. Russian imperial rule was to have a tremendous influence on most writers of the Caucasus, not just in the realm of geopolitics, but also in the domains of language and culture. The most educated writers of this era were educated at Russian schools and fluent in Russian. Many attempted to import what they learned from Russian and other European sources into their local curriculum, sometimes going so far as to attempt to reform their native alphabet. Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh is perhaps the most prominent example of a writer whose life and work conforms to this trajectory.

Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh. Akhundzadeh's short autobiography, first published in the Persian newspaper *Kashkul* in 1887, is one such example. This work provides a snapshot of life under Russian rule among the Muslims of the south Caucasus. Akhundzadeh's early education was focused on Persian and Arabic. In his own words, he learned to "speak like the theology students of Arabic in Daghestan." However, the next phase of his education involved a turn away from religion and towards more secular studies. He describes how the poet Mirza Shafii Vazeh (1796-1852) discouraged him from becoming a mullah. "Do you want to become a deceitful charlatan?" he asked the young Akhundzadeh. Akhundzadeh was shocked by Mirza Shafii's response—never before had he heard the Muslim clergy critiqued so forthrightly—but followed his advice. He enrolled in a local Russian school, though he was only able to study there for a year. In 1834, Akhundzadeh travelled for the first time to Tbilisi, which was then called Tiflis and was the center of Russian rule in the Caucasus. His father directly approached the Russian diplomat and general Baron Rosen with the request that his son receive employment as a translator and have the opportunity to perfect his Russian language skills. Baron Rosen agreed to take Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh into his service and he became his mentor. Akhundzadeh was himself appointed to the rank of colonel in recognition of his service to the Russian administration.

Azeri alphabet reform Akhundzadeh places particular emphasis on his efforts to reform the Azeri alphabet, on which topic he composed a pamphlet in 1857. He received permission from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikhail Vorontsov, to present his plan for alphabet reform to the Turkish sultan. Vorontsov agreed to cover the cost of his journal and to write a letter of

recommendation for him addressed to the Russian ambassador. The Russian ambassador undertook to present Akhundzadeh's pamphlet to Fuad Pasha, the Ottoman Grand Vizier and influential advocate of *tanzimat* (modernizing) reforms throughout the Ottoman empire. According to Akhundzadeh, his pamphlet was discussed by Ottoman scholars. The main objection that was raised was that the letters could not be joined. Akhundzadeh's radical solution for this problem was to do away with joined letters entirely. Both the Ottoman ministers and the Iranian plenipotentiary Mirza Hussein Khan in Istanbul were opposed to this plan. Akhundzadeh also tells of the hostility that the Iranian plenipotentiary exhibited towards him as a result of his satire of Iranian characters in his Azeri plays.

Petitioning the Qajars Akhundzadeh returned to Tbilisi with his plans unrealized, but he did not give up on his dreams of alphabet reform. He decided to instead direct his plans for alphabet reform to the Iranian government and sent a letter on the topic to Tehran along with his pamphlet. He proposed a compromise: the letters were to be printed separately like the Latin alphabet, but written from left to right, like the Arabic alphabet that was used for Persian and Azeri. Akhundzadeh later added to this pamphlet a document called *Kertika*, which consisted of answers to criticism by an Ottoman scholar named Samavi Effendi. Ultimately, this pamphlet didn't achieve anything either, and Akhundzadeh was forced to abandon his project without ever living to see its fruition. He composed a Persian poem in the style of Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings* on the subject of the alphabet that explained all of its features. In his letters from 1870, Akhundzadeh cited the positive impact of the alphabet reforms introduced to the languages of the northern Caucasus by Russian engineer, general, and linguist Pyotr Uslar as further evidence that Azeri and Persian would benefit from a simplified script.

Alphabets in the Caucasus Akhundzadeh's interest in alphabet reform was widely shared across the Caucasus. His work in this domain runs parallel to the activities of Georgian poet Ilia Chavchavadze, whose alphabet reform proposals resulted in dropping five letters from the Georgian alphabet during the 1860s. Given that he was living in Tbilisi during the time that he developed his proposals for the reform of the Persian-Azeri alphabet, it is possible that Akhundzadeh was inspired by Chavchavadze's proposals to reform the Georgian script. He was also inspired by Mirza Malkam-Khan's efforts at alphabet reform, which were carried out mostly from London. In the decades after his death, the Republic of Azerbaijan shifted to an entirely different alphabet. In 1929, an Azeri alphabet, based on the Latin alphabet was introduced. Ten years later, on the order of Stalin, Azeri began to be written in an adapted version of the Cyrillic alphabet, in line with other Soviet Republics.

Akhundzadeh's autobiography Overall, the style of Akhundzadeh's autobiography is straightforward and matter-of-fact. In contrast to his polemical writings, he does not seek to persuade. He simply narrates the basic details of his life and leaves it for the reader to judge whether he acts rightly or wrongly in a given situation. The genre of short autobiography to which this work belongs was later popularized during the Soviet era, and became a staple of many authors' collected writings.

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

Niko Nikoladze. Georgian revolutionary Niko Nikoladze was also born in Western Georgia. In his memoirs, he describes studying history, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, rhetoric, and Russian, Georgian, Turkish, and French at the same Kutaisi Gymnasium. As he recalls, any student who wished to continue on to university had to study Latin as well. The writer Giorgi Tsereteli also reflected on the time passed in the Kutaisi school in his fictionalized autobiography, *The Flower of Our Lives* (ჩვენი ცხოვრების ყვავილი/ *chveni tskhovrebis qvavili*, 1872). Both Akaki Tsereteli and Nikoladze would go on to matriculate to St. Petersburg State University. Nikoladze's memoirs mark a new era in the autobiographical traditions of the Caucasus, for his life and work traverse the break between the Caucasus that was ruled by the Russian empire and the Soviet Caucasus that emerged from the 1917 revolutions and the establishment of Marxist-Leninism as the state ideology. Nikoladze was a strong supporter of the revolution, particularly when it was aligned with Georgian nationalism. He

initially was inspired by Ilia Chavchavadze's nationalism, and then affiliated himself with the more radical movement called Second Group (*meore dasi*), and soon became one of its leaders. Nikoladze would become the first Georgian to receive a degree from a European university. His PhD "On the Social and Economic Consequences of Disarmament," was defended at the University of Zurich's Faculty of Law in 1868. It was in Zurich that Nikoladze met Karl Marx, who invited him to become the Transcaucasian representative of the International, a political organization that was at the forefront of revolutionary communism. Although Nikoladze did not take Marx up on his offer, this did not mark the end of his political career. Instead, he became mayor of the city of Poti, on the coast of the Black Sea. He held this position from 1894 to 1912. During the 1880s, Nikoladze was directly involved in negotiations with the Russian tsar Alexander III, whose father had been assassinated by Russian revolutionaries.

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.

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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

Armenians

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.

Azerbaijani Entrepreneurs. While Armenians were enduring genocide, Caucasus people to the north were experiencing turmoil linked to the Bolshevik revolution. The first decade of the 20th century was marked by prosperity and growth in Azerbaijan, largely due to the oil boom. Prosperity facilitated cultural rebirth, and Baku became a cultural hub for people of many different backgrounds. The family of Ummulbanu Asadullayeva, better known as Banine (1905-19992), the author of one of the most important autobiographies of the early 20th century Caucasus, participated in this cultural and economic ferment. *Days in the Caucasus (Jours caucasiens)* was Banine's second book, her first being the novel *Nami*, which was published in France in 1942. Banine followed *Days in the Caucasus* with a second memoir, entitled *Days in Paris*, but it was the first volume of her memoirs that received acclaim. She also composed an account of her conversion to Christianity, entitled *I Chose Opium*. She worked as a model as well as a translator from Russian and German into French. Banine's grandfathers were the famous oil tycoon Musa Naghiyev on her mother's side and the investor Shamsi Asadullaev on her father's side. Her father was a government minister in the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. In her own words, she was born at a time when "the majority of the population of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were busy massacring each other." Her mother died from puerperal fever while giving birth to her, in the middle of a war.

Banine's Memoirs In her memoirs, Banine provides a snapshot of a forgotten era, on the brink of revolution. She deploys her skills as a novelist to evoke a distant childhood, and to portray pre-revolutionary Baku through a child's eyes. Religion has a special place in this world, but it is a religion of culture and aesthetics rather than of belief. Her governess was a devout Lutheran German whom she came to regard as a mother. Her narrative exposes the close link between the oil boom in Azerbaijan and the cultural liberation of the Muslims of the Caucasus. Oil meant wealth, and wealth meant power, as her own family story illustrates in full. While commenting on the sources of her family's wealth, Banine remarks on the conflict between her interest as an author in telling the truth and the temptation to portray her family in a more favorable light. While she was growing up, Russian was the primary medium of Banine's education. She laments her lack of fluency in Azeri, which was the language of her grandmother, but not of her formal education. Yet she did absorb local Azeri culture to a great degree, and documents her perception of it, including practices such as polygamy and the veil, from the point of view of a sophisticated intellectual. The contrast between Banine's childhood naivete and her urbane perception as an adult makes for compelling reading.

Georgian Revolutionaries. Another kind of response to the Soviet revolution is revealed in the autobiographical writings of Georgian Menshevik leader Noe Zhordania. Like many other major writers of his generation, Zhordania was born near Kutaisi, in western Georgia. After graduating from Ozurgeti Orthodox Theological Academy, he moved to Tbilisi, where he enrolled in the same Georgian Orthodox Theological Seminary that Stalin would enter a few years later. Although his parents dreamed of him becoming a priest, around this time Zhordania was losing his faith in God. Zhordania began reading forbidden books, such as the writings of Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Alexander Herzen. His writings from this period show the influence of materialist thought on his intellectual development. He moved to Warsaw in 1891, where he studied to become a veterinarian and began to educate himself in Marxist theory. By the time he returned to Georgia in 1892, he had been transformed and inspired by his engagements with Marxism, his correspondence with fellow

radical Georgian intellectuals, and his exposure to the Polish nationalist movement which exhibited many parallels with the Georgian nationalist movement, specifically a shared opposition to Russian rule. Back in Tbilisi, Zhordania became the leader of the first legal Marxist group in Georgia, called the Third Group (*mesame das*). He was forced to leave Georgia in 1893, fearing arrest for a political manifesto he published in the journal *Moambe* (Messenger). He reached Geneva on this escape journey, where he met other leading Marxist revolutionaries, such as Georgi Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich. He then relocated to Paris for several months, where he met Paul Lafargue and other French socialists. The next step in Zhordania's peregrinations was Stuttgart, where he met Czech-Austrian philosopher and Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky. After enrolling at Stuttgart University and attending lectures by Franz Brentano, Zhordania moved to Munich and then Berlin. During his travels throughout Europe, Zhordania steadily contributed to the Georgian newspaper *Kvali* (Track), one of the first formally Marxist papers within the Russian empire.

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

Further Readings

Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918* translated by Peter Balakian with Aris Sevag (New York: Knopf, 2009).

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Vahan Totovents, *Scenes from an Armenian childhood* (London: Mashtots Press, 1980).

Ervant Der Megerditchian, *The Life of an Armenian Emigrant* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1970).

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

Discussion Questions

- 1) What strategies did Armenian authors develop for representing the Armenian genocide?
- 2) What role did women writers play in establishing modern Azerbaijani autobiography?
- 3) How did the political turmoil of the early 20th century shape Georgians' literary horizons?
- 4) How was the pre-revolutionary Caucasus recollected by writers after the 1917 revolution?

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.

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

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

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

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

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

Readings

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How was Armenian dramaturgy shaped by ancient Greek theatre?
- 2) How were historical events and the experiences of foreign invasions transmuted into Georgian theatrical culture?
- 3) What is the evidence for the earliest beginnings of Georgian theatrical culture?

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 *aşiq*, 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, Shahen, Havasi, and Ashot.

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 (*vucudname*), and questions and answers or riddle poems (*qıfılbənd*), and displays of mastery (*ustadname*).

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.

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

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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 Arsen 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).

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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?

19TH CENTURY

Comparisons. The 19th century was a period of reform across the Caucasus. In Azeri, Armenian, and Georgian drama played a leading role in translating political and social agendas into accessible prose. The center of literary and dramatic activity was Tbilisi (Tiflis), for Armenian and Azeri as well as for Georgian literature.

Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh. The outstanding playwright in this milieu was the polymath Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh, who was also discussed above in connection with nonfictional prose. Although Akhundzadeh wrote in Azeri, his writings had a wide readership, both in Russian and Persian. Akhundzadeh was prolific in many genres, but drama enabled him to develop his gift for humorous and biting satire. In a brief span of just a few years, he composed *The Story of Alchemist Mullah Ebrahim Khalil* (1850), *The Story of Monsieur Jurdan, the Botanical Professor, and the Drunken Dervish Alishah, the Famous Sorcerer* (1850), *The Story of Lankaran Minister* (1850), *The Story of Gholdorbashan Bear* (185), *The Story of the Stingy Man* (1852), and *The Pleaders of the Court* (1855). These six plays were published together, in a collection entitled *Tamsilat* (1855). The performances Akhundzadeh attended of Alexander Griboedov's *Wit from Woe* (1823) and Moliere's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) are believed to have been formative in determining his style and writerly vision. While there are certainly significant parallels in terms of their attacks on hypocrisy and use of satire with Moliere and Griboedov, Akhundzadeh also drew on different and more local literary traditions in his creative practice.

Akhundzadeh's dramas translated Akhundzadeh's dramas were widely translated into English during the 19th century. Three of his plays—*The Story of Monsieur Jurdan*, *The Pleaders of the Court*, and *The Story of Gholdorbashan Bear*—were included in Alexander Rogers' bilingual edition intended for students of Persian employed by the British colonial administration in India. Although the plays were originally composed in Azeri, the English versions of the plays were translated from Persian. Akhundzadeh had requested their translation into Persian by Mirza Jafar Karajahdaghi (1834-1893), a young translator who worked for the forward-thinking Qajar prince for Jalal al-Din Mirza. These were the versions used for the first English edition. When the plays were translated into Persian, they played a major role in establishing theatre as a genre within modern Persian literature.

Reception The dissemination of Akhundzadeh's plays was also facilitated by his connections to the Russian administration in the Caucasus. Akhundzadeh records in his autobiography how he presented his plays to Prince Vorontsov, the Russian Viceroy of the Caucasus. He was compensated for the plays, which were performed in Tbilisi's Opera and Ballet Theater, which had been built by Vorontsov. During the 1920s, the Mailov Theatre in Baku was renamed Akhundov Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater, in honor of Akhundzadeh (whose name was Russianized as Akhundov).

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. Kalfayian 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 Akhonzadeh, 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 Molière'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.

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

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. Simultaneously in Azerbaijan, playwright and director Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev (1870-1933) occupied himself with Nikolai Gogol and Alexander Ostrovsky, Shakespeare, Molière, Schiller and other major European writers into Azerbaijani. In 1925, Jafar Gafar oglu Jabbarly produced a landmark translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into English that he directed the following year at the Azerbaijan Drama Theatre in Baku.

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Discussion Questions

- 1) What European and Russian playwrights exerted the greatest influence on theatre in 19th century Transcaucasia?
- 2) What social groups and classes were the primary targets of satire by 19th century Transcaucasian playwrights?
- 3) Alongside drama, what other performance genres were popular in the 19th century Caucasus?

20TH CENTURY

Alexsandr 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 Alexsandr Shirvanzadeh (1858-1935), widely regarded as the greatest realist dramatist of Eastern Armenian literature. Shirvanzadeh's most notable play *For the Sake of Honor* (Պատվի 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 ethnic clashes. 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 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.

Reform and revolutionary activism Dramatists of the 20th centuries followed the paths of reform and revolutionary activism pioneered by their predecessors during the preceding century. Women's liberation, the plight of the poor, and workers' rights were common themes in the drama of this period. The use of drama to advance social reform was supported by the aesthetic of the Soviet state, in which Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia all participated alongside other Soviet Socialist Republics.

Sakina Mirza Heybat qizi Akhundzadeh. Sakina Mirza Heybat qizi Akhundzadeh (1865–1927) was the first female playwright in Azerbaijani literature. She was born in the city of Quba. Her father was a poet who wrote under the penname Fada. She worked as one of the first teachers at the Empress Alexandra Russian Muslim Boarding School for Girls, the first secular school for Muslim girls in the Russian empire founded by oil baron and philanthropist Hajji Zeynalabdin Taghi oglu Taghiyev. This school offered a more accommodating space for promoting secular education than did her hometown. When she tried to introduce secular education to Quba, her husband was killed by religious extremists. In 1904, Sakina Akhundzadeh's first play, *The Benefit of Science (Elmin manfaati)* was staged by her students in Baku to great acclaim. This initial success encouraged her to continue writing, and she produced more plays, including *Truth Hurts (Hagg soz aji olar)* and *Daughter-in-Law and Mother-in-Law (Galın va gayınana)*. At this point, she began to acquire fame outside the Caucasus. In 1917, the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, Akhundzadeh's play *The Consequence of Evil (Zulmun natijasi)*, about the daughter of a Brahmin priest and modeled on an earlier opera by Leo Delibes, was staged at the Taghiyev theatre.

Judeo-Tat (Juhuri) During the 20th century, voices from communities that had never before had the opportunity to express themselves in literature were registered for the first time. This applied to the increased space granted to women playwrights, and it also extended to authors of minor literatures not represented within Georgian, Azeri, and Armenian. Judeo-Tat (Juhuri) writer Yakov Agarunov's (1907–1992) satirical comedy *King, Rabbi and the Rich Man (Padshah, rabbi, va oshir, 1920)* fits within this new trend, for it was the first play written in the Juhuri language of mountainous Azerbaijan and Daghestan. A second play by Agarunov, *Whose Fault? (Taxzir kini, 1928)*, achieved great popularity and was performed multiple times on the stages of Baku and Derbent.

Huseyn Javid. While many Soviet-era dramatists pioneered new themes, others reworked old subjects drawn from Islamic history, literature, and theology. Huseyn Javid (1882—1941) composed a series of historical and epic tragedies, as well as plays on historical themes, that fit within this trend. His play *The Devil (Iblis, 1918)* is considered his masterpiece, and is recognized as the first play in the Azeri language that is in free (unmetered) verse. It is a drama in three acts that presents the poet's vision for a humanity free from imperial war and colonial rule. Contesting the view that the

devil (Iblis) is the source of all human problems, Javid argues that humans' misfortune actually originates in their greed, in the tyranny of rulers, and in strife among different religious sects. The play is said to have been inspired by Goethe's *Faust* (1790). Notably, this view is in keeping with the Sufi tradition of thought pertaining to Iblis, who is seen less as an archetype of evil than as an embodiment of human flaws, foremost among which is arrogance.

Sheikh Sanan Javid's play *Sheikh Sanan* (1914) borrows from a story famously recorded in the long poem *The Conference of the Birds* (1221) by medieval Persian poet Attar, which tells of a saintly old man who sees himself bowing down to an idol in his dreams. He travels to Rum, meets a Christian woman and falls in love with her. She imposes four conditions on their union. He must: bow down to an idol, burn the Quran, start drinking wine, and renounce his faith. Sanan sets about fulfilling these conditions and becomes a swineherd for his beloved's pigs in order to cover the cost of her dowry. His disciples find Sanan in Rum and persuade him to return to the Muslim faith. He returns to the Kaaba where he has lived for fifty years. The woman whom he fell in love with follows him and converts to Islam. This play reflects on the idea of a universal religion that would overcome differences among humans. Javid's plays on historical themes include *The Prophet* (*Peyghambar*, 1922), *Timur* (*Topal Teymur*, 1925), about Timur the Great, founder of the Timurid dynasty, and *Khayyam* (1935), on the life of 10th/11th century Persian poet Omar Khayyam.

Uzeyir Hajibeyov. While Azeri drama flourished during the twentieth century, the musical traditions of Azerbaijan also came under the influence of global trends in music and performance. The Soviet musicologist and composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948) composed the first national opera *Leyli and Majnun* (1908). Hajibeyov formulated the theoretical basis of Azerbaijani *mugham* for the first time in *The Principles of Azerbaijani Folk Music* (*Osnovi Azerbaidjanskoi narodnoi muziki*, 1957). Although Nizami Ganjevi had made the story of *Leyli and Majnun* famous in Persian, Hajibeyov based his libretto on the Ottoman Turkish version of this story by Fizuli. Hajibeyov's *Leyli and Majnun* introduced a new genre into Azeri culture: the *mugham*-opera. This opera premiered in the famous theatre of Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev in Baku. The following year Hajibeyov produced another opera based on a Persian story, in this case the same story from Attar which Huseyn Javid would make the subject of his play five years later: *Sheikh Sanan* (1909). Yet another *mugham*-opera in the Persian tradition was composed by Hajibeyov the next year: *Rustam and Zohrab* (1910). After producing this series of *mugham*-operas on Persian themes, the composer turned in his later decades to Turkish material, such as the epic *Koroghlu* (*The Blind Man's Son*, 1936), based on a libretto by the Azeri poet Mammed Said Ordubadi (1872-1950).

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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?