The Literature of Georgia

A History

by the same author

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Donald Rayfield

The Literature of Georgia

A History

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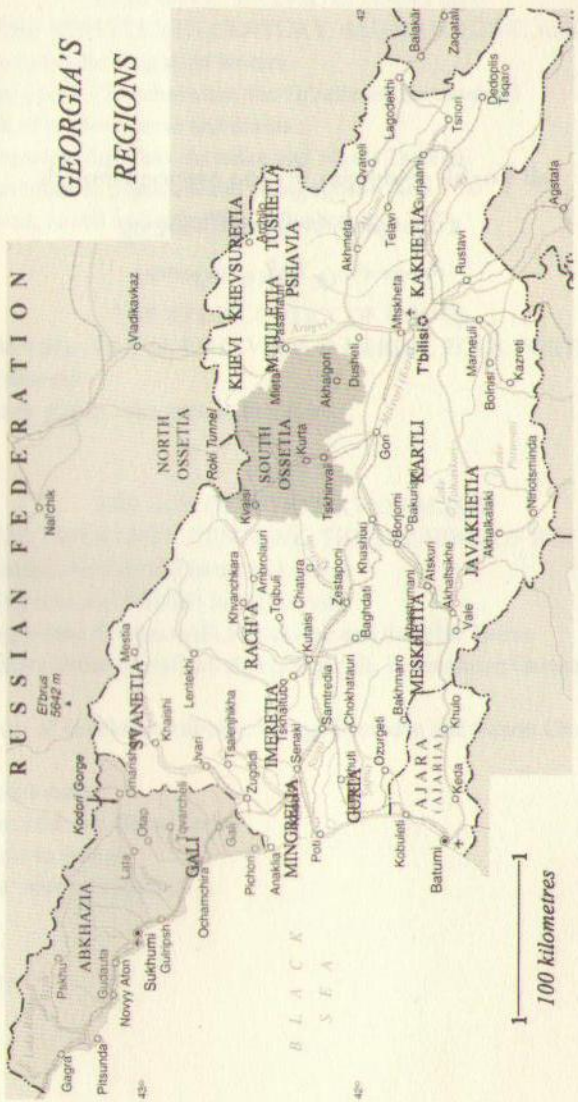
ამ წიგნს ვუძღვნი შუქია აფრიდონიძეს:
«შენ პატრონე, ემშობლე,
როგორაც შენი ზნეაო».



Preface

The importance of Georgian literature is out of all proportion to the number of speakers of the language. Between the high and the 'little' Caucasus, from the Black Sea to a point half-way to the Caspian Sea, is a triangle of land with its maximum dimensions no more than 250 miles west to east and 150 miles north to south: here live four million speakers of Georgian, a language that, like most of the many Caucasian languages is not closely or demonstrably related to any on earth. Georgian is akin only to its own tiny group, Kartvelian (which apart from Georgian comprises the generally unwritten Svan, Mingrelian and Laz languages).

The Georgian language at the greatest period of Georgian history and culture (the twelfth century AD) probably had the same number of speakers and readers, and the same prestige among its neighbours, as the English language in the time of Shakespeare. It certainly had a longer continuous history and drew on resources just as rich as those of English. The language of today is recognizably the same as the language first recorded in AD 430. Like English, which derives its vigour from being a hybrid of Germanic and Romance elements, Georgia has, over the centuries, absorbed the vocabulary of its invaders and neighbours — Greeks, Persians, Armenians, Arabs, Turks, Russians. Over fifteen hundred years the literary language has been shaped by the syntax of classical authors and by the Greek Bible and Orthodox liturgy. It has also been extended by the lexical wealth of its many dialects. Georgian resembles English in its enormous range of synonyms and in the rich phonetic resources the language offers to its poets. Like English, too, Georgian has an alternative folk-culture on which it draws as a counterpart to the cultural influences of its neighbours.

The arguments for a comprehensive history of Georgian literature are based on more than the length of the literary language's history and the depth of its resources. Simply, we cannot ignore a literature that can give rise to such extraordinary works as Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther Skin*, to poets of such genius and originality as the anonymous hymnographers of Byzantine times, or, in modern times, Vazha Pshavela

or Galaktion Tabidze. This is the literature which inspired the theatre and cinema for which Georgia became famous in the 1970s. The audience of a film such as *Invocation* is deprived of half its enjoyment if it has no access to the poetry of Vazha Pshavela: one might as well watch Laurence Olivier as Richard III and never have read Shakespeare. Even a casual perusal of this book may move the reader to believe that our ignorance of Georgian literature is deplorable, almost criminal. Yet how many Georgian authors are to be found in *Encyclopædia Britannica* or *Brockhaus*?

Secondly, Georgian literature has been for fifteen hundred years a bridge between neighbouring cultures, disciplines and religions. That bridge has often been demolished by Arab, Persian, Mongol, Turkish, or Russian invaders — sometimes for as long as two centuries — only to be rebuilt again. Georgian culture for its first thousand years linked Hellenic and Byzantine Christianity to pagan and Islamic Persia; it then, at desperate cost to itself, united the whole of Orthodoxy, and even the western Christian and humanist worlds, to the Orient. In the last 200 years, under Russian domination, it has linked north and south as much as east and west. Many texts from Byzantine Greek, Syriac, Persian, Turkish, Russian and even German literatures can be fully understood only through their Georgian reflections (and sometimes sources). In some cases Georgian has preserved works whose original versions (especially Greek) are otherwise completely lost to us.

Ignorance of Georgian literature is thus a handicap for Byzantinologists, for historians of the 'Christian Orient', for Iranologists, for students of what were once 'Soviet Studies'. But in many other fields, from archæology to ethnology, from musicology to critical theory, from linguistics to theology, Georgian has literary texts of great interest.

This study was born of a series of encyclopædia-style entries I was commissioned to write for Robert Pynsent's *Everyman Companion to East European Literatures* (Dent, 1992). Eight times as long as the sum of those entries, this book attempts to make a long-term contribution towards filling a yawning gap in western knowledge. It is by no means the first venture in English: nearly a hundred years ago, Oliver and Marjory Wardrop began their selfless work of translation from, and advocacy of, the literature of a country where they had been made so welcome. Ten

years ago Katharine Vivian translated from the French Kalistrate Salia's patriotic survey of Georgian literature. In my bibliography I have tried to list every significant bibliography or survey in English and European languages of Georgian writing. Nevertheless, foreign studies are more *hors d'œuvre* than *entrée*; for want of any better-qualified scholar undertaking the task, this study will have to satisfy the appetite of the non-specialist reader.

As the bibliography shows, my sources are many. Georgian scholars have in the last hundred years produced an authoritative, comprehensive and well-written history of their literature up to the end of the eighteenth century. The result is to be found in the first two volumes of Korneli Kekelidze's *History*[1], which evolved over sixty years. I have based much of my approach in Parts I and II on Kekelidze, and find his judgements on dating, authenticity and literary value generally convincing. There are, however, cases where I have preferred other views, sometimes just my own, and since the last edition of his work (1980) new texts and better editions have surfaced. For Georgian literature in the nineteenth century no satisfactory continuous monograph has been written, even in Georgian. The most objective evaluations are to be found in the second part of the 1984 handbook ქართული მწერლობა: ლექსიკონი-ცნობარი წიგნი. As for the twentieth century, the objective work of the mid-1920s and late 1980s was broken off by political pressure, and Part V of this study has had to be written on the basis of my own judgements, helped by just a handful of good academic editions and critical studies, and the best of Georgian literary journalism. As a result, the subjective element in this book is more dominant than I should wish.

In my approach to the reader I have tried to encompass all levels of interest and competence, from scholars who know the language and the literature better than I do, to the lay English-speaking reader who is interested in a literature that has just begun to make its way, through translation, into our common heritage. I have thus had to operate at two levels. For the expert, I have given sources for Georgian texts both primary and secondary, and the bibliographical information they might deem necessary.

Two problems are only partially soluble. First, many Georgian texts are not to be found in most western collections.[2] I have therefore referred

not always to the best, but to the most accessible editions. Particularly for Parts I and II, and the first half of Part III, I refer the reader to the anthology *Georgian Literature* (ქართული მწერლობა), of whose projected volumes about thirty have now appeared, although most of their texts are also available in more informative monographs. Secondly, my last visit to Georgia was in 1992, on the eve of civil war, and I have been unable to check sources or catch up with changes in opinion as I should have wished. Most of the research for this work was thus carried out between 1973 and 1990, since when Georgian publications have often failed to reach me, or anybody else.

Most of my readers will know no Georgian, and for them I have tried to list every accessible translation in more familiar languages. (All unattributed translations in this book are my own.) As they may not feel inclined to familiarise themselves with the very straightforward and consistent Georgian alphabet, I have tried to offer transliteration into roman letters on two levels. In the ordinary, unbracketed text I have given a rough, simple transliteration that makes no distinction between consonants that are aspirated (that is, have air expelled from the mouth as they are pronounced) and consonants that are ejective (pronounced with a sudden release of the closed glottis). After the first discussion of a Georgian name or title, to avoid doubts, I have immediately given the word in Georgian. In a few cases where the precise sound and spelling of a Georgian word is important, I have given words in a 'scientific' roman transliteration. An apostrophe after a consonant indicates that it is 'ejective' or 'glottalized'. In this internationally recognized 'scientific' system, the Czech háček (a circumflex upside-down), as in linguistics, is used to distinguish sh [š], zh [ž] from [s] and [z], while [c] denotes [ts], [ʒ] denotes [dz], [ǯ] denotes an English [j], [č] denotes English [ch], [x] denotes Scottish [ch], and the Greek gamma [γ] denotes its voiced equivalent, i.e. a Dutch or modern Greek [g]. A table (p. 16) shows how Georgian letters are represented in both the simple and 'scientific' transliteration.

My greatest debt in writing this work is to unwritten sources, to a very large number of people who educated, inspired, and corrected me in Georgia and in Georgian, to archivists, librarians, and bibliophiles who gave me access to books and manuscripts, often at a time when Soviet

rule made this dangerous to their prospects. A real account of my debts would make another book. I shall merely name some of my creditors (and none of them bear any responsibility for what I have written) in roughly chronological order of contact, since my first visit to Georgia in 1973: the linguist and teacher Shukia Apridonidze (შუქია აფრიდონიძე); the late poet and scholar Nia Abesadze (ნია აბესაძე); the astrophysicist Gia Machabeli (გია მაჭაბელი) and his wife, Dali Sakhokia (დალი სახოკია); the biblical scholar Zurab Kiknadze (ზურაბ კიკნაძე); the translator of James Joyce, Niko Qiasashvili (ნიკო ყიასაშვილი); the director of Rustaveli Theatre in the mid-1970s, now editor and critic, Rezo Tvaradze (რეზო თვარაძე); the translator and editor Nodar Ebralidze (ნოდარ ებრალიძე); postgraduate students such as Gunana Nizharadze (გუნანა ნიჟარაძე); the archivist Vakhtang Gurgenidze (ვახტანგ გურგენიძე); the courageous historian of the Union of Writers, Rezo Kverenchkhiladze (რეზო კვერენჩხილაძე). A number of Georgian authors, notably Ana Kalandadze (ანა კალანდაძე), Otar Chiladze (ოთარ ჭილაძე), Chabua Amirejibi (ჭაბუა ამირეჯიბი), the late Kolau Nadiradze (კოლაუ ნადირაძე), were extremely tolerant of my importunacy. I owe much to relatives of the dead — Vazha Pshavela's youngest son, the late Vakhtang, Titsian Tabidze's daughter Tanit, Simon Chikovani's nephew Niko. I must avow a debt to the late Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the 1970s, despite the rift brought about by his entry into politics.

Outside Georgia, I am indebted to Tatiana Nikolskaia of Saint Petersburg for her encyclopaedic knowledge of the 1910s and 1920s. David Barrett, of the Department of Oriental Books at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, keeps a megawatt light under a bushel: he has provided a thorough critique of my first draft which has substantially improved Parts I and II. Other friends and scholars, such as Valérie Le Galcher-Baron (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris), Dr George Hewitt (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), Professor Charles Dowsett (Oxford), Dr Jost Gippert (Bamberg), and Professor Winfried Boeder (Oldenburg) have provided valuable suggestions and corrections, as has the anonymous reader for the Oxford University Press. Much remains that they would disagree with, but without their help this would be a far worse book.

I am grateful to a number of western institutions for access to their

material: to Helsinki University Library for its periodicals of the 1890s, to the Bodleian (Oxford), to the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, to the Oriental Section of the British Library, to the Russian State Library and its depository at Khimki. Not merely the published catalogues of the Wardrop Collection in Oxford and the British Library, but their present and past compilers and custodians have been very helpful. I also thank Liz Mailer of the Queen Mary and Westfield College library. A number of *bouquinistes* in Tbilisi, especially on Melikishvili and Davit Aghmashenebeli, have been bountiful beyond the call of commerce. Finally, I must pay tribute to the memory of a controversial, stimulating, and often infuriating man, but at his best a great writer and scholar on Georgian matters, the late Professor David Marshall Lang of London University.

I owe thanks to the Wardrop Trust, which has assisted me with funding both for research travel and for publication of this work. The British Academy has also supported a previous research trip and enabled me to attend conferences in Oslo, Tbilisi, and Chicago which gave much food for thought.

D.R.

Nizhni Arkhyz (Circassia) and London, 1993

Preface to the Second Edition

THE first edition of this work (Clarendon Press, Oxford) sold out in 1998, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to revise my original text for this new edition. There has been a face-lift — better fonts for Georgian and Cyrillic — but my main effort has been to make over a hundred corrections and improvements. I am grateful to friendly reviewers, readers and scholars (notably Professor Jost Gippert of Frankfurt, Professor George Hewitt of SOAS, Professor Zurab Kiknadze of Tbilisi State University, Shukia Apridonidze of the Georgian Academy of Sciences and the late David Barrett) for their constructive criticism. A

trip to Batumi, Tbilisi and Kakhetia in summer 1996, and then in 1997 to Istanbul with its renascent Georgian community, allowed me to gather more material, to check many statements and data and to bring the concluding chapter up to date.

I have taken careful heed of every critical observation and only in a few cases, where my subjective assessment contradicted an equally subjective opinion, have I preferred my original wording. A better history of Georgian literature will, of course, be written, but to do the subject justice many more volumes will be required. Foreign scholars can once again work securely in Georgia, and I hope that this work will prompt others to explore deeper a remarkable and complex culture. The deaths of David Barrett and Charles Dowsett make it all the more imperative that a new generation of Caucasologists carry on the work of their predecessors.

London, 1999

Preface to the Third Edition

THE second edition, published by Curzon Press in 2000, is now nearly sold out; the publisher has let the rights revert to the author, so that I can revise the book and publish it more cheaply than a commercial publisher.

Recent years, particularly since the 'rose' revolution, have seen a resurgence of literature and even a revival in scholarship — a by-product of the upturn in Georgia's economic and geo-political fortunes, rather than of any cultural interest by today's political leaders. Surviving authors of the 1980s can write and publish again; new poets and playwrights are attracting attention in Europe, as well as at home, with the originality and breadth of their work. Scholars have not yet dug deep into the still interred treasures of the archives and Manuscript Institute: this new edition, apart from minor revisions, is distinguished from the second edition by the addition of a chapter on writing since the year 2000. The bibliography is only slightly expanded: details of newer publications are now best found on the internet.

Otford, 2009

Transliteration of the Georgian Alphabet

asomtavruli — the 'rounded', 'capital' or 'ecclesiastic' script of the classical period
nuskhuri — the 'registry', 'official' script of the classical period
mkhedruli — the 'military', 'lay', modern cursive script

asomtavruli	Ⴑ	Ⴒ	Ⴓ	Ⴔ	Ⴕ	Ⴖ	Ⴗ	Ⴘ	Ⴙ	Ⴚ	Ⴛ	Ⴜ	Ⴝ
nuskhuri	ⴑ	ⴒ	ⴓ	ⴔ	ⴕ	ⴖ	ⴗ	ⴘ	ⴙ	ⴚ	ⴛ	ⴜ	ⴝ
mkhedruli	ა	ბ	გ	დ	ე	ვ	ზ	თ*	ი	კ	ლ	მ	ნ
roman	*a*	*b*	*g*	*d*	*e*	*v*	*z*	*ei*	*t*	*i*	*k'*	*l*	*m*
numerical value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20	30	40

asomtavruli	Ⴞ	Ⴟ	Ⴠ	Ⴡ	Ⴢ	Ⴣ	Ⴤ	Ⴥ	Ⴆ	Ⴇ	Ⴈ	Ⴉ	Ⴊ
nuskhuri	ⴞ	ⴟ	ⴠ	ⴡ	ⴢ	ⴣ	ⴤ	ⴥ	ⴆ	ⴇ	ⴈ	ⴉ	ⴊ
mkhedruli	ს	ტ	უ	ფ	ქ	ღ	ყ	შ	ჩ	ც	ძ	წ	ჭ
roman	*n*	*y*	*o*	*p'*	*zh/ž*	*r*	*s*	*t'*	*wi*	*u*	*p*	*k*	*gh/ɣ*
numerical value	50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	—	400	500	600	700

asomtavruli	Ⴋ	Ⴌ	Ⴍ	Ⴎ	Ⴏ	Ⴐ	Ⴑ	Ⴒ	Ⴓ	Ⴔ	Ⴕ	Ⴖ	Ⴗ
nuskhuri	ⴋ	ⴌ	ⴍ	ⴎ	ⴏ	ⴐ	ⴑ	ⴒ	ⴓ	ⴔ	ⴕ	ⴖ	ⴗ
mkhedruli	ხ	ჯ	ჰ	ჱ	ჲ	ჳ	ჴ	ჵ	ჶ	ჷ	ჸ	ჹ	ჺ
roman	*q(')*	*sh/š*	*ch/č*	*ts/c*	*dz/ʒ*	*ts'/c'*	*ch'/č'*	*kh/x*	*q*	*j/ǰ*	*h*	*ô*	
numerical value	800	900	1000	2000	3000	4000	5000	6000	7000	8000	9000	10000	

** these letters are no longer in common use*

I
THE MAKING OF THE CLASSICAL AGE
The Fifth to the Eleventh Centuries: Asceticism and Byzantium

1: Laying the Foundations

BEFORE the earliest texts of Georgian literature could appear, three conditions had to be met. First, an alphabet had to be devised for the language; secondly, texts, above all religious, had to be translated from neighbouring cultures; thirdly, centres — monastic, diocesan, and temporal — had to be established, where a new culture could be sustained and propagated over centuries of invasion, conquest, and oppression.

The Georgian alphabet was, in the view of most non-Georgian scholars, introduced not long after Byzantine Christianity, in the fourth century AD. The alphabetic order of Georgian, however, seems archaic: it roughly follows that of classical Greek (where the digamma comes sixth), whereas the Armenian, whose sign for *v* comes thirtieth rather than sixth, follows the Christian Greek order. Nevertheless, like Armenians before them and Slavs after them, the Georgians probably received a package deal:[3] the Byzantine missionaries included, or recruited, very able educated men, linguists to all effects; they drew up an alphabet based — with one exception, namely the Hellenic digraph *ou* for *u* — on the modern phonetic principle of 'one sign equals one sound'. (The digraph for *u* soon evolved into the minuscule *nuskhuri* single letter ⴓ.) The latter alphabet's forms were influenced by Christian symbolism: this is strongly suggested by the aspirated *k*, (now ქ, then ⴕ), the initial letter of Christ's name, having the form of a cross, while the letter for *j*, (now ჯ, then Ⴡ) which was originally the final letter in the Georgian alphabet, combines the cross and Jesus's initial into a monogram. The Georgian alphabet seems unlikely to have a pre-Christian origin, for the major archaeological monument of the first century AD, the bilingual Armazi gravestone commemorating Serafita, daughter of the Georgian viceroy of Mtskheta,

is inscribed in Greek and Aramaic only. It has been believed, and not only in Armenia, that all the Caucasian alphabets — Armenian, Georgian, and Caucaso-Albanian — were devised in the fourth century by the Armenian scholar Mesrop Mashtots. Whatever the origin of the Georgian alphabet, this great *asomtavruli* (ასომთავრული, 'capital letter') script which first appears in AD 430, like the Armenian, which its *kutkhovani* (კუთხოვანი, 'angular') version resembles in design, is monumental, suitable for inscription in stone. Within a few centuries texts were written in a modified minuscule, the *nuskhuri* (ნუსხური); by the eleventh century a handwritten cursive — known as *mkhedruli* (მხედრული, 'military') in contrast to the older *khutsuri* (ხუცური, 'priestly') scripts — giving birth to the modern Georgian alphabet forms, which now added superb visual recognition to their linguistic virtues.

The Georgian chronicles *The Life of Kartli* (ქართლის ცხოვრება)[4] assert that a Georgian script was invented two centuries before Christ, an assertion unsupported by archaeology. It may be that the Georgians, like many minor nations of the area, wrote in a foreign language — Persian, Aramaic, or Greek — and translated back as they read.

The translation of texts is the beginning of original literature. Before we embark on a study of written texts, we should briefly survey the centres where they originated. From the fourth century Georgians were sent to monastic colonies in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople. From there, under Arab pressure, they spread to Saint Katherine's monastery on Mount Sinai, and by the tenth century to Mount Athos. This brought them into contact with most of the nations of the near east and eastern Mediterranean: the resulting waves of translation thus far outweigh in quantity, if not in quality, the original literature that was yet to come. Georgian was not merely a recipient, however, but very often an intermediary, as texts might be translated, through Georgian, from Arabic or Assyrian into Greek or Armenian, in endless permutations, frequently leaving only the Georgian version to survive barbarian or Islamic attack intact. Georgian texts thus illuminate the history of many other oriental Christian literatures that are largely beyond the scope of this book. Some Georgian writers, such as the prince Peter the Iberian (traditionally 409–88), became purely Greek writers. (Peter the Iberian is sometimes identified as the philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagiticus.)

Conversely, missionaries (many of them were probably of Georgian birth) migrated or fled to Georgia and disseminated the texts and doctrines of monastic colonies. The legends of 'The Thirteen Assyrian Fathers' of the sixth century, which we shall examine as part of hagiographical literature, presumably reflect an intermittent flow of missionaries for the next 900 years.

The first centres abroad were in Jerusalem, and of these the Palavra and Mar-Saba (483) cloisters were the oldest. In Jerusalem too the oldest Georgian inscription (AD 430) has been found. In the seventh century these centres began to shift, by a process of diffusion, to a group of Georgian monasteries on Mount Sinai, where eighty-five surviving Georgian manuscripts include a *mravaltavi*, (მრავალთავი, literally 'many chapters' — a lectionary, or miscellany of Bible texts that were read as part of the liturgy) dated 864. These manuscripts give us an idea of the most archaic Georgian literary language.[5] A catalogue of the earliest translations (biblical and liturgical) also survives on Mount Sinai, but, except for a few fragments, these works are lost. A Georgian presence lingered on Mount Sinai until the sixteenth century.

Monasteries within Georgia were recolonized from Jerusalem and survived only precariously if, like Garesja, they were near turbulent political centres of Mtskheta or Tbilisi. Monks had to flee to the periphery, to Tao-Klarjeti (today around Artvin in north-east Turkey), or new centres, notably the Romana monastery in Constantinople, built by Basil in 876 to commemorate Hilarion the Iberian. The greatest Georgian centre abroad was the Iviron monastery, founded on Mt Athos by the Byzantine general-turned-monk Tornike Eristavi (თორნიკე ერისთავი) in 983. Here Ekvtime Atoneli (ექვთიმე ათონელი, also known as Euthymius Hagiorite, 963–1028) translated or adapted into Georgian 160 literary works — biblical, exegetic, hagiographical, and liturgical — as well as a number of Greek texts: Ekvtime may have translated the very important *Tale of Varlaam and Iosaphat* into Greek from a Georgian version. The Georgians endured a stormy century on Athos before their acceptance by the Greeks, and it is the Iviron monastery on Athos that for three centuries replenishes the devastated homeland with learning and propagators. The life of Ekvtime records a request by the Georgian *kuropalates* ('prince-regent') for books to be sent from Athos because of the dearth of literature in Georgia.[6]

In the eleventh century Georgian monks colonized the Black Mountain (an area between Antioch and Seleucia), the Petritsoni monastery (1083) in Bulgaria, and the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (restored 1040–60), which prospered until the fourteenth century. Only Turkish rule, interrupting the flow of new recruits strangled these institutions.

The greatest cultural stimulus came from the very first texts of Georgian literature. They were composed largely in Palestine and Sinai and were almost entirely translations from the Bible, first the Four Gospels, the Psalms, and then the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Saint Paul. *The Life of Kartli* asserts that King Parsman gave to the Shio Mghvimeli monastery a Gospel decorated by King Vakhtang. Vakhtang reigned roughly between AD 450 and 500, so that by the fifth century the Gospels may have existed in Georgian. In *The Passion of Saint Shushanik* (dubiously dated to AD 473) the martyr quotes from Saint Paul, the Psalms, and the Gospels. We know that Georgian monks at Mar-Saba in the sixth century had a liturgy which, except for the Mass, was entirely in Georgian. But our earliest unambiguously dated manuscripts were written much later. We may speculate that the first translations date from the fourth or fifth century, since early palimpsest and other fragments show linguistic archaicism of a provenance earlier than the eighth century. But in our discussion of the Georgian Bible, let us be warned that, in the words of one scholar: 'To this day it is a mystery and a secret who the first translators of the Bible into Georgian were, what foreign-language versions they were using, or when this gigantic work of political and imperial importance must have been completed… it must have been an entire commission, not just one or two persons, who carried out this task.'[7]

Of the earliest *khanmeti* translations — assuming that the *kh-* really indicates the earliest form of the language — little more than fragments of paper and parchment, used for rewriting or for binding in the monasteries of Mount Sinai and Jerusalem remain. For example, we have Mark 9: 43–50 and two versions of Matt. 7: 5–15. The earliest translations may largely have been extracts for liturgical use: the most substantial body is two fragments of a lectionary. Until much more linguistic, palaeological, and stylistic research has been carried out, we can only guess what survived of these early versions to be incorporated into the Bibles of the tenth to twelfth centuries. A complete canonical Bible was not attained

until modern times. The earliest unbroken and dated text, the Adish manuscript of 897, contains just the complete Gospels.

The first substantial approximation to a canonical Bible is the Oshki text. It originated in the Oshki *laura*[8] in Tao-Klarjeti in AD 978 and was soon afterwards taken to Mount Athos by the founder of the Iberian cloister, Ioane. It lacks Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Chronicles, Psalms, and the Revelation. This earliest version was the foundation for the first printed Georgian Bible, the Bakar Bible of 1743. The Mtskheta Bible of the early 1700s is better known, but, to judge by its errors, if not its fine style, it derives from lost, perhaps earlier, translations. Those translations that Giorgi Atoneli, continuing where Ekvtime had left off, revised in about 1050 by checking against the Greek, apparently included the very earliest versions from monastic colonies in western Georgia, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Antioch. Giorgi states that he had two authoritative versions of the Gospels in need of revision. One was *khanmeti* and the other presumably later *haemeti* from Mar-Saba. Earlier revision or retranslation was called for by the break with the Armenian church: the Georgian church then firmly embraced dyophysite doctrines, and any existing monophysite turns of phrase, especially if they had been translated with reference to the Armenian, would presumably be expunged by collation with the Septuagint. Giorgi Atoneli's revised version — or so a colophon of the Vani Gospels alleges — was kept under lock and key in the monastery's great library and only a faulty copy was accessible, until Stepane of Shatberdi (შატბერდი) managed to secure the copy which later served as the basis of the twelfth-century Vani Gospels. The Adish Gospels (found in the Svan village of Hadysh) appear to represent yet another translation, whereas the twelve other known Gospel texts of the ninth century (the Urbnisi (ურბნისი, 906), Jruchi (ჯრუჭი, 936), and Tbeti (ტბეთი, 995), for example) are related variants of some translation that is closely linked to most surviving *khanmeti* and *haemeti* fragments. Yet the Adish Gospels, in which many scholars see an Armenian and Syriac origin, it is surmised, more consistently reflect the earliest norms of old Georgian: they may be the direct descendant of the first translations. The discrepancies between the early translations, such as the Jruchi and Parkhali, and Giorgi Atoneli's revised version are slight but numerous. Take for example Matt. 25: 1, where Giorgi Atoneli translates:

'ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom', whereas Jruchi has: 'ten virgins, who lit their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom and the bride'.

Of the Old Testament the remnants of *khanmeti* manuscripts are mainly extracts from Genesis, The Wisdom of Solomon, Jeremiah, and a few verses of the Psalms. The fifth-century martyr Shushanik is credited, however, with knowing all 150 Psalms by heart. The fact remains that the earliest papyrus psalter in Sinai is no older than eighth-century, while the first complete canonical version in uncial writing dates from 904. The tenth-century Shatberdi codex contains a commentary on the Psalms. Ekvtime Atoneli (ექვთიმე ათონელი, 'of Athos') translated them anew, in a mutilated version which Giorgi Atoneli revised into the form still currently in use in the Georgian church.

Recent studies of individual books suggest multiple sources and constant revision and retranslation for textual or doctrinal reasons.[9] Some early fragments, such as a *khanmeti* palimpsest found by Birdsall in Vienna, coincide with the Greek Septuagint in its non-standard Lukianos version. It is natural to suspect that the Georgian Bible has a provenance contemporaneous with that of the Georgian alphabet and of Georgia's conversion to Christianity. Texts from Armenia, whose culture led the way — at least up to the schism between the churches in 607 — played a frequent part in the earliest translations. Let us not forget, however, that Christian Armenian culture was also Hellenistic in orientation. Nikolai Marr's studies suggest the importance of an Armenian text in determining the Georgian version of Ezra which was later collated in the first true Bibles. But Armenian and Georgian Old Testament books echo other eastern translations, notably Syriac. A few books, such as Ezekiel, may even have been directly translated from the Masoretic Hebrew text.

A few examples from Genesis alone suffice to illustrate the complexities and inconsistencies of the Georgian Bible. A feature of the earliest translations (such as the Oshki Bible) is the natural Georgian idiom — for example, the consistent avoidance of participles, forms which were later restored in the twelfth-century Gelati Bible to accord with the Greek text. Such artificial constructions were standardized in the Mtskheta manuscript Bible (*c.*1690) and in Prince Bakar's printed Bible, Moscow 1743. Thus for Gen. 15: 18, 'the Lord made a covenant with

Abraham, saying,' we find in Oshki: 'and said' (და ჰრქუა), but in later versions: 'he who was saying' (მეტყუელმან). Greek syntax dominates later versions, as do calques — ვერმკედველობაჲ, 'sightlessness', modelled on Greek αφορασια, instead of the earlier standard სიბრმითა, 'with blindness'. In all but the most modern translations many Hebrew words are left in Greek transliteration or completely mistranslated: *haimim*, 'warm springs' (Gen. 36: 24) is left as meaningless *iamini* in both Greek and Georgian (in the English King James Bible, it is given as 'mules'). Even grosser mistakes occur: at Gen. 46: 28 Greek καθ' Ηρώων πόλιν (King James: 'to the land of Goshen') is given in Oshki as *kateron* (კათერონ), the preposition being merged nonsensically with the proper noun, a mistake not found in Armenian versions (*ekan Gesemi erkirəy*, 'went to the land of Gesem'). Sometimes the errors are found in the later versions, such as the Mtskheta Bible: later versions often bypassed their immediate predecessors and relied on the most primitive texts. One example is Gen. 14: 7: 'And they returned and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh', where Oshki correctly renders the Hebrew (and Greek επι την πηγην της κρίσεως) 'to the source of judgement', namely წყაროსა მას საშჯელისასა, while Mtskheta has ქუეყანად კერისისა, 'to the land of the hearth'. Mistakes are often due to sheer incompetence in Greek: Mtskheta and Bakar both confuse θερινός, 'springtime', with θερισμός, 'reaping', so that Reuben goes out 'on a hot spring day' instead of 'the days of wheat harvest'.

The Book of Judges shows some evidence of translation, or rather mistranslation, from Armenian. Mtskheta 10: 5 gives იკამონს for 'in Camon', the *i* stemming from the Armenian preposition *i*; at 11: 34 'only child' in two manuscripts is rendered by the word იამავრი (*iamavri*), unintelligible save as a transliteration of Armenian *miamòr*, 'only child'.

Such errors and variations show that the chronological order of manuscripts is not always the order in which the texts were translated. Particularly in the earliest period, before the great revisions and collation on Mount Athos in the tenth century, it is hazardous to date or identify sources on purely stylistic criteria.

Those parts of the Bible important in the liturgy received special attention: the Psalms, translated first and revised more carefully, became the models for Georgian hymnography. Commentaries, too, were quickly made available. One translator, Dachi (დაჩი, *c.*910), translated commen-

taries on fifteen of the Psalms (including Psalms 44–50, the canon for Sundays) from an Armenian version of Theodoretus of Cyrrhus (whom he confuses with Epiphanius of Cyprus). Dachi wrote to Stepane Mtbevari (სტეფანე მტბევარი 'of Tbeti', *fl.* 900, the author of *The Passion of Mikael Gobron*); his apologia for his work shows the inhibitions and motivation of Georgian translators at that time:

> For a long time I have been seeking the *Commentary on the Psalms* by Epiphanius of Cyprus, but it does not appear to exist in Georgian. True, I found it in Greek, but this turned out to be an unattainable source for me, because I never managed to learn Greek. Afterwards the work fell into my hands in Armenian, completely like the Greek in purpose and scope, and I felt envy of the Armenians. I knew Armenian and was able to translate it, but I was afraid: the fact is that if a book has already been translated once, to translate it again is a great sin, for a second translation is an offensive act against the first translation… If anything seems unworthy [in my work], burn it; if it pleases you, perfect it: let Your Holiness take charge of it.

A later translator, Eprem Mtsire (ეფრემ მცირე, *fl.* 1100) in the eleventh century, subscribed to more sophisticated principles. He rejected the 'add as much as you lose' principle of earlier scholars. In his 'Testament', written when he had revised previous Georgian translations, he set out three necessary principles: to translate directly from the original; not to distort the natural style of the target language; to provide full commentaries and glosses. Unlike Dachi, he only retranslated inadequate existing texts, and he scrupulously collated the many variants of his original Greek texts. 'By questioning wise and holy Greeks, I borrowed their fullness and truthfulness.' Later translators, notably Ioane Petritsi (იოანე პეტრიწი, *c.*1125), often reverted to the failings of the primitive translators, glossing rather than investigating and retranslating Greek terms.

In addition to the canonical biblical books, Georgian was enriched by the equally numerous uncanonical Apocrypha. A list written by Ekvtime Atoneli is preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript and a very different nineteenth-century version. Compiled perhaps for Giorgi, bishop of Chqondidi (გიორგი ჭყონდიდელი), it names eleven books, including an Apocryphon, rejected by the church. Oddly, Ekvtime himself had trans-

lated Apocrypha into Georgian. They survive as individual works, thirteen of them in the eighteenth century 'Pearl' manuscript (მარგალიტი).

The trickle of biblical and apocryphal translations altered the Georgian language considerably. Closer collation with the Greek introduced subordinate and participial constructions so alien to the Georgian language that by the twelfth century such revisions as the Gelati Bible were cast in an unintelligibly convoluted style. Nevertheless, besides these new syntactic resources, there was a gradual introduction of new imagery, phraseology, and themes into what was an embryonic original literature. The influx of constructions and terms from an alien tongue was a stimulus to creating a literary language full of hybrid vigour.

Exegesis, like those Dachi provided for translations, was also crucial for understanding canonical texts. The tenth-century Shatberdi collection contains eighth-century translations from Hippolytus the Roman and Epiphanius of Cyprus. In a wave that began in the late eleventh century, Eprem Mtsire translated more sophisticated theologians, such as John Chrysostom; Ekvtime Atoneli translated Basil the Great's commentary to the Psalms. Twelfth-century manuscripts of scholia from varied sources encompassed Leviticus to Ruth, and were thus far wider in scope than anything that survives in Greek. Such wealth of commentary implies that there existed an encyclopaedic, fully annotated Georgian edition of the Old Testament, even an original work of scholarship. To judge by the scholia's ornate style, the edition may have been compiled by Ioane Petritsi, who is also credited with a translation of an important Catechism by Anastasius of Antioch.

Together with commentaries to Scripture, the Georgian church needed church law and a liturgy. As for church law, to judge by the Mount Sinai catalogue of manuscripts, Patriarch Photius' great *Canon of the Faith* may have existed in Georgian by the tenth century; certainly Arsen of Iqalto's translation was not the first. The liturgy, however, is of far older origin. The testament of Saint Saba of Jerusalem (d. 532) states that even then, 'although the Georgians and Syrians have no right to say Mass in their own languages, they may say the breviary, the *triodion* [τριῳδιον, songs in three parts, known in Georgian as ვარხვანი, 'prayers for Lent'], the Acts of the Apostles, and the Gospels in their own language'. Armenian sources confirm that the Georgians were soon afterwards con-

ducting all services in their own language. Of the early *khanmeti* documents one is a liturgical lectionary. Various Greek *typika*, monastery rule-books which laid down the order of services, were all available in Georgian. They specified the books (Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistles, Psalms, and, from the tenth century, the Prophets), as well as various miscellanies of Scripture (lectionaries) from which readings might be made. The Mass, which the Georgians called ჟამის წირვა, *zhamis tsirva*, 'offering of the time', followed the Greek *kontakion*. Like the Greeks, in the tenth century the Georgians abandoned the lengthy Saint James Mass for the eloquent and manageable liturgy by Saint John Chrysostom. The rest of the prayer-book (*Euchologion*), revised to a canonical version by Giorgi Atoneli, consisted of 126 prayers for various forms of consecration. All in all, the Georgian church accumulated such a mass of liturgical material that Patriarch Makarius of Antioch in the seventeenth century was astounded: 'Every Georgian church has a gigantic box, which weighs at least half of a mule's load… containing all the books for divine worship that the faithful need.' These collections, *gulani*, survive from over a dozen churches and monasteries.

2: *Lyrical Poetry: Hymnography*

It was the third section of the liturgy — hymns arranged according to their appropriate days — that was the most fruitful for Georgian literature. Nurtured in both Hellenistic and Syrian traditions, Georgian hymnography soon flourished independently. Hymns, themselves inspired by the Psalms and the Gospels, led, both in Byzantine Greek and in Georgian, to a flowering of lyrical and spiritual poetry. The Greek *oktoechos* (the hymns in the eight Byzantine modes established by John Damascene), the Lenten *triodion,* the *pentekostarion* (hymns for Pentecost), and the *menaion* (monthly hymns) all found their counterpart in Georgia. They are the most numerous, the most undervalued, and the most seminal part of the Byzantine poetic heritage. At first, hymns were so linked to Psalms that they were known by the initial words of the Psalm with which they were sung. Later hymns (known as დასდებელნი, *dasdebelni*, literally 'supplements') were independent of the Psalms. At least one *dasdebeli*, an evening hymn to Saint Hilarion, survives in a *khanmeti* text (possibly fifth century). The Georgian terminology is far simpler than the Greek, there being no distinction between the elaborate *sticharion* and the simpler *troparion*. Perhaps Georgian hymnography had already developed before the full Byzantine terminology had evolved.

The earliest hymns are in free verse of varying line-length (but for their innate rhythm, they would pass for prose). Very soon an 'iambic' hymn developed, with lines of fixed length, often of twelve syllables, separated by a caesura into two unequal halves, 5 + 7. Hymns were typically in strophes (მუხლი, *mukhli*, 'knee') of five lines, so that the sixty-syllable strophe became a standard form. Rhyme, which the inflections of Georgian make almost automatic, grew from a casual, weak force — perhaps under the influence of folk poetry, whose pagan imagery underlies many a Georgian hymn — into a primary element, sometimes developing into the homonymic rhymes that were to be a feature of Georgian virtuoso literary versification. Apart from rhyme, the other frequent formal binding element was the use of acrostics, so that each line, even in free-verse hymns, may begin with a specific letter. The

author's name — for example, 'Stepane' — or the hymn's theme — for example, 'Christ is born, peoples, sing with joy' — can emerge from a vertical reading of the left-hand margin.

Georgia's hymns stand at the apex of its cultural heritage. Here we have not only the ingestion of biblical Psalms, Byzantine liturgy, and spiritual poetry into Georgian, but also a personal lyrical input and, more controversially, continuity with native pagan folk-poetry. Moreover, many hymns were sung, not just chanted, to a complex polyphonic music that pre-dates, perhaps by centuries, the development of polyphony in the Mediterranean. Still sung to this day, inside and outside church, Georgian hymns, *galoba*, are the indestructible sinews that connect the classical period to modern times. They might be composed by laymen or lay-women: one example is the eleventh-century inscription of a passionate and moving hymn by Borena, presumably the Borena who was queen to Bagrat IV, on an icon of the Virgin in a Svanetian church:

> O Virgin who took away Eve's guilt, saying to Gabriel:
> 'I am the maid of the Lord', rescue me, thy sentinel,
> The much-troubled Borena who wanders on earth.
> Let the force that was drunk with the first blood collapse.

Many of the finest hymnographers are anonymous. Among the greatest was the translator of John Damascene's powerful requiem *Hymns* [*dasdebelni*] *for the Departed*, which elevates the asceticism of the great Byzantine poet into a poignant expression of disillusionment with terrestrial happiness. Echoes of John Damascene are found in original hymns, such as the magnificent anonymous lyric of the tenth century from Opiza monastery:

> Life will pass and be exhausted,
> Beauty and glory will fade,
> and riches will rot and perish.
> Why should I exalt the bad, when all of us
> are mortal and destined to be turned to earth!
> Come, brothers, look down at the graves,
> where is envy, wonder and fulfilment,
> where is precious memory and pride

> and the innermost urges of the flesh? Behold here
> everything is turned into earth, ash, and clay.[10]

In translating hymns, the Georgian poets were driven to greater originality simply by trying to keep the original Byzantine melodies, which made literal translation of the words impracticable. In the great collection of hymns by Mikael Modrekili (მიქაელ მოდრეკილი, literally 'the bent', also 'the hermit', 'simple monk', *fl.* 970) we have the shifts in pitch and note-length marked by neumes, which shows that musical and textual notations were of equal importance. Unfortunately, the Georgian neume notation differs from the Byzantine Greek notation of the seventh and eighth centuries. To this day it has not been deciphered, although it may be a task within the competence of any Byzantine musicologist: enough ancient hymns are still sung to traditional melodies and counterpoint to give a key to unlock them. Georgian neumes (*nishnebi*, 'signs') already existed by the tenth century, and not only in Mikel Modrekili's collection. We know that by the twelfth century many Georgian hymns were sung in three parts (the *mzakhr/mozakhili, zhir*, and *bami/bani*); we also know that Greek melodies (*heirmoi*) were alien enough to Georgian tradition for Catholicos Ioane to be ordered in the twelfth century to have new music composed for a translation of hymns by Andreas of Crete.

The main body of Georgian hymns extant from the tenth century are translations of the Byzantine Greek canon. First are the *oktoechoi*, eight modes for Sunday services (as opposed to the *paraklitiki* of weekdays). The Georgian church divided these hymns into four primary modes — *khmani*, 'voices' (ηχοι) — and four secondary modes — *gverdni*, 'sides' (πλάγιοι). Ekvtime Atoneli and Giorgi Atoneli standardized these categories. The second body of hymns, also comprehensively gathered together by Giorgi Atoneli, are hymns for Lent — the *triodion* — and for the festivals after Easter — *pentekostarion*. In Georgian they are called *markhvani* ('fasting hymns') and *zatiki* (ზატიკი, 'festive' (Easter to Whitsun) hymns). Both are also called *khvedrni* (ხვედრნი, 'appropriates'), hymns for specific days: Sundays might have numbers 1, 8, and 9, Monday 12, 8, and 9, etc. These *khvedrni* are early. They are found on papyrus and pre-date AD 826, to judge by the absence of hymns by Theodore Studite, who died in that year. The third group of translated hymns

are the *ttveni* (თთვენი, a calque of Greek *menaioi*, or hymns for the twelve months of the year), also collated by Ekvtime and Giorgi Atoneli. Anthologies of all three types of hymns, but especially of *ttveni* and *zatiki*, were also called, from the tenth century, by an Iranian name, *iadgari*.

Many original hymns are closely linked to hagiography. The fourth chapter of Ioane Sabanisdze's *Passion of Saint Abo* is a free-verse hymn (perhaps by a different author). Around AD 1000 were composed the eight short anonymous 'Hymns to Nino' (გალობანი ნინოსნი) which complement the chronicles and the *Conversion of Georgia*. The first runs:

> Magnify, O Christ, Georgia
> With threefold glory:
> With the loincloth of thine,
> With the nails in thy hand,
> With the board at thy feet.
> — A forgotten land,
> Darkened by idols,
> Again remembered,
> Reprieved by God,
> Renewed by Nino.

The earliest original hymn (if it is authentic) is a rhymed 'invocation' (ოხთაჲ, *okhitay*) attributed to the Assyrian Father Shio Mghvimeli (sixth century), in praise of the Virgin. Claimed by the scribe to have been found under a pot, it prays for protection

> With immunity from all attacks,
> From earthquakes and being swallowed up, from fire,
> From the effects of evil spirits and from Barbarians moved by them,
> Through the intercession of the virgin Mother of God.

'And he ordered', says the scribe, 'this invocation to be recited at vespers every Lord's day together with other invocations.'[11]

The person of the hymnographer is often shadowy, recorded only as an acrostic, each verse beginning with a successive letter of the poet's name. Thus we decipher 'Basili' in the sole surviving hymn by Basil of Mar-Saba in Palestine: this hymn in praise of the monastery's founder may date from anywhere between the fifth and eight century. Apart from its power, it has a notably archaic metre. Unrhymed, it is constructed on a

strange syllabic pattern in lines of varying lengths, most commonly in units of nine syllables, in six verses each of six lines:

> By changing nature and pursued by evil,
> You transcended all the lies of this world, Saint Saba,
> Who made the wilderness fertile and beautiful
> And was clad in the joy of Christ,
> Intercede for us sinners,
> Preacher of the wilderness, Saint Saba.
>
> You raised the cross and followed Christ
> Following the examples of his passion, by fasting and prayer
> And waiting for the most high, as though among pleasures,
> You always acted with joy.
> Intercede for us sinners,
> Preacher of the wilderness, Saint Saba.

Few of these syllabic unrhymed hymns (a form which died out by the ninth century) survive. An anonymous 'Hymn for Consecration of the Church' (დასდებელნი სატფურებისანი) ends:

> The rites of heaven celebrate the holy temple,
> Built with the understanding and the wisdom of the divinity
> And together with heavenly powers the sons of men sing in
> confirmation of this to Christ,
> For he is magnified with glory.

Also anonymous is a magnificent 'Triple Sung Hymn for Easter Tuesday' (სამ-საგალობელი ვნებისა სამშაბათისა), which calls upon the congregation:

> Give, peoples, glory to Christ our God!
> When you have heard that longed-for voice —
> Let us light up the lamps of our souls,
> That we may be worthy together with the wise virgins
> To enter his palace for the wedding.

A handful of hymns is often all we have by the famous Fathers of the church: their other works appear to be lost. Thus Grigol Khandzteli (გრიგოლ ხანძთელი, 759–861), whom we know so well through Giorgi Merchule's 'Life', has left, apart from the names of his monasteries,

pupils, and associates, just one set of eight hymns, and that of uncertain attribution, 'For Epiphany [Baptism]' (ნათლისთვის). Its sustained aquatic imagery has a remarkable baroque intensity for all its gnosticism:

Hymn VI
He who gave birth to man
Regretted genesis
And in fury slew with water
Noah's kith and kin,
Now with the same water
The redeemer has slain our sins.
The fishing-rod of the divinity
Has placed like a worm
Our earthly nature
And with it hooked
In the waters the dragon
That seeks us for its clutches.

Hymn VIII
He who gathered the waters
Into one great mass
By divine command
And put them as into a gourd
Of the abyss of his treasures, He the Word of God,
The Baptizer-Precursor through the Water of Light.
By baptism in light
Of the sun that knows no beginning
Are humbled
And cast into utter darkness
Harmful evil spirits,
And like the sun shine forth
Baptized human beings.

The first hymnographer of whose work and authorship we have any certain knowledge is a simple monk, first at Mar-Saba in Palestine, then on Mount Sinai. He was Ioane-Zosime (იოანე-ზოსიმე), who compiled and composed a large body of work between 949 and 987. The colophons on his manuscripts are full of complaints: 956: 'Very ill with malaria [?] and bad eyesight I have worked on [დამიწხრეკიან] this book'; 978: 'With bad

malaria and blindness I have worked on this book'; 982: 'I have worked on this book, the canon of days, with a hand that is full of sin, in my so wicked state of old age, very ill with malaria and blind with many afflictions.' Three manuscripts survive from Ioane-Zosime's years at Mar-Saba. Two are important: a collection of hymns of 954 and an *iadgari* (presentational volume of hymns etc.) of 956. By 973 he had fled, probably from Arab rule, with other Georgian monks to the Matsqvlovani cloister on Mount Sinai, where he was employed in more humble roles (and ruined his eyesight) as bookbinder, collator, and copyist. His Mount Sinai period is interesting, however, because his 'postscripts' or 'testaments' (ანდერძი) to each manuscript he handled give information that is sorely lacking elsewhere: dates, authorship, collaborators. Ioane-Zosime was probably never a translator — his Greek has been assessed by various authorities as either excellent or inadequate. He is more important, anyway, for his originality than for his apparatus. The *iadgari* of hymns he compiled 'for learned persons… provides for all the feasts, new and old, and the twelve Masses completely in Georgian and as performed at Mar-Saba, and all the chronikon.'

Through this collection we can confirm the relationship of the Georgian and Greek calendars; Ioane-Zosime provides in his arrangement of hymns not just his sources, but an encyclopædic list of saints' days and the chronological structure of the Georgian liturgy. Ioane-Zosime was an antiquary: he collects older, disused texts and cites archaic liturgy, comparing usage in different ecclesiastical centres, distinguishing Greek from Georgian sources. The two major works which still await full scholarly treatment are thus his calendar, the 'Synaxary [συναξάριον, a collection of liturgical texts] for the Months of the Year' (კრებაჲ თთუეთაჲ წლისწდისათაჲ) and the great collection 'On true knowledge and information which we have from our masters to establish the times and years, months and days, the full moon before Easter, the determination of the day, on the seven and the leap year, the epakton, the five and the six'. It is the *iadgari* that ends with Ioane-Zosime's 'testament' (*anderdzi*), an acrostic hymn, elaborate to the point of inarticulacy, in which reading the first and last letter of each strophe gives us the saint's name 'Giorgi':

The heavenly hosts to thee, saint of saints
Ranked together sing hymns.

I unworthy implore thee, that I should be with them
Beloved by you.
This praise of the soul, which is given by thee
Which is uttered with great wisdom by dedicated men,
Accept from me too,
O lover of man.

An earlier hymn, attributed to (and written down by) Ioane-Zosime, is 'The Praise and Magnification of the Georgian Language' (ქებაჲ და დიდებაჲ ქართულისა ენისაჲ). A mystical poem, full of numerological symbolism and scriptural allusion, it anticipates intimations of martyrdom and resurrection that were to plague the Georgia for centuries. The poet's confidence stems from knowing that Georgians' calendar, 94 years ahead of the Byzantine, will bring them first to the second coming:

Buried is the Georgian language
As a witness until the day of the second coming,
So that God may examine every language
Through this language.
And so the language
Is sleeping to this day
And in the Gospels this language
Is called Lazarus.
And, on her arrival, Saint Nino converted it
And so did Queen Helen.
So they are two sisters
Like Mary and Martha.
And 'Friendship,'
He [Jesus] said, because
Every secret
Is buried in this language.
And [like Lazarus], lain in the grave four days already.
Therefore David the Prophet spoke,
Saying: 'A thousand years in thy sight
Are but as yesterday.'
And in the Georgian Gospels, namely in Matthew,
Is *ts'ili*, which is a letter,
And it generally means
The number four thousand, —

And these are also the four days
And the man who was dead for four days,
Therefore buried with him
By baptism into death.
And this language,
Beautified and blessed by the name of the Lord,
Humble and afflicted,
Awaits the day of the second coming of the Lord.
And it has this wondrous thing:
Ninety four years
More than other languages
From Christ's coming to this day.
And all this which is written
I have told you as a witness,
This letter, which is
the letter *ts'ili* of the alphabet.

Georgian hymnography of the tenth century blossomed not only from the industry of Ioane-Zosime but from lyrical inspiration throughout the monastic diaspora. One of the greatest hymnographers was Ioane Minchkhi[12] (იოანე მინჩხი, *fl.* 925): his testament is a manuscript on Mount Sinai entitled 'Hymns for Saint George, Composed by the Blessed Minchkhi', to which is annotated, 'These hymns are written for the good King Giorgi the Great, who implored Minchkhi for them', King George presumably being Minchkhi's contemporary, Giorgi, King of Abkhazia, whom the chronicles judge to have been full of every perfection, 'a lover of God more than anything else, a builder of churches and merciful to the poor'. Because of his remoteness in Sinai, only four of Minchkhi's works (all metrical twelve-syllable *iambikoi*) are included in the great collection of Mikael Modrekili of 978–88: two are hymns (*dasdebelni*) for Easter, one to commemorate King Saint Theodosius the Great (346–95) on 19 January, one for Euthymius (Ekvtime) the Great of Palestine on 20 January. Both of the latter are probably fragments of a set of hymns for the whole of January. The Sinai manuscripts distinguish hymns that are Minchkhi 'proper' (თჳთნი) from those that are Minchkhian (მინჩხურნი), that is to say of his school. Some are in prose (or probably free verse whose rhythms we fail to catch), some in *iambikos* metre. Typical of Minchkhi at his best are the hymns to Saint George: the ingenious acrostic, which may

have read, before the last verses were lost, 'St George, intercede for King Giorgi before the King of Kings and magnify him', does not inhibit the clarity of thought or flow of religious feeling:

Hymn II
Give light
To my mind, sweet Jesus,
And give real understanding to my heart,
Lord who makes the blind wise,
Who gave the word to the deaf, to the mute from birth,
The same, o gracious God,
Give to this unworthy one,
So that I may speak the praise of your witness Giorgi!
Like a rose
Fragrant with beautiful colours
You appeared among the barren thorns
And like a candle you lit
Amid the darkness of the unreasonable human race.
Magnified witness,
You declared your loathing
For their lying idols,
And for this they set out to kill you.

Hymn IV
He fled this fleeting world
Of deceptive, dark, material things,
Because he was enlightened
By immaterial light —
He, Giorgi, by Jesus's light,
Came to hate earthly pleasures
And, courageous, he respected tribulations as a release
So that with him remained
The divine spirit that works wonders,
And through it he left the godless awestruck.
Winds struck,
Terrible to undergo —
Against the tower built by
The Holy Spirit
Against the holy martyr
And the fortified wall of believers,

But they could not break down its strength,
For it was founded
Not on sand, but
On the rock of Christ's teachings.

Within Georgia, in the safe wilderness of the monasteries and cathedrals on its southern and western fringes, hymnography also flourished in the tenth century. A certain Ioane Mtbevari (იოანე მტბევარი), son of Arsen and Mariam, became second bishop of Tbeti after Stepane and, by 995, bishop of Atsquri (აწყური), and died after 1002, to judge by an inscription of that date: 'I the sinful Ioane Mtbevari, the ignorant reviser of this book, have mercy on me.' This is all we know of his life. Fifteen of his *dasdebelni*, most in non-metric form, found their way into Mikael Modrekili's collection. Many of his hymns are *sticharia* linked to the period from Advent to the days allotted to John Damascene and to the Desert Fathers, that is to say from mid-December to the end of January. Ioane thinks on an emphatically dyophysite theological level, but with great lyrical verve, as his Christmas hymn (in twelve-syllable metre) 'On the Birth of Our Lord' (შობისათვის უფლისა ჩვენისა) shows:

Rejoice, all creatures,
For God has today appeared in the flesh
And born in Bethlehem, cradled
In a trough blesses mankind
And makes divine light shine forth.
Behold, the mystery of divine wisdom,
For Bethlehem has today become paradise
And the cradle the container of the Lord of Heaven,
The manger his throne and his swaddling clothes the raiment
which has created the first light.
God has appeared in the flesh and the father's
Thrones were not lacking, even though
He became man, there was no change
In the oneness of his nature,
Nor is his becoming man strange,
But he is man and God immortal.
O thou, who inexpressibly containest God,
O ladder on which descended
God and took on today the image of a humble man,

And heavenwards raised us through thee, O Virgin,
Therefore we magnify thee with fervour.
Behold the unattainable mystery, for the unbounded nature
Of God has been contained in flesh
And God is born of a peerless virgin
And he is one with two natures.

The pull of hymnography was irresistible to Georgian writers: the great clerical translators all composed at least one original extant hymn. In the eleventh century Giorgi Atoneli wrote a fine 'Praise of Paul', with an acrostic 'Christ have mercy on us', while Eprem Mtsire's 'To the Model of Wisdom' (სახედ სიბრძნისა) is a sustained original metaphor of Christianity as a building for a congregation:

He calls you to the model of wisdom, come and enter,
And know the apostles' writings,
How Luke acts within as the floor
Of Christ's apostles' acts,
And James and Peter, together with John,
Stand with the seven saints and with Judas,
And Paul adorns it with the roof,
With cells that are blessed with gold.
When Paul gives peace to the congregation,
Thanks to twice-seven epistles,
Those who are all separated,
O Lord, appropriate them to yourself.[13]

Three tenth-century hymnographers whose work is preserved by Mikael Modrekili deserve mention. Ezra, possibly the bishop of Anchi mentioned in the life of Grigol Khandzteli, left an acrostic hymn to Euthymius the Great (გალობანი ეფთვიმე დიდისანი): the acrostic prays for Ezra's patrons Saurmag and Mirean. Kurdanai-Kvirike (კურდანაჲ-კვირიკე), whose name we know only from the acrostic of his one extant work, wrote a very fine Easter hymn (საგალობელი აღდგებისა), imploring Christ:

Look down, lover of man,
On men from heaven to earth
To convert the errant,
To gather those in darkness
To heal the weak,

To seek out man
And give life to the whole world.[14]

Lastly, Stepane Sananoisdze (სტეფანე სანანოისძე), bishop of Chqondidi (ჭყონდიდი), otherwise respected as an inseparable collaborator of bishop Davit Mtbevari (მტბევარი, 'of Tbeti'), the translator of many Greek *keimena* ('texts', here 'original hagiographies'), is also represented as a hymnographer, with an acrostic hymn, from which his own name can be read, in honour of his namesake Stephen the Martyr (საგალობელი სტეფანე პირველმოწამისა). Stepane's metrical ingenuity is expressed in strophes of seven nine-syllable lines, each strophe having the same inflectional rhyme, which gives his hymn a purely invocational quality, but anticipates the virtuosity of secular verse to come.

All these hymnographers were represented in Mikael Modrekili's collection of 491 *folia* (texts and neumes) of 978–88. More remarkable still are Mikael Modrekili's own hymns. Not just an anthologist, an expert in the liturgy, and a musicologist, Mikael was a superb, if humble, poet. He explained: 'With the help of God's great goodness, I, Mikael the Hermit, a wretched man of a very idle life, swallowed by the upsets of the world and weighed down by the manifold weight of sins, have worked… and collected hymns to the Holy Resurrection, which I found in Georgian, by masters Greek and Georgian, complete for all purposes, in accord with the rites of the church.' This he declared to be all he could find written in Greek, Georgian, and Armenian (if მეხური means 'Armenian'). From ambiguous manuscript annotations only a shadowy biography can be conjectured: he may have been a copyist at Athos; around 978, when his major work begins, he appears to have been at the monastery of Oshki in south-west Georgia. He may have been Ekvtime Atoneli's elder brother, and uncle to Ioane the Monk who copied the Shatberdi codex. His initial inspiration seems to have been to improve the translation and ordering of the Byzantine hymns for specific occasions and saints. The work became an obsession, and his original hymns frequently encrypt his own name as an acrostic or by converting letters from numeric values. His verse-forms have more variety than those of all other hymnographers together, often making a pictorial impact on the page, while the religious zeal is sustained from first to last word, as his 'Easter Hymn in the Seventh Tone' (საგალობელი აღდგებისა VII ხმისა) shows:

Only born son and word of God
Nailed to the cross, tormented by his own wish,
Tortured by the unbelievers,
Come to turn his cheek,
Placed in the grave and sealed,
Condemning death
And redeeming darkness,
Peerless God, unchanging in nature,
And without evil,
Utterly untouched,
Not born or created,
Without end,
Giver of life,
Christ is arisen from the dead
And he is alive
Now and for time everlasting.[15]

Very few tenth-century hymnographers escaped Mikael Modrekili's researches. Just two eluded him. One is the utterly unknown Rati Orbeli (რატი ორბელი), who wrote the fifteen-line 'Hymn to the Apostle Titus', where the initial letter of each strophe reveals Orbeli's name. Far more significant is Pilipe, who survives as an acrostic signature ('Philip of Bethlehem' — ფილიპე ბეთლემელი) on two manuscripts of an *iambikos* on Mount Sinai. This poem is very significant, for Pilipe did not just anticipate the extravagant imagery of future secular verse: he first employed the sixteen-syllable rhymed syllabo-tonic rhyme which was to endure as the major vehicle for Georgian secular and religious verse for the next eight centuries. Pilipe may once have been less obscure, for traces of Philip of Bethlehem have been found in Georgian folklore. His 'Praise of Bethlehem, the Virgin and the Son' (ქებაჲ ბეთლემისაჲ, ქალწულისაჲ და ძისაჲ) deserves to be quoted in full:

Thou art adorned by the golden roots, O Virgin
Thou hast sapphires and porphyry for thy raiment, mother of God,
By his shining light we greet thee, Queen,
Ask for forgiveness of our sins, O thou whom we magnify.
Respected and pure is thy house, beloved Woman,
The church of Bethlehem is like the heavens, O immaculate one,
We know the creator of nature through thee, hail, Bethlehem,

We pay tribute to the glorious cradle, hail, O thou without corruption.
Consecrate our prayer, child that lies in the manger,
Let those that believe in thee find mercy, O gracious one,
Give me, the unworthy, thy protective grace, O merciful one,
Ask this day for forgiveness of my sins, O giver of mercy.
Grant me, a sinner, today my request, O benefactor.[16]

3: *Original Prose: from Homilies to Hagiography*

AMONG the considerable body of prosaic theological work translated into Georgian, certain works deserve to be treated as though they were original texts. Following the conjectures of Nutsubidze in Georgia (1942) and Honigmann in Belgium (1952), some scholars identify the Neoplatonist philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagiticus with the fifth-century Georgian Prince Murvan, known as Peter the Iberian. There are strong arguments to the contrary, notably the fact that Eprem Mtsire and Georgian hymnographers of the tenth century consistently treated Peter the Iberian and Dionysius Areopagiticus, the saint and the Father of the church, as distinct figures.[17] If they were one and the same person, then the translation five centuries later of Pseudo-Dionysius' work, such as *On Divine Names* (საღმრთოთა სახელთათვის), stripping it of monophysite terminology, by Eprem Mtsire may be repatriation, rather than importation, from Greek into Georgian. A Georgian origin has been less plausibly proposed for other Fathers of the Greek church. But the corpus of Georgian dogmatic literature was Greek in origin: the Athos school, first Ekvtime, then Giorgi, provided translations of works such as the *Symbolon* of Mikel Synkelos, *On Belief* by Gregory the Theologian, and *The Search for the Soul* by Gregory of Nyssa. By the twelfth century Arsen Vachesdze had compiled the *Dogmatikon*, 'a book of teachings', from sixteen key authors, from John Damascene to Pope Leo the Great.

More originality was called for in religious polemic. Apart from combating Persian, Jewish, and Arab religions, the Georgian church from the seventh to tenth century was fighting its way back to mainstream Orthodoxy and bitterly repudiating heretical Armenian monophysites, with whom Georgian ecclesiasts had hitherto peaceably coexisted. Hagiography, from Saint Nino onwards, fulfilled some polemical functions by attacking those who martyred the saints. While in Constantinople, the founder of the academy at Iqalto, Arsen Iqaltoeli (არსენ იყალთოელი, *fl.* 1090), translated half a dozen anti-monophysite tracts: on Georgian territory these spawned more chauvinistic anti-Armenian diatribe. Among the less aggressive doctrinal work, we find

texts preaching asceticism or mysticism through anecdote, thus paving the way for secular fiction. Particularly important is the sixth-century *Leimonarion*, 'Spiritual Meadow', (from λειμών, 'green meadow') of John Moschus, which as *Samotkhe* ('Paradise') appears to be a very early Georgian narrative text (the surviving copy is from Oshki, AD 977). It has been asserted, on the slender evidence that Moschus could mean both 'suckling' and 'Meskhian' (a Georgian from the extreme south-west of Georgia), that John Moschus was a Georgian, Ioane Meskhi (იოანე მესხი), and that John Moschus/Ioane Meskhi wrote the *Leimonarion* as a Greek and a Georgian text in tandem. It is now proven, from many coincidences with Arabic versions, as well as the text's syntax, that the *Leimonarion* reached Georgian via Arabic.

Whatever the means of transmission, such improving novellas were popular: a similar, but unattributed, collection, known just as *Novellas of the Middle Ages*, was circulating in several manuscripts in the eleventh century. Other such anecdotal didactic narratives survive, notably the anonymous *Stories of the Holy and Godly Fathers* (თხრობანი წმიდათა და ღმერთშემოსილთა მამათანი), sixty-six anecdotes, of which forty-three are about unnamed saints. Basil the Great's *Asketikon* and the popular *Book of Holy Men* (Ανδρών 'αγίων βιβλίον) were translated by Theophile the Hieromonach (თეოფილე ხუცესმონაზონი, a hieromonach being a monk ordained as a priest). In the fourth century Basil the Great (Basil of Cappadocia, or of Caesaria) provided, in two sets of questions and answers, the ascetic rules by which the major Georgian monastic foundations lived. Every Christian literary language of the time had a version of the *Asketikon*: no fewer than four translations survive in Georgian, one of them by Eprem Mtsire, and these are crucial to reconstructing Basil's original conception from the innumerable revisions. However, the original literature of asceticism in Georgian is sparse: its earliest example (apparently from the sixth century) is a short essay 'On Repentance and Humility' (სინანულისათჳს და სიმდაბლისა) by Martviri (მარტვირი), abbot of Mar-Saba in Palestine (to whom is also attributed one of the earliest hagiographies, the life of one of the Assyrian Fathers, Shio Mghvimeli).

A Georgian *mravaltavi* of 864 from Mount Sinai was compiled by Makari (მაკარი), a pupil of Grigol Khandzteli. It preserves in translation, as well as John Chrysostom and Epiphanius of Cyprus, homilies by

Gregory the Miracle-Worker. The recent fathers, notably John Chrysostom, influenced the fourteen extant sermons of Ioane Bolneli (იოანე ბოლნელი, bishop of Bolnisi *c.*1000), on such subjects as 'wine-drinkers and drunkards' (ღვინის მსმელთა და მომთრვალეთათჳს), the Transfiguration, or the bodily Assumption. Ioane Bolneli also left an edifying fragment of verse 'On [the Feast] of the Archpriests':

> Whoever has not been glad of the day
> Commemorating the holy archpriests,
> Or whoever has not wished to perform
> The commemoration of the holy archpriests?
> Or whoever has not felt within his heart
> A desire to hear the hymns
> That are performed by the believers
> To commemorate the holy archpriests?[18]

Over 110 homilies are preserved in Georgian.[19] Some seventy of them have no extant Greek sources and, though they are translations, are of great importance in adumbrating the range of such early Byzantine writers as John Chrysostom, as well as the phraseology and themes we are to find in original Georgian hagiography.

Hagiography was perhaps the most productive field for translation, from Armenian, Syriac, and Arabic, as well as Greek. A *mravaltavi* from Mount Sinai, with a postscript 'Translated in Jerusalem by the hand of Seit [სჱთ]', is all we know of one monk of about AD 800 who provided Georgian versions of some twenty-five *keimena* (texts or original hagiographies). But despite the overwhelming predominance of translated Lives of the saints, the first genre of original early Georgian literature is hagiography, Lives of the saints, particularly of the martyrs.[20] The earliest surviving Georgian literary text may be the greatest hagiographic narrative *The Passion of Queen Saint Shushanik* (წამებაჲ წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისაჲ). It is attributed to the first-person narrator of the martyrdom, the queen's chaplain, the presbyter Iakob Tsurtaveli (იაკობ ცურტაველი), and dated 476–83. (This may be the Iakob mentioned as bishop of Tsurtavi (south-east of Tbilisi) in the early sixth century.) The surviving manuscript is, however, 600 years younger than the narrative's events, and most fifth-century Georgian linguistic norms have been updated. Iakob describes, with many dramatic nuances and few hagiographical

clichés, the six-year torments that are inflicted by a vindictive husband, Varsken, on Shushanik, after she refuses to follow his conversion to Zoroastrianism, the religion of his Iranian masters. Varsken is a historically attested *pitiakhsh* (governor-general), viceroy to the Sassanid shah of Persia, limiting the power of the Georgian kings in Mtskheta. He was murdered in 483, at the instigation of the Georgian king Vakhtang Gorgasal. Varsken's death is not mentioned in the Passion, which may be evidence that the latter was composed within eight years of Shushanik's death, or, paradoxically, that the narrative dates from much later, when the chronology was obscured. Historical record apart, Iakob's moving, twenty-page first-person memoir conveys personal pain and admiration for a victim as much of marital breakdown as of religious imperatives. Its graphic dialogue shows a heroine with the self-destructive vehemence of a Euripidean avenger, the simplicity of an Old Testament heroine, and the pieties — fasting, mortification, study of the Scriptures — of a Byzantine saint. The narrative gives a disconcertingly modern account of a woman avenging herself by intransigence on her oppressors:

> And [Shushanik's sister-in-law], the wife of Jojik, offered her a glass of wine and tried to make her drink some. Furious, Saint Shushanik told her: 'When has it ever been right for men and women to take meals together?' And she flung out her arm and smashed the glass in her sister-in-law's face and the wine was spilt. Then Varsken started to swear blasphemously at her and trampled her with his feet. And he picked up a poker and struck at her head, split it open and made one of her eyes swell up. He punched her face pitilessly and dragged her about by the hair. He was yelling like a furious wild animal and howling as if he had rabies. Then Jojik, his brother, got up to intervene and they fought until Varsken won and ripped off Shushanik's veil. And with difficulty, like a lamb from a wolf, Jojik pulled her out of Varsken's hands. Saint Shushanik lay on the ground as though dead. And Varsken cursed her seed and race and blamed her for ruining his family. And he ordered her to be bound and shackles to be placed around her feet.

The wavering psychology of Shushanik's supporters and enemies is nicely contrasted with her determination to die rather than surrender. When Varsken relents and offers to commute her sentence to exile, she refuses: 'You killed me by telling me I wouldn't walk out alive from this

prison. And now, if you are capable of raising the dead, first raise up your mother, who is buried in Urdi.' As she nears death, Iakob sees maggots on her ulcerated legs and bursts into tears. He relates: 'Then she told me angrily: "Presbyter, why are you sad? Rather than be eaten by worms that do not die, better that I should be eaten by mortal worms in this life."'

The vivid evocation of Shushanik's degradation is all the stronger for the contrast with the fragrance of her name (Susanna), an Armenian diminutive from Hebrew *šūšan*, lily. Apart from its tremendous artistry, however, the narrative has historical and sociological value. It names and dates leading ecclesiastical and temporal figures; it gives wry hints about Georgia's uneasy coexistence with Persian suzerainty — the dyarchy of Christian nobility and populace and Zoroastrian overlords and officials — as well as the privations and fragility of everyday Georgian life:

> The people who live in this region are full of disease, suffering from gout and jaundice, pockmarked, emaciated, and mangy. They have erysipelas, swollen faces, and short lives, so that there are no elderly people in those lands.

The Passion of Saint Shushanik is introduced as though it were a fragment of Iakob's lost writings, but its completeness suggests that this opening impression is an artifice. The dating is questionable, because the manuscript shows linguistic and intertextual features which imply that the Passion is a modernization, reconstruction, or mystification written between the seventh and ninth centuries. Oddest are the biblical phrases ascribed to Saint Shushanik. For example, her remark რამეთუ მუნი იგი მატლი უდიდეს არს და არა მოკუდების ('for there the worm is bigger and does not die') echoes Isa. 66: 24, რამეთუ მატლი არა მოკუდეს ('for their worm shall not die') in versions of the Georgian Bible translated *after* the seventh-century breach with the Armenian church, a revision to conform to Greek Orthodox norms that could not have been made long before AD 700.[21] There are many such biblical reminiscences and it is striking that a scribe should have so consistently updated all Iakob Tsurtaveli's references. Other textual features, such as the use of the Iranian root *dev-* in the Armenian sense to mean 'evil spirit', rather than the earlier and also modern Georgian sense of 'monster', pose the question whether this version of *The Passion of Saint Shushanik* has not been filtered through

an Armenian text[22] (a more extensive tenth-century Armenian version of the Passion is extant). It is also odd that Shushanik is not referred to as a precedent in Passions of the next two centuries. A later date, of course, does not degrade the work: if it is a work of reconstruction, its genius is just as impressive as that of the contemporary reportage it purports to be.

Traditionally, the next extant Passion is that of Evstati (ევსტათი, Eustace) of Mtskheta, which is precisely dated to AD 540–50, and appears to have been compiled within thirty years of Evstati's death. The author remains unidentified, but some theological turns of phrase — 'Had Christ not concealed with flesh [კორცითა გადაიფარა, instead of the dyophysite formula კორცნი შეემოსნეს, 'had been clothed in flesh'] his Godhood, man could not have approached God' — hint that the author was a Monophysite, writing before the break between the Georgian and Armenian churches, probably a native of Mtskheta, conceivably a Georgianized Persian. While the morphology of the earliest manuscript (*c.*1000) is more modern, lexical usages, such as *sopeli* rather than *kveqana* to mean 'land', suggest the text's antiquity. Like Shushanik, Evstati is a martyr to the Zoroastrianism of the ruling Persian viceroy; unlike Shushanik, he is himself a Zoroastrian Persian, who converts to Christianity on his arrival in Mtskheta as an apprentice cobbler. He changes his name from Gvirobandak and marries a local Christian. With eight other Persian apostates, he is sent by the commandant of Mtskheta to Arvand Gushnap, the Persian *marzapan* (military governor) in Tbilisi, for refusing to celebrate a Zoroastrian festival. It is a testimony to the waning of Zoroastrian influence at the time, when Georgia was gravitating towards stronger Greek influence, that Catholicos Samuel and the Christian *pitiakhsh* Arshusha were able to win the converts' release. Four years later, under a new *marzapan*, Evstati is rearrested, reaffirms his faith in a speech of some 3,000 words that occupies half the Passion, and thus forces the reluctant *marzapan* and his executioners to behead him.

Instead of the drama of Shushanik, *The Passion of Evstati* gives us a formalized account of the saint's life — which is, however, richer in historical data and, above all, in pious instruction. Before his execution Evstati quotes Catholicos Samuel, first of all giving a brief summary of the Old and New Testaments; secondly, Evstati repeats the arguments against Georgian paganism — the deification of sun and moon — and

against fire-worship. The first digression may derive from a Georgian, Greek, or Syrian *targum* or interpretative summary, and uses a *Diatessaron*, a synthesized version of the Four Gospels. The *targum* is intriguing: it places the Ten Commandments in a new order, in descending order of gravity: from loving God, not killing, stealing, or fornicating, to forbidding lust, perjury, slander, equivocation, ending with love of neighbours and observing the sabbath. The denunciation of paganism is a version of the second-century Greek apologist Aristides' justification of Christianity (the Greek original has been lost).

The third of the extant pre-Arab Passions is very short: *The Passion of the Saintly Children, Nine in Number, Who Were Siblings in Spirit Through Being Baptized by Holy Immersion, But Were Born Each of Different Mothers* (წამებაჲ ყრმათა წმიდათაჲ, რიცხჳთ ცხრათაჲ, რომელნი იყუნეს სულითა ძმანი ნათლისღებითა წმიდისაგან ემბაზისა, ხოლო შობილ იყუნეს თავეთავეისაგან დედისა თჳსა). At the instigation of the local ruler, the children, 7 to 9 years old, are stoned to death by their parents, pagan villagers, for accepting baptism and running away to join their Christian godfathers. The priest who baptized them is, however, merely wounded and expelled. The location is precise: a village (სოფელი) in the Kola valley (კოლის ხევი) on the upper Mtkvari (მტკვარი) river, but the date is anywhere between AD 350 and 700, when majority paganism and minority Christianity uneasily coexist. (The Christianity is primitive, for converts are baptized in the river, not in a church, and worship is still referred to, as in *The Passion of Evstati*, as ჯამნობა, 'reading the breviary'.) The events are confirmed by folklore: in 1907 the villagers of Kola-Oltisi (კოლა ოლთისი) still called the site of the martyrdom Aiazma (αγιασμός, 'sanctification'). The text is part of a tenth-century manuscript *mravaltavi* from Mount Athos. Just over a thousand words long, the Passion is a harrowing piece of prose:

> Then their godless parents struck their heads and brained them. Snakes and vipers, asps and wild beasts have pity for their children, but these pagans showed no pity for their children. And a crowd of people gathered stones, until they had filled the pit and covered the holy bodies with stones and filled it in with the earth that had been dug out.

A striking feature of this short piece is the baptismal hymn, where the prose text shows traces of a lost rhythm and metre. The origins of this

Passion are obscure: its opening resembles an early work, translated into Georgian in Jerusalem, *The Passion of Abdul Mesia*, about a Jewish boy who is baptized by shepherds and then killed by his father. The Athos *mravaltavi* also contains a text believed to be of Armenian origin, *The Martyrdom of Davit and Tirichan* (წამებაჲ დავითის და ტირიჭანისაჲ), which has many similarities in plot (soul-brothers, baptized youths, killed by pagan relatives), and in terminology. Although both Passions are set in Tao (ტაო), the south-west of Georgia on the borders of Armenia, it is curious that no Armenian version of either Passion survives.

All later hagiographies in Georgia celebrate victims of Islam. From their first appearance at the end of the seventh century on Georgia's borders to the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Tbilisi in the mid-eighth century, the Arabs took over the suzerainty that Byzantium and Persia had competed for. The Arabs had a profound effect on the Georgian language and enriched it with many terms and concepts, but they never established Islam. Nevertheless, they fiercely restricted Christianity to the common people and extirpated it among their vassals — hence the martyrdoms. The first and greatest hagiography of the Islamic period has a known author, Ioane Sabanisdze (იოანე საბანისძე, 'son of Saban'), who composed *The Passion of Habo* [or *Abo*] — very shortly after the saint's execution on 6 January 786, to judge by the fact that the author does not mention the martyrdom of the Georgian king Archil around 787. Preserved in a tenth-century manuscript, the hagiography is more a compendium of documents: it opens with a letter from Samoel, catholicos of Kartli from 780 to 790, praising Ioane Sabanisdze for his 'desire to serve God and his God-magnifying erudition in theological writings', praising Habo 'who in our lifetime was martyred to intercede for us and for the whole of our land of Kartli before Christ'. Ioane is asked by Samoel 'to set your hand to expres the complete truth, as it was and as you yourself know it and describe the martyrdom of the Holy Martyr Habo', in effusive terms which imply that Ioane, perhaps an intimate of Habo, was a prominent layman rather than a subordinate cleric. After Ioane's reply accepting the commission, the four chapters of the hagiography are announced.

The introductory first chapter gives a gruesome vision of Kartli under Arab rule but tails off into a pious exegesis of the symbolic names of Christ, as 'gate', 'road', 'lamb', 'shepherd', 'rock', 'pearl', 'salt',

'flower', 'angel', etc. Chapter 2 gives the biography of Habo. Like Evstati and Shushanik before him, he was a foreigner, inspired by Georgian Christians to outshine them. Originally an Arab perfumer from Baghdad, Habo was attached to the *erismtavari* (duke) Nerse, appointed by the Caliphate to rule Tbilisi. Like many Arab emirs, Nerse 'went native', resisted his overlords, and had to flee. Habo, by now a convinced if secret Christian, accompanied Nerse across the Caucasus to Ossetian (or Alanian) and Khazar territory. Ioane Sabanisdze records that they found refuge in Christian Abkhazia, which then extended as far as Trebizond. Here Habo openly avows his conversion and spends 780 fasting and meditating; Nerse is forgiven by his Arab overlords and allowed a safe conduct back to Tbilisi. Habo returns with him, despite warnings from the Abkhaz prince that as a Muslim renegade he faces martyrdom:

> Do not leave this land, for the Saracens have conquered the land of Kartli. And you are by birth a Saracen and they will not pardon you for being a Christian among them. I fear for you, lest they drive you out of your faith in Christ, whether you wish it or not, and undo your great labours.

The third and most intense chapter is the martyrdom proper: after three years of Muslim agitation, despite the support of the Georgian *erismtavari* Stepane Gurgenisdze, a new judge detains Habo. Against offers of money Habo stands firm: 'May your gold and silver stay with you and undo you. I seek no respect from men, because I have the power of Christ, a crown of life that cannot corrupt, and eternal respect in heaven.' After ten days in prison Habo greets his death as a second baptism and a sublime version of his craft:

> I used to be a perfumer and blender of fragrant oils, but this anointing today is for my burial. Henceforth I shall anoint no more with the perishable oil of my exile, but as the wise Solomon taught me in the 'Song of Songs', 'I ran in the savour of Thy good ointments.'

The Muslims reluctantly behead him, but fear a miraculous aftermath:

> They went and lifted up his revered corpse from the ground and placed it in a box with his clothes and scraped up the just man's blood from the earth and, leaving nothing on the ground, they put it in a vessel… They

> gathered firewood and hay and oil and swamped the saint's body on it and set fire to it… And the martyred saint's bones which they could not destroy by burning they collected in a sheepskin, stitched it tightly and picked up and threw it into the great river beneath the town bridge.

Despite these precautions a miraculous flaming star lights up the spot on the river for half the night and the next.

Ioane's fourth chapter seems to have been originally a free-verse paean of praise to the martyr, calling on all Christians to celebrate Habo's martyrdom. The process of transcription has not fully effaced the rhythms of this iambic psalm, a very early specimens of Georgian religious verse. (It may be a variant of the anonymous hymn *In Praise of Saint Habo*.)

Phrases and concepts from Habo's Passion are echoed in one of the best-documented of Georgian Passions, that of Kostanti Kakhi, (კოსტანტი კახი)[23] *The Life and Passion of the Holy Martyr Kostanti the Georgian, Who Was Martyred by Jafar, King of the Arabs* (known as 'Babylonians') (*ცხოვრებაჲ და წამებაჲ წმიდისა მოწამისა კოსტანტი ქართველისაჲ, რომელი იწამა ბაბილონელთა მეფისა ჯაფარის მიერ*). Kostanti Kakhi (presumably the sobriquet is due to his Kakhetian origins) was, unusually for a martyr, a wealthy elderly nobleman. Renowned for his generosity to all, a pilgrim to Jerusalem, he was 85 in 853, when he was seized by Bugha, the Turkic general of the Arab army in the Caucasus, and sent to the royal residence in Samarra (Mesopotamia). The martyrdom proceeds conventionally: Kostanti remains steadfast despite offers of wealth and threats of torture. Two renegade Georgian dukes (*eristavi*), once Christians themselves, visit him in prison, first to persuade him and then to behead him. Both eloquence and courage fail them: Jafar sends a vassal (წინაშემდგომელი) to kill the saint. The Passion ends with graphic moralizing:

> The transient warmth of the sun's orb did not seem sweet to him, he looked with indignation at the rising sun, its light was like a storm-cloud looming and for the love of Christ he spat out all of life's pleasures like the blood of [extracted] teeth in the great desire of his heart and the wisdom of his repudiation of deceit.

While lacking the emotions and colour of earlier Passions, that of Kostanti Kakhi has unique qualities. For one, it is corroborated by a stone inscription in Ateni cathedral (known as სიონი, 'Sioni'): 'In AH 239 [AD

861] Bugha burnt the city of Tbilisi and captured the Emir Sahak and killed him. And also in August, on the 26th, on Saturday, Zirak took Kakha and his son Tarkhuji prisoner.' For another, it gives intriguing scraps of information, such as Empress Theodora's 'freeing all the Greek lands of the madness of iconoclasm', and a view of the rise of Byzantine influence and of Georgian nationalism, which saturates the narrative. The text incorporates many other narratives, some biblical: its opening phrases are a literal translation from Georgios of Alexandria's *Life of Saint John Chrysostom* (*c.*620), a text otherwise unknown in Georgian until 968. The closing phrases, rejecting 'the transient warmth of the sun', echo the same apologia by Marcianus Aristides that is embedded in Evstati's Passion, while Kostanti's letter asking the city's hermits and senior monks to pray not for his rescue but for his endurance echoes Saint Habo's message to the priests of Tbilisi.

Other, less flamboyantly evoked martyrdoms under the Arab yoke are derived from, or incorporated into, the chronicles *Kartlis tskhovreba. The Life of Kings* (*მეფეთა ცხოვრება*) written by Leonti Mroveli (*ლეონტი მროველი*) in the eleventh century includes a résumé of such hagiographies as the martyrdom of King Archil, evidently around 787, to judge by the silence of Ioane Sabanisdze on the subject. But distance from events and the influence of metaphrastic hagiographical clichés lower the literary interest of such martyria. The anonymous Passion of two princes, Davit and Konstantine (*წამებაჲ დავითის და კოსტანტინესი*), in 741 at the hands of the Arab general Marwan (known in Georgia as Murvan the Deaf), is likewise, to judge by allusions to the chronicles of Juansher and reminiscences of late Byzantine hagiography, an impoverished, standardized version of what may have been an interesting early work. Earlier martyrdoms, such as that of Razhden under the Persians in the fifth century, are embedded in Juansher's *Life of King Vakhtang Gorgasali*, part of *Kartlis tskhovreba*. Other late Passions are best discussed not as hagiography but as last chapters in a patristic life of one of the Fathers of the church.

The last Passion of the Arab era compares in its literary impact with that of Habo: it is *The Passion of the Holy Martyr* [*Mikel*] *Gobron, Who Was Abducted from the Castle of Qveli* (*წამებაჲ წმიდისა მოწამისა გობრონისი, რომელი განიყვანეს ყუელის ციხით*), composed by Stepane Mtbevari (*სტეფანე მტბევარი*, Stephen, the first bishop of Tbeti, in south-west Georgia). Gobroni was a general captured and executed in 914 by the Arab invader Abu 'l Qasim, who had earlier killed King Smbat of Armenia. Stepane Mtbevari is praised by Giorgi Merchule as a writer in *The Life of Grigol of Khandzta*, but apart from a translation of a commentary to the Psalms, the *Passion of Gobron* is his only extant work. It was commissioned by the archduke (*erismtavar-erismtavari*) Ashot-Kukhi (*აშოტ-კუხი*) between 914 and 918. It suffers from its professionalism (four centuries of hagiographic writing had stylized the genre): it begins with edifying quotations from the Book of Job and Saint Paul. It also follows a ritual pattern, condemning the 'heretical' monophysite Armenians ('for whom Christ died in vain') and their sins which (in the shape of the Arab invasion) have brought God's wrath down on them 'like the fall of Nineveh'. (Stepane Mtbevari's lack of irony made him blind to the fact that the Orthodox Georgians had suffered just as dire a fate.) In cursing the Arab invaders Stepane does, however, show a talent for epic storytelling:

> And they came to the castle of Qveli, belonging to Gurgen the Archduke, in which the leading lords and among them Gobron the blessed martyr for Christ. They came and set up their tents like snow, over an expanse broad enough to contain five villages. And they put up ropes to link their tents, since this was the way in which they attacked, that loathsome race of godless, cruel bowmen, who would eat dogs, mice, human flesh, and all sorts of unclean things. And they also prepared for battle with many catapults, and the number of arrows they shot blocked out the sun from the air, for they had a hundred camel-loads of arrows and as many spears.

As usual in such Passions, after capture Gobron first rejects inducements to convert to Islam, then holds out against torture and expresses his gratitude to Christ for being chosen as a witness and martyr[24] before being beheaded. The Passion ends in the conventional moral symmetry: the Greeks will do to the Arabs what the Arabs have done to Christians, and torture of the martyr's body will bring his soul closer to God.

Among the numerous Passions translated into Georgian from neighbouring languages, one, *The Passion of Mikael of Mar-Saba*,

assumed to be translated from a lost Arabic original in the ninth or tenth century, must be treated as an integral part of Georgian literature: it is a unique and effectively laconic free-verse lyrical narrative, dramatizing the encounter in a Jerusalem church of the monk Mikael with Seida, the wife of Emir Murman. Mikael spurns the infatuated woman, whose

> heart then is stirred by an asp.
> And it was filled with weeping
> With much anger.
> And she ordered him to be bound with a bow-string
> And tortured with whips.

4: *The Lives of the Fathers: Serapion Zarzmeli, Grigol Khandzteli*

THE boundary between a 'Passion' and a biography of a Father of the church is fuzzy. Where the life seems more important for posterity than the manner of death, we deal with such stories — for example, that of Abibos — as part of patristic literature. The genre begins with *The Lives of the Thirteen Assyrian Fathers* (ათსამეტ ასურელ მამათა ცხოვრება). Tradition, written and oral, names as many as nineteen Assyrian Fathers, presumably missionaries leaving Mesopotamia in the first half of the sixth century to strengthen Christianity in Georgia. Historians accept that some of the colonizing Fathers were the founders of Georgia's monasteries and convents, as their names suggest: Shio Mghvimeli (შიო მღვიმელი, 'cave-dweller'), Davit Garesjeli (დავით გარეჯელი, 'who sits outside'). Opinion is divided as to whether they were Syrians or Georgians, whether missionaries or refugees — monophysite or dyophysite — from Syria, where dyophysite orthodoxy was being reasserted and yet monophysitism still resisted. All assumptions are flawed: Georgia was primarily monophysite in the sixth century, yet it is unlikely that the Lives of the Assyrian Fathers would be written or their cult maintained between the ninth and twelfth centuries, when Georgia was again strongly dyophysite. Some of the Lives are formalities composed for an eighteenth-century synaxary, but four, *The Achievements and Passion of Saint Abibos, Bishop of Nekres* (მოქალაქობაჲ და წამებაჲ წმიდისა აბიბოს ნეკრესელ ეპისკოპოსისაჲ), *The Life of Ioane Zedazneli*, *The Life of Shio Mghvimeli*, and *The Life of Davit Garesjeli*, all exist in original (*keimenon*) form, as well as extended, perhaps metaphrastic, versions. Prolonged disputes on the date and authorship of these Lives can be resolved only by systematic stylistic analysis.[25] Least likely is the authorship of Catholicos Arsen I Sapareli (830–87); quite plausible is that of Catholicos Arsen II (reigned 955–80) for the lives of Ioane Zedazneli and Shio Mghvimeli (which seem to be two parts of one work), and perhaps for the *Passion of Abibos*. *The Life of Davit Garesjeli*, also in an earlier short and later extended version, is unattributed, and dated variously to between 690 and 950.

The Passion of Abibos fixes its chronology by depicting the martyr as a friend of Saint Simeon the younger Stylite of Antioch (d. 596): Abibos confronts the Iranian *marzapan* by extinguishing the sacred Zoroastrian fire. The context makes it clear that Christianity was then tolerated, except when its proponents attacked their rulers' religion. Abibos is shown delivering a traditional Byzantine denunciation of fire-worship, asserting the equality of all four elements in God's creation, before the irritated Persians brain him with a stone.

Conventional formulas are used to far greater effect in the Life of the ascetic Davit Garesjeli, which is closer to a Franciscan idyll than any other Georgian patristic work. Davit and his disciple Lukian are at one with nature:

> Suddenly there came three deer, followed by their fawns, and stood before them like calm sheep. Father Davit said, 'Brother Lukian, take a bowl and milk the deer.' And he got up and milked them. When the bowl was full, he brought it to the hermit. And he made the sign of the cross and it curdled and they ate curds and were sated and glorified God. After that the deer came every day, except Wednesdays and Fridays, and brought their fawns with them.

Davit saves the deer from a dragon, but loves all fauna so much that he protests when an angel slays the dragon. He saves a partridge from a hunter's hawk and converts the barbarian hunter by healing his son. Such motifs are found in other Lives of the Assyrian Fathers: Ioane Zedazneli befriends bears, Shio Mghvimeli has a tame wolf to herd his donkeys.

The important trait of the Assyrian Fathers was their role in building sanctuaries whence Christian culture and example could spread; seen retrospectively from the relative security of tenth-century Byzantine Georgia, they were the real patriarchs of Georgian ethnic identity. We find a similar idyllic confidence in two other major monuments of Georgian patristic literature, which deal with the recolonization of south-west Georgia, Tao-Klarjeti (ტაო-კლარჯეთი) and Samtskhe (სამცხე), in the ninth and tenth centuries, in the wake of the devastation left by Arab invaders.

Probably the earlier of these two works is *The Life and Achievement of Our Divinely Inspired Blessed Father Serapion* [*of Zarzma*] (*ცხოვრებაჲ და მოქალაქობაჲ ღმერთ-შემოსილისა ნეტარისა მამისა ჩუენისაჲ სერაპიონისი*), written some twenty-five years after Serapion's death by his nephew Basil

Zarzmeli. The chronology has been hotly disputed, since there is no mention of the Arabs, the founding of the Zarzma monastery is described as if no building had taken place before, and Serapion, it is implied, is a protégé of the sixth-century Assyrian Father, Shio Mghvimeli. But the mention of the later cult of the Transfiguration, the presence of many proper names, particularly of local dignitaries such as Laklak and Bahlaundi, whose existence is corroborated by tenth-century frescos and inscriptions in the Opiza church, as well as the lexical and syntactical modernism of the language, compel us to assume that Serapion built, or rebuilt, Zarzma much later, around 865, and died in about 900.[26] The only surviving manuscript (about 9,000 words) is a corrupt metaphrasis[27] in a sixteenth-century copy, although the original text survives intact among the additions. The orphaned Serapion is shown sheltering with Mikael of Parekhi (მიქაელ პარეხელი, whose lost hagiography is referred to). Serapion is then encouraged to migrate to Samtskhe with an icon of the Transfiguration to find a site for a new monastery, under the protection of a local prince, Giorgi Chorchaneli. After Serapion's death his nephew Basil becomes the abbot of this monastery of Zarzma and the author of Serapion's Life. Vague in chronology, the Life is rich in toponyms and is a valuable source of architectural, geographical, and social information. It is also rich, if frustrating, in allusion to a large corpus of hagiographical literature that is now irretrievably lost. It is also unusual in its lyrical evocation of the luxuriant wilderness of Samtskhe: switching into the first person, the narrative enthuses:

> We followed the river upstream and reached a deep, impenetrable gorge, called Goderdzi, and with a lot of effort we entered it, for so densely forested was it that for a long time we could no longer see the sky nor any ray of light. Therefore, delayed by the trouble and effort of going through thick mist and deep mud, we climbed to the head of the gorge and saw small meadows… They saw a small hill and, climbing to the top, a spring and a stream so beautiful that it met all the desires behind their journeying. [They had] an everlasting dried palm-branch which Serapion had been handed by Mikael of Parekhi, and he planted it in the earth. In a short time it took root and he would preach about this glorious miracle under its spreading branches.

After three years' hard work and more prodigies, Zarzma is established: the biography ends by affirming continuity, ecclesiastical and dynastic.

The Life of Grigol of Khandzta (გრიგოლ ხანძთელის ცხოვრება), written by Giorgi Merchule (გიორგი მერჩულე, 'ecclesiastical lawyer'), is much more substantial in length (about 25,000 words) and in chronology, for the whole political structure of Georgia emerges from the narrative. Grigol too is a less shadowy figure than Serapion: apart from texts quoted by Giorgi Merchule, some of his hymns survive. Born in 759, Grigol lived until 861. Helped by Teodore, a later abbot of Khandzta, Merchule compiled this biography some ninety years later, and in 958–66 it was revised by *eristavt-eristavi* (Grand Duke) Bagrat. The earliest surviving manuscript (whose language is close to the tenth century norms, though the original order of episodes may have been disturbed) was discovered in Jerusalem: it dates from the twelfth century. Like Basil Zarzmeli, Giorgi Merchule has a rich feeling for nature and culture: Nikolai Marr, who first published the work in 1911, called him a Baedeker of ninth-century Georgia. The stylistic range, from lyricism and dramatic dialogue to dogmatic argument, marks out Giorgi Merchule as the outstanding Georgian prose writer of the millennium and this biography as its most important narrative, for aesthetic as well as practical value.

Grigol, like the martyr Habo, is an ascetic and a protégé of Nerse, but chooses, instead of confrontation, migration to the depopulated south-west of the country, along the River Chorokh (ჭოროხი), under the rule of one of the early Bagratids, Ashot (აშოტი, 780–826), who gambled his survival on the recovery of Byzantine and the decline of Arab power. Unlike Serapion, and despite his hermetic instincts, Grigol shows political drive and a capacity for forming alliances: the monasteries he founds become a parallel state to Ashot's. In a devastated wilderness, without tools, Khandzta, by whose name Grigol is known, is built. Khandzta attracts the temporal ruler's attention: he is told (in chapter 11):

> This wilderness is fine because of the sun's warmth and the gentle air all about it and it has a copious flowing spring, beautiful, cool and pleasant. There are innumerable copses and a modicum of other food, such as the wilderness can provide. There are no arable fields or hay meadows: there cannot be any on the sharp rugged Ghado mountains.

At first Khandzta is an offshoot of the revived Opiza monastery and then, when Ashot grants the monks better farming-land, it becomes a centre for still greater monasteries, notably Shatberdi, from where one of Georgia's most important collections of manuscripts stems. Grigol's power is demonstrated when he decides to intervene in Ashot's private life and dismiss his mistress (this episode already adumbrates the novelistic skills that underwrite the Georgian romance two centuries later):

> The devil led the King astray, and he brought a concubine into the castle and fornicated with her, for the demon of carnal love had affected him badly, a man who had never before had such habits, but was overcome by this evil sin.
>
> When the blessed Grigol heard of this soul-destroying matter, he was very worried. The King turned to Saint Grigol, an elderly man, established in the church, because he was a miracle-worker and greatly respected by God and man. And he deliberately had an interview with him. The King undertook to stop sinning and to send away the woman he had brought in. But he couldn't keep his word, because he was enslaved by instinct.
>
> The blessed Grigol found the right time: one day, when the *kuropalates* was far from Artanuj, he left Shatberdi and was at the castle gate by sunset. He sent a man to the woman with a request for food, mentioning the reason why he was there. She was very glad and gave various supplies for the saint and his disciples. At daybreak he sent his man back to make her come out to see him.

Grigol refuses his blessing until the woman consents to be led away, whereupon the saint gives her his shoe-lace to tie up her gown and delivers her to Mere, the convent of his ally Mother Pebronia. Ashot tries to retrieve her, but the abbess refuses him and the episode ends, like several others, with a victory of church over state: the *kuropalates* is shamed and dismayed: 'Blessed is he who is no longer alive.'

Grimmer major patristic literature stems from Mount Athos, where the Georgian monks of the tenth and eleventh centuries had to defend themselves against Greek nationalism and accusations of heresy and insubordination. It has a brief precedent in the unattributed *Life of Ilarion the Georgian* (ილარიონ ქართველის ცხოვრება). Ilarion (822–75) is one of the first Georgian monks to colonize the west: Olympus monastery in

Anatolia, and Romana in Constantinople. The Life itself is unremarkable, except for its proof that close Byzantine–Georgian relations existed in the mid-ninth century. Although probably a translation from Greek, it is believed by some authorities to be original. A far more impressive piece of propaganda and historical record, however, was written by the productive translator Giorgi Atoneli or Mtatsmindeli (გიორგი ათონელი, მთაწმინდელი, 'of Athos' or 'of The Holy Mountain', 1009–65): *The Life of Our Blessed Fathers Ioane and Ekvtime and an Account of their Worthy Achievements* (*ცხოვრებაჲ ნეტარის მამისა ჩუენისა იოვანესი და ევთჳმესი და უწყებაჲ ღირსისა მის მოქალაქობისა მათისაჲ*). It is Giorgi's most important original work. Written some time after 1040, this manuscript of some 12,000 words in the Athos collection (A558) amounts to a history celebrating Georgia's contribution to the defence of Byzantium and to its monasteries, notably the *laura* 'whose like will not be found' on Mount Athos. Giorgi lauds Ioane (Iovane) (d. 1005) and Ekvtime (Eptvime) (955–1038) Atoneli as the founders of Georgian expatriate literature, and Ekvtime in particular as a translator from Georgian to Greek as well as from Greek into Georgian. Apart from its political and theological message, Giorgi's work is particularly valuable for its graphic rhythmic prose, describing the monks (even Ekvtime himself) mowing grass, hauling boats ashore, toiling in the vineyards.

In 1066, a year after his death, Giorgi Atoneli became the subject of a similar biography by his disciple, who had followed him from Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople to Mount Athos. The disciple, Giorgi Mtsire (მცირე, 'junior') or Khutsesmonazoni (ხუცესმონაზონი, 'senior monk'), is himself a shadowy figure, who died some time after 1083. Giorgi Atoneli, like many a Georgian Father, is turned into an Old Testament role-model: 'like Abraham, he chose to live in alien lands and in destitution and poverty'. The ascetic ideal is raised above all others: 'whoever wishes to be closer to God, distances themselves first of all from themselves and from their friends, and only then finds their true nature and God's intentions'. Giorgi Mtsire borrows some of his subject's own hagiographic phrases to praise him: 'for such translations had never appeared in our language, nor do I think they will ever appear… he translated the books of the elders by night'. Nevertheless, Giorgi Mtsire has a distinct style, full of rhetorical questions and elaborate metaphors.

The death of Giorgi Atoneli is a particularly fine piece of euphuism in the best sense of the word:

> Tranquil and peaceful, he ordered a Mass for his own departure and revealed such peace as that of a skilful ship's captain who has crossed many an abyss and experienced battle with many a wave and has joyfully prepared to enter port, or like a powerful cavalryman who has fought countless generals and many fights and battles and has always returned home victorious to his king, or a merchant, who has amassed countless wealth at a small cost and is hurrying towards his treasure, or like a workman joyful because his sack is full of the fruits of his labour, so the saint at his Mass for the departing was like all of these persons.

Commissioned to commemorate the late abbot by Ioane, bishop of Chqondidi (იოანე ჭყონდიდელი), and by a monk, Giorgi Sheqenebuli (შეყენებული, 'in holy orders'), who also edited this substantial narrative of some 20,000 words), Giorgi Mtsire gives us not just a panegyric of his master, 'a boy adorned with seniority', but also a mass of political information, and some eyewitness accounts, although there are no dates and the chronology is all relative. We realize how close was the network linking Byzantine and Georgian culture, religion, and politics — there is a graphic account of Bagrat IV's marrying his daughter Martha to the Byzantine emperor — and how strong were the nationalist tensions rending that network: '[in the Black Mountain] some of the men of Saint Simon's were moved by satanic envy against the Georgians and tried to remove us, lock, stock, and barrel, from Saint Simon's.'

The Lives by, and of, Giorgi Atoneli cross the bridge between patristics and recognizable modern historiography. Giorgi Atoneli, who in 1057–8 finally took up Bagrat IV's invitation to return to Georgia for a year, initiated reforms in the Georgian church that were, ironically enough, to contribute to a cleansed ecclesiastical hierarchy and subordinate it to a powerful unified kingdom, in which a non-clerical literature would arise.

5: Chronicles: The 'Conversion' and 'Life of Georgia'

TRADITIONALLY it is the composite work *The Conversion of Georgia* (მოქცევაჲ ქართლისაჲ) which is regarded as the primary Georgian historical chronicle. Its core is a hagiography of the legendary Saint Nino, believed to have brought Christianity to central Georgia around AD 335. But the *Conversion* has a detailed relative and absolute chronology, unparalleled in hagiographic and patristic literature; certain episodes are corroborated by Roman sources, such as Tyrannius Rufinus' *Historia ecclesiastica* of AD 403. For all its contradictions — elements of folklore, traditional magic, and biblical reminiscences — we may, guardedly, treat the *Conversion* as history. Rufinus names a Georgian prince Bakurus (Bakar?) as his source for accounts of Nino's miracles, in particular the raising of the miraculous 'living pillar'. Other Byzantine writers identify Nino as the *Theognoste*, 'she who made God known' to the Iberians.

The *Conversion*'s narrative, though roughly chronological, is disjointed, and its style varies from the banal to the florid. Linguistically, too, it shows clear signs of varying authorship, perhaps over a period of three centuries. The main narrative device, in which the story is successively told by Nino herself, her disciples, and her converts, may in fact reflect a disparity of sources. There is no reason to identify any one real author: most probably, the editor-compiler was a ninth-century monk, probably in Tao-Klarjeti, perhaps a contemporary of Grigol of Khandzta or of Serapion of Zarzma, and his sources go back to written material at least as early as the seventh century, to judge by the occasionally very archaic verbal forms[28] which he employs.

The *Conversion* has come down to us in several forms. The earliest is in the tenth-century Shatberdi (შატბერდი) collection: this text is very close to a slightly fuller version in the fourteenth-century Chelish (ჭელიში) manuscript. The first author of the chronicles *The Life of Georgia* (ქართლის ცხოვრება), Leonti Mroveli, appears to have reworked this original version of the *Conversion* as *The Life of Saint Nino* in the eleventh century. A third, metaphrastic, version, perhaps using other sources, was

compiled by Arsen the Monk (არსენ ბერი) in the twelfth century, while an anonymous author produced a still more elaborate account in the thirteenth — proof indeed of the crucial role this work played in establishing a sense of Christian Georgia's identity.

Part I of the *Conversion* has four chapters: it begins with a list of Georgia's first twenty-eight pagan kings up to the time of the Byzantine emperor Constantine the Great, with whose acceptance of Christianity Nino's childhood coincides. We then have an account of Nino, the only child of a military commander who is to desert his family to become a missionary, and her travels at the age of 12 to Constantinople, where she is taught Christianity by a lady, Ripsime. The two leave for Armenia with other missionaries: all are martyred except Nino, who wanders down the River Mtkvari and reaches the Georgian capital, Mtskheta. After four years, Nino begins to preach openly; she then cures and converts Queen Nana. A church is built and Constantine is asked to send priests. The Georgian king Mirian and his court are then baptized, after which, led by the Jews of Mtskheta, who possess Christ's loincloth, all Georgia, and many of the mountain peoples, are converted. Fifteen years after arriving in Georgia, Nino falls ill; surrounded by king, priests, and disciples, she then tells the story of her life.

After an untidy interpolation by the narrator, listing Georgia's later rulers, chapter 2 jumps back in time. In the first person Nino retells another, but more detailed, version of her childhood, beginning with her father, Zabilon, converting prisoners of war about to be executed by the Romans, thus spreading Christianity in their country. The family then sell up and move to Jerusalem. The crux of the legend is particularly intriguing: it asserts that Christianity reached Georgia not through Gregory the Illuminator from Armenia nor Saint Andrew from Greece, as later chroniclers asserted, but directly from the Holy Land, and, moreover, through the efforts of women, not men. In Jerusalem Nino serves an Armenian, Miaphora, who instructs her in Christianity for two years.

Chapter 3, told by Nino to a female disciple, Salome of Uzharma, begins with the legend of the Jews of Mtskheta hurrying to see Christ, and then recounts how Nino persuades Miaphora to let her instruct the Empress Helena. A year after the Council of Nicaea (325), Nino, Ripsime, and forty others set off for Armenia. Nino ends up wandering in the

Georgian highlands, and is rescued by a youth in a divine vision. The apparition provides Nino with ten utterances cast in stone as a basis for her preaching. The divine aphorisms strike one as a mix of Saint Paul and feminism:[29]

> Where the Gospel is preached, this woman shall be spoken of.
> You are all the same, neither men nor women.
> Go and preach to all heathens and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
> A light has appeared and shines forth, glory to your people of Israel.
> Wherever the news of the Kingdom of Heaven is preached, let it be said to the whole world.
> Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives my messenger.
> The Lord loved Maria, because she always listened to his true wisdom.
> Do not fear those who break your flesh, for they cannot break your soul.
> Jesus said to Maria Magdalena, 'Go away, woman, and give the good news to my brothers.'
> Everywhere preach in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Chapter 4 continues the first-person narrative: it deals with Nino's arrival at Mtskheta, where Nino breaks up a bloodthirsty pagan rite by summoning a devastating hailstorm. Here the narrative achieves a Gothic effect worthy of Edgar Allan Poe:

> A man made of bronze stood there; he was wearing golden chainmail and golden shoulder-pads and his head was protected with a golden helmet and his sleeves were covered with onyx and beryl. He clutched a sword which flashed like lightning in his hands, and whoever came near did so on pain of death. And some people were saying, 'Let nobody fail in their worship, nor side with the Jews.' And others said, 'Let no alien God of Heaven, nor the Sun-God be mentioned.' So outrageous was the devil among them. To the right of the idol stood a man of gold, and his name was Gatsi, and the other on the left was a man of silver and he was called Ga, gods whom our fathers had from Arian Georgia… And there was a moment when airs and winds blew from the west and thunder rang out with terrible noise… And suddenly the cloud of fury broke and brought hail the size of buckets and destroyed the idols.

At this point King Mirian announces in an alien tongue, '*rayt meboy xojat stabanub rasul psarzad*', a distorted version of the Persian '*rast megoyi khugasta banog, rasul-i pusar-i izad*', which the version of the text in the Shatberdi codex translates as 'Rightly thou speakest, fortunate Queen and emissary of the Son of God' — proof not only that Persian was then the language of Georgia's rulers, but that it was modern Persian: even if this is a later interpolation, modern Persian was thus the colloquial language by 1000, the date of the codex.[30]

The second section changes narrator. Chapter 5 'was written by a Jewess, Sidonia by name, the daughter of Abiatar the priest' and takes up the story of the Jews of Mtskheta acquiring Christ's loincloth before Nino's arrival. Chapter 6 goes on to describe Nino's miraculous healing of Queen Nana and of her uncle, while Sidonia describes in chapter 7 the conversion of King Mirian during the eclipse of the sun and, in chapter 8 (not to be found in the Chelish manuscript), Nino's building of a church. Both manuscripts, however, end this section with the miracle of the living cedar-tree, a pillar so heavy that it needs the prayers of Nino and twelve women followers and the power of an angel to shift it to its base.

A short third section, narrated by Sidonia's father, Abiatar, who is baptized by Nino, tells of the Jewish diaspora. Chapter 11 opens a fourth section, narrated by Iakob, the first Georgian archbishop, and describing the erection of the shrines (ჯვარი) in Mtskheta and elsewhere. The conclusion of the *Conversion*, however, summarizes all previous sections and may have been intended as a separate work. It consists of 'A Document Which King Mirian of Georgia Wrote at the Time of his Death'. For the first time Nino's death is described. We are told of a church, where Mirian is to be buried, consecrated to her. The work ends with Mirian's testament (ანდერძი) 'to his son Rev and his wife Nana', exhorting them to preserve Nino's church, to destroy idols, and to spread Christianity.

The *Conversion* has also been handed down to us as the core of Leonti Mroveli's *Life of Kings: The Life of Georgian Kings and of their First Ancestors and Relatives* (*მეფეთა ცხოვრება: ცხოვრება ქართველთა მეფეთა და პირველთაგანთა მამათა და ნათესავთა*, *c.*1070), classified by eighteenth-century collators as merely the first part of the cumulative Georgian chronicles, *The Life of Georgia* (*ქართლის ცხოვრება*). Leonti Mroveli not only recast the entire structure, in favour of a less convoluted, more linear narrative; he

also added dramatic and sensational episodes from a metaphrastic version of *The Life of Saint Nino*. In Mroveli's version we are told how Ripsime, Nino's tutor-missionary, is the object first of the passion, then of the vindictiveness of a Byzantine emperor, whom she spurns. Consequently, she is cruelly martyred by King Trdat of Armenia. Probably *The Life of Saint Nino* was incorporated only later into Mroveli's work — in the twelfth century, to judge by its insertion into a twelfth century Armenian translation of the chronicles. Leonti Mroveli handles other hagiographical material with deliberate brevity: Shushanik is allotted only a few lines — 'because of length I have not written of her exploits in my work' — while other early figures, such as the Assyrian Father Ioane Zedazneli, are also given short shrift. Leonti Mroveli's more extended hagiography of a shadowy eighth-century figure, *The Passion of King Archil*, a narrative thin in incident and interest, was evidently composed as a separate work.

The importance of Leonti Mroveli's *Life of Kings* is that it is a work of secular, albeit fanciful, historiography. Leonti Mroveli, it is assumed, was an ecclesiast, Mroveli being the adjective for the diocese of Ruisi, whose bishop he probably was. His shadow is very faint: textual evidence leaves us with AD 1072 as the latest date at which he could have written his chronicle. Apart from late annotations to manuscripts, his name is mentioned only thrice: once in an eleventh-century Athos manuscript (MS61) 'Archbishop Leonti Mroveli'; once by Ekvtime Atoneli, in a translation of Chrysostom's commentary to Saint Matthew; finally on a recently discovered inscription, dated 1066, in the Ruisi cathedral, 'I, Leonti Mroveli, with great self-denial, erected this grotto for an icon.' Assumptions that Leonti Mroveli belonged to the eighth or early tenth century now seem implausible.

The Life of Kings begins, as does the *Conversion*, with a catalogue, this time from the Creation to about AD 523, when the Georgian monarchy was abolished by the Persians and King Gurgen withdrew to the mountains. The chronicle is in style an offshoot of the Old Testament; certainly, its approach to history weaves a weft of myth, fairy story, and reminiscence of Scripture into a thin warp of historical fact. Leonti Mroveli divides his account into twelve sections: sections 1–5 consist of the legendary 'ancestors and kinsfolk', the making of the kingdom of Kartli (Georgia), the history of the pagan kingdom, the conversion of

King Mirian by Nino, and the century and a half that elapse until Vakhtang Gorgasali drove the Persians out and installed a dyophysite catholicos. Artistically, the most rounded section of Leonti's *Life of Kings* is that concerning the legendary Parnavaz, the first king of all Georgia, whom the narrative follows from birth to burial. Parnavaz (who may be based on a king of the third century BC) has a fairy-story beginning. He is a fatherless son, whose heritage has been usurped by an alien (here Azon, a general of Alexander the Great); by magic he is restored to his inheritance. The dream which heralds the magic peripeteia (turning of the tables) is poetic prose remarkable not just for its imagery, nor for being a 'dream of state' like that of Joseph in Egypt, but for its solar symbolism and Mithraic religious implications, which show that Leonti Mroveli the Christian chronicler is handling genuine pagan legend:

> Parnavaz was distressed at leaving his patrimony, but great fear forced him to leave. Then Parnavaz had a dream, where he was in an empty house and wanted to leave but could not. Then through his window came a ray of sunlight and grasped him by the waist and raised him and led him towards the window. and when he went out into the open, he saw the sun low in the sky. He lifted his hand, wiped the dew from the sun's surface, and anointed his face. Parnavaz awoke and was amazed and said, 'This dream means that I shall go to Aspan and there I shall devote myself to noble deeds.'
>
> And the same day Parnavaz set off hunting on his own. And he began chasing deer on the field of Dighomi; the deer fled to the ravines around Tbilisi. Parnavaz pursued them, shot an arrow, and struck a deer. And the deer ran on a little and fell at the bottom of a rock. Parnavaz went up to the deer. And day had become evening and he pitched camp beside the deer to spend the night there and on the morrow set off. And at the base of the rock was a cave, whose entrance had been sealed off long ago by a stone and ever since had caused this building to be deserted. Then heavy rain broke out and Parnavaz picked up a crowbar and forced open the entrance to the cave, so that he could dry off inside after the rain, and he entered the cave. And he saw inside a treasure beyond understanding, gold and silver and vessels of gold and silver beyond understanding. Then Parnavaz was filled with joy and recalled the dream.

Thus the Georgian state is founded in Mithraic terms: a king anointed by dew from the sun, in imagery of sun, deer, and dew — which is linked in mythology with both royal myrrh and the magical milk of the deer. In the Armenian version of the chronicles, translated a hundred years after the original, Parnavaz dreams that he is in a 'narrow', not an 'empty' house, which brings the dream still closer to a political analogy of Georgia oppressed and aligns it with the Mithraic idea of the sun leading from the narrow to the broad, from darkness to light.[31]

The sixth to ninth sections of *The Life of Kings* are now attributed to an even more shadowy Juansher Juansheriani (ჯუანშერ ჯუანშერიანი), signing off as the husband of the niece of the martyred King Archil (d. *c.*787): these sections contain 'The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali', one of the most satisfying and dramatic episodes in Georgian historiography, even though its lively dialogue owes more to hagiographic stereotypes than to historical record. The heroic epithet which Juansher gives to Vakhtang epithet is derived from middle Persian *gurg(a)sar*, 'wolf- head'. The fabulous stereotyped accounts of battles anticipate epic fiction such as the *Amirandarejaniani*:

> Then the King of Sindh emerged and Vakhtang told his men, 'Pray to God and watch my back.' Then he too went out. They both were armed with spears and started to circle each other at a gallop, waiting for a moment to strike with the spear. The King of Sindh waited for Vakhtang to strike with his spear and then he too attacked and struck. Vakhtang calmly and nimbly bent down so that the spear missed, then rode round the King like a whirlwind and put his spear into his left shoulder. The King of Sindh's armour could not protect him; he fell from his horse with a two-foot wound. Vakhtang walked up to him, grabbed his foot and dragged him to the King of Persia. The whole army praised Vakhtang in loud song and the whole camp rejoiced.

If Juansher existed and really was a relative of King Archil, then his work would be of early ninth-century origin. The stylistic unity with the earlier and later sections ascribed to Leonti Mroveli may stem from Leonti's editing, if Juansher is not a fictitious author. The sections on the Byzantine invasion under Heraclius and the life of King Archil (a martyr of the eighth century otherwise strangely unattested) are also attributed to Juansher. Later parts of *The Life of Georgia* include *The Chronicle of*

Kartli (მატიანე ქართლისა). The last two sections of *The Life of Kings* lead to contemporary times, to King Davit Aghmashenebeli (დავით აღმაშენებელი, 'The Builder', 1073–1125), who may have commissioned the work: they are more certainly by Leonti Mroveli than any other section.

Davit Aghmashenebeli had reasons of state which required Leonti Mroveli's work to be substantial. A dry summary by Sumbat Davitisdze (სუმბათ დავითისძე), *The Life and Known Facts about the Bagratid Kings* (ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატოონიანთა მეფეთა), needed supplementation, validation, and continuity if the ruling dynasty was to be linked convincingly to antiquity and to Genesis. To make the link, Leonti Mroveli uses folklore, fantasy, and stereotypes from many genres, romance to apocrypha, in a way that clearly sets a precedent for the secular fiction to come. Some of his sources are ancient, as is suggested by calling Lazica (the land of the Laz, which then stretched along the coast and hinterland from Trebizond to Abkhazia) Egrisi. He appears to have had a command of Armenian, Greek, and Persian. The Armenian chronicle by Mose of Khorene provides some of the plan and ideology (although Leonti Mroveli does not accept that Saint Nino appealed to the Armenian Saint Gregory the Illuminator to send priests). Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh* (1010) with its fantastical half-romance, half-history of Persian rulers, or perhaps an eighth-century Arabic version of Firdousi's sources, the *Khodai-Nameh*, by Abdullah Ibn Muqafa, provide material as well as compositional method. Greek models, however, predominate: the description of the baptism of Constantine derives from Eusebius Kesarius and others; a Life of Giorgius Amastrides clearly influences the evocation of Vakhtang's battles; the Pseudo-Ephremus is plundered for an exegesis of the genesis of heaven, earth, and man; while the Pseudo-Callisthenes, author of the *Alexander Romance*, is quoted for his assertion that 'Georgians then recognized no kin, did not bury their dead and ate all sorts of filth.' For the *Conversion of Armenia*, oddly, Leonti Mroveli uses a Greek version, not the Armenian original of Agathangelos, nor the short Georgian version (dated no later than 1081). Thus, even if modern historians find Leonti Mroveli frustratingly short on factual information, he himself appears to have used every source available.

6: *The Dawn of Secular Literature:* 'Balahvar and Iodasap'

STRIVING to inform and entertain, as well as to edify, Leonti Mroveli as chronicler shifted the balance of Georgian literature from the spiritual to the temporal. An even greater shift towards a Renaissance idea of literature was prepared by a semi-hagiography, semi-romance, the *Balahvariani*, (ბალაჰვარიანი, or 'The Tale of Balahvar and Iodasap'). In Europe the work is known as *The Tale of Varlaam and Io[da]saphat*, and by the thirteenth century almost every literature from Icelandic to Russian had a version, derived from a Greek text from around the eleventh century. The Greek author has been called Byzantine literature's main candidate for the Nobel prize, and the 'monk John' mentioned in some manuscripts has been assumed to be John Damascene, who is the only poetic genius of the time and region known to be capable of such narrative power, poetic imagination, and ascetic conviction (not to mention a knowledge of Syriac and Arabic) as the tale possesses. Nevertheless, the protagonists, assumed by the Christian world to be Christian Indian saints, Balahvar the instructor and Iodasap the prince, are in fact the instructor and the Boddhisattva prince from the Sanskrit Buddhist *Lalita-vistara*. Manichaean fragments in Iranian and Old Turkish from Central Asia show that the legend migrated westwards, appearing in Middle Persian (Pählevi) by the sixth century AD, and in a Christian Syriac version shortly afterwards. A *Book of Bilauhar and Budasaf*, whose early manuscripts are now lost, is recorded in Arabic by the end of the tenth century. Somewhere between this time and a translation into Latin of 1048, the Greek version was compiled. From the next few centuries, over 140 manuscripts of the Greek version of the *Tale of Varlaam and Iosaphat* are extant — and yet the work remained unprinted until the nineteenth century. It is generally believed, however, that the Georgian versions of the legend are crucial links between the oriental and occidental. Only one Georgian text of about seventy pages, known as *The Wisdom of Balahvar* (სიბრძნე ბალაჰვარისი) was thought to exist, until in 1956 a version twice as long, the *Balahvariani*,[32] far closer

to the Arabic text, was discovered in Jerusalem. (An eighteenth-century versified version was found in 1965 in a yew-tree in western Georgia.)

It has taken some time for Byzantine Greek nationalism to yield to the most plausible hypothesis on the transmission of a Buddhist legend as a Christian tale,[33] particularly the evidence that the first Greek version was translated into Greek from Georgian by a Georgian, the great ecclesiastical translator Ekvtime Atoneli, around AD 1000. The circumstantial evidence is strong: Ekvtime worked under the soldier-monk Ioane-Tornike (იოანე-თორნიკე), who brought eastern texts from Mar-Saba in Palestine to Athos; a manuscript of 1048, the testament of Ekvtime's father, Ioane Atoneli, credits him as a translator of the *Balahvariani*; Ekvtime's biographer, Giorgi Atoneli (who himself *c.*1050 wrote a hymn to Saint Iodasap) states, 'Father Ekvtime rendered from Georgian into Greek Balahvari and Abukura and a number of other works'; an eleventh-century manuscript has a lemma (presumably written by a Georgian monk) which states in bad Greek, 'A salutary tale from the heart of Ethiopia, brought to the Holy City by Ioane a monk of the monastery of Mar-Saba, and translated from the language of the Iberians to that of the Hellenes by the respected and virtuous Euthymius, known as the Iberian.'

The presence of vocabulary of modern Iranian origin (*pasukhi*, 'answer'; *dasturi*, 'reliable') points to the ninth century as the earliest date for the composition of the Georgian, which excludes the wild theory that John Moschus may have composed the work in both Greek and Georgian in the seventh century. In any case, the textual evidence for the priority of the Georgian over the Greek is overwhelming; the fuller Georgian (Jerusalem) version corresponds consistently to the Arabic, even though it may be not just a translation but a Christianized version of a non-Christian Arabic text. Not only are Hellenisms absent from the Georgian, but the ordering of elements of the narrative and much of the phraseology repeat the Arabic. While the Greek adds some didactic material to the narrative, some of the parables — for example, 'The Warrior and the Passionate Wife' — in the central second book of the *Balahvariani* are not to be found in the Greek. Although a later (eighth- or ninth-century) Arabic redaction does appear to have contributed directly to the Greek, textual analysis suggests that the full Georgian *Balahvariani* is the main source for a Greek text, presumably by Ekvtime Atoneli. This Greek text

was later subjected to metaphrastic revision by Simon Logothetes or his school. Even mistranslations in the Greek, such as 'worms' for 'enemies', 'doctor' for 'tailor', are best blamed on misreadings of the Georgian script (მატლთა/მტერთა; მკურნალი/მკერვალი, *mat'lta/mt'erta; mk'urnali/mk'ervali*).

The Georgian *Balahvariani*'s degree of independence from its source may be judged by comparing the 'Parable of the Bird and the Gardener' with the Arabic source.

The Georgian

Those who believe in idols are like a man who caught a nightingale, as our fable-tellers say, and meant to kill it. But the nightingale suddenly found the gift of speech and told him: 'Why do you want to kill me? After all, I won't make a meal for you. If you let me go, I shall give you three pieces of advice. They will be the best of all your possessions if you follow them.' And the nightingale persuaded the man to let it go as soon as it pronounced the advice. And the nightingale said, as soon as it was released, 'Here is the advice: don't seek what you can't get, don't regret the past, and don't believe the impossible.' And when it was released the nightingale decided to test the man, to see if the advice had been beneficial, and told him: 'If you knew what a treasure you let go of! In fact I have a pearl the size of an ostrich egg in my crop.'

The Arabic

There was in ancient times a man who had an orchard, which he cultivated and watched. Once he saw a bird in his orchard: it perched on one of the trees, eating the fruit and spoiling it. This made him angry and he set a trap for the bird and caught it. When he was about to kill it, the bird opened its mouth and spoke, telling the owner of the orchard: 'I can see that you mean to kill me. But there isn't enough in me to satisfy hunger, nor to preserve you from weakness. Don't you want something better than what you intend?' The man said to it, 'What is this?' The bird told him, 'Let me go and I shall teach you three pronouncements which, if you remember them, will be better than any family and any estate.' The man said, 'What are the pronouncements?' The bird said, 'Promise me to let me have my freedom.' And he did so. The bird told him, 'Remember what I am going to tell you: do not grieve for what you have lost, and do not believe what cannot be, and do not strive for what you cannot obtain.' When the bird spoke these pronouncements, the man released it and the bird perched on a branch in the orchard and

then told the man. 'If you knew what you have lost in me, you would know it was something big and very important.' The man said, 'What is it?' The bird said, 'If you had killed me as you planned, you would have extracted from my crop a pearl the size of a goose's egg which would have brought you wealth for the rest of your life.'

The Greek is similar only in length to the Arabic. The Georgian text in fact is a digest which concentrates the essentials of the Arabic into a pithy, economical narrative, which the metaphrastic Greek dilutes again into a looser, less compelling text, with reminiscences of the New Testament and Saint John Damascene absent from the Georgian.

The real merit of the *Balahvariani* is its saturation with the fabulous parable fiction of its sources and its reduction of the didactic and circumstantial elements to maximum brevity. Here we see the groundwork for the masterpieces of the Georgian golden age. In fact, to judge by the use of many of the parables from this work in other literatures (for example, Tolstoy's *Confession*), Georgian in the *Balahvariani* for the first time makes a major contribution to European literature. Here (from the shortened version *The Wisdom of Balahvar*) is the Georgian text of the third parable from which one of the most powerful passages in Tolstoy's *Confession* ultimately derives:

Balahvar told him: 'This transitory world is like a man who was chased by an enraged elephant and forced to the edge of a terrifying abyss. And he saw trees which grew out over the edge. And he saw also two mice, one black and one white, which were gnawing at the roots of the trees, on which the man was clinging. And he looked down into the abyss and saw a dragon which had its jaws open wide and was waiting to swallow him. And he looked up and saw a little honey dripping from the trees, and began licking at it. And he no longer remembered the predicament that he was victim to. And the mice gnawed through the trees and the man fell and the elephant plucked him up and threw him to the dragon.'

The shortened version of the *Balahvariani*, *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, is now thought to be a later abridgement (by about 60 per cent) of the full redaction, but the archaicism of the language, with its ninth-century features, suggests that this condensation, for anthological purposes, took place less than a century after the first adaptation of the work into Georgian. (Curiously, however, the *Wisdom* effaces traces of Arabic

syntax — the use of 'and' where Georgian would demand 'when' — which suggest the full version's dependence on Semitic grammar.) Apart from the short *Wisdom of Balahvar*, the *Balahvariani* spawned hymns to Saint Iodasap (whom the church allotted 19 May as a saint's day). Perhaps before Giorgi Atoneli, an anonymous hymnographer composed a résumé in the form of an extravagant hymn, recently discovered in Jerusalem. It demonstrates that the *Balahvariani* (and its transfigured Boddhisattva) affected spiritual literature as deeply as it was to influence Georgia's embryonic secular literature:

> When your godly and blessed teacher Balahvar was informed by the Holy Spirit of the problems which beset you, O blessed one, he cast out all human fear and dread of death… You made haste like a deer towards the well-spring and wandered from place to place, O blessed one, seeking for your good teacher Balahvar… Your mouth is filled, O blessed one, with the divine fragrance of myrrh and spreads spiritual sweetness among the faithful throng; for it flows inexhaustible like the river of Eden and effaces the nauseous smell of sin from the souls of Christ's faithful Orthodox believers.

II
THE GOLDEN AGE, THE FALL, AND THE RESURRECTION
The Twelfth to the Eighteenth Centuries: Court and Courtly Love

7: Prose Romance: Rustaveli's Precursors

FROM the beginning of the twelfth century, Georgia became not so much a planet torn between Byzantine and oriental orbits but a centre of gravity in its own right. The invasions of the Seljük Turks had forced not just independence but unity on the Georgian principalities. Mtskheta and Tbilisi were at last no longer vulnerable to foreign domination but places where a king, his court, and his church could attract the men of talent and learning who had for centuries previously scattered either to the remote regions of Tao-Klarjeti or to monastic communities all over the eastern Mediterranean. The state under Davit Aghmashenebeli, his predecessors and his successors, was now stable and successful enough to rival the church as guardian and patron of Christian culture. Prosperity, leisure, and self-confidence grew so strong that life was no longer a vale of tears that only religious literature could make bearable: a life-affirming secular literature became possible, even literature that was not overtly Christian.

The lyricism of the classical Byzantine hymns was a preparation for an explosion of lyrical poetry. More important still, such an extended hagiographical romance as the *Balahvariani* introduced to literature the idea of fiction with narrative suspense, with a quest for the heart's desire its central structural element. All that had to happen was for this quest to switch from spiritual to other goals and a secular literature was born. The basis for Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther Skin* (ვეფხისტყაოსანი) was in place. Two major epic prose works of the early twelfth century, however, are reflected, paralleled, and mentioned in Rustaveli's great poem: they may be all that survives of a far more extensive courtly, chivalrous, half-epic, half-romantic literature. One is the *Amirandareja-*

niani (ამირანდარეჯანიანი, 'The Tale of Amiran Son of Darejan'); the other is the Georgian version of the Persian 'Love of Vis and Ramin', the *Visramiani* (ვისრამიანი).

The *Amirandarejaniani*[34] is attributed by Rustaveli to Mose Khoneli (მოსე ხონელი, from Khoni in western Georgia): that is all we know of its authorship. The name of the hero speaks for a connection with Caucasian (perhaps ultimately Iranian) folklore, where Amirani, the chained demi-god, corresponds to the Greek Prometheus. The fabulous strain in the story-line, and aspects of Amiran Darejanisdze's characterization, certainly derive from folklore, which is itself influenced by literary texts. The *Amirandarejaniani* over the following six centuries redissolved into the Georgian folk culture from which it may have crystallized, leaving many magical verse variants.[35] (Georgian folklore, especially fairy-tales, had already absorbed elements of the *Shah-Nameh*, perhaps through a literary translation now lost.) A second, literary Amiran, a knight as much as a God, is, however, the core of the narrative. The Persian and Arabic names of places and persons, the lack of specific Georgian references (even if analogies can be found) have led some to declare that the *Amirandarejaniani* is a translation of a lost Persian text, an assertion as valid as making Shakespeare an Italian on the basis of *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice*. Mose Khoneli (to assume his reality) was saturated in Persian literature, especially Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh*, but he has every right to be considered an original author.

Unfortunately the earliest manuscript to survive comes from the seventeenth century and is full of inconsistencies. But references to the work in the early twelfth century, its position as the first link in a chain of secular literature, and its strikingly archaic language suggest the mid-eleventh century as a date of composition. Abrupt switches in narration, and an end which leaves the hero at the height of his glory, with no aftermath, may be taken as proof of incompleteness, a corrupt text, or, we may suspect, an idiosyncratic author who is bored by conventional chronological sequence and quits his narrative while the going is good. The peculiarity of the *Amirandarejaniani* is that it stands on the boundary between myth, where a demigod battles with fantastic chimeras and asserts superior human force, and epic, where a hero pursues an ideal or a prize and reveals his inner qualities. Amiran Darejanisdze's quests lack

psychological insights and his tasks are void of symbolic meaning: this is typical of the unquestioning nature of the mythological creature and of the purely story-telling purpose of the epic.

By the mid-1100s Georgian literature was on the fringe of a world obsessed by crusading chivalry; it now had a tale of knightly prowess befitting its new position, with quests, violent battles, and material success. *Amirandarejaniani* is no tale of courtly love. It shares with early western romance — for instance, *La Chanson de Roland* — and also with the Georgian folk epos, an absence of idealism and of female interest. This is typified by Amiran's knight Amadisdze, who kills a coward and thus wins the victim's beautiful wife. The knight tells the narrator:

> I set eyes on the beautiful lady, and I just said to her, 'My sister, God knows, you had a coward for a husband.' I deprived her of nothing else, picked up a piece of bread and left.

Even when the princely Amiran wins a fair woman, his triumph is void of erotic or emotional tension.

Nevertheless, *Amirandarejaniani* is a riveting work of genius. Like so many narratives in Georgian literature it begins with a king, a hunt, a deer, and a predicament. Here the predicament is a mystery: King Abesalom and his hunters, lured by a golden-horned antelope, stumble on a remote building. They enter and see portraits of three knights. Above the most impressive of them is an inscription by Amiran, listing his knights Savarsamidze, Badri, and Nosar, and their exploits.[36] Eventually the king traces Savarsamidze, now old, who then narrates the story's twelve chapters (კარები, from *kari*, 'gate'). Each new 'gate' has an adventure involving Amiran, but the focus is shared by a different knight (*chabuki*, ჭაბუკი, 'youth') and partly told by a new narrator. Three knights, Badri ('full moon' in Arabic) Iamanisdze, Usib, and Nosar Nisreli, are built up into demigods as magical as Amiran: they compete to slaughter ever more fearsome and mythical beasts and hosts of enemies. In 'gate' three Badri wins the daughter of the King of the Seas, but almost instantly leaves her, in order to wander and battle further. The fifth 'gate' gives us Amirani's core adventure, storming the Devs' castle (the Devs being half-men, half-demons in Caucasian and Iranian folklore) and escaping with their treasure, so that the initial mystery of the stone building is now resolved.

New knights, Ambri Arabi and Indo Chabuki, and a new land, the Yemen, are now introduced, before the eighth 'gate', where Amiran's quest, just for once, involves a female element: he abducts the Seven Luminaries, the daughters of King Aspan. The narrative is reduced to a series of single combats, each wilder than the last, and the seven maidens get no more respect than the thousand stallions and asses captured. The tale of the talismans, too, where Amiran pursues a maiden of whom he has only a magical picture, is so absorbed in battles that Amiran's marriage to the Lady Khuareshan, despite the feasting and hunting, is just a pretext for an even greater battle with the talisman (here, a dragon) that blocks access to the royal gardens. Marriage does not assuage Amiran: the tale moves to India and to new knights, Sepedavle Darispanisdze and the Mzechabuki ('sun-like youth'), one of the few heroes of this tale to die in battle. In the last chapter Amiran saves the queen of Balkh from a demon ravaging her city, and we leave him settled as a guest there with his own queen. But we have no assurance from the narrator, Savarsamidze, that Amiran's voracious appetite for combat is sated.

Soviet critics have attempted to see in *Amirandarejaniani* a mirror of feudal Georgia. Certainly the relationship of a king dependent on feudal lords motivated by loyalty and commanding their own squires is reflected in twelfth-century literature, but specific historical or Georgian circumstances are elusive. Mose Khoneli is preaching a chivalric ideal of fearlessness and male solidarity, as well as astounding his reader with the magnificent violence and peripatetics of his knights. He is independent of Christian, Muslim, or any other religious ideals; thirst to prove prowess obliterates all other virtues (except intermittent mercy to defeated human enemies). Even though a queen or princess may spark off a quest, love, courtly or erotic, plays none of the part that is so crucial to Rustaveli or the *Visramiani*. There is no sense of nationality in a tale where Arab, Indian, Caucasian, and Persian communicate and mingle so freely. Not until Georgia lost its nationhood again did national identity become as sore a point as it had been under Arab and Persian yokes.

For all its absence of national pathos, *Amirandarejaniani* was treasured by successive centuries: it was versified in the seventeenth century by the brothers Sulkhan and Begtabeg Taniashvili (სულხან, ბეგთაბეგ თანიაშვილი); in the eighteenth century sequels were interpolated (the story

of Jimsher, son of the king of the Khazars, that of Jimsher's son, and the story of Jizi, son of King Gurgen). Khoneli is an extraordinarily intense, if hyperbolic, story-teller, as a paragraph from the tenth 'gate' demonstrates:

> In the morning half-light they played a bugle and drum at Sepedavle's gate. Sepedavle emerged, mounted on a white charger. He had put iron armour over his and the horse's vulnerable parts, and had put on chainmail over the armour, as well as the horse's head, chest, and flanks. He wore three swords: one on the horse's flanks, one on his waist, and one on the saddle. To look at him you would have said you had never seen such a man. We were afraid of his being victorious. When he came out and took the buglers' breath away, he commanded: 'Tell Darejanisdze that it is best for a knight to join battle early,'[37] and he rode at ease.
>
> Then the bugle was played at Darejanisdze's gate. He too came out armed like Sepedavle. To see them you would have said two such men had never joined battle. By Your Majesty's life, we could not tell which was the better man. They circled each other at a gallop, charged, and joined battle. Their combat was like great rocks clashing. The striking of swords was like thunder and lightning. They fought for a long time and broke their swords. Then they drew their second swords and again charged each other, and we could not detect either one weakening.

Equally outlandish battles are to be found in the *Visramiani*,[38] where we are dealing with a thoroughly professional piece of story-telling, in which the reader is as involved as in any modern fiction in the tribulations, not just the prowess, of the star-crossed lovers. The shock of the *Visramiani*'s entry into a hitherto clerical culture must have been enormous: the nominal Islam of the original has been replaced by amorphous monotheism and a belief in arbitrary fate. Nothing shocks the narrator, not incest, adultery, bigamy, treachery, domestic violence, nor erotomania. The shock lasted so long that in the eighteenth century Georgian luminaries still felt the need to destroy surviving manuscripts: an anonymous verse of 1769 warns, 'Any man who believes in God, let him not look at the *Visramiani*. It will darken his daylight, he will see its faults in hell.' We are lucky that at least a seventeenth-century manuscript survived, to be published for the first time in 1884.

The origin of the *Visramiani* lies in a pre-Islamic Persian prose romance, whose text is lost, and perhaps even earlier in Indian literature. But it was Fakhr al-Din, As'ad al-Astarabadi al Gurgani (henceforth Gurgani) who, with the most superficial Islamic gloss, recast the tale in modern Persian verse between 1040 and 1054. That it should make as great an impact on Georgian literature as the *Shah-Nameh* is not surprising, but that it should find such a fine translator, not just attuned to the rich imagery and passionate narration of the Persian, but capable of making his own language rise in often poetic prose to match and adapt the story into Georgian, is a miracle. The self-confidence of the newly unified Georgian state enabled it to accept wholeheartedly the alien literature and values of a culture that had for a millennium been mostly a mortal threat to Georgian culture. *Visramiani* is not only referred to by Rustaveli three times, but there are many lines in *The Knight in the Panther Skin* which echo the Persian work.

Tradition used to ascribe the translation to Sargis Tmogveli, who is credited with the lost (and later reconstituted) *Dilariani* (დილარიანი, 'The Story of Dilar'), as well as a lost prose sequel to Rustaveli, *The Story of the Chorasmians* (ხვარაზმელთა ამბავი): Sargis Tmogveli, whose name is found among the conspirators in Tsotne Dadiani's (ცოტნე დადიანი) resistance to the Mongols in the 1240s, is unlikely to have lived long enough to be responsible for both the *Visramiani* and the Rustavelian pastiches, for the scant evidence points to *Visramiani*'s being translated into Georgian some time around 1150, and we must reckon with the translator, for all his brilliance, disappearing into total anonymity. Quirks and sensitivities of his personality show through his text: he renames the author Gurgani as Pakhpur, 'emperor of China' and the poet's patron, Abu 'l Fath Muzaffar, as Ibdal-Meliki-Vaziri, and explains only that the story takes place 'before Christ's coming', even though an Islamic Bairam feast is described. Where Gurgani compares Ramin to Joseph (of the Old Testament) and to Jesus — 'at times Ramin was in fetters like Joseph, at times like Jesus he aspired to the moon' — the translator deletes the Christian reference: 'He would reach for the clouds and would sink down, like Joseph in the pit.' Elsewhere, however, the translator introduces comments that are slightly disparaging for a Christian: 'When the priest plays the fiddle, what can the deacon do but dance?' Georgian critics see

a hint of greater patriotism in the translation — for the first time the word *samshoblo*, 'motherland', is widely used, while the sentence 'Another country is not as pleasing to a man as his own country' corresponds to the blander 'No place is like the first place' — but there is no real ideological correction to Gurgani's worship of cosmopolitan paganism.

The Georgian version is a little shorter than the Persian. The apology for Islam in the first two chapters is omitted; the evocation of Islamic Persia of the next five chapters is curtailed, the translator loses patience with a few elaborate descriptions, and the narrative ceases as soon as Ramin disappears into Vis's sepulchre. But chapter by chapter, and often line by line, the correspondence to Gurgani's text is so close that the Georgian is of considerable importance in determining an authoritative reading of the Persian (which was not published until 1864).

Like so many a romance of the period, the *Visramiani* begins with a king — Moabad — feasting. But Moabad is a womanizer, who betrothes himself to the unborn daughter of Shahro, one of his 'faded roses': the first tragic error ascribed by the author to fate and love. Shahro gives birth to Vis, but sends her away into the care of a nurse. Only later, hearing of her beauty, does Shahro recall Vis and marry her off to her own brother Viro, a wedding which infuriates Moabad, who makes war to enforce his betrothal and captures Vis. (Shahro's crime is breaking a promise, rather than conniving at incest.) Moabad's young brother, Ramin, is the same age as Vis. He falls in love with her, forgets his fealty, and through Vis's nurse cajoles his way into her affections. Vis torments Moabad with her hatred, but manages to love both Viro and Ramin. Until she is finally sent away by the desperate Moabad into Ramin's care, she preserves her virginity, for menstruation prevented Viro from consummating their marriage, and the nurse makes a special talisman which renders Moabad impotent in her presence. After a few months' happiness with Ramin, Vis is again recaptured, imprisoned, and beaten by the furious Moabad. Ramin consoles himself by marrying Gul: the latter third of the work is largely the passionate and penitential correspondence between the parted lovers. Finally Moabad is killed by a boar: Ramin becomes king and Vis his consort and they have eight years connubial bliss before Vis dies and Ramin immolates himself in her tomb. The archetypical quality of the tale is obvious: Moabad becomes King Mark, Ramin — Tristan, Vis —

Isolda, and the nurse — Brangwen in *Tristan and Isolda*; the compliant nurse and the death in the sepulchre anticipate *Romeo and Juliet*. What is remarkable in Gurgani's work is ruthless defiance by the young, and cynical manipulation by the old. Shah Moabad fails to prevent the determined young lovers: as the poet puts it, 'That time and day have gone when a Bishop could take two Castles.' Vis is no sleeping beauty, but capable of torrents of abuse and devious scheming: the heroines of *Visramiani* are extremely subversive for a courtly, let alone a Christian or Islamic, culture. They show an erotic fire equal to that of the male, and it is no wonder that Rustaveli had to purge his tale of most of the *Visramiani*'s physical passion, even though he retained the floods of tears and effusive laments of the work that so heavily influenced his poem.

Closer comparison of the Georgian and the original Persian testifies to the genius of the translator.[39] (Such comparison is helpful to philologists, for the Georgian rendering of Persian names tells us about the vowel system of early modern Persian, settles lexical ambiguities, and brings us closer to a definitive text. Conversely, faulty readings of the corrupt Georgian manuscript can also be corrected by comparing Persian manuscripts.) Apart from muting the Islamic, the Georgian translator adapted many *realia* to his own setting. 'Dervishes' become 'beggars', 'crocodiles' — 'lions', 'wolves' — 'panthers', 'tulips' — 'roses', the Marv river — the Mtkvari. Occasionally delicacy intervenes: when Vis's nurse decides to help Vis escape Moabad's attentions, the original shows how:

> Then she brought brass and copper, described the talisman of each party;
> Then tied them together with iron, sealed the fastening of both with a spell.
> So long as the iron clasp should be fastened would a man remain spellbound and impotent with a woman.
> But should anyone break its clasp, there and then the spellbound male would be released.

but the Georgian is more explicit about the metalwork, less explicit about the effects:

> Then the nurse took copper and bronze, and with some magic made a talisman: two in Moabad's likeness, and one in Vis's. She invoked

> something, welded them firmly together with iron. The nurse was an exemplary sorceress and these two bonds were made in such a way that as long as they were welded together, Moabad would be bound as far as Vis was concerned, and if anyone split them apart, immediately Moabad would be released.

Although writing in prose, the translator often uses alliteration, even rhyme, in parallel to the Persian verse — for example, Persian *nava-yi nou*, 'new string [on an old fiddle]' is reflected in Georgian *dzvelisa dzalisagan*, 'from an old string [a new tune]'. Despite his attention to every level of the Persian's poetics, his Georgian is very purist — he uses the old native words *iadoni*, (იადონი, 'nightingale') and *qvanchi*, (ყვანჩი, 'polo-stick'), instead of the more commonly used Iranisms *bulbuli*, *chogani* (ბულბული, ჩოგანი) — just as Gurgani avoids Arabisms in his Persian. The *Visramiani* as a sustained piece of literary Georgian, using all the resources of the classical hagiographies and versions of the Bible, is a necessary precursor to Rustaveli.

8: Rustaveli and The Knight in the Panther Skin

SHOTA Rustaveli (archaically, some think correctly, 'Rustveli'), the author of *Vepkhistqaosani* (ვეფხისტყაოსანი, 'The Knight in the Panther Skin'), the greatest classic of Georgian secular literature, is assumed to have been born around 1166; there is no exact date for his death. He is believed by many to be the elderly subject of a fresco portrait rediscovered in 1960 at the monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, on which the names 'Shota' and 'Rustvli' are inscribed in different hands. In 1956 Shota was also found to be registered as a benefactor of the same monastery. Whether he was the treasurer of Queen Tamar (who reigned 1184–1213), or part of her close circle, whether he undertook a mission or pilgrimage to Palestine around 1192 to refurbish the monastery (where he is said to have taken vows and to be buried) is just conjecture. (He has also been identified as a feudal lord, Shota III of Hereti, and even as a captive Persian princess.) Few poets of his stature, however, have left so little proof of their existence: perhaps he died young and abroad? Folk traditions and textual references claim that he came from Rustavi in Meskhetia (south-west Georgia), not Rustavi near Tbilisi. All our evidence for his identity and personality comes from the prologue to his sole extant work: the 1,666 stanzas (each of four sixteen-syllable rhyming lines) of *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. Rustaveli has also been credited with an anonymous eulogy of Queen Tamar's reign; the prologue, and common sense, imply that the *Vepkhistqaosani* is not his only work.

Stylistic analysis suggests, that some strophes in the prologue which introduces the poet and his ideas may be by a different hand from that which penned the body of the text. There are also interpolations by an anonymous 'rhymester' (as David Barrett has called him[40]) of inferior or contradictory verse into the main text, perhaps to fill lacunae in the manuscripts. A canonical edition is problematic: only in the fifteenth century were two lines from Rustaveli inscribed on a cave wall at Vani; the earliest extant manuscripts date almost four centuries after the likely time of composition (although in the 1870s the scholar Platon Ioseliani reported credibly that he had worked from a manuscript of the 1440s,

belonging to King Aleksandre the Great). The poem's first scholarly collation and publication was King Vakhtang VI's 1712 edition.[41] If we suppose that the prologue was written by Rustaveli, and that Rustaveli is invoking the living, not eulogizing the dead, then his praise of Tamar and, by implication, of her consort Davit Soslan lead us to date the work to the time of their marriage (1189–1207). This dating is plausible if we accept the apparent date of the *Amirandarejaniani* and *Visramiani*, which are both reflected in Rustaveli's composition.[42] One clue for dating the poem is the resemblance between the opening of the poem and reality: in 1184 Giorgi III renounced the throne in favour of his daughter Tamar (if only as a ploy to secure the succession) in a scene which was just as dramatic and fateful as that in Rustaveli's work where King Rostevan renounces his throne in favour of his daughter Tinatin. Rustaveli's comment 'A lion cub is just as good, be it female or male' may have had political punch. Comparison of different manuscripts of the work began in the eighteenth century. They have led to no new firm evidence of the circumstances in which Rustaveli composed his poem, and the 1988 Georgian Academy of Sciences edition, twenty years in the making, based on the 'symphonic' principles first set out by Giorgi Tsereteli (გიორგი წერეთელი) decades earlier, is the best that has been envisaged.

The Knight in the Panther Skin is an extravagant and apparently pagan tale. Curiously, the poet avoids direct praise of Christianity[43] — Christ, the Trinity, the Virgin are never mentioned. But Saint Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians is cited in the testament of one hero (Avtandil):

> Have you read what the Apostles write about love?
> How they speak of it, how they praise it?
> Know it, they give you knowledge.
> 'Love raises us up,' they ring out like little bells.

Phrases such as 'In the final end all concealed things shall be made known' recalls the Gospel of Saint Luke. Many aphorisms, especially on brotherhood or fear and love, echo biblical turns of phrase. In his satirical passages, however, Rustaveli mocks Islam. Heroes and heroines make their oaths in Zoroastrian and pagan formulas, invoking the sun or the four elements. But Rustaveli's God is generally good and generous and the world deceptive and treacherous — a fundamentally Christian

dichotomy. Aphorisms and reflections shape the stanza structure, but it is difficult to form a coherent picture of Rustaveli's mind: sometimes a Neoplatonist, sometimes baroque in his extravagant expostulations, he varies from extreme idealism to worldly scepticism. It is difficult to pin him down. Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagiticus (whom he may have believed to be either the apostolic Denis or the Georgian Peter the Iberian), Rustaveli declares himself an idealist, a believer in the unknowable nature of God, a Neoplatonic stance contradicting his more worldly, Aristotelian moments. Certainly he was well read in contemporary theological literature, and specifically in Eprem Mtsire's translations of Pseudo-Dionysius' *On Divine Names*: the penultimate chapter links the imminent triumph of love to the Areopagiticus:

> The wise Greek Dionysius makes clear this hidden secret:
> God sets the good in motion and does not generate evil,
> He reduces evil to a moment, and extends the good for a long time,
> He makes Himself yet more immaculate and causes no imperfections.

At other times, Rustaveli's outlook is more rough-hewn, with a sportsman's or a soldier's bluffness: his prologue propounds an interesting poetics, justifying the scale on which he is to operate:

> Poetry is above all else a branch of wisdom,
> Godly in source and sense, sustenance for the listener;
> Still more does it please the virtuous man who hears it.
> Verse is good at saying long things shortly.
>
> Just as a long race and great gallop prove a horse,
> Or the field, true aim and skilful swing a polo-player,
> So speaking and drawing out long poems proves the poet;
> How can his speech falter or the poem begin to wane?
>
> Now see a poet and the verse he writes;
> How can Georgian words fail or the poem turn base?
> He'll not run out of Georgian nor impoverish his words,
> But strike the polo-stick with skill and do heroic deeds.
>
> A man is not a poet who writes just a thing or two;
> Let him not think he is the peer of good poets.
> Should he write a few vile lines that miss the mark
> And then say, 'Mine is best', he is a stubborn mule.

> Secondly, lesser verse of men who are part poets,
> Unable to perfect their words and make them pierce the heart:
> I'd compare them with youthful hunters' arrows,
> Useless for killing big beasts, fit only to slaughter small game.
>
> A third kind of poem is for feasting and singing,
> For lovemaking, for rejoicing, for drinking with friends;
> These give us pleasure, if only spoken clearly,
> But he is no poet who cannot say things at length.

The poetics, however, are preceded by a eulogy, in which Rustaveli compares the passion of his heroes to his own tearful adoration of Queen Tamar. It would be wrong to see this panegyric as just an expression of a minnesinger's courtly love;[44] it is one of the ways Rustaveli links his exotic fictional plot — the triumph of love, harmony and stable rule — with political reality, the final, only too brief, apotheosis of the Georgian state under Tamar and her second consort Davit Soslan.

These images of love, agonized but triumphant, and of poetry as hunting, lead straight into the plot: King Rostevan celebrates the transfer of power to his daughter Tinatin, who is in love with his general Avtandil. These events are then celebrated with a fabulous three-day hunt. During the hunt a mysterious melancholy knight in a panther's skin, Tariel, is found, but vanishes. At Tinatin's command Avtandil seeks him out — the first set of adventures being the initial quest for the hero, glimpsed during a hunt, with only mysterious clues to go by, as in the *Amirandarejaniani*. Tariel is traced and induced to reveal his secret: he is in love with the Indian princess Nestan-Darejan, who has been betrothed by her father, Parsadan, king of India, to the prince of Chorasmia. Parsadan has deprived Tariel of his throne. At Nestan's instigation Tariel murders the prince and is forced to flee, accompanied only by Nestan's lady-in-waiting, Asmat. Nestan (like Vis) is punished by imprisonment for refusing an unwelcome marriage. She is handed to two demonic sorcerers, who take her out to sea. She is sighted by Pridon, ruler of Mulghanazar, who reports the fact to Tariel. Tariel despairs of finding her and retreats to live in a cave with Asmat, where Avtandil finally finds him.

The next stage of the story marks Rustaveli out from his models: oaths of friendship now bind Avtandil and Tariel after these revelations and become as strong a motif in the plot as the desperate Ramin-like love

of Tariel or the hunting and fighting prowess of the heroes. Rustaveli's chivalrous ideal puts male friendship and courtly love on the same plane. In search of Nestan, Avtandil visits the third knight, Pridon, who, in the traditional pattern, completes the brotherhood. After an eventful voyage, Avtandil reaches 'the Kingdom of the Seas', where Nestan is held prisoner. One of Patman's servants manages to break through the sorcerers' spells, tells Nestan that Tariel is still alive and in love with her. The servant brings back a letter, which Avtandil takes to Tariel. The three knights besiege the sorcerers and free Nestan. Tariel inherits the kingdom of India; all return happy to their dominions and establish a harmony and unity that transcends nationality and race.

Rich and peregrinatory though the adventures are, Rustaveli's plot is, with a few flashbacks, a single narrative line, uncomplicated by a plethora of encapsulated narrations or sub-plots. He varies the *Amirandarejaniani* style, the accounts of battles, with the same means for arousing pathos that we find in the *Visramiani*: an exchange of letters between unhappily separated lovers. Rustaveli's range is wider still: episodes such as Avtandil's visit to the trading-port of Gulansharo introduce a Chaucerian tone, where a lowly character, Patman, a merchant's wife, shows us that Rustaveli can also create a 'Wife of Bath'. By doing so, he shows a feudal stratification of humanity, in which only the aristocrats indulge in pure altruistic sentiment, while common humanity lives (happily enough) by its wits and appetites. Thus the poem is a celebration now of feudalism, courtly love, and altruism, now of common sense and worldly love.

Constantly varying the tempo from lyrical contemplation to dynamic questing and combat, Rustaveli can be bloodthirsty in his descriptions of combat. But his violent episodes also have a symbolic import, the symbol of lion and panther standing for the male and female elements in the hero's psyche, prowess in battle and hunting, passion in affection and sorrow. Thus Tariel's tale has to be understood on three planes, as an example of his ruthless determination, as an allegory of the internal political and private drives tearing him apart, and finally as an evocation of the terrible potential of erotic, though sublimated, passion. It also lays bare the device of the panther's skin in which Tariel has clothed his body:

'I reached a ridge over there after crossing the reeds;
A lion and a panther had met and were rushing at each other.
They seemed like lovers, I was happy to see them,
But what they did to each other was to stun and dismay me.

'They first played gently, then they clung on stubbornly,
They struck out with their limbs, not shrinking from death.
The panther lost heart — for women will flee —
The lion hung on and no one could have calmed him.

'The lion appalled me; I called out, "You are mad;
Why hurt your beloved? Shame on your manhood!"
With drawn sword I went for him, let the blade pierce him,
I struck at his head, killed him, freed him from care.

'I flung down my sword, steeled myself and grabbed the panther,
I tried to kiss it, for the sake of her who makes me burn.
It growled at me, struck me with blood-shedding claws,
I could endure no more; maddened, I killed it.'

This barbaric episode is interpreted by Avtandil: 'We need love to bring us close to death, to drive the learned mad and make the unlearned wise.' The work can be seen as a contrast of love and friendship, and of two types of obsessive love, *mijnuroba* (მიჯნურობა), both in Tariel's hyperbolic single-mindedness and in Avtandil's more human vacillations.

Both Rustaveli and his characters draw morals from episodes, and stanzas regularly end with a rhymed aphorism. Here Rustaveli has developed a technique of commenting and moralizing begun by Gurgani and brought out more strongly still by the Georgian translator of the *Visramiani*. The aphorisms are sometimes cryptic paradoxes, sometimes down-to-earth proverbs, but they intrude the poet-narrator's views and often align him with the calm common sense of his first hero, Avtandil.

Rustaveli, with all his originality and sheer enjoyment in improvising plot and commenting on life and love, stands nevertheless at the apex of an established literature, only some of whose monuments survive. First and foremost is the *Visramiani*, which he specifically refers to three times. Moreover, he knew the Persian original, for some reminiscences are not to be found in the Georgian: for instance, Rustaveli says of Avtandil 'When they heard the youth's singing, the wild animals would come to listen, at

the sweetness of his voice stones would turn to water', where Gurgani has 'when Ramin began to sing to the lyre, stones would rise to the water's surface', but the Georgian translator paraphrases this as 'Ramin was himself such a good lyre-player that he had only to pick up the lyre and begin to strike the strings for birds to give up the ghost from pleasure.' The similarities in plot extend to the heroine's compliant nurse, to heroes (Rustaveli's Pridon, Gurgani's Ramin) penetrating a castle by a rope, and the equation of love with fatal madness. Blood and tears are fundamental to both works. Many of Rustaveli's aphorisms recall Gurgani's: 'Do you not know that nobody has picked roses without thorns?' echoes 'Whoever sows and gathers roses will have thorns in his hand', while Rustaveli's 'Even enemies pity the infatuated [*mijnuri*]' echoes 'It is best for everyone to pity the infatuated.' There are many common similes and metaphors: 'Tears flowed from the eyes, like the Tigris river,' recalling Gurgani's 'As much water as in the Tigris poured from your eyes.'

Rustaveli may have known Nizam of Ganja's more tragic romance of obsessive love *Leila and Majnun* in Persian (unless a lost Georgian version then existed), for his prologue, with its invocation of the deity, the monarchy, poetry, and love, in that order, is identical in structure with Nizam's. The development of Leila and Majnun's love from childhood intimacy parallels that of Tinatin and Avtandil and Nestan and Tariel; likewise the cult of altruistic friendship between the infatuated Majnun and the knight *sans peur et sans reproche* Nofal sets the pattern for Rustaveli. A philosophy of obsessive love (*mijnuroba*), as opposed to the eroticism of Vis and Ramin, unites Nizam and Rustaveli. Nizam declares: 'Love is a great mirror, bathed in a ray of light. Between lust and love there is a great distance.' Rustaveli concurs: '*Mijnuroba* is something else, not comparable with fornication; it is one thing, fornication another, between them sits a great barrier.'

The third Persian text which laid the foundations for Rustaveli was Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh*, in which Rostom, too, wears a panther skin and hides in the wilderness. Possibly Rustaveli also bore in mind Unsuri's *Vamek and Ezra*, with its two pairs of lovers, its three allied heroes, and its triumphant end. (The Persian is lost: it is known from a sixteenth-century Turkish translation.) The importance of Persian texts for the genre in which Rustaveli is working explains the remark in the prologue:

> This Persian tale, translated into Georgian,
> Like an orphaned pearl, like a toy passed from hand to hand,
> I found and retold in verse, I did something prestigious,
> Let her who drives me mad, proud and beautiful, direct my wishes.

Rustaveli is not literally translating from the Persian, but making a Georgian contribution to a Persian canon.

The *Amirandarejaniani*, however, has as many parallels with Rustaveli as any Persian text: the three central heroes Amiran, Badri, and Usib anticipate Avtandil, Tariel, and Pridon, and the plot's skeleton, notably its battles with the demonic and the triumph of the fighters, is as akin to Rustaveli's scheme as the morality and spirit are alien to his idealism.

Rustaveli's outspokenly fresh ideas set him apart from his sources: his heroines have an emancipated strength that makes them less victims or beneficiaries than equal participants, even when captives awaiting rescue. Like Rustaveli's religious tolerance (despite sarcasms about Islam), it suggests a eulogy of the period when Georgia made little distinction between its subject peoples or their religions. To call Rustaveli a humanist or a Renaissance man on this basis is, however, rash, for a series of reactions, not systematic ideas, inform his outlook. The eccentricities of plotting and thinking and the specifically personal and national traits in this eclectic work are comparable to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*: *The Knight in the Panther Skin* is first and foremost a national, rather than an international, masterpiece, for it lacks the driving conviction on the human predicament that informs Dante or Shakespeare. Yet Rustaveli's poem is for Georgians what Dante's *Divina Commedia* is for Italians.

Quite apart from the narrative structure, on the linguistic plane Rustaveli's genius is undeniable: he invented a language far closer to the colloquial; the grammar and vocabulary of modern Georgian is born in his stanzas. In the *shairi*, the sixteen-syllable line that the obscure hymnographer Pilipe Betlemeli had used for his invocation of the Virgin,[45] Rustaveli found the ideal vehicle for a heavily inflected polysyllabic language. He dispenses with cerebral elements such as acrostics. Rhyme, which was more casual and incidental to the lyrics of the classical period, is now elevated into a display of virtuosity, sometimes achieving four five-syllable rhymes in a stanza. The *shairi* alternates in two types, 'high' and 'low': the low has a trisyllabic rhyme and combines four dactyls and

two trochees, to give six feet, evenly divided by a cæsura, with a rhythm of 3/2/3//2/3/3; the high has a bisyllabic rhyme and consists of four feet of four syllables, each being double trochees, creating rhythmic variety and fitting the subtle accentuation of Georgian as the Alexandrine was to fit the natural rhythm of French. But Rustaveli also uses alliteration and a complex web of sonorities in his poetics: they act as much as a mnemonic system as an orchestration.

No wonder then that Rustaveli's *shairi*, divided into two, created the standard folk-verse, and that the work penetrated into society's collective memory at every level from prince to peasant. Rustaveli's mixture of sophisticated reading and forthright naïvety caused him to feed into his language more than he had drawn from it. His aphorisms have become idioms; his images have turned into clichés. Georgian folklore and literature both quote *The Knight in the Panther Skin* in the same way that Shakespeare is quoted by speakers of English who have never read him.

There are dubious indications that Rustaveli became known in Iranian and Central Asian languages, even Spanish, but, unlike Dante, his impact on neighbouring literatures was delayed until the nineteenth century, since when repeated attempts, four or five in both Russian and English, for example, have been made to convey his impact. A complex narrative structure and virtuoso rhyming, however, make Rustaveli a prisoner of his own language. Verse translation into English has been too unimpressive to be mentionable, but Rustaveli's poetic technique loses less in heavily inflected languages: notable are the Russian version by Nutsubidze and the recent Finnish translation (via the English) by Linnus.[46]

Pseudo-Rustaveliana exceeds in quantity, though not in quality, the original model. Some of it may genuinely be by Rustaveli: *Tamariani*, the panegyric of Queen Tamar, is a substantial lyric of about 110 strophes, which we know only from distorted manuscripts dating from about 1800: the original readings have not yet been reconstituted authoritatively, and lines, stanzas, and phrases are jumbled. Nikolai Marr believed the work to be the relict of a collective anthology, produced at Tamar's court, of eleven odes and an elegy on the missing son of one of the poets. The clues to authorship are confusing: the *Tamariani* has a postscript appended (Korneli Kekelidze's punctuation):

> Chakhrukhadze, a Khevi tribesman, praised fortunate Queen Tamar,
> Her greatness, the bewilderment of the wise. I shall praise Tinatin, a well-watered garden,
> Oh, this Tinatin, not the generous Tinatin in [*Rustaveli's*] Arabia,
> But a young woman, pure, a rose of paradise, sun-like to behold.

The seventeenth-century king-poets had no doubts of his identity: both Teimuraz I and Archil acknowledge him, Archil saying: 'I'd number Chakhrukhadze among the wise, but he hides his name from us', and telling us that he was a *Mokheve* ('a man from the gorges of the north'), the queen's secretary, and preceded Rustaveli. The only contemporary clue is from Gelati monastery. A thirteenth-century testament on a manuscript of Arsen Iqaltoeli's 'Canon of the Faith', was written, in rather unclerical style, by a Grigol Chakhrukhadze, applying to enter the monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem: the use of the dialect word *masha* to mean 'wanderer' links the *Tamariani* with this testament. A cryptic figure, Chakhrukhadze, by using a new twenty-syllable line, in strophes of four rhyming couplets, with internal rhymes (the fifth and tenth syllables of each line rhyme), created a new verse-form, the *chakhrukhauli*, apt for odes and displays of linguistic virtuosity.

Chakhrukhadze's pyrotechnical style obscures many historical references to Tamar's victories. The evidence points to the odes being written between 1195 and 1210, although no mention is made of Tamar's widowhood when Davit Soslan died in 1207.

The verse is as showy as the author is shadowy. Torrents of rhyming adjectives praise Tamar's beauty; prophets and philosophers are summoned for terms to describe her wisdom; political enthusiasm is masked as maniacal *mijnuroba*. The consistent energy of the punning and the inventive torrent of imagery is proof of single authorship of all the odes. Even when the subject switches to elegy, on the loss of his *moqme* (young vassal), Chakhrukhadze's impetus does not slacken:

> I know you feel pity for me: the water of mercy will swallow me, Noah's flood, turning into a torrent.
> Shall I die again? Should I not die, alas, O exemplary one, I am alone.
> My young man, a peer to lions, no longer to be seen at house or home,
> Has been added to my troubles: he has wandered off abroad, his lair was a marsh where lions were.

Unequalled by anybody, he went off afar, India was his frontier.
. . . . . .
He would have brought a wife, a daughter-in-law for me
Bashful, tactful, wise in words,
He would travel Persia, he would do other such things,
He would see the sultan, deceiver of heaven,
He would speak fables, praise kings, and serve as an army for them.
He would make his image as one among friends, for me he would bring loot from all lands.
. . . . . .
When I think of this, I cannot stay calm, I am ready, too, to wander off abroad.

Of the same date, of the same length, in the same exalted style and twenty-syllable *chakhrukhauli* metre, of equally disputed authorship, is an ode which should now be called the *The Praise of Davit the Builder and of Tamar* and be attributed to Ioane Shavteli, a contemporary of Rustaveli. This work has for a century been known as *Abdul-Mesia*, 'Slave of the Messiah', the assumption being that this was a sobriquet of Davit Aghmashenebeli (who liked to inscribe his coins with the Arabic words *ḥusām al-masīḥ*, 'sword of the Messiah'). This incongruous mismatch of an ode and a title was prompted by a postscript to Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther Skin*, which claims: 'Mose Khoneli praised Amiran Darejanisdze, Shavteli praised Abdul-Mesia.'[47] But a letter from Prince Teimuraz (who as a Bagration was privy to a thousand years of oral tradition and documentation) to Brosset in 1833 clarifies:

> Shavteli wrote in verse a marvellously composed narrative about an Abdul-Mesia, and our chroniclers say that never had such fine verses been written in Georgian. We unfortunate Georgians have lost these amazing verses by Shavteli, the book of Abdul-Mesia; my grandfather King Erekle had many searches made, he badly wanted this poem, but he could no longer find it. Shavteli wrote other verses, too — a eulogy of Queen Tamar, and several others that are very distinguished.

So subtle and circumspect is Shavteli's style that not every reader has understood this eulogy to be in praise both of Tamar and of her great-grandfather Davit Aghmashenebeli. Shavteli, without naming either, idealizes them, (with some prophetic vision), as the omega and alpha of the miraculous Georgian unified state. The references to Tamar are coded

by praise of her beauty, her love of 'doing good by stealth' (იდუმალი ქველი საქმე), virtues simultaneously recorded by the prose chronicler in similar phrases — 'protector of the widowed' (მსაჯული ქვრივთა), 'the thrice blessed (სამგზის ნეტარი/სამგზის სანატრელი). Her pet lion from Shirvan is mentioned, as are her pining suitors.

As Shavteli switches from one monarch to another, Davit Aghmashenebeli is more and more subtly built into the text, both by reference to his namesake David the Psalmist and by interweaving words and phrases from his own magnificent religious lyrics, the 'Hymns of Penitence' (გალობანი სინანულისანი). Shavteli describes Davit: 'He has a body like a poplar, a handsome bearing like a cut branch [კოწოლი] of a cypress'; Davit accused himself as having 'the hard-heartedness of the Egyptians [მეგვპტური], of practising magic with locks of hair [კოწოლი]'. By means of puns on *kviparis*, *megvipturi* ('cypress', 'Egyptian'), *kotsoli* ('lock of hair', 'branch of tree'), Davit's vices are turned into his virtues, a technique the eulogist pursues still further when he praises Davit for *destroying* 'Baal, Moloch, and the idol of Astarte', whereas Davit in his penitential hymns confessed to having '*worshipped* Mammon, Baal, and Astarte'. Other motifs from religious poetry and prose are just as ingeniously introduced. To show Davit as a battler for Christ against pagans, Shavteli appropriates the apocryphal Pseudo-Ephremus' Faustian exegesis of the genesis of heaven, earth, and man: 'Andiban the Priest, who worshipped fire, invoked devils from it, who appeared in the fire to teach him the wisdom of Nebroth'. Shavteli adapts it thus: 'Andiban the Magus, furious in feeling, with cunning magic performed a deceit; he invoked the devil, pledged his soul, so that he would become his ally.' Similarly the Byzantine hymns for the anathema of heretics, naming their seven groups — Saducees, Pharisees, Nazarenes, Herodians, etc. — are plundered for a list of Davit's enemies. When he has no outside material to embroider, however, Shavteli's ingenuity lapses into unflagging adoration: his sixty-third strophe, devoted to Tamar, is typical:

You are the eye of the blind, the tutor of the young, bread for the hungry, shelter for the homeless,
Father to orphans, protector of widows, destined to clothe the naked,
A staff of strength for the old, worn out by labour, to lean on!
You spread wisdom among us; the teller of grace, you show us the depth of written words.

9: Religious Literature of the Golden Age

THE court-centred and courtly poetry of Shavteli, Chakhrukhadze, and Rustaveli is not derived wholly from the new world of entertainment, secular love, and knightly prowess. When Davit Aghmashenebeli, before his foreign wars, conquered first the enemy within, the ecclesiastical aristocracy that had allied itself to the centrifugal provincial nobility, he subjugated, rather than destroyed, its culture. The traditions of hagiography and hymnography became hackneyed, but not broken. Praise of Christ and the Virgin provided the structures and imagery for eulogy of the king and the queen. The clerics who returned to the Georgia that Davit was reconquering, pacifying, and rebuilding, under the firm government of the bishop of Chqondidi (who was also secretary of state), expressed themselves in their security at the new centres of learning and worship, Gelati and Iqalto, with less pathos and more pomp than they had as exiles in multi-ethnic monasteries abroad. We can see stylization and didacticism, rather than religious passion, in the short lyric by the philosopher Ioane Petritsi (იოანე პეტრიწი, *c.*1050–1125) 'Not for Love of the World' (არ სოფლისათვის სოფლისა), where an elaborate triple acrostic gives the poem both a vertical and a horizontal reading:

> Know, take this to your mind,
> Why should you not hate the world?
> Do not make the fleeting world, like nothingness, a reality!
> May you look up to an entity that is truer,
> In every way you shall aspire to the eternal life of the sun.

Some of the great hymns of the period are not so much lost as sunken into the enormous treasure-trove of folklore: it is only recently that hymns such as 'I Speak to You of the Greatness' (გიამბობ სიდიადესა) have been recognized as of twelfth-century literary origin: the latter's verse of double lines each of eight syllables shows, like Pilipe Betlemeli's hymn, the basis of both the eight-syllable folk-verse and the sixteen-syllable Rustavelian form. The hymn praises first Davit Aghmashenebeli for his power and charity, then the influence of the holy places, especially Athos,

and the men who 'sow grace and wisdom, propagating enlightenment of souls'.

The great exception to the sterile, Hellenistic process affecting Georgian hymnography, however, is to be found in Davit Aghmashenebeli's own magnificent 'Hymns of Penitence' (გალობანი სინანულისანი). Instead of celebrating his three decades of warfare, his international prestige among Arabs, Byzantines, Turks, and Crusaders, his building of a centralized but tolerant state, where ecclesiastical and secular nobilities accepted their feudal obligations, where Muslim Qipchak and Christian Georgian lived in peace and an exiled culture had returned, Davit, like his namesake a boy-hero, feels the burden of his sins to be unbearable. The third of the eight extant 'Hymns'[48] is as intense as any:

> Cain's murderous act,
> The defilement of the sons of Seth,
> The wild drives of warriors
> The filth of the blasphemy of the five cities
> I multiplied still further,
> Like some upward rising
> River of corruption.
> The Egyptians' hard-heartedness,
> The habits of the Canaanites,
> Sacrificing victims, soothsaying, sorcery,
> With locks of hair and other things, which
> You told us not to imitate,
> I followed still more wildly than their first practitioners.
> For this was the Virgin
> And the Word made flesh,
> That through motherly intercession,
> Sinners should live, sinners of whom the first,
> The average, and the last
> I am, like a bottomless
> Vessel brimming with filth.

Writing recognizably modern Georgian in an archaic free-verse pattern, Davit Aghmashenebeli showed his genius as a poet to be equal to that as a statesman, and thus set a model of versatility for eight centuries of Bagration kings and queens.

Davit Aghmashenebeli's 'Testament' (ანდერძი, *anderdzi*) is as self-abasing as are his hymns. One manuscript is remarkable for its opening line in Davit's own hand, a rare example of the earliest *mkhedruli*, 'military', modern Georgian cursive script.

Davit's son Demetre I (დემეტრე, d. 1156), praised in his father's 'Testament' as 'in wisdom, purity, bravery, and manliness better than myself', was, alas, a far weaker king: he abdicated in favour of his son Davit and settled in Davit Garesja monastery under the name of Damiane. If we discount the fine hymn 'Thou art the vine' (შენ ხარ ვენახი) sometimes attributed to him, he was also a less formidable poet, as his four five-line poems, two to the Assyrian Father Shio Mghvimeli, two to the Virgin, prove. The elaborate punning on the name of Shio Mghvimeli, linking him with *shoba*, 'to give birth' and *ghvidzvili*, 'awakening', imitates the mannered academic style propagated by Ioane Petritsi and Arsen of Iqalto in the institutions that Davit Aghmashenebeli had founded.

On the occasion of the battle of Shamkor in 1195, Queen Tamar followed her great-grandfather's example, composing a hymn of thanksgiving that was to be incorporated into the chronicle of her reign.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Georgian hagiography had also become less innovative: often it contented itself with metaphrastic revisions, such as Arsen Beri's (არსენ ბერი, 'the monk' *fl.*1100) version of *The Life of Saint Nino*. But hagiographical writing was crucial to maintaining a sense of nationhood in the terrible years following the Mongol conquest. Thus Makari Meskhi's translation from a now missing Syrian text of the *The Life of Peter the Iberian* was of great importance for national self-consciousness, because it repatriated what some suppose to be the first Georgian of international repute, the Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagiticus: it is also one of the first extended narratives in an unadorned, almost colloquial, Georgian. Two short passions of the early fourteenth century, presumably compressed versions of full Lives, are found in a Jerusalem synaxary: the *The Life of Saint Luka of Jerusalem* (ცხოვრებაჲ წმიდისა ლუკა იერუსალიმელისაჲ) and *The Life of Saint Nikoloz Dvali* (ცხოვრებაჲ წმიდისა ნიკოლოზ დვალისაჲ). Luka was a monk-priest (*hieromonach*), co-abbot of the Georgian monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. His mother had abandoned him as a boy to become a nun; twenty years later he followed her to Jerusalem. There he eventually fell

foul of a Persian nobleman, Shekhqidar, refused to apostasize, and was beheaded by Sultan Zakhir-Ruknedin-Beibar-Bundukdar around 1270. Nikoloz Dvali appears to have been a Georgianized Ossete, who likewise offended Muslim sensitivities and who, despite being discreetly exiled to Cyprus and repeatedly released by Christian intercessors in Damascus, stubbornly and publicly denounced Islam and was eventually (and understandably) beheaded by the mameluke's deputy Tenkiz.

Hagiography now played a secondary role in Georgian literature. Nevertheless collations of synaxaries continued over the centuries, and one or two martyrdoms, particularly that of Queen Ketevan in 1624, were to inspire fine poetry. The church was more concerned with issuing regulations and interpreting doctrine. Out of imported Byzantine ecclesiastical and philosophical texts, in the academes of Gelati (გელათი) in the west and Iqalto (იყალთო) in the east, a Georgian canonical and philosophical literature germinated. Arsen Iqaltoeli (probably the same person as Arsen Vachesdze) brought from Constantinople the philosophical traditions of the Mangana monastery and from Antioch those of Eprem Mtsire to Georgia around 1114, with an influx of monks in response to Davit Aghmashenebeli's reconstruction of the church as a centre of learning. Arsen Iqaltoeli is thought to have played a leading part in the great debate between the Armenian and Georgian theologians stage-managed by Davit Aghmashenebeli at Ruisi-Urbnisi in 1123, and lived long enough to write the king's epitaph:

> To the man who turned seven kings into breadcrumbs,
> Who chased Turks, Persians, and Arabs over the borders,
> Who brought back fish from far waters to the waters of Imeretia,
> Now let me put my hands on my heart to him.

Most of Arsen Iqaltoeli's work at Antioch and Mangana, and in Georgia, consists, however, of authoritative translations of major doctrinal work, much of it collected in a massive *Dogmatikon*. Recently he has been identified by Mzekala Shanidze as the author of the first extant Georgian work on grammar, *A Treaty on Affixes* (სიტყვაჲ ართრონთათჳს)

Arsen Iqaltoeli's contemporary Ioane Petritsi took refuge from Turkish wars in the new foundation of Petritsoni in Bulgaria and stayed twenty years, before being invited to Gelati by Davit Aghmashenebeli.

Ioane Petritsi translated historical work, but the major part of Josephus' *History of the Jews* is probably falsely attributed to him.[49] His range of interests was phenomenal, from astrology to philosophy (Aristotle and Psellus), in which sphere he is particularly impressive. He is also credited with the first grammar of the Georgian language, a work which has never been traced. Although his translations of ascetic works were sometimes also versifications, Petritsi is not a writer of original texts, apart from an occasional hymn. But his translations, for example of Gregory the Theologian, expand the original, sometimes by a third, with Petritsi's own commentary and exegesis. Most importantly, Petritsi founded a school, not only of philosophy, but of a literary style (regrettably mannered and excessively Greek). Its influence was to survive centuries of cultural oblivion. Basing himself on Proclus Diadochus, Petritsi kept a balance between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian objectivity, and his attempt to reconcile them with Christian doctrine not only reflects a Georgian concern that goes back to Ekvtime Atoneli, but may well have influenced Rustaveli's broad and eclectic world outlook in *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. To equate Petritsi's single-handed work with a European Renaissance is hyperbolic, but he enlarged the scope of Georgian thinking and tolerance to match the political vision of the country's rulers.

The 'golden age' had other translators and theologians, of whose work only fragments remain: for instance, Nikoloz Gulasberidze (ნიკოლოზ გულასბერიძე, died *c.*1190) left a fascinating 'Lectionary on the Living Pillar, the Lord's Loincloth, and the Catholic Church', based on the miracle performed by Saint Nino in Mtskheta, and enters the realm of historiosophy when he speculates on God's purpose in using a woman to convert Georgia.

10: The Later Chronicles

FOR historians, the great achievement of Davit Aghmashenebeli's and Tamar's era is that the chronicles are now based on political judgements and facts, not merely on philosophy, religion, and legend. Each successive reign brings a new layer of increasingly informative documentation to *The Life of Kartli* [*Georgia*] (*ქართლის ცხოვრება*). By the end of the twelfth century the chronicles had acquired the name of *The Life of Georgia*: Arsen Beri is the first writer recorded as using the term. Despite the flattery, the Bagrations being traced back to Christ and David the Psalmist, we can consider Sumbat Davitisdze's colourless *The Life and Known Facts about the Bagratid Kings* (*ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატონიანთა მეფეთა*) as recognizable historiography. This was followed by an anonymous *Life of King of Kings Davit* (*მეფეთა მეფის ცხოვრება*), which also deals with Davit's father, Giorgi. The reign of Davit's son King Demetre I is dealt with in a slight and uninformative work by Ioane Chimchimeli (იოანე ჭიმჭიმელი), but Tamar's reign has two anonymous chronicles, a euphuistic tribute devoted to her father, Giorgi, and herself, known as *The Histories and Praises of the Crowned Monarchs* (*ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი*), and a plain-spoken court history of Tamar unjustifiably attributed to Basil Ezosmodzghvari (ეზოსმოძღვარი, 'court chamberlain'). The chronicles then conclude in the fourteenth century with one of the most moving, if dry, accounts of a disaster ever composed, the 40,000-word *Chronicles of Mongol Times* (*მონღოლთადროინდელი მატიანე*) by the anonymous chronicler *zhamtaaghmtsereli* (ჟამთააღმწერელი, 'recorder of the times').

The Life of King of Kings Davit is a eulogy (sometimes attributed to Arsen Beri) that echoes many of Davit's own words. It uses impressively multiple use sources from east and west. It opens with a history of Giorgi, his father, but rapidly moves from factual accounts to panegyric on the superhuman achievements of Davit: 'the Georgians did not have as many armies as Alexander the Great, otherwise Davit would have had the dominion of the Persians, or the power of the Greeks and Romans'. The lyrical verve extends from king to country:

> The Turks came to Gachiani on the banks of the Mtkvari, from Tbilisi as far as Vardava and the banks of the Iori, all of them fine places for

> overwintering, where in winter as in spring hay can be cut and there is wood and water in abundance: there is plenty of game of all kinds and everything you need. Here they pitched camp with their felt tents. Their horses, mules, sheep, and camels were beyond counting. They had an enviable life, they hunted, they rested, they enjoyed themselves, and there was nothing they lacked.

The author plunders earlier chronicles, both original and translated, especially Georgios Monachus' *Chronograph* for analogies with the legendary past; his colourful phrases and venerable clichés are also found in later chronicles. The traitor 'Liparit like a dog's tail cannot be straightened' in *The Life of Davit* becomes in *The Life of Queen of Queens Tamar* 'Liparit's treacherous behaviour resembled the tail of a dog'.

The florid veneration and the flow of similes reaches a *non plus ultra* in the *Histories and Praises of the Crowned Monarchs* (შარავანდედთა ისტორიანი და ქებანი), which we presume was written shortly after Tamar's death in 1212. Whoever composed it must have been the most erudite writer of his times, for there is barely a single work of Greek, Persian, biblical, or Georgian literature, lost or extant, lay or ecclesiastical, historical or fictional, that is not exploited. While the *Visramiani*, *Amirandarejaniani*, *Tamariani*, and Shavteli are all alluded to, Rustaveli's poem is conspicuously absent as a source for analogies, strong evidence that it had not yet been composed. As a historical document, this eulogy has little value; as narrative prose, it shows that the euphuist school of English Elizabethan literature had been not just anticipated but upstaged. The eloquence of the preceding chronicle turns into a virtuoso display of sustained rhythmic prose. The nobility's quest to find Tamar a consort who is not just a noble peer but suitably enamoured is evoked thus:

> Those concerned gathered to discuss how to find and bring a future husband, whom they wanted to be of the times of heroes and Goliaths, or when those whom outsiders called the Hellenes shed blood, or the wanderings of desperate lovers [*mijnurtani*], maddened for love of a woman, like Taham for Tumian, like Amiran for Khuarashan, like Khosro-Shansha for Banua, like the Knight of the Sun for the Daughter of the Khazars, like Jacob for Rachel and Joseph for Asenath, David for Bathsheba and Abishag, like Pelops, emboldened warrior, for Hippodameia, daughter of Oenomaus, like Pluto for Persephone, like Ramin for Vis, like Pridon for Sharion-Arnavaz, like Shadber for Ainliet.

The Life of Queen of Queens Tamar, written after 1236 to judge by the mention of Queen Rusudan's fortieth birthday,[50] retreats from such extremes to matters of fact. Because Basil Ezosmodzghvari is mentioned as holding a cross with his left hand that Tamar holds with her right hand while troops are being blessed, he has been credited with composing the Life. Whoever the author was, his evocation of Tamar's beauty follows the convention that those who speak of her should do so as if personally enamoured. The imagery is often effusive: Tamar's enemies pour down like 'crickets and ants', while her warriors are like 'lions and panthers'. Given these florid touches, it was not hard for an eighteenth-century collator to weld the two histories of Tamar into one version.

The last of the chronicles written by contemporaries and eyewitnesses is the most substantial continuous non-fictional narrative in Georgian literature so far. It is also the last gasp of the golden age. The 'recorder of the times', as he twice calls himself in a work that is now known as *The Hundred Years Chronicle* (ასწლოვანი მატიანე),[51] begins at 1213, with the coronation of Tamar's thirteen-year-old son Lasha Giorgi, and breaks off early in the reign of Giorgi Brtsqinvale (გიორგი ბრწყინვალე, 'the brilliant'), around 1320, when Giorgi goes to the Mongol Horde to be confirmed in office and then returns to behead his insubordinate dukes. The chronicle may have been composed some time after the middle of the fourteenth century, for Giorgi Brtsqinvale succeeded in winning back autonomy and even unity for Georgia. Not until the second half of the century did a far worse catastrophe, the invasions of Tamerlane, strike Georgia a fatal blow; yet the chronicler's last words suggest he may have lived to see both hope and horror: 'The morning star began to shine, and my tongue will not move to speak of the astounding and the terrible.' Despite the abrupt end, the narrative is shaped by the unexpectedness of its events: the Georgians were as surprised as any of the Mongols' victims: from the start the chronicler is fascinated by the bearers of nemesis:

> In the country of the Orient proper, called Chin-Machin, appeared astounding men, at a place called Karakoram: they were alien in face, customs and appearance… They were full-bodied, bold in their person, and strong on their feet, handsome and clean in their flesh, with small, narrow, dark eyes, with obvious and well-developed strength, their heads covered with thick black hair, flat-browed, with noses set so low

> that their cheeks stood out above their noses, their nostrils seemed just as small, their lips were small, their teeth even and clean, and they were completely without facial hair.

Despite the simplicity of the narrative tone, which is restrained in its references to legend and its similes, the chronicler is as erudite as his predecessors. He appears also to have known the Mongols' language and folk poetry. He acknowledges the Mongols' virtues: Genghis Khan is a man of his word, however dreadful that word may be. Conversely, he does not mince words over the wickedness of such Georgian rulers as Queen Rusudan, who did everything she could to murder the legitimate heir, her nephew, and install her son on the throne. The chronicler also blames the nation's immorality for laying it open to invasion:

> Every age, old and young, kings and princes, great and small, was inclined to evil, for they abandoned justice and truth, and even among the priests impurity was to be seen, because every estate was committing foul acts.

At the same time, the pathos of *The Hundred Years Chronicle* is nationalistic: the Georgians' oppressors — the Persians displaced by the Mongol Il Khan, as well as the Mongols themselves — are shown in all their brutality and treachery. Conversely, the Georgians, at least for most of the narrative, retain Christian chivalrous values: 'Among the Georgian people there is not a single murderer nor do they believe in doing bad things.' Even the Mongols are made to acknowledge their virtues: 'The Georgians have a noble faith and they avoid lies, there are no sorcerers or soothsayers among them.' Heroic resistance is the theme of the most moving narratives: Tsotne Dadiani's (ცოტნე დადიანი) insistence on sharing his fellow conspirators' fate, and thus moving the Mongols to mercy, is followed by the story of King Dimitri II Tavdadebuli ('Self-Sacrificing'), who backed the wrong khan in one of the perpetual Mongol internecine wars and who was given the choice of having Georgia, already a shrunken vassal state, devastated, or of surrendering to the new khan and suffering execution. Dimitri made the nobler choice and was beheaded in 1289. 'Let them kill me, I think the country will remain unharmed. I pity my innocent people, they have no comfort from anywhere, I shall lay down my soul for my people and I shall not block the departure of the Horde,'

he is reported to have said, in words that six centuries later were to inspire one of Ilia Chavchavadze's finest poems.

The Christianity behind this exemplary altruism shows in the rest of *The Hundred Years Chronicle* in the form of miraculous revelations: Genghis Khan is credited with a vision of Christ on a mountain in China, the Virgin forces a Persian, the true murderer of Chaghat Noin, to confess and save the Georgians who are falsely accused; John the Baptist causes a landslide that destroys a Tatar army besieging the monastery of Opiza. But the chronicler is at his greatest in realistic descriptions of the famine, disease, and earthquake that followed upon the Mongol massacres:

> There began such a famine that they ate filthy carrion without disgust, the towns, market-places, roads, and meadows, the cities and villages were filled with corpses. Children sucked at the breasts of dead mothers… The land moved with its foundations; cathedrals and monasteries collapsed; church and castle buildings were ruined; mountains and hills fell down; walls disintegrated into dust and the earth was annihilated; water, as black as pitch, gushed out; trees fell and moved.

Not only is the *The Hundred Years Chronicle* almost all that remains of Georgian literature at the end of the Mongol invasion: it is almost our only source of concrete information on what seemed the extermination of a culture, for Georgia's neighbours found little to say about the eclipse of the kingdom and its court.

11: *Rebuilding on a* Tabula Rasa

IT is reported later by Ioane Batonishvili (იოანე ბატონიშვილი) in *Alms-Gathering* (კალმახობა) that around 1390 the Mongol khan Tamerlane took all the Georgian books he could find to Turkestan, where of course they vanished. Tamerlane's six genocidal attacks between 1384 and 1403 made the first Mongol invasions seem benevolent by comparison. The number of Georgian speakers (archaeological data suggest) dropped from perhaps 5,000,000 of the 1200s to perhaps 2,000,000; the flow of ideas, clerics, and statesmen between Europe and Georgia was cut for 200 years; the unified state split into three, Imeretia, Kartli, and Kakhetia, and the church's structure also crumbled. Forced to adopt or to recant Islam, Georgia's rulers lost their ideological bearings: their politics degenerated into desperate, treacherous, and violent contrivances to survive a suzerainty that threatened to exterminate not just their culture but their language and ethnos. From Tamerlane's disappearance in 1403 until the Russian conquest of 1801, Georgia endured 400 years as a carcass torn between Turkey and Iran. In the first half of this desolate period Georgian literature could amount only to a pale pastiche of what went before: a nadir of two centuries had to be endured.

Apart from the handful of hagiographies, the fourteenth century, even the brief hopeful interlude brought about by Giorgi Brtsqinvale (1314–46), gives us only legal documents, for example, *The Ordering of the King's Court* (*გარიგება ხელმწიფის კარისა*) and genealogies such as *The Dukes' Memorial* (*ძეგლი ერისთავთა*). Giorgi Brtsqinvale's *Enactment of the Law* (*ძეგლის დადება*), written in the 1330s for the mountain peoples of Mtiuleti, shows that his brilliance did not extend to economics:

> We have set out the business of debt thus: profit is not right for those of the Georgian faith, nor do other faiths prescribe it, and profit is wrong. And if anyone who gives money is so evil as to impose interest, whatever time has elapsed, let him be given two tetri for every thousand tetri; however great a time elapses, let nobody give more, even as a matter of justice, and if a man is not evil, then even this much should not be due. Let everyone do justice accordingly.

The documentation of the fifteenth century is still more desolate: little more than a handful of royal decrees is extant. The one work of great interest is a medical treatise dated to 1486, by Zaza Panaskerteli-Tsitsishvili (ზაზა ფანასკერტელი-ციციშვილი), the *Karabadini* or *Book of Medical Treatment* (*სამკურნალო წიგნი*).[52] Known as 'the great healer and head of the wise', Zaza Tsitsishvili was more of a Mrs Beeton of medicine than an original therapeut: he builds on anonymous Georgian compendia of Galenic medicine, notably the 11th century *The Peerless Handbook* (*უსწორო კარაბადინი*) and 13th century *Doctoring Book* (*წიგნი სააკიმოჲ*). Tsitsishvili summarises the state of medical arts in Armenia, Iran, and Georgia at the time. It is also relevant to the history of folk culture, for Tsitsishvili gives examples of magic spells (შელოცვა, *shelotsva*), such as one for curing migraine.[53] After an important role in the administration of King Giorgi VIII and in the army, Zaza Tsitsishvili had retreated to a *eukterion* (ევკტერი, 'chapel') he had built near Qintsvisi cathedral. Here, as well as composing his *Karabadini* ('a medical or astrological handbook', ultimately from the Greek *graphidion*, 'booklet') he transcribed a Georgian translation of the doctrines of Saint John Chrysostom. In the 1580s the *Karabadini* was superseded by the handbook of Galenic and Arab medicine, *David's Anthology* (იადგარ დაუდი), compiled in Constantinople by the exiled King Davit Bagrationi.

As the sixteenth century ends we find again literary compositions of note: they fall into two types. First we have interpolations and sequels, of varying bathos or pretentiousness to Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. Secondly, poetasts adapted the first, legendary and un-Islamic part of Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh*: such adaptations may versify a lost Georgian prose version, or translate anew extended and falsified versions of the *Shah-Nameh* of fourteenth-century Iran. The second genre, for all its mediocrity, prepared the ground for work of real genius in the seventeenth century. Rustaveliana, however, rarely rise above the usual level of 'sequel' literature.

Unknown imitators and falsifiers tried to prolong the reader's enjoyment by spinning out Rustaveli's story-line. The defeat of the shah of Chorasmia and Tariel's recuperation from despair and restoration to his throne is the subject of one such expansion, which has its own prologue and epilogue, the epilogue attributing a prose version of the episode to the

shadowy Sargis Tmogveli. The work shows borrowings from the Georgian verse translation of Firdousi (the story of Rostom) which, together with references to the short-lived catholicos of Atsquri, dates it to the first half of the sixteenth century.

A sequel by a similar *pasticheur*, perhaps Ioseb Saakadze (იოსებ საკაძე, d. 1688, also known as Ioseb of Tbilisi, ტფილელი), relates how Tariel and Avtandil 'grow blind, deaf, and feeble-minded', enthrone their respective son and daughter and die, mourned by Pridon. Reminiscences from King Teimuraz I's *Iosebzilikhaniani* (Joseph and Zuleika) date this sequel to after 1629.[54] The sequel is mysteriously signed:

> Their story is over, like a dream at night,
> They have passed over and travelled the world — see the
> treachery of time!
> For him to whom it seems long it is just a moment.
> I, a Meskhetian, am writing this in the style of Rustaveli.

Tariel, Nestan-Darejan, and Avtandil bequeath testaments, the centre of the 'poem's' gravity. In the seventeenth century a Nanucha or Manuchar Tsitsishvili is said to have revised these testaments, and they, like other apocrypha, were included in many manuscripts of Rustaveli's work, until King Vakhtang VI finally expunged the accretions in 1712, when he edited the first authentic version (and first book printed on Georgian soil).

Much bolder is an entire sequel called the *Omainiani*, which creates a poem around the wunderkind Omain, a superhuman son belatedly born to the ageing Tariel and Nestan-Darejan. Omain's adventures follow a pattern similar to his parents' tale of quests, desperate love, imprisonment over Arabia and India, with episodes just as derivative stolen from the *Amirandarejaniani*. The *Omainiani* is attributed to a certain Kaikhosro, and, of the four candidates, Kaikhosro Choloqashvili is thought to be the most likely, particularly as military prowess had won him the sobriquet Omiani. If so, the *Omainiani* dates from the 1610s.

Adapting Persian romance was more beneficial to the revival of Georgian poetry than milking the last drops out of Rustaveli. The chief preoccupation of many of Georgia's poets at the end of the sixteenth century was to translate into Georgian verse the 'prehistoric' half of Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh*, usually known as the *Rostomiani* (როსტომიანი,

'The Story of Rostom'). They thus reconstituted the lost source of the romance of Georgia's golden age, as well as the models of self-sacrifice and heroism that were needed to reawaken the struggle to recover national pride from its Iranian humiliation. The primary translator was Serapion Sogratisdze Sabashvili (სერაპიონ სოგრატისძე საბაშვილი). He was working from a lost and very defective Georgian prose version, or from spurious Persian expansions of the Firdousi: 'Whatever is missing, if you can finish it, may paradise greet your soul,' he tells the reader. His 3,729 strophes begin with the birth of Zaal, omitting the beginning of the *Shah-Nameh*, and end with the story of Kaikhosro. He interpolates many clues — personal remarks and historical details — to his identity. He was a monk of Khevi, a contemporary of King Konstantine II of Kartli and his son Bagrat: he must have completed his *Rostomiani* around 1530. Other translators, such as Khosro Turmanidze (ხოსრო თურმანიძე, *c.*1610) and Parsadan Gorgijanidze (ფარსადან გორგიჯანიძე, *c.*1650) attempted to fill in the lacunae, proving and promoting the popularity of *Rostomiani* for the next two centuries. Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Firdousi endured pastiche as well as translation into Georgian: poets spun out such episodes as the devil covering Zaal's shoulders with snakes.

Other Persian poems were equally important in rebuilding the corpus of Georgian poetry. One of the most influential is a successor to *Vis and Ramin* and prototype of *Romeo and Juliet*, Nizam of Ganja's powerful and tragic love-story *Leila and Majnun* (1188), a subject taken up by Amir Khosro (1299), Jami in the fifteenth and Hatif in the sixteenth century: King Teimuraz I's free Georgian version is an important stage of his own development as an original poet, and his prestige made his version particularly popular. Teimuraz's authority gave him unfair priority, for his version of *Joseph and Zuleika* (the *Iosebzilikhaniani*) supplanted a finer, anonymous translation. The story is loosely based on the biblical account of Joseph, for whom Potiphar's wife conceives a passion, but who eventually marries Asenath, the daughter of the high priest. It was adapted by Firdousi, but Abdurahman Jami's 1483 version is considered a greater achievement.

The longer, anonymous Georgian version in Rustavelian metre has Joseph bought as a slave by Zuleika (Zilikh). Zuleika finds she has a rival for his love in Queen Baziq of the Yemen, who has come to Egypt to

capture him. Zuleika behaves like Potiphar's wife (in accordance with the biblical story). In this version, however, Zuleika is widowed and Joseph agrees to marry her if she abandons paganism. Zuleika is hounded for such apostasy and reduced to a jaundiced, blind hag whom Joseph cannot at first recognize. The end is missing, but seems unlikely to be happy. This version seems to stem from a lost imitation of Jami's Persian original. The author leaves few clues to his dates or identity, apart from his use of western dialect forms and his mention of European engineers. He remained so obscure that his is one of the very few texts not used as a source for Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's all-embracing lexicological work at the end of the seventeenth century. Teimuraz I's 311 strophes, apparently of the same date, about 1630, are much more conformist (they end with Joseph and Zuleika married) but supplanted the 736 strophes of the anonymous, but more imaginative, *Iosebzilikhaniani*.

The greatest of Georgian adaptations is of part of Nizam's *Haft Paikar* ('Seven Portraits') of 1197. It had many imitations and translations, the best among them being that by the Uzbek poet Navoi in Chaghatai Turkic. In Georgian the poem is known as *Shvidi Mtiebi* (შვიდი მთიები, literally 'seven morning stars'), or as *The Story of Baram Guri* (ბარამგურიანი). The author, Nodar Tsitsishvili (ნოდარ ცოციშვილი), son of a leading feudal lord, has so radically reconstructed the poem from both Persian and Chaghatai Turkic sources that he, like Navoi, can be considered an original poet. *Shvidi Mtiebi* already shows a turn from escapist entertainment to didacticism. Its core consists of seven tales from different countries told by King Baram's wise counsellor, a Chinese painter, at each of the king's seven weddings to princesses of different lands. All but the first tale, of the city whose chaste inhabitants dress in black, are stories which conclude with a happy wedding. The frame-story begins far more grimly: King Baram is called *guri* ('wild ass') because his killing of two wild asses with one arrow is the start of his adventures. His wife Dilaram is unimpressed, 'Anything becomes easy if you do it often enough.' Baram, in fury, hands her over to a vassal to be killed. After seven weddings to seven princesses in seven years, Baram is invited to a tower, where he finds Dilaram has been kept alive by the tender-hearted vassal. He is amazed at her strength when he sees her carrying a seven-year-old ox, which she has raised since it was a calf. Her reply, of course,

is the moral: 'Anything becomes easy if you do it often enough.' Finally Baram again goes hunting and pursues a wild ass into a cave from which neither ever emerges.

Nodar Tsitsishvili derives his imagery and his tropes from Georgian as well as Persian sources: many of his similes are to be found in Rustaveli and in King Teimuraz I's poetry (for example, the *Iosebzilikhaniani*) which dates the composition of *Shvidi Mtiebi* to around 1655. The moral implicit in the frame-story, urging marital reconciliation, hints at a turn Georgian literature is to take in the eighteenth century, as it moves from fantastic entertainment towards instruction and enlightenment. Nodar Tsitsishvili's work was popular, to judge by the number of manuscripts extant and from the disparaging remarks made by European missionaries such as Father Bernardi.

More popular still, however, was a prose work of the time, the *Rusudaniani* (რუსუდანიანი, 'The Story of Queen Rusudan'). Its still unknown author freely acknowledges that he has borrowed extensively from Arabic and Persian sources for the twelve stories that form its central core: many of them are famous from the *Arabian Nights*. But the frame-story is of another order: not only is it original but, unlike the entertainments proffered in the core, it has a moving tragic vein. Because of the similarities between the real Queen Rusudan, daughter of Tamar, who waited in vain for her son Davit to return from Mongol captivity, and the Rusudan of the *Rusudaniani*, who dies shortly after her son's return but before her beloved husband, Manuchar, is released from captivity, the work has been supposed to be based on reality, and even attributed to the thirteenth century — an absurdity, in view of the language, which is saturated with terminology of the seventeenth century, for example, references to the *abazi* coin of Shah Abbas and administrative terms introduced by King Rostom (1632–58).

The fictional Rusudan has twelve brothers, each of whom tries to console her with a story during the absence of her daughter Roden, her son Pridon, and her husband, Manuchar, detained as hostages at the court of the Persian shah. The twelve stories have been well adapted to Georgian circumstances — not just to Christianity, but to folklore. Thus horses are called *bedshavi*, 'wretched' and *bedukughmarti*, 'unlucky'. Such stories as the eleventh, of the three wise brothers, who use Sherlock

Holmes techniques to identify mysterious riders and the king's humble birth, belong to an oral genre, *zghapari* (ზღაპარი, 'fairy story'). The final ten pages that follow the twelfth tale are, however, the apotheosis of the *Rusudaniani*. Rusudan's son Pridon is released, returns to her, ascends the throne, and decides to have his uncles' stories written down. Rusudan is overcome by fatal illness and grief, and finally the captive Manuchar hears of her death. The work ends with a Jeremiad of despair, with Manuchar exploding into murderous fury at the shah. The shah mercifully releases Manuchar, who returns to his country, out of his mind and physically exhausted. The consoling stories told by the twelve brothers, the author implies, are only a veneer over a tragic reality:

> Note how treacherous this world is, how changeable its behaviour, how much trouble and delight it shows to people, but the world is never sated with maternal desperation, will not let you have your fill of joy, and imbues both grief and joy with poison.

The mark of greatness in the *Rusudaniani* is the constant development of the frame-narration, as the brothers interrupt their story-telling to commiserate with their sister, and the reader sees the gap widening between the tragic frame and happy fairy-story core. Some of the stories involve battles with monsters and dragons, but the later stories, from 7 to 12, with their stress on patience and the triumph of virtue, have more moral and didactic content. Like Tsitsishvili, the author of *Rusudaniani* has reminiscences from Rustaveli and other golden age authors, and like Tsitsishvili he celebrates the patience of an abandoned queen as a model of female virtue. But the *Rusudaniani* goes further. It inserts Georgian rituals and traditions into the central stories — for example, Arzut's funeral lament for her brother in the first tale, a source of some ethnological interest:

> Arzut sat where the mourning relatives sat, terribly emaciated, in ripped clothing, her hair torn and red with blood; blood streamed from three orifices, two streams from her eyes, one from her breast, like a torrent of scarlet, and she proclaimed: 'O lion-like indomitable man, cypress of Eden, rose of Paradise, luxuriant and fragrant, unquenchable light of my eyes, inexhaustible joy of my heart… Where now is your handsome figure, your black hair so smoothly laid over your crystal pillar, where is the strength and might of your hands?'

Likewise the language moves from Rustavelian eloquence, especially in the frame-story, to dialogue which is colloquial, even folk-like in many of the core incidents: western dialect forms suggest the author may have been a member of Levan Dadiani's court in Mingrelia. The manuscripts of the *Rusudaniani* are diverse: one suggests a folklore contribution, for it includes a popular magical spell (ვედრება) against migraine.

12: *The Authorial Persona: King Teimuraz I*

WHOEVER he or she was, the author of the *Rusudaniani* is one of the last anonymous authors in Georgian. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the author as a person with a known biography and personality, recorded by painters and other witnesses, appears in Georgia. Although another century elapsed before a printing-press was finally set up in Tbilisi, establishing canonical texts for all to read, the authority of a known author already helped to create a literature tightly bound up with contemporary psychological and political realities. The first such author is one of Georgia's greatest figures, King Teimuraz I. Born in 1589, he became king of Kakhetia (eastern Georgia) at 16 and kept his throne for the first third of the seventeenth century (under Persian suzerainty). He was king of Kartli too from 1634 until 1648 and died in 1663, an exile at Astarabad. His life was described in verse by King Archil of Imeretia and Kartli in the fifteenth 'response' of his *Comparison* (ჯაბაახება). Teimuraz's father was the ruthless usurper King Davit I of Kakhetia, who had had poetic ambitions and had tried his hand at retranslating from the Persian the didactic romance *Kilila and Damana*. Teimuraz's mother was one of the last Georgian martyrs, Queen Saint Ketevan, who also articulated her grief in elegiac verse. Teimuraz was educated in Persia under the tutelage of the horrible Shah Abbas (1587–1629). Despite the appalling suffering inflicted on the king, his family, and his country by Persian armies and by Shah Abbas, who seriously envisaged exterminating the Georgian population of Kakhetia, Teimuraz unstintingly acknowledged his debt to Persia: 'Persian poetry instilled in me musicality.' He had such a universal knowledge of Persian and Georgian literature, clerical and lay, that he thought himself superior to Rustaveli.

Few poets or kings had such a traumatic life as Teimuraz: the sketches made by Italian missionaries in the 1630s, such as de Castelli, show the king with his second wife, in profound melancholy, with prominent hyperthyroid weeping eyes typical of the later Bagrations. For most of his reign feudal lords or neighbouring kings forced him into Turkish, Persian, Imeretian, or Russian exile; in 1610 Ana, his beloved first wife, died, and Teimuraz was forced by the shah to marry a cousin

(who died in 1659); his mother was martyred at the age of 59 in 1624 for refusing to accept Islam; his sons Aleksandre and Levan were castrated, Aleksandre dying of the operation, while the youngest, Davit, eventually perished in battle with the Persians; his daughter Nestan-Darejan, the Georgian Cleopatra, had a catastrophic life: after gouging out her step-daughter's eyes, she herself was speared to death in 1668.[55] Teimuraz's sole success in a last humiliating exile was to take holy orders (at the age of 70) and refuse Islam. He died in 1663. Mistrustful to the point of paranoia, Teimuraz could not exploit the fact that Persia's military élite were predominantly Georgians in exile, nor would he collaborate with the aristocratic national resistance led by Giorgi Saakadze (the *didi mouravi*, 'great prefect') and Teimuraz's son-in-law Zurab Eristavi, preferring bootless intrigue to rallying the nation. Teimuraz's prolonged periods of virtual imprisonment were devoted to poetry.

Spectacular political failure was, however, compensated by single-handed poetic success. To say that Teimuraz was the greatest king among poets and the greatest poet among kings is to undervalue him. From the very start the Georgian cultural renaissance recognized Teimuraz I as its progenitor. Nihilist critics disagree: Anton Purtseladze (ანტონ ფურცელაძე, 1839–1913) wrote (1911):

> Teimuraz added poetry to banqueting, luxury, and hunting, and preferred it to all these. He imagined, like Nero with his music, poetry, and acting, that no poet had ever equalled him and sat for days on end at his ugly, mindless verses and wrecked his life thereby. One is amazed… that, the victim of a thousand tragic, lamentable events… not once was he struck by a worthwhile, heartfelt idea.

True, a stoicism that borders on the callous psychopathic strength of a Stalin makes Teimuraz sometimes remote from our sympathies. His ability to endure the deaths of wives and children and to continue evading, prevaricating, and intriguing also anticipates Stalin (who, we should remember, was also a poet). Teimuraz's antagonism to the 'great prefect' Giorgi Saakadze, who should have been his ally, recalls, if not King Alfonso's distrust of El Cid, then Stalin's distrust of Trotsky. Odder still is Teimuraz's professed admiration for Quli Khan, the renegade Georgian governor of Shiraz who supervised the torturing of Queen Ketevan. Teimuraz wept primarily for himself.

Teimuraz I's first creative period was 1625–34, when he was secure on his throne; he then adapted from the Persian the romances of *Leila and Majnun* and *Josef and Zuleika (Leilmajnuniani, Iosebzilikhiani)* with more facility but less genius than anonymous contemporaries. The second period, 1649–56, was exile at the court of his son-in-law, Aleksandre III of Imeretia: poetry had now become therapy, as the introduction to his version of the Persian *Shamiparvaniani* ('Candle and Ash') affirms:

> Tears flowed mercilessly like the Nile from my eyes.
> To overcome I wrote from time to time,
> I threw my heart into it, I spent many days and nights,
> By sitting plunged in thought, I salvaged my heart,
> The wheel turned back, it was fate that wept for me.

His original verse includes *Gazapkhulshemodgomiani* (გაზაფხულ-შემოდგომის ქება or შედარება, 'Praise [or Comparison] of Spring and Autumn'), as much elegy as eulogy; in a *Majama* (here 'Anthology') of odes to beauty, he expresses Persian ascetic and aesthetic ideals of mystical union with the divine, as well as Christian repentance. For all his virtuosity in rhyme, Teimuraz I's personal pessimism imbues everything:

> The accursed world has made me regret my days in utter bitterness,
> It has given me no sleep, nor has it ever said a tender word to me.
> The world has not exhausted its treachery on me,
> It has given me mortal poison to drink…
> It has given me a shroud for a skin.

Nevertheless, he can observe the world in a way typical of post-Renaissance Europe: the *Gazapkhulshemodgomiani* imbues the typical 'seasons' genre with the verve of Vivaldi:

> Autumn told [Spring]: you tell the wildest lies,
> The grape-picking time is the best of times, is that not right?
> Anyone can prove you wrong — why talk nonsense?
> How the amber-coloured grapes gush forth blood-red [juice].
> If you don't appreciate this, I'll tell you something better,
> When September is at its height, what better sight is there?
> Everything reaches fullness, what was planted, what was sown.
> Now pick up your bow and arrow, or if a gunman, flint and powder.
> How the shouting gets more frequent and the hunting increases.

> Let everyone get their quiver ready, the surveys of the hunting field,
> Day or night nobody notices what time it is,
> Then there are plenty of pleasures — let there be no frosting of roses.
> They drive to the court the kings' branching-antlered stags,
> They cannot submit, they cannot stand this confinement,
> They dye the fields red and the palace grounds everywhere.
> What do you have to match the joy of this day?

The manuscript of this poem is still reprinted today with a final twenty-five strophes that belong to an entirely different work, 'A Word of Learning' (სიტყვა სწავლისა) and match the excitement of *Gazapkhulshemodgomiani* with an austere evangelical view of the world of nature as a dismal prelude to the world beyond the grave.

Teimuraz's most painful poem, however, is probably his first, written in 1625, seven months after the event: eighty stanzas (eighty-six including later interpolations) of *The Book and Passion of Queen Ketevan* (წიგნი და წამება ქეთევან დედოფლისა).[56] They describe the capture of his mother, Ketevan, and of his sons, Aleksandre and Levan, by Shah Abbas, after the shah had laid waste to Kakhetia, and Teimuraz felt obliged to send his mother as negotiator and hostage. After five years the shah removed Ketevan's grandsons from Shiraz and ordered a reluctant vassal (of Georgian Christian origin) to have her converted or killed. Like Shushanik, Ketevan refuses every plea from the prison governor, her devoted servants, and her fellow Christians to relent: Teimuraz quotes her prayers to the Trinity and the Archangel Gabriel for the strength to endure. Ketevan underwent appalling torture: Teimuraz spares his readers nothing of the eyewitness accounts related by Augustinian missionaries from Iran, who brought the king his mother's head and heart and a clot of blood for burial. Teimuraz's ability to describe horrors, albeit in the mediæval hagiographical genre, is proof that whatever Georgia lost in the king, it gained in the poet:

> Then they bound her hand and foot, they stretched out her wrists,
> With pliers they tore off her breasts and put red-hot metal bowls on her,
> They placed spade-heads on her forehead, they all did as they had been told,
> They struck her head with a metal lid, alas, I intercede with [mere] words.
> Woe is me, recalling that day, I forget the days before.
> From chest to back they covered her with red-hot pieces of iron,
> Wicked that I am, I sinned in not being next to her, I regret it,

I did not make the sign of the cross over her with my right hand,
And for this I weep floods of tears.

Teimuraz uses all the resources of Georgian of his age and of the past: he enriches it with many Persian words and turns of phrase. When he indulges in word-play, the torrent of homonyms and homophones and the alien vocabulary can obscure his meaning, but his feeling for sonorities and rhythm justifies the loss of clarity. Teimuraz understood the common elements in the Persian and Georgian languages — the rich rhyme, the natural rhythm that allows poetry to sustain long lines and extended syntax — and made his enemies' tongue an integral part of his own. In this poem, for the first time, Georgian literature shared a common source with western Europe: in 1647, using information brought back from Persia by an Italian missionary, Pietro della Valle (*Informazione sulla Georgia*, 1627), Andreas Gryphius wrote his classical tragedy *Katharina von Georgien*. More important, Teimuraz had now established in Georgian a genre, the narrative historical poem, closer to those of Europe and a modern persona, the author whose sufferings mirror his country's. Lastly, Teimuraz served for Georgia's insecure kings as a king-as-poet role-model first adopted by Davit Aghmashenebeli and then by many more Bagrations until the nineteenth century, as their regal powers evaporated and they became a dynasty of exiled poets and scholars.

13: Kings and Enlightenment

KING ARCHIL followed Teimuraz I's example and developed his poetics to link personal and national tragedy and the metres of Rustaveli and Chakhrukhadze with conceits, forms, and themes inspired by Persia. King of Imeretia from 1664 to 1675 and for a few months at a time in the 1690s, Archil was born in 1647 and died at the Georgian exiles' village of Vsesviatskoe, near Moscow,[57] in 1712. His last thirteen years of exile in Russia were devoted to setting up Georgian printing-presses — the first book printed was the Psalms in 1703; he worked on the Georgian Bible that was to be printed in 1743, compiled chronicles, translated Russian and Greek texts, and, through his association with Peter the Great, made tentative contacts with European scholars. He versified earlier prose texts — for example, the *Visramiani* — in Rustavelian metre, wrote didactic poems, such as *Dispute between Man and the World* (*კაბაასება კაცისა და სოფლისა*, 1684) and *Georgia's Morality* (*საქართველოს ზნეობანი*, 1684), as well as a few eulogies and a very few lyrics. The philosophical *Dispute between Man and the World* was inspired by four bitter lines written in Astrakhan by a certain Davit Japaridze (*დავით ჯაფარიძე*, dates unknown):

They said: 'The grinding wheel of the world's treachery is eternally turning,
It gives us delight, we have trouble equally, now help, now grief.
Let no one pursue it, no one can reach it, whether you have horse or boat.'
It is said that nobody will remain to the end without resentment.

Archil's *Love Verses* (*სამეჯნურო ლექსები*, *c.*1703) imitate the *Majama* of King Teimuraz I. Archil is more inclined to straightforward preaching than to Teimuraz's ornate word-play, and his bitterness is compensated by a faith, less troubled than the monastic consolations of Teimuraz, in the justice of the world beyond the grave. Archil was more open-minded: to mark Georgia's coming reorientation in the world, he even attempted a poem in Russian. His immediate heirs, collecting his writings into one *Archiliani*,[58] had no doubt about his genius: 'In eloquence most splendid, when did Plato speak like this? I cannot think of anyone who speaks better,' claimed Petre Mgalobeli (*პეტრე მგალობელი*) in the 1700s. But later readers found him pedestrian, lacking the 'upswing… without which

a work has everything but poetry' (Petre Umikashvili, პეტრე უმიკაშვილი, 1881), and denied him the title of herald of the Georgian enlightenment.

Archil's acclaimed masterpiece, however, is *The Life of Teimuraz I* (თეიმურაზიანი, *Teimuraziani*, begun in Ossetia in 1681 and finished in Astrakhan around 1685); written as a *gabaaseba* ('Dispute' or 'Comparison') in nineteen 'responses' (პასუხები) amounting to over 1,100 stanzas, it shows empathy with the conflicts of poetry and power and with the mind of Rustaveli, who is made to tell Teimuraz, his rival after four centuries: 'I am the root of poetry, poets build on me. I said what was unsaid before me and afterwards is not to be invented.' Archil has Teimuraz claim that his greatness lies in the all-encompassing range of his poetry and the terrible times in which it was written. The major part of the *Teimuraziani*, however, lies in the longer, historical responses 15 to 18: they evoke the hell of Teimuraz I's times in contrast with the glory of Queen Tamar's. Archil's sixteenth response is a full, if curt, summary of all Tamar's exploits, while the eighteenth outlines the wanderings and bereavements that Teimuraz underwent, thus helping us to pinpoint the years when Teimuraz composed verse. The nineteenth response includes the saddest historical poetry ever written: it describes Teimuraz's desperate journey to Russia at the age of 70, his even more forlorn return to Imeretia on hearing of his grandson's death, and his final trek to die in Persian captivity. Archil's own disheartening, if less gruesome, experiences between the Persian Scylla and the Russian Charybdis add to the bitterness he puts into Teimuraz's mouth:

> The world is not tired of striking me, so much has it punched me,
> Life, I cannot cope with you, condemn me here and now to die,
> You have riddled me with a spear, sparing me only the two-pronged stick,
> I shall don a cassock, I have departed, no more do I wear a jewelled crown.

Such powerful rhymed historical writing is also to be found in a Life of Archil's father, Vakhtang V, who converted to Islam and took the name of Shah Navaz. The author is a poet of Armenian origin, Peshangi Pashvibertqadze (ფეშანგი ფაშვიბერტყაძე), who appears to have been closely associated with Shah Navaz's campaigns in Kakhetia between 1658 and 1664. The poem, the *Shahnavaziani*, was written immediately after the victorious end of the internecine bloodshed. Peshangi is eyewitness and,

unfortunately, courtier: he whitewashes such facts as Shah Navaz's conversion to Islam. The prologue in prose, which surveys the whole of Vakhtang V's life, is partly lost, but something of Peshangi's outlook emerges: passionate adherence to Vakhtang V's policy of using all means, fair and foul, to unite the Georgian kingdoms. Peshangi is nevertheless no aristocrat, but a man of merchant background who measures a state and its ruler by the criterion of economic prosperity, not historical legitimacy. The language of an amateur polyglot writer, Peshangi's Georgian is marked by its Persian vocabulary and dialect forms, which has led purists to underestimate its straightforward value as a testament.

The second half of the seventeenth century shows Georgia's kings and nobles just as embattled as in Teimuraz's times, but readier to compromise to the point of apostasy, to negotiate with all three 'dragons' (Turk, Persian, Caucasian highlander) as well as prospective European, especially Russian 'Saint Georges'. A nostalgia for the more heroic, if futile, beginning of the century is found not only in Archil's survey of Teimuraz I, but in a history of Teimuraz's rival, the insurrectionary Giorgi Saakadze (გიორგი სააკაძე), the 'great prefect' (*didi mouravi*). A poem by Ioseb Saakadze (metropolitan bishop of Tbilisi from 1661 to 1686), the *Didmouraviani* surveys Saakadze's life from his first rebellion in 1609, but spares us his humiliating death in Turkey in 1629. The poem (written just before Ioseb's own murder in 1688) is based on a lost letter of self-justification that Giorgi Saakadze sent through his spokesman Domenti to King Teimuraz I, whom he rightly suspected of plotting to kill him. Ioseb Saakadze shares his subject's passionate desire for rehabilitation:

> Others have spoken the history of Georgia, I am made out to be guilty.
> Because my story is lost, it has been made pitiful,
> A sweet and pleasant source has been dried up.

Ioseb admits his own interest: 'A noble kinsman of his family and clan, I have begun to write this.' (He was perhaps Saakadze's nephew.) Nevertheless, his essay in restoration is a powerful poem, the first nine sections' historical narrative leading to Saakadze's final lament in Turkish exile:

> O my poor self, how you have ended, melancholy, as one accursed,
> Tormented in a thousand ways for faith in Georgia,
> How you have been damned by the King, you who have served so loyally,
> Lost in Aleppo and Istanbul, you no longer have the delights of the flute.

Although Ioseb Saakadze was fond enough of golden age literature to quote from Rustaveli and the *Amirandarejaniani*, he leans, like his *Zeitgeist*, towards the instructive and useful moral. The second half of the seventeenth century in Georgia saw disillusionment in chivalry and prowess. Even Ioseb's own pastiches of Rustaveli, his 'Testaments' (*anderdzi*) attributed to Avtandil and Nestan-Darejan and to Tariel, are moral documents, rather than continuations of Rustaveli's poem.

The revival of literature in the eighteenth century was initially indistinguishable from a return to the past: the new hagiographies that appeared in the first decades are often in language more archaic than Rustaveli's, a fact that should warn us against any certainty in dating texts by purely linguistic criteria. Few of the late hagiographies are of interest, except for Grigol Dodorkeli Vakhvakhishvili (გრიგოლ დოდორქელი-ვახვახიშვილი) and his *Passion of the Most Magnified Martyr Queen Ketevan* (*წამებაი ყოვლად დიდებულისა მოწამისა დედოფლისა ქეთევანისა*, *c.*1705): this is a fine account covering the same ground as Teimuraz I's verse Passion, but with details that must have reached Dodorkeli from unknown Georgian accounts or reports by Portuguese missionaries. Thus this Passion is the first original prose narrative of the Georgian Renaissance. The hagiography is also interesting for Dodorkeli's care to distinguish the Christianity of the Catholic missionaries, who intervened to save the relicts, from the martyr's own Orthodoxy. This text was imitated Besarion Orbelishvili's *Passion of King Luarsab* (another victim of Shah Abbas): the latter text was found in 1940 in a compilation of early eighteenth-century prose now known as the Paris chronicle.[59]

The thirst for didactic literature was first of all satisfied by translation from Persian. An insatiable demand for instructive oriental fables stemmed from the earliest period, from the *Balahvariani*: as the eighteenth century brought chinks of light from Europe this taste curiously coincided with the fashion stimulated by Montesquieu and Voltaire for an oriental fable[60] also based on dialogue between a naïve prince and his experienced tutor. In fact the scepticism of Buddhist philosophy about the material world is very close to the principles of doubt and uncertainty underlying the rationalism of the French *Encyclopédie* that was to penetrate even into eighteenth-century Georgia. The first of such texts are the illustrative fables of *The Treasury of Kings* (*მეფეთა სალარო*),

anonymously translated from an unidentified Persian original at the beginning of the seventeenth century, preaching the advantages of justice and forgiveness. The Indian *Panchatantra*, passing through Pählevi and other Persian versions from the sixth to sixteenth centuries, gathering ornamentation all the way, finally reached Georgia between the sixteenth and eighteenth century as *Kilila and Damana*, in a version begun by Teimuraz I's father, Davit of Kakhetia, revised by Vakhtang VI and finally rewritten by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani. Here the tension is not between the naïve and the sophisticated, but between the 'good' Kilila and 'bad' Damana. This long-suffering text was a prelude to Sulkhan-Saba's own work, a link to a later irreligious humanistic rationalism. The gap between oriental asceticism and European enlightenment was easily bridged.

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani fathered the Georgian 'enlightenment'. He was virtually all his life uncle, tutor, and ally to Vakhtang VI, first regent, then king of Kartli. Sulkhan was born in 1658, related by marriage to the royal family at one of the most oppressive stages of Persian suzerainty. Sulkhan-Saba's political alliances, as much as his religious convictions, forced him to flee the court for exile or the cloister, especially when the shah handed over Kartli to the Muslim Erekle in 1687. In 1698 Sulkhan left his second wife, Tamar, and became a monk (taking the name of Saba) in the monastery of Saint John the Baptist at Gareja, which was recovering the influence it had exerted on Georgian culture a thousand years before. His restoration came with that of Vakhtang VI in 1703, but Sulkhan-Saba was exiled ten years later for refusing to convert to Islam. (He had converted to Catholicism by 1710, possibly secretly much earlier, in the Order of Saint Basil, which was very pro-Orthodox.) In 1714–5 he played a leading part in the futile embassies sent by Georgian kings to Louis XIV of France and Pope Clement in Rome, soliciting western help in exchange for religious and commercial concessions, failing to comprehend the impotence of the papacy or the *realpolitik* of France in Turkey and Iran, or the fury of the Georgian Orthodox church at the unprofitable apostasy. In 1725, accompanying King Vakhtang into exile, Sulkhan-Saba died, twenty-two years before his protégé.

Despite his hardships, he effectively laid the foundations needed for standardizing the modern Georgian language and for resurrecting secular literature. His knowledge of eastern and western languages and traditions

made him a Renaissance man. His most enduring work is *The Book of Wisdom and Lies* (წიგნი სიბრძნე-სიცრუისა), more wittily known as *The Wisdom of Lies* (სიბრძნე სიცრუისა), a collection of fables, some Georgian, some eastern, arranged in a complex narrative, ostensibly a discussion between courtiers and a king. Their clear intention is a moral education for an enlightened (but absolute) monarch. While *The Wisdom of Lies* follows the established principle of exemplary dialogue between Jumber the prince and Leon the tutor, it has a strong autobiographical verve that stems from Sulkhan-Saba's own tuition of Vakhtang and his battle for predominance at court. The frame for the 110 fables and anecdotes, related with more and more rivalry by the protagonists, is the story of a developing relationship. Tutor and pupil create an aura of male friendship comparable to the brotherhood of Rustaveli's knights: Sulkhan-Saba rises to verse to celebrate it:

> A good comrade cannot easily be won,
> You won't find him on the road, nobody can buy him cheap,
> A comrade is a moated castle,
> A high rampart,
> An unbreachable fortress,
> A comrade is light for the heart,
> Sight for the eyes,
> Strength for the arms,
> Support for the back.

The story is also built around a lively debate on education that in its combative radicalism and its stress on physical toughness predates Rousseau's *Émile*. Undoubtedly prompted by *Kilila and Damana* which he had retranslated, Sulkhan-Saba has an argument between Leon the tutor and his opponent, the cynical eunuch Ruka, and their respective 'wisdom' and 'lies' show the polarity linking two deceptively similar approaches. Ruka's fables on one level betray his unprincipled nature and on another level oppose the realities of life to the ideals of the preceptor: James Thurber would have been proud of one tale, 'The Man and the Snake'. A man saves a snake's life, the snake begins to strangle him; the victim asks a tree to arbitrate, but the tree takes the snake's side on the grounds that travellers take its shade and then break its branches for firewood. The next arbiter is an ox, who also supports the snake because

men treat him so unfairly. Finally a fox is appointed arbiter and tricks the snake into releasing the man:

> When the snake did so and slipped to the ground, the fox hit it on the head with a piece of wood and killed it, saying, 'There's snake justice.' The man then thought about the fox and struck at it with his spear, with the thought, 'He has a good pelt.' The fox guessed his intentions and ran off, saying to itself, 'I should not have saved him.'

But the oxymoronic title of the book can also be understood as a moral justification of fiction, i.e. of secular literature. Whatever Sulkhan-Saba's intentions, the concision, wit, and subtle transitions from story to story, the use of folklore as well as oriental literature and Sufic parables as sources, have made the work a classic for children and adults to this day. It is also the first extended Georgian text that prefers the norms of the colloquial to those of the literary language. Sulkhan-Saba appears to have begun the work very early. Printed in 1720 on Vakhtang's presses, it hastened the belated emergence of Georgia into the post-Gutenberg era.

Just as important is Sulkhan-Saba's dictionary (სიტყვის კონა, 'anthology of the word') of the Georgian language, which he compiled 1685–1716. It is not merely the first modern monolingual (and only unexpurgated) dictionary in Georgian: its depth, breadth, and wit prevent it from becoming redundant. The achievement is comparable with Dr Johnson's in England: arguably, Sulkhan-Saba did more, for his material includes almost every text extant from the earliest period, and, as the mediæval dictionaries compiled by translators such as Eprem Mtsire had disappeared with the Mongols, the lexicographer was working from zero. Even though it circulated only in manuscript form, the dictionary's influence was crucial for the poets of the next generation, Davit Guramishvili and Besiki. Quite apart from stimulating others to write and publish, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani wrote religious works and collated and edited many manuscripts to prepare mediæval works for publication. Between 1713 and 1716 he also recorded his *Travels in Europe* (მოგზაურობა ევროპაში, only the second half is extant). They are, however, more concerned with the bewildered traveller's state of mind than the sights he saw: in his linguistic isolation, Sulkhan-Saba was more impressed by churches and monasteries than by the diplomatic contacts he hoped he had established.

Although primarily a prose writer, Sulkhan-Saba had effectively provided a modern Georgian idiom that used the resources of the colloquial idiom and made a less retrospective literature possible. His first and most adept pupil was naturally King Vakhtang VI, whose chief merits are to have commissioned many translations, collations, and revisions. More remarkably, he himself also wrote, in a reign punctuated by exile and mortal danger. Born in 1675, he was most active during his nine-year reign in Kartli, 1703–12: the *Life of Georgia* was collated and updated, Georgia's laws were first codified, the first printing-press was set up in Tbilisi, and Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther Skin* was printed.[61] In subsequent years of exile in Iran, Vakhtang produced more translations, astronomical as well as poetic, from Persian. After a brief return to Georgia in 1719, Vakhtang was forced in 1724 to take refuge in Russia, removing with him 1200 of Georgia's most educated men and their families, in the forlorn hope (all the more so after Peter the Great's death) of an eventual return with the help of a Russian army. This was a false promise that trusting Georgian kings repeatedly relied on between the 1630s and 1790s. In thirteen years of exile in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and Astrakhan, bereft of his tutor, Vakhtang VI consoled himself by writing and revising his lyrics, relapsing into the same spirit and language of the *majama* ('lyrical anthology') as his predecessors Teimuraz I and Archil. Typical in its rich but obscure imagery are some stanzas of a work annotated 'King Vakhtang, expelled from his kingdom, as a balm to heal the wound of his heart, perhaps just for himself, writes thus in Isfahan.' King Vakhtang's poetics rely on a dazzling accumulation of Persian symbols and metaphor:

> I am bound up in nooses, a lake of ink to swallow me
> A drawn black bow shoots at me constantly,
> Diamond and sapphire, pearls to drink my blood,
> A crystal pillar draws up the water of necessity to drink.
> Fair cheeks, curly hair, wicked black eyes,
> The indomitable dispute of the seven planets,
> Neat, soothing, ornament of pretty girls,
> The lips of immortality are blended with sugar.[62]

A more straightforward way of communicating lyrical pathos had to wait for more European poetics: Mamuka Baratashvili (მამუკა ბარათაშვილი,

before 1700–after 1750), a bold, if modestly endowed poet, was the first eighteenth-century Georgian to face up to the problem. A protégé of Vakhtang VI, his identity is obscure (three contemporary Mamuka Baratashvilis are known to history): he is first registered in Astrakhan in Vakhtang's suite as Prince Matvei Baratov. At Vakhtang's behest, he versified *The Adventures of King Jimshed*, a chapter of the *Rusudaniani*. His lyrics, however, are new for the Georgian Renaissance in exile: they celebrate earthly, not heavenly, love. He was effectively a court poet for Vakhtang VI and his heir, Bakar, and slavishly eulogized and mourned them, as well as Peter the Great. His main achievement was *The Sample of Wine, or Book of Studying Verse* (*Chashniki*, ჭაშნიკი, ანუ ლექსის სწავლის წიგნი, 1731), the first recognizable 'Poetics' in Georgian, however naïve. Mamuka Baratashvili still felt the main purpose of poetry to be divine and to exert a positive social or moral influence: 'it is wrong for a man to make a poem out of an evil story'. But only his first poem, *Of Belief* (წამებული, 1725) was religious, and his richest work consists of the love poems his *Chashniki* so categorically disapproves of (unless, like Rustaveli's work, they celebrate married love). He was the first poet to introduce the metres of popular song into poetry, thus setting the precedent for Davit Guramishvili. Mamuka Baratashvili's European orientation (breaking free of mediæval Georgian metres and themes), linguistic range, and theoretical backing, however infantile, blazed a trail for later, more inspired, poets.

14: *Three Great Poets. Guramishvili, Sayat-Nova, Besiki*

OUTSTANDING as the first great 'modern' who followed Mamuka Baratashvili's trail was Davit Guramishvili. Born in 1705 he made his eighty-seven years of life into one great cycle of autobiographical poetry, the *Davitiani*, which he sent to Georgia through an embassy returning from the Ukraine in 1787. Davit Guramishvili's first fifty years are truly Homeric: his poetry is an old man's *Iliad* without the *Odyssey*'s hope or joy of coming home. As an eighteen-year-old he fought near his home in the crucial battle of Zedavela, which resulted in a defeat at the hands of Turks, Dagestani tribes, and fratricidal Georgians that crushed Vakhtang VI's hopes and condemned Georgia to seventy more years of anarchy:

> Alas, to say it turns my lips bitter and sour,
> The army should not have stayed at Zedavela:
> When it first came our troops defeated the enemy with a charge,
> But at the end by internal treachery they lost.
> Woe is that day! The Ottomans shed much innocent blood,
> Wherever they met a workman or a simple peasant, they cut off their heads;
> The basket needs a head, they said, they threw them into many wicker carts,
> The bodies had no burial, foxes and wild goats gnawed at them.

His most substantial poems are chronicles in the tenth to nineteenth sections of the *Davitiani* now called *Kartli's Afflictions* (ქართლის ჭირი). They are historically valuable for the sparsely documented 1720s and 1730s, when Vakhtang VI was forced to choose Russian patronage as an alternative to Persian genocide and endure exile and death in Astrakhan. *Kartli's Afflictions* almost defy expression:

> Nobody can count Kartli's afflictions, except a wise and eloquent tongue!
> Autumn wheat became weeds, it was threshed only by fire.
> One enemy struck down ten, two enemies made many flee,
> Few remained of the men whom God made sinful.
> Turk, Persian, Lezgi, Circassian, Chechen, Dido, Ingush,
> All were Georgia's enemies, each one struck his blow.
> Then from within the Georgians quarrelled, brother slandered brother;
> They drew swords on each other, their hearts longed to give offence.

In 1727/8 Davit was snatched from his bride by tribesmen from Dagestan who then prowled the valleys around Mtskheta for hostages and slaves; he escaped and made his way on foot to Russia, following King Vakhtang VI into exile. The account of his imprisonment, his despair, his attempts to escape, and his religious solace form the next twenty-five 'poems' of the *Davitiani* and mingle hymns with autobiographical introspection as sincere and as graphic as that of Wordsworth, especially in his evocation of a twelve-day trek through pathless mountains until he stumbled on a Cossack station:

> Night fell, another day dawned, nobody was pursuing me,
> I stayed up all night standing sleepless until early morning:
> I left, the Lord provided me with food for the journey,
> Two gherkins and half a watermelon…
> Wearing only shirts, they had crosses round their necks;
> I approached one of the crosses and made the sign of the cross over it.
> One said to the other, 'Dai khleba, Lazar!'
> When I heard 'khleba', joy overcame me,
> My knees began to tremble, my body shook all over,
> My pillars [*legs*] could no longer stand and my temple [*body*] collapsed.
> In Russian 'khleba' meant 'bread', I knew that before;
> Until they mentioned it, I knew no Russian,
> When they uttered the noun 'bread', it took all the tension from me;
> The joy released me, like a bundle that had been bound with spite.
> How one of the Cossacks took care of me,
> When he brought me in, he cared for me better than my father could;
> He took pity on me, hugged me, kissed me, and shed tears,
> He quickly brought me a Pshavian called Ianvara to interpret.

Serving as a Russian hussar, Guramishvili was wounded and held by the Prussians in 1758 in Magdeburg; the rest of his life, married to a Russian, he spent as an invalided lieutenant, a landowner near Myrhorod, the sleepy Ukrainian town Gogol was to make famous, on the estate that the tsaritsa had granted to him, like all the exiled Georgian nobles. Here he introduced Georgian water-mills to the Ukrainian peasantry and wrote poetry to lament, repent, and console himself for the destruction of the Georgian state and his life. The second book of the *Davitiani*, in between accounts of the Georgian kings' political lobbying in Russia, records his

life as a hussar, gives thanks to the Virgin Mary, and invents a new type of lyric. In the first book, Guramishvili's verse is modelled on Georgian hymns or is a simple verse diary, but now Russian folklore extends his poetics. Davit Guramishvili was primarily a musical ear: Russian songs provide new metres and, in fact, melodies. Many of his poems have Russian subtitles, for example, 'Aria: in Russian *Akh kak skuchno*, [Oh how dreary]', or 'To the tune of the Russian song, *Chto za prichina, vsegda kruchina*, [What is the reason, always sadness?]' The content of the Russian song is almost irrelevant: Guramishvili, like a Byzantine hymnographer, indicates a mode, as well as a rhythm, to guide the performance of his composition. He had already used Georgian folklore as a similar sub-text, for many of his religious poems have the fourteen-syllable metre and the rhymes of village working songs. Guramishvili acts rather like the first Christians, infusing into a pagan folk ritual new spiritual essence. Once in the Ukraine, he uses Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian songs to find a new vitality for lyrics that otherwise would just perpetuate an exile's lament. Thus a spiritual song

> Listen, people with knowing hearts,
> I shall move my lips, I shall tell you good things;
> Lend me your ears.
> Powerful word, divine and heavenly,
> Told from on high, listened to below,
> Called the son;
> As our redemption, not to be seen,
> Known to God, born of man
> By a virgin.

is set to the irrepressible coquettish complaint of a Russian peasant girl.

Some of Davit's poems are purely psalm-like prayers (not for nothing was he called David), but the essential Guramishvili lies in his matching of two apparently incompatible elements, the Georgian psalmist's spiritual asceticism and the Russian peasant's carnal hedonism.

The most attractive part of Guramishvili's work is the end of the *Davitiani*, where he develops the pastoral and pseudo-folk modes of eighteenth-century France and Russia into witty, delicate interludes. Many are designed to be set to Russian music, but now the Russian *joie de vivre* takes over. For instance, a song near the end of the second book

is set to the Russian *Akh skol'ko tsvela v letakh molodykh*, 'O how much I [*female*] blossomed in the years of my youth' and develops the words as well as the rhythm as a point of departure for a far more introverted elegy than that of a superannuated peasant girl:

> Alas, how many new flowers blossom in summer,
> I knew not the spite of time, the time of evils;
> I was always hoping for summer,
> I never controlled my headstrong self,
> I did not want to listen.
> I sat in the garden with whomever I loved,
> To the scent of roses, I enjoyed looking at the flowers;
> I had no complaints, woes, or grumbles,
> I was downcast by nothing.

'Zubovka' (Guramishvili's patrimonial village) is a classic song, to be sung to the tune of the incongruous Russian song 'The Cossack is a Sincere Soul'. It begins as a comic account of dalliance with a reluctant peasant girl: the Russian sensuality stems more from the Gallic bucolic modes of Russian poetry in the 1760s, and clearly Guramishvili had learnt the Russian for more than 'bread'. Georgian interpreters have had as much difficulty as theologians and exegetists of the 'Song of Solomon' in finding a purely Christian interpretation of 'Zubovka'. One of the greatest as well as the wryest poems written in Georgian, it should be regarded as a late celebration of eroticism, even though in the end Guramishvili turns an erotic encounter into an allegory of religious devotion:

> Coming back from Zubovka I saw a woman,
> Very beautiful, handsome, she let her eye rest on me.
> Black eyebrows, white face set off by a black beauty-spot,
> Her charm shattered me, crumbled my bones.
> I asked her, 'My sun, where are you coming from, where are you off to?
> I implore you, tell me your path and your traces;
> My heart has turned to stone because of you, become like a bare rock,
> Show me mercy, quench me, your flame burns me.'
> She spoke to me, she got angry, she said a spiteful word to me.
> 'Evil man, how dare you, you asked to have me,
> Why should a rosebud be tasted by a crow instead of by a nightingale?'
> At this I wept, I shed tears enough for an ocean.
> Thus she spoke: 'Let me pass, leave me alone, clear off,

I don't want you, I don't love you, I have another good lover—
Better than you to look at, a real man and a husband.'
When I heard this, a vinegar of spite poured from my nose.
She told me, 'Don't let me hear another word like that from you.'
She picked up a big stick and battered my head.
I was stunned, I fell to the ground, giddiness overcame me;
I felt sorry and a pillar of light, as if in the darkness, stood over my head.
When I came round, she was pleased, she put her arm round me;
She raised me up and said to me, 'Why have you gone mad?'
I told her, 'Because of you I have become so weak-minded,
Because you scorn me, hot fire burns round my heart!'
Still she tarried sweetly round me, again she laughed at me;
She said, 'Let's not sit here in case someone sees us.
Now let us get up and go to our homes;
Take a walk somewhere and I shall be there to meet you.'
Wherever she went, I could not see my beloved,
She gave me a joyful word of hope,
Let me her slave have no protection from her!
Let her help me where I am troubled, I expect nothing else.
She promised, she said, 'I shall come back.' Now I wait for her:
I weep for her, my breast-pocket full of tears and my coat wet to the hem.
I have nobody but her to help me at the hour of my death,
To open the door that leads to eternal dwellings.
I wish to serve my beloved,
Behold I have become infatuated by her, my soul burns for her,
I hope she gives me what I ask, that she does not grudge it me,
She will grant me the water of immortality, the bread of life.
I ask God not to separate me from my beloved,
Whom else will I find better, so perfect in beauty?
They struck her and bound her hands for my love's sake,
I see her dead for me, pierced with bloody wounds.
Now, O my beloved, where are you?
On earth I have had nobody better than you.
I am in hell, I cannot see, I sense you are in heaven
I beseech you, do not abandon me, take me there!
I beseech you, do not abandon me, take me there!
I am in hell, I cannot see, I sense you are in heaven
I beseech you, do not abandon me, take me there!
I beseech you, do not abandon me, take me there!

Stripped of religious fervour, playful eroticism is tamed in the vernal eclogues of the *Davitiani*'s fourth and most pastoral book: the cycle of poems *Katsvia the Shepherd* (ქაცვია მწყემსი) is a dream-like idyll, full of a chaste imaginary family life, wisdom, and coy pathos, a purified *Daphnis and Chloë*, even if let down by moralizing bathos. Guramishvili imagines the Eden Georgia might have been without war, corruption, and natural calamity. At the end the *Davitiani*, with Guramishvili's testament and epitaph, reverts to religious contemplation: a life's work thus becomes truly cyclic. Guramishvili's historical and autobiographical verses sometimes emulate the mediæval Rustaveli *shairi* stanzas of four rhyming sixteen-syllable lines, following the pattern laid out by King Archil and Mamuka Baratashvili. But once he discovered the varying metres and dramatic plasticity of the folk-songs and the fable form used first by French and then Russian pastoral poets, Guramishvili developed a colloquial flexibility. He was a pioneer from whom modern Georgian poets still have much to learn.

While Guramishvili composed in peaceful retirement, a very different poet endured the calamitous turmoil of Tbilisi at the court of Erekle II. Because he was an Armenian by birth and and a simple tailor by trade, Sayat-Nova (საათ-ნოვა, also known as Haritun, Stepane the Priest, or Stepane the Tailor) was brushed aside in the aristocrats' histories of Georgian literature.[63] Sayat-Nova was born perhaps in 1712 and died around 1801. Like most Tbilisi Armenians, Sayat-Nova knew Georgian, as well as Azeri Turkish and Farsi. By the age of 30 he was a celebrated *ashugh* ('minstrel'), performing improvised songs on a variety of instruments. The Georgian poems of his *Davtar* (დავთარი, 'Collection') are lost, but about thirty (with distortions) have been retrieved, a few in manuscript, most mutilated through oral transmission across a dozen generations. Most were first published by another Tbilisi tradesman-turned-poet, Ioseb Grishashvili, in 1918. Some are youthful (*c.*1750), but at least two autobiographical lyrics, 'O My Poor Self' (ვე ნაწყალო ჩემო თავო) and 'Do Me Justice' (სამართალი მიყავ), were written around the time that Sayat-Nova married, quarrelled with the king, and then took holy orders, in 1768. The latter poem shows Sayat-Nova's complete lack of self–consciousness or caution:

Poor thing, my self, what have you done?
What you've done would make the whole world laugh!
Flee back whence you fled,
At the last moment remake your fate!
Whom should I blame, what is the cause?
These deeds are my own idea.
I was almost famous in the world,
Placed like a gold goblet in the drawer.
What obstinacy came over me?!
Whom should I blame, what is the cause?
These deeds are my own idea.
I was rice — why did I want to be barley;
I was a dove — why did I want to be a quail?
Tell me one thing, why did I want to be a monk?
I suspect it is because of my unlucky day.
Whom should I blame, what is the cause?
These deeds are my own idea.
They have sent carts to go the other way,
They have tuned the lovely French zither,
They have appointed a six-ball cannon as town
commandant,
Because you are staying in a certain hut.
Whom should I blame, what is the cause?
These deeds are my own idea.
Keep Sayat-Nova with you…
Put him up in the stable with the horse!
He cannot go to see Sultans or Shahs,
He is praised at the dinner-table here,
My fiddle is made of wood…
Whom should I blame, what is the cause?
These deeds are my own idea.

The style is typical of the city *ashugh*, with the traditional mention of the author's name in the last verse. But Sayat-Nova's language can fox even a connoisseur like Grishashvili: Farsi words like *khontkar* ('commander'), or Turkish-Armenian composites like *altmishughi* ('six-ball cannon') do violence to literary Georgian.

Apart from four didactic poems, all Sayat-Nova's compositions are songs of fervent love. They are musical and ingenious, if clichéd, and may

have stimulated Besiki's verse. Too passionate for conventional court *ashugh* lyrics, they may have been addressed to his mistress Talita, a Catholic woman married to a prominent furrier. Sayat-Nova, who became a monk after being widowed, soon left the church, and reverted to minstrelsy. The report of him meeting his death at the hands of the Persian invaders in 1795, challenging them at the church door in their own language: 'I shan't betray my Jesus, I shan't leave the Holy Temple,' may be apocryphal. Sayat-Nova is as free of religious zeal as he is of aristocratic conventions. He plays with his audience and is unashamed of hedonism: like Guramishvili, but for more obvious reasons, he models his poetry on musical composition, and thus achieves a natural breath and a variety of forms. Of his contemporaries, only Besiki outdoes him. Sayat-Nova's genius lay in hybridizing languages. He not only brought Armenian, Persian and Turkish words into his songs: he sometimes wrote Georgian in Armenian letters and Azeri in Armenian script. (Later Georgian poets were to experiment with the Tbilisi jargon, Russian words sporting Georgian morphology arranged in Georgian syntax.) His fearless improvisation and disrespect for literary norms has led to a Georgian consensus that Sayat-Nova was a greater poet in Armenian or Azeri. But this is at best snobbery, at worst chauvinism: Sayat-Nova's Georgian poetry has irrepressible vitality.

A purely Georgian younger contemporary of Sayat Nova, Besiki (ბესიკი), won the public's affection. Besiki is the pseudonym of Besarion Gabashvili (ბესარიონ გაბაშვილი). Born in Tbilisi 1750, he was the most gifted poet of his time in Georgia, adulated for sheer musicality and spontaneity, and he was the first to adopt a predominantly Voltairean stance. The Gabashvilis were a proud but impoverished family at the centre of intrigues both at the court of the kings of Kartli (Vakhtang VI, Teimuraz II, and Erekle II) and in the patriarchate of Anton I. Besiki's father was anathematized by the understandably vindictive Catholicos Anton I and fled to Russia. Quarrels with the church made it impossible for Besiki to receive an education at the catholicos's model grammar school, but his poetry proves that he studied Greek poetry and philosophy, oriental languages, and French. Besiki's favourite pseudonym was 'Velizariani', from Bélisaire, the free-thinking hero of the eponymous *conte* by the French *encyclopédiste* Marmontel. (The *Encylopédie* was

one of King Erekle II's chief weapons in his campaign to modernize Georgian culture.) At the age of 27, Besiki angered Anton I, who named him as the Antichrist and denounced him to King Erekle II. The poet fled to join his father in Imeretia, where King Solomon I used him first as an agent to retrieve Prince Aleksandre from Persian captivity, then as an ambassador to Potiomkin's headquarters in Kremenchug and Iasi to negotiate a protectorate treaty for Imeretia. (Besiki died suddenly in 1791 in Iasi, where his marble tombstone is, appropriately for such a Byronic and Anacreontic figure, inscribed in Greek and Georgian.)

His passionate poem 'On Queen Ana' (დედოფალს ანაზედ) and tradition credit him with illicit love-affairs with two Queen Anas: first Teimuraz II's widowed daughter (Erekle's sister), then in her fifties, then Ana Orbeliani, the adolescent bride of Solomon I, not to mention Solomon's mother-in-law, the widowed Maia. (Despite, or because of, Besiki's notoriety, Kings Solomon I and II chose him for dangerous missions abroad in 1778 and 1790.) The scandalous and improbable were the essence of Besiki's reputation. His personal poetry, however intoxicating in its assonance, its rhythms, and its erotic passion, is tantalizingly obscure — who, for instance, are the two women in the lyric 'Blackbirds' (შავნი შაშვნი, *shavni shashvni*)? Much of Besiki's life and Georgia's history in those unsettled times is conjectural: Besiki's manuscripts are richly and contradictorily annotated by amateurs of the following generation, but few precise dates can be given for his work. Nevertheless, hypnotic and moving lyrics such as 'I entered the garden of sadness' (ხვედი ბაღს შევედ) show the tragic side of Besiki's reckless hedonism and the decadent culture of an apocalyptic Georgia:

I entered the garden of sadness,
I wanted to pick bunches of roses.
The rose was annoyed by my conceit,
It shot an arrow to enslave me,
It took all my strength away,
It told me, 'Think in your heart of what you have,
Perhaps this will make you hesitate.'
Pierced by the sharpness, I couldn't understand it,
Therefore I weep pools of tears.
I asked the violet that stood tender there,
'Why do you bolt the door to the rose?'

I saw the beautiful violet proud and angry,
She retorted to me: 'Get out of here!
Because of you we have drawn a line on our hearts.
You are sitting far below joy.
Ask your heart, seize it with pincers!
Put a lock on your mind:
Leave us and be somebody else's slave!'
As the violet was angry, I went to the narcissus,
I addressed her with blood-stained tears,
I said: 'Guide me
To find the narrow path — you have wide paths,
Lend me a consoling hand,
Entreat the rose for me, offer me delight,
Lighten her black heart with joy,
Make her look at me: why have you turned away?
Why has she made me think the unthinkable?'
I saw the narcissus full of pity,
Tears dropped discreetly,
She told me: 'Poor man,' — with tenderness —
'The rose is disheartened because
She has been sacrificed by you,
She was proud, she was fond of you,
Why did you abandon her for another's company?
No wonder that she should be angry and inflamed with you.
You have the ashes as a memory.'
I returned, finding pity nowhere,
I sat down at the garden's entrance, drained of strength,
My tiny eyes filled with tears,
I was to be pitied by fate,
Anyone who had seen me exhausted
Would have become awestruck with the misery.
The world's deadly claws had got me,
I Besiki am not hiding from death,
I have weighed myself up for it.

The same fascination for women and the same faithlessness is as evident and as compelling when he turns from floral to ornithological symbolism in the poem known as 'Two Blackbirds' (ორნი შაშვნი). In this poem the blackbirds may be the bereaved Maia and her daughter in their black veils (though the poem has been interpreted as a tribute to a pair of eyebrows):

Blackbirds sitting in a black cage,
Pure-voiced, whistling faintly,
Watching like twins with one face,
Making hearts feel the same pain as them,
Voicing the onset of spring,
Bringing joy to violets, roses, and lilies.
Speaking of other flowers and other stories,
Dressed in black velvet whose darkness shines out.
One following the other, identical,
Both luring [me] to seize hold of one of them,
A dangerous embarrassment in the open,
Sometimes deadly, sometimes wounding, and sometimes even delighting.
Gather round, come, let me see who they are —
Two equal in age, dressed in black, prominent,
Do not disappoint those who sing and smile,
Those who make the poor man's tears flow.

Besiki died unpublished, but hundreds of manuscript copies circulated for decades after his death; the titles and notes to many poems may be inventions of amateur copyists. His early style is florid and shares its florid Persian similes with the polyglot Armenian *ashugh* Sayat-Nova, but Besiki soon learnt to be direct in his imagery. His energy was developed in exchanges of satire with his many enemies at court and abroad: his scurrilous attacks on Catholicos Anton exhibit such ingenious anagrammatical word-play that they may almost have been a pleasure to receive. Besiki's political and military adventures were just as bold. He participated in the brief war for the throne of Imeretia after Solomon's death, as well as in the mission to retrieve Prince Aleksandre from Persia. He admired all combatants and did not stint his praise of his family's opponent King Erekle II, for the king's courage in the battle of Aspindza (1770). But the same *élan* makes Besiki's bitter historical ode *On the Battle of Aspindza* (ასპინძისათვის) a graphic denunciation of Russia's policy of leaving the Georgians in the lurch after urging them to take on the Turkish army:

Alas, how can I who mention this day slander anyone?
The Russians misled the King: there was nothing good there for us.
The Count turned back with his army — and it does his name no good —
He gave the same answer to all: 'Whence I came, there I shall go!'

The hero of the battle in *On the Battle of Aspindza* is Davit 'the General' Orbeliani (დავით სარდალი ორბელიანი, 1739?–96): Davit Sardali responded to the panegyric by writing love-poetry very much in the spirit of Besiki: his 'You have a veil on your face' (პირზედ გაქვს ხალი) continues the Sayat-Nova and Besiki genre of reckless surrender to feeling in a Persian-Arabic genre, the *mukhambazi*. The *mukhambazi* has five-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme *aaaaa, bbbba, cccca* etc.: it was to become increasingly popular in Tbilisi's urban culture:

You have a veil over your face and black eyes, I long to see you,
The world around you is lit up, are you sun or moon, creature of beauty,
Crazed with tenderness, deadly to lovers. Lo, yours is the knife,
Like a siren you make me hear your strange voice,
Rose in bud, do not reject me, your slave.

Besiki's influence affected far staider figures: even Davit Aleksidze-Meskhishvili the Rector, (დავით ალექსიძე-მესხიშვილი რექტორი, 1745–1824) the great pedagogue, calligrapher, and archivist of Telavi seminary until the Russians closed it in 1801, was not so busy copying and correcting old manuscripts that he could withstand the influence. But Davit Rektori's best-known poem is a *mukhambazi* that recants 'Besikism':

I had a beloved, a full moon, equal to the world,
Sadness enveloped me, flames beset me, I saw double,
I lost my heart, what was bequeathed to me, it fled far away,
It became eternally ashes, a sacrifice to sadness,
No longer does anything like good weather extend to me…
The deceits of the world, the fickleness of time, stun me,
I was in love with the sun and I imagined my desires prolonged,
Firing its arrows, the world gave me mortality,
Let it regret my dalliance with it, its changeability,
Parables have not appeased it but portrayed its true nature.

The best that Besiki's verse and spirit passed on to later poets were, however, his impulsiveness and pulse: a Byronic prototype, he provided the standard and the genre that the next Romantic generations of Georgian poets struggled to match.

15: *The Last Gasps of the Eighteenth Century*

A VERY fragmented body of lyrical work exists from the last years of the Georgian monarchy, remains of a lost corpus. Two poems survive by a woman poet known only as Manana (მანანა): one of her poems *A Conversation with a Fever* (ცოებასთან ბაასი) is a fine poem in the style of *Death and the Maiden*. It consists of fourteen wry stanzas: in the last lines the kindly-callous fever, which can see nothing cruel in its attack, advises:

> Manana, I have something heart-breaking and very bitter to say.
> Now that I have to extinguish you, let me not be blamed.
> If you have any property, you can't use it now.
> Put it towards a shroud, you are a wretched dead woman.

The poem was popular and for long enough to give rise to folk versions.

Despite such surges of lyrical, self-centred verse, the didactic and encyclopædic work begun by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani and Vakhtang VI maintained its impetus even at a court which over the century was relentlessly tumbling into the maw of the Russian state. Successive kings in Tbilisi spent longer periods in Russian exile, knowledge of Russian began to seep through the borders of Georgia (where Pshavs and Khevsurs had been interpreters since the first contacts in the sixteenth century) into the court, even though Persian remained the second language of the aristocracy (added to Armenian and Turkish among the merchant classes). French and Italian missionaries simultaneously disseminated Catholicism and a knowledge of Latin that finally opened the doors to the post-Renaissance west.[64]

After Vakhtang VI's departure for Russia, Teimuraz II (born 1700), king of Kakhetia 1731–44, then of Kartli until his death in 1762 (in Astrakhan, after a visit to Tsaritsa Elizaveta of Russia) took up, in the pursuit of an enlightened but absolute monarchy, the ideological baton of the Tbilisi catholicos Anton I. Despite his political successes in uniting central and eastern Georgia under a Christian king, yet keeping the peace with the Persian sovereign, he was constantly at war or on guard. As well as translating the *Timsariani* (*Sinbad*, 1737) from Persian, he composed (on horseback) a verse *Dispute between Day and Night, or Mirror of*

Sayings (დღის და ღამის გაბაასება, ანუ სარკე თქმულთა, 1738). *Praise of Fruit* (ხილთა ქება, date unknown) — a description of thirty-eight fruits — and a number of ingenious acrostics show that Teimuraz II lacked originality, depth, and artistry, but had exemplary motives. His prosaic honesty makes him a valuable recorder of his times: the *Mirror of Sayings* gives graphic accounts of shooting-matches (*qabakhoba*) and ball games. Teimuraz II could also be absurdly touching, for instance in a neglected pearl of Georgian poetry, his poem to console the young Prince (and future King) Erekle: 'On the Decease of Bizhina, a Nanny-Goat Who Suckled a Roe Fawn' (შვცლის აღმზრდელი თხის ბიჟინის გარდაცვალებაზე):

> Your Bizhina has died, will depart this world!
> We couldn't use the meat, not the thigh, not the rump,
> Nor could we use her as leather gourd, nor will her skin be a shield.
> By our bad luck she died, for a little time she lay ill.
> Bizhina complained because her soul wanted to go:
> 'Where is my master now, who built me a shed?
> The women killed me when he was away, I had no one to pity me.'
> Now, callously, I've had to break to you the news of the ill-starred
> goat's death…
> During her agony she had a vision: a sunny place,
> She told us, 'I've seen in the light there is a golden-horned goat,
> Bleating in alien dwellings, it does not weep for the loss of its soul.
> Come and rejoice with me, dry your tearful eyes.'

Teimuraz II's court had several minor writers: the best was Iese Baratashvili (იესე ბარათაშვილი, 1728–86). While his love poetry follows older traditions, his *Life and Testament* (ცხოვრება-ანდერძი) is a remarkable diary of some ninety pages, ostensibly composed for his children's benefit, in which his life is upstaged by the political turmoil he witnesses.

Two other members of the Bagration dynasty made substantial contributions to the the eighteenth-century renaissance of Georgian culture: Catholicos Anton I (ანტონ კათოლიკოზი, 1720–88), born Prince Teimuraz, nephew of Vakhtang VI, rose to dominate the church in his twenties, fell from power in 1755, accused of conversion to Catholicism, and took refuge in Russia as bishop of Vladimir, where he learnt Russian and Latin (he already knew Armenian). In 1764, Erekle's counter-

revolution restored him to power, both as diplomat to negotiate the notorious Treaty of Georgievsk that sealed Georgia's destiny as a Russian protectorate, and as architect of a centralized monarchy.[65] Nevertheless, Anton found time to revise the liturgy, to collate a Martyrikon (მარტირიკა) of twenty-nine passions and to compose authoritative dogmatic tracts in verse and prose. While his theological work came too late to save a Georgian church about to lose its autocephaly and succumb to the dead hand of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, Anton's other work bore fruit: out of various European handbooks he composed introductions to logic, ethics and rhetoric, grammar and stylistics which, together with Sulkhan-Saba's dictionary, helped to stabilize the literary language, though his preference for an artificial 'high' style obfuscated real literary norms. Russian writers' stratification of their language into an archaic 'high', an intelligible 'middle', and a vulgar 'low' register was irrelevant to Georgian, which had established between 1200 and 1700 a viable language for literary narration. Anton was seduced by the obscurities of Petritsi's Hellenistic style, and his example proved retrograde. Nevertheless, he was a writer who sought to standardize and collate language, style and philosophy. The writers who followed Anton's example, though obscure themselves, were to infiltrate the Russian Academy and universities, thus eventually securing Georgia a foothold in European minds.

While Anton I digested the European thinking which he felt was least heretical for Georgian intellects, a contemporary Bagration, his cousin Vakhushti (ვახუშტი, 1696–1757), son of Vakhtang VI, did the opposite and through a life's work in history and geography produced *The Life of Georgia* (*საქართველოს ცხოვრება*), the first work after Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's dictionary of recognizably European scholarship, moreover one that within two generations was to bring Georgia to the attention of Europe's scholars, not just its missionaries. Vakhushti's work was carried out in the doldrums of exile in Moscow, where he became one of the founders of the university. His achievement was to collate once more the Georgian chronicles, to fill in the gaps and write an introduction and, above all, a geographical *Description of the Kingdom of Georgia* (*აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა*), supplying indices, sources, maps, and a modern critical apparatus. Equally important was Vakhushti's ability to find a 'middle' style, capable of dealing with the fundamental question of

Georgia's statehood and of being intelligible to those unversed in the language of the Middle Ages.

A number of Vakhushti's contemporaries had similar interests. Timote Gabashvili (ტიმოთე გაბაშვილი, ?–1764) rose in the 1730s from being a monk at Gareja to the top of the hierarchy; he served as a diplomat as well as ecclesiast and died in Astrakhan. He wrote works about church history and made maps of western Georgia, but is chiefly known for his description of a voyage, half pilgrimage, half diplomatic mission, across the seas and across Anatolia to Jerusalem. His *Travels* (*მოგზაურობა*) are preoccupied with holy sites and ecclesiastical history, but are notable for his confirmation that a fresco in Jerusalem represents Rustaveli and for his lambasting the poet as 'a composer of evil verses' and an idolizer of female beauty.

Like the works of Tatishchev and Karamzin in Russia, Georgian historiography produced the prose narrative style in which fiction could later flourish. The forces of history, however, made Vakhushti's work an unexpected epilogue, rather than a prologue, to Georgia's rebirth, and several decades passed before Georgian writers recovered sufficiently from the shock of being swallowed up by their protector to continue the work that the greatest Bagration writers had initiated.

III
ROMANTIC AND CIVIC LITERATURE
The Nineteenth Century: Russian Tutelage

16: Exiled Royalty: The Bagration Writers

TSARS Paul and Alexander I in 1801 ignored promises implicit and explicit and began a ruthless absorption of the Georgian kingdoms and Georgian church into the Russian state. The disaster was mitigated in that Georgia was now spared massacres, forced conversion and internecine anarchy: slave-trading, castration, decapitation gave way to milder forms of oppression. Russification was a more insidious process, since the Georgian aristocracy was lured into deserting their people by the offer of integration into the Russian nobility and military élite, while the church lost not just its frescos and music, but its dignity to the tamed, apathetic Orthodoxy of the Russian Holy Synod. The peasants were subjected to a new serfdom under a lazy, corrupt, ignorant, and arrogant Russian bureaucracy, with whom they literally had no common language. Divorced from their vassals, serfs, and roots, the Bagrations were mildly punished by exile for any remaining aspirations to their throne: those who did not become courtiers, soldiers, or civil servants to the tsar spent their forces in largely dilettante literary efforts. Nevertheless, the Russians built more than they demolished: the printing-presses that Agha Mahmed Khan wrecked in 1795 were replaced by General Titsianov (a Russified Tsitsishvili) in 1804, even though it was 1818 before the suspicious Russian censor allowed a feeble Georgian newspaper to appear. Nevertheless, Tbilisi's College for Sons of the Gentry, which became its first new grammar school, its vice-regal court and civil service, even its infant bureaucratic establishment, provided a new hearth for the eventual spread of a new Georgian-language culture.

Not all the last Bagrations' efforts were the work of a spent force. The royal princes were often accompanied by their tutors into exile: the most extraordinary of these figures, a survival of the heroic past, was Petre Laradze (პეტრე ლარაძე, 1770s–1837), teacher, saviour, librarian, and model

to Teimuraz Bagrationi (son of Giorgi XII). Petre Laradze was a figure of the past, in that he persisted with the composition of chivalrous and fantastic verse-romance as if a century of enlightenment had never happened. At the same time, he is the typical figure of the early Romantic era, the forger, mystifier, or *pasticheur* who, like Chatterton in England, Macpherson in Scotland, and in Russia perhaps the author of *The Lay of Igor's Host*, invents mediæval literature that can no longer be recovered. Petre Laradze's greatest work is the *Dilariani* (დილარიანი, 'The Story of Dilar'). The *Dilariani* is one of several extant or lost works attributed to the spectral Sargis Tmogveli (სარგის თმოგველი, *c.*1200). Laradze was the youngest son of a heroic priest-genera. He was 'bequeathed' to the royal family by his father, and thus followed Teimuraz to Persia for seven years. He retrieved Teimuraz with enormous difficulty, but as they were expelled by the Russians from Tbilisi to Peterhof, Laradze was suspected of treachery by Teimuraz, and took refuge between 1811 and 1825 in composing 20,000 lines in three volumes of poetry, of which *Dilariani* is by far the most curious. It is closest in genre to the versified *Amirandarejaniani*, but there are elements from almost every Georgian romance from the twelfth to the seventeenth century: while out hunting, King Dilar sees a strange youth holding a portrait of a woman. After many quests and battles with sorcerers, the heroes return to triumph at a mass wedding of 10,000 warriors and maidens. The work was posthumously published by Laradze's younger brother, but has lain forgotten ever since. The royal princes were by then freeing themselves from their past and trying to deal with present predicaments.

The abilities of Teimuraz I and Archil were transmitted not only by brave tutors such as Laradze, but by indestructible genes. Of Erekle II's many children, six made their mark in verse or prose: apart from the ecclesiast Anton II, his writer-sons include his youngest child, Parnaoz (ფარნაოზ, 1777–1852), who, as the 'young pretender', sparked off a number of conspiracies and rebellions. In 1804 Parnaoz was captured while trying to flee to Persia: he was deported to Voronezh and Moscow, where he translated Jean-Jacques Rousseau, faced up to blindness, and despaired of restoration. A germ of Romanticism imbues his most influential poem, a highly stylized lament for his lost kingdom, 'All of you, remember bygone times' (ოჲნეთ ყოველთა დრონი წინარე), each stanza

ending, 'Listen to unlistenable troubles, Let a river flow from your eyes.' His elder brother Mirian (მირიან, 1767–1834) was made of sterner stuff. A general in the Russian army, a member of the Russian senate, married to a Russian, he was reconciled to Georgia's integration in the tsar's empire. Only briefly, as his father lay dying, did Mirian revisit Georgia. Himself a minor talent, he was in contact with Davit Guramishvili and Besiki, and not only learnt from them, but helped preserve and transmit their poetry. His love-poetry shows their influence, but his address to his brother Georgian exiles, 'Come, young men, gather, valiant warriors' (მოვედით, მოყმენო, შეკრებით, ჯომარდნო), has a convincingly personal stoicism.

Erekle II's daughters, Mariam (მარიამ, 1758?–1834?), Ketevan (ქეთევან, 1764–1840) and, above all, Tekle (თეკლე, 1766–1846), were still more important. Mariam, a pensioner who eked out her exile in obscurity, was highly regarded by her contemporaries: 'She was very talented, very skilled in divine writing, and such a versifier that they said this woman had inherited King Teimuraz's talent… she was a great music-lover and knew music herself,' says her friend Barbare Kobulashvili. Her sadness is always couched in terms of retribution: 'Behold, the heavens have let me know their anger.' Her best poem, 'Alas, that the sweetness of time should turn bitter' (ჰოი, დამწარდეს დროთა ტკბილობა), begins and ends with astrological imagery:

> Alas, the sweetness of times has turned bitter,
> What hostility the merciless constellation has created,
> It has ploughed up the blossoming roses in the flower beds,
> It has trampled on my good fortune,
> It has made Georgia's precious gardens dark,
> Bloodthirsty Mars has his sword drawn…
> O luminary of the evening [*maghreb*],
> Life-giver of my soul,
> Who has usurped your sweet domains?
> I weep because of Mars, who has clouded you over,
> I beseech you, adornment of the earth,
> Dry up the furnace of the wretch's heart.

Ketevan's fate was kinder: married at the age of 12 to a courtier, she had six children. Imprisoned by the tsar on suspicion of involvement in the 1805 restoration plot, she wrote a lyric, 'Alas how shall I say?' (ჰოი,

ვითარ ვსთქვა), which has imagery similar to her sister Mariam's to represent the collapse of Georgia: she sees 'a little cloud darkening Asia's stars, laying waste happy palaces, not letting beautiful gardens bloom'. The youngest sister, Tekle, Erekle II's favourite, the 'tomboy' (ბიჭი), was more forceful than her sisters: her husband, an Orbeliani, was killed in the 1812 Kakhetian uprising, and in 1834 she shared exile with her two sons for her involvement in the 1832 conspiracy. Unlike most of her siblings, she was allowed to return to Georgia to die. Among a handful of surviving poems is a reaction to her sister's despair, 'In Response to Princess Ketevan' (პასუხად ქეთევან ბატონიშვილს):

> Why are you stunned by a prisoner's sadness,
> By the bitterness of short-lived delights?..
> Do not be sad, the flow of tears will be stemmed…
> Though you have seen the passions of the stars,
> The flowers of Jericho wandering abroad,
> The tender violets fading in tears,
> Let us bear with a quiet groan the sighs and woes.

Ketevan wrote little else: her contribution to the new Georgian Romanticism was that she infused her two sons, Aleksandre and Vakhtang Orbeliani, with her passion and her fluency, thus turning the Bagration talent away from elegy towards the future.

The offspring of Erekle's son and heir, the sickly Giorgi XII, were differently endowed. They were embittered by the incarceration in a nunnery of their mother Maria in 1801 for stabbing to death General Lazarev, who had come to deport the royal family to Saint Petersburg. Davit (დავით, 1767–1819) the unrecognized king of Kartli and Kakhetia for a few months before the Russian take-over, despite the consolation prize of becoming a general in the Russian army, took refuge in a study of Voltaire and in a wide range of lexicological and *encyclopédiste* activities. He took a benignly cynical view of the peripeteia in his life, from being a defender of Tbilisi against Agha Mahmed Khan to sitting in the Russian senate. His satire, 'Whatever next, are we to become a senator?' (რა იქნება, ჩვენც ვიყვნეთ სენატორი?), has a fine sense of the absurd:

> At their court stand Georgian and Armenian,
> Princes, merchants, and peasants,
> Who will let you in if your feet are dirty,

> All the more so if you have eaten garlic?
> Whatever next, are we to become a senator?
> Bring the coffee pestle and mortar, Bezhan.

Davit's younger brother Teimuraz (თეიმურაზ, 1782–1846), who in 1795, at the age of 13, a fighter against the Persian invader Agha Mahmad Khan, was equally versatile: retrieved from Persia by his tutor, the poet Petre Laradze, he spent most of his life in St Petersburg putting his vast knowledge of literature and languages (Persian, Turkish, Italian, French and Russian) at the service of scholars like Marie-Félicité Brosset, whom Teimuraz's friendship turned into the world's first specialist in Georgian studies, or 'kartvelologist'. Brosset became so proficient in the language that he delivered Teimuraz's funeral oration in Georgian. Teimuraz finally made the west aware of the richness of the Georgian language and the antiquity of its culture. In 1831 he was elected to the French Asiatic Society and in 1837 to the Russian Academy, its first Georgian member. Brosset continued Teimuraz's work of retrieval, commentary, and dissemination until 1880. Teimuraz's initiatives led to Davit Chubinashvili (დავით ჩუბინაშვილი, 1814–91) taking the chair of Georgian at St Petersburg University, to the scholarship of Platon Ioseliani (პლატონ იოსელიანი, 1809–75) and the pioneering work of writers such as Solomon Razmadze (სოლომონ რაზმაძე, 1797–1860), who had accompanied him from Persia to Russia, and of pedagogues such as Solomon Dodashvili (სოლომონ დოდაშვილი, 1805–36). Compared with this patronage, Teimuraz's other activities — orthographic reform, poems, a play, translations of Latin and French classics, a new edition of Rustaveli — seem trivial.

The last Bagration to make a substantial original contribution to Georgian literature was Ioane Batonishvili (იოანე ბატონიშვილი, 1768–1830). Educated by Davit Rektori, his first thirty years are typified by heroic fighting against Persians and Turks and composing geographical surveys and legislative projects. His last thirty, spent in Saint Petersburg, were largely devoted to one great work, the longest consecutive composition in Georgian so far, the six-hundred-page curiosity *Kalmasoba* (კალმახობა, 'Alms-Gathering'), a mixture of fiction, encyclopædia, propaganda, and a personal grindstone for his many axes. *Kalmasoba* begins as a Quixotic novel: a junior deacon, Ioane Khelashvili, sets off from his monastery of Kvabtakhevi on a journey all over Georgia gathering alms; on the very

first page he is joined by his friend Zurab, a merchant who plays Watson to the cleric's Holmes, or Sancho Panza to his Quixote. Ioane is a defender of Christian ideals and justice, full of good humour and patience, a Quixote who emerges from each encounter at least morally victorious.

Half of Ioane Batonishvili's narrative is comprises forty days of Ioane's and Zurab's adventures: they range from shaming a priest so ignorant that he barely knows the Creed, to freeing Ossetian slaves from captivity. As they travel, we learn everything about Georgia's geography and population that Ioane Bagrationi recalled from his surveying days. The journey is interspersed with ever more frequent digressions: lexical explanations of words such as 'antipathy' or 'philosophy', or homilies on marriage, architecture and microscopes. In the second half of the work, Ioane goes abroad on his own: much of the narrative consists of descriptions of Armenia and Russia or of arguments with real, living people. The confusion of fact and fiction is complete: Ioane Khelashvili was a real person, a member of Ioane Bagrationi's household, and to this day it is uncertain how much he is ghost-author as well as mouthpiece for Ioane Bagrationi, who had a reputation for misappropriating other writers' texts. Although the framework of *Kalmasoba* often falls apart under the weight of its peripheral material, it has the perambulatory fascination of *Tristram Shandy*, and many of the episodes show real narrative power. Ioane, on the way to Imeretia, at his most Quixotic and eloquent, is shown helping an abandoned unmarried mother by writing a letter to her seducer:

> To the breaker of the highest vows and the spoiler of the bonds of friendship, the opponent of faith and the most disgraceful of men, Gogi Gamqrelidze. You have fled, deceitful Gogi, from Elene who is in trouble because of you. You have fled and pursued your pride and dishonesty. Enjoy your relaxation, propped in the arms of your new wife. But don't count any more on being safe from remorse and from the eternal curse of the woman you deceived and besmirched.

But Ioane Khelashvili's indignation leads only to a sermon in which Eve is held to be ultimately responsible. Elsewhere, however, when Ioane is on the way over the mountain passes with the captive Princes Parnaoz and Iulon to Russia, the Quixotic monk's interventions have a coarser, Rabelaisian nature:

> Then the monk was lagging behind and made haste at the double to catch up with the King's son. At the time he saw a young woman sitting on the snow at the foot of the mountain, and the monk said to her: 'Who are you, young woman?' She told him, 'I am a traveller going to Russia, but the bad weather has separated me from my fellow travellers and I've been left on my own and I haven't the strength to go on.' Then the monk said, 'I shall load you on my back and take you with me'... finally the woman was forced to hang on to him and set off up the road. The woman fell asleep from exhaustion and weakness. And while she slept, urine came from her and completely wetted the monk's back, and the warmth of the urine gave the monk a strong sensation and he said: 'O good grief [უი ჩემ თავს, *ui chem tavs,* Khelashvili's recurrent exclamation], who has poured water from Hoja [Nasreddin]'s bath-house and burnt my back so? Could water have come from a tap on this load?' And he said, 'Woman's nature is heated, and that keeps men awake.' He said, 'I had better move fast lest I fall into the devil's snare.'

The mixture of crude comedy and serious homily, of disputes with the living and discourses on the dead, give Ioane Bagrationi's work a disconcerting, occasionally disagreeable tone. His achievement is to have asserted the idiosyncrasies of Georgian culture at a time when it seemed likely to drown in a Russian ocean. For all its amateur story-telling and naïve pontification, *Kalmasoba* is one of the most original and compulsive narratives ever written. In *Kalmasoba* a Byzantine regal outlook clashes with new demotic European forms, just as Ioane Bagrationi's mediæval vocabulary and orthography mingle with the modern, in a discord that later Georgian writers had to resolve.

Among the many rivals and contemporaries that Ioane Bagrationi savaged in *Kalmasoba* was Giorgi Avalishvili (გიორგი ავალიშვილი, 1769–1850), who may have offended him by being married to a daughter of a distant cousin, Dimitri Bagrationi, another royal poet. Avalishvili spent almost all his life in Russia, but in 1819–20 he undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and turned his diary into a valuable and long travelogue, *A Journey from Tbilisi to Jerusalem through Greece; the Return from Jerusalem to Tbilisi via the Island of Cyprus, Asia Minor, and Anatolia* (*მგზავრობაჲ თბილისით იერუსალიმისადმი საბერძნეთსა ზედა; და უკუქცევაჲ იერუსალიმით თბილისისადმივე კიპრიის ჭალაკისა, მცირისა აზიისა და ანატოლიის ძლით*). Avalishvili's knowledge of Armenian and Turkish makes him a

reliable recorder, and his work is a valuable, if unexciting, compendium of detailed information on living conditions in the Ottoman Empire. It ought to be widely known among historians of the Levant. Ioane Bagrationi slandered Giorgi Avalishvili as an opportunist who was trying only to bring back an inheritance from Egypt. But the *Journey* is patently a sincere pilgrimage which Avalishvili had dreamt of for most of his life. The rest of his work has largely vanished: he is credited with writing the first original Georgian drama, *King Teimuraz*, of which only the author's prologue survives. Certainly his translations of Sumarokov's inept but frivolous pseudo-classical comedies show Avalishvili to be one of the fathers of the Georgian theatre.

17: Romantic Poets: Chavchavadze, the Orbelianis, Baratashvili

THE younger generation associated with the dispossessed royal family were more open to new ideas, in particular to Romanticism, its egalitarianism and its pathetic fallacy. The prototype Georgian Romantic Aleksandre Chavchavadze (ალექსანდრე ჭავჭავაძე, 1786–1846) was the son of Garsevan Chavchavadze. Garsevan had, as Erekle II's ambassador to Moscow, negotiated the 1783 treaty which many Bagrations saw as treason. (Giorgi Avalishvili was Aleksandre Chavchavadze's uncle, which also linked him to Bagration circles.) Aleksandre's early education was Russian: he did not see Georgia until he was 13. There his career began as a political fighter: aged 18, he joined Prince Parnaoz in the first rebellion in the mountains of Mtiuletia against Russian hegemony, a forlorn attempt to restore the Georgian throne. Prison made him a poet: he translated an anonymous Russian essay, a pastiche of Rousseau's *De l'inégalité* as *Man Who is Now Oppressed* (*ახლოით განჩხრეკილი კაცი*), inappropriately dedicated it to the pretender Parnaoz, and then wrote the first radical civic poem in Georgian, a *mukhambazi* beginning 'Woe to this world and its tenants' (*ვაჲ, ხოფელსა ამას და მახთა მდგმურთა*). The fifth line of each stanza denounces those who live 'by oppressing the humble, by extortion and acquisition'. The poem became deservedly popular: at the age of 18 Aleksandre Chavchavadze's manuscripts were already circulating, and his lyrics, songs of love or protest, in the spirit of Besiki or of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, were soon to be sung to the sound of the pianofortes and harpsichords now being imported to Tbilisi. Davit Rektori, whose seminary the Russians had closed, expressed his amazement:

> Nobody like you has been born in Iverian lands,
> I envy the wisdom your parents gave you,
> Broad understanding, humble intuition, sun-like knowledge,
> Beholding you, I can't find praise that is ornate enough.

Like most of the rebels, the poet was treated very leniently: a year's exile in Tambov followed by entry into a hussar regiment. Ironically, under General Paulucci, Chavchavadze took part in suppressing the anti-

Russian rebellion in Kakhetia, and pursued Napoleon with the Russian army all the way to Paris, where he stayed two years and was awarded a Légion d'honneur. Even more than Russian officers, such as Batiushkov, who had fought their way to Paris, Chavchavadze was deeply affected by the early French Romantics: Lamartine and Victor Hugo, as well as Racine and Corneille, entered Georgian literature through Chavchavadze. But his wartime verse could be purely Anacreontic for all seasons, as his infectious fifteen-stanza *Drunkards' Song* (*ლოთური სიმღერა*) shows:

> Drunkards, let us too be drunk,
> Today autumn has given us
> Release and delight, has put
> Bacchus in the wine-press
> Whether winter freezes,
> Whether the crow no longer flies,
> Cold cannot frighten us,
> If wine radiates in our heads.
> Once Noah allowed himself
> The taste of the juice of the grape,
> Then he got down to the booze,
> And left the water for the beasts…
> In summer, night or day,
> Nobody can get cool,
> The heat cannot bother us,
> Let's get drunk and sleep it off.

Despite his wounds, he fought on, taking part in the capture of Tabriz in 1827. He rose to be the first Romantic poet with the rank of lieutenant-general, a polymath who spoke the major European and Asian languages. In middle age he failed once more at political conspiracy: the real disaster, for literature, was his burning almost everything he had written between 1820 and 1832, lest it be used as evidence against him. The tsar (who needed Georgians as a bulwark in the conquest of the Caucasus) forgave him once more. Some of his surviving mature poetry is less Romantic than his life, even contrived neo-Persian, sentimental in style, melody and symmetry ousting originality. Chavchavadze never ceased to be an aristocrat, outraged when a Russian bureaucrat reported that serfdom had no legal basis in Georgia. His salon in Tbilisi and Italianate house in

Tsinandali were a Mecca for famous travellers (like the English explorer Colonel Wilbraham), while his elder daughters Nino and Ekaterine linked him with Romantic poets: Nino married Griboedov and inspired Grigol Orbeliani with unrequited passion for thirty years, while Ekaterine married Davit Dadiani, prince of Mingrelia, and fired the hopeless love and then rancour that fuelled Nikoloz Baratashvili's greatest poetry.

For thirty years Aleksandre Chavchavadze on his own dragged Georgian verse into Europe and the nineteenth century, hammering the artificial antiquated 'high' style of Catholicos Anton I into a language closer to the vernacular, disseminating the moods and themes of western Romanticism without rejecting the formal and thematic wealth that Georgian had inherited from Persian or from the streets of Tbilisi. Even when Griboedov, his 'unforgettable son-in-law', was butchered by the Tehran mullahs in 1829, and when the poet failed to lead the last rebellion in 1832 to success, disasters did not sour Chavchavadze or make him another Teimuraz I. Romanticism instilled in him an optimistic streak to moderate his predecessors' 'vale of tears' nostalgia. A lyric of the 1840s, perhaps Chavchavadze's prime, 'Oh, my dream, why have you appeared to me again' (ეჰა, ჩემო ოცნებავ, კვლავ რად წარმომედგინე), with typical Romanticism, ends with hope for the future by contemplating the past:

Do not leave me, dream, give me the old visions,
Give me the old tears and old desolation,
Blow the breeze of past life on me
And thus let my dried-up soul feel the sweetness,
I implore you, do not leave me, prolong my joy,
That with memories I should sweeten my wounded heart.

His most original late poem, 'The Ploughman' (გუთნის დედა),[66] is a remarkably uninhibited farewell to potency (apart from the obvious metaphor, in Georgian the word for ploughing, ხვნა, *khvna*, echoes the vulgar verb for sexual activity, ტყვნა, *tqvna*). Chavchavadze's imperturbable good humour shines through the elegy for a lost sex-life:

Farewell, arable lands, beautiful and fair,
Henceforth I cannot plough you, I must be lost to you.
My horses have turned lazy, much time has passed,
You lie abandoned, too tired to pull the plough-tip.
There was a time when several acres

Were ploughed at one go and the handle never shook.
Now even if a man smashed ten drover's sticks on it,
I think it still couldn't plough a single furrow straight.
Where is the time, my horse, when ears pricked,
Prancing and heated, you turned the sods?
No, I think, however I bang my head,
Even if I tie a string to you, I shan't break through.
I would not ask for help: 'The earth's too tough!'
Once it was all the same to me, field, mountains, valleys.
If I was in the mood, then I'd set to
My plough-tip and would plough virgin land as if it were soft soil.
Some earth is hard, some dry, stony,
Some is what they call hoggin, some is waterlogged,
But it's all nonsense, whatever the place,
If the ploughman is any good, anywhere can be ploughed at the gallop.
Whoever made for a copse full of prickly hawthorns?!
I ploughed everywhere and reaped the fruit in plenty.
But now old age has forced me to take heed,
I no longer dare break the turf of the lamented land I used to plough.
If I don't like the place, I get angry, agitated, downcast,
But again I am so fond of soft arable lands
And all the more so that, awestruck,
I hardly dare show myself where the silky grass grows.
Alas, why do I discuss these places
When I have not the strength to plough or to sow?
Young ploughmen, you are what I was,
Therefore pity me by shedding a tear
And you, arable fields, nevertheless
Give my elderly horse the solace of grazing the grass.
Renouncing ploughing you, I shall get joy from watching
And by running on your greenery I shall sweeten my heart's wounds.

Aleksandre Chavchavadze's best, and almost final, lyric is an extraordinarily musical and calm elegy, *Gogcha* (გოგჩა, 'Lake Gokcha', 1841): it shows a retrogressive assimilation of Lamartine's 'Le Lac' to Epicurean lament, half Hafiz, half *grand siècle*. The idea of 'Mountains that bless, are happy and contented' looking down indifferently on a deserted lake and caring nothing for the past glories of a depopulated country, applies the German and English view of nature's timelessness

and numinous message to a very Georgian anguish about time's ravages: it also anticipates the stark Romantic contrast of nature and man in later Georgian poetry, particularly that of Vazha Pshavela.

Only 146 poems survive. In his lifetime just a translation of a Pushkin poem was printed: Chavchavadze, like his ancestors, relied on manuscripts circulating. His prose is limited to a few fragments, including a memoir to the tsar on Georgian history. His translations are more important. Apart from lines of Victor Hugo, he produced a very fine Georgian version of Derzhavin's baroque 'Ode to God', and, to judge by the published extract, his rendering of Racine's *Phèdre* shows real genius and ought to have established the basis for a national theatre in Tbilisi. Even though, like his son-in-law, the Russian poet-playwright Griboedov, Chavchavadze applied Byronic principles more to action than to literary forms, he achieved the transplantation of Romantic sensibility to a fundamentally Byzantine culture. Nobody had a bad word to say about Aleksandre Chavchavadze. When his horses bolted and he leapt to his death out of the carriage under their hooves, in his death agony he uttered only one word '*Araperia*' — 'It's nothing.' His was the first public poet's funeral in Georgia: his marble tomb in Shuamta monastery bears a verse from Psalm 30, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning', appropriate for his fusion of elegy and celebration.

The next generation of early Romantics included three poets with the surname Orbeliani. Aleksandre Orbeliani (ალექსანდრე ორბელიანი, 1802–69), son of Tekle Bagrationi, Erekle II's beloved daughter, could not escape his heritage: as the eldest son, he was a potential claimant to the throne, and was confined to a retrospective view of the world, which his expressive talent was too limited to widen. Together with his mother and his brother Vakhtang, he led the 1832 rebellion. Its failure, like that of the Decembrists' rebellion in Russia, was due to the conspirators' incompetence and naïvety — they planned to invite the Russian rulers of the Caucasus to a grand ball where they would be given the choice of death or surrender. Their pathetic ineffectuality and mild punishment forced most conspirators to see the independent past as irremediably lost and the dependent future as the best of all possible worlds. Aleksandre and Vakhtang's father had in fact perished defending the Russian empire against the Kakhetian rebels in 1812. But Aleksandre Orbeliani persisted.

His best-known allegorical poem of 1832, 'The Moon' (მთოვარე), published in the short-lived infant literary supplement to the *Tbilisi Herald* (სალიტერატურო ნაწილნი ტფილისის უწყებათანი), ends:

> Then the cloud of time cleared away,
> I saw the moon destroyed, it was quite dark,
> The beautiful body waited for me, its face steeped with light,
> I said I saw it thus: what was it?

Romantic elements, such as 'clouds of time' or 'evil spirits', always had a historical allegorical value in Aleksandre Orbeliani's verse. He matches them to apostrophes of ancient heroes, whether an epitaph for Erekle II or the ode of 1853 to Rustaveli — one of the first free blank-verse poems in modern Georgian. His most coherent piece of prose is a patriotic short story 'Immaculate Blood' (უმანკო სისხლი) about three sisters, nuns, who prefer death to conversion when the Persian invaders demand it: the Persian commander is so impressed that he has to die with them. Aleksandre Orbeliani attempted a series of plays, on Davit Aghmashenebeli (1846), Erekle I (1862) and finally a modern piece, *The Times Rule* (ჟამნი მეფობენ) about the tsarist bureaucracy exploiting the liberation of the serfs: none of them are more than wordy and worthy tableaux, occasionally enlivened by borrowed devices, such as a Hamlet-like gravediggers' scene in *A Tragedy: The Early Times of Erekle I*. Aleksandre Orbeliani's politics were naïve: he believed serfdom and class conflict were no threat to the paternalistic structure of Georgian society; on the other hand, he was one of the first Georgian writers to take an interest in retrieving folk poetry from the people. Most important was his interest in the press, as a founder member of the editorial board of *Tsiskari* (ცისკარი, 'Dawn'), which in 1852–3 and 1857–75 was the linchpin of the Georgian periodical press. Through it Aleksandre Orbeliani fought to establish a standard literary language, albeit based on a revival of archaic norms.

Vakhtang Orbeliani (ვახტანგ ორბელიანი, 1812–90), too, was firmly linked to the past. But he took longer to find his voice; sentenced to death for leading the 1832 conspiracy, he was reprieved and became an army officer. Like his elder brother Aleksandre's, his poetry was fixed on earlier models and obsessed with the destruction of the Georgian state in the eighteenth century. The image that pervades his best poetry in his old

age is Saint Nino's cross of vine-stalks: his 'Cross of the Vine' (ჯვარი ვაზისა) is a patriotic retelling of the miraculous thunder and iconoclasm first told in *The Conversion of Georgia* (მოქცევაი ქართლისაი). Vakhtang Orbeliani's longevity finally brought him recognition as the link between three generations of Romantics, while his rank of general was as important as his literary talent for translation for ensuring the prestige of Goethe and Hugo in Georgian. It also stiffened his resistance to change or popular culture. In *To the Poet* (1884) he declares:

> I dislike the tone of the *mukhambazi*, the tone of the *kinto* [street-trader],
> The tone of the bazaar…
> Give me Rustaveli's tone,
> Blooming like the flower of the field.

Grigol Orbeliani (გრიგოლ ორბელიანი, 1804–83) was a far more significant poet. He had close family ties to the future Georgian and Russian Romanticism: Nikoloz Baratashvili was his nephew; he fell in love with Griboedov's widow and Aleksandre Chavchavadze's daughter, Nino Chavchavadze. To distinguish himself from his namesake cousins, the two 'royal' Orbeliani poets, he also used an ancestral name 'Qaplanishvili', although King Erekle II was his maternal grandfather. He spent the 1820s and 1830s fighting in the Russian army in the Caucasus, with a brief spell in the Baltic states and Poland as a punishment for his intellectual support of the 1832 conspiracy — largely translations from the Decembrist ideologue Raevsky and a poem, 'The Weapon' (იარადი), about a heroic youth who cuts off the right arm, in other words the bureaucracy, of a tsarist dragon. Strangely, unlike other Georgians, he was not struck by the similar fate of the kingdoms of Poland and Georgia, nor was his Romanticism spurred by the more sophisticated stance of Polish poets. Under the viceroy Bariatinsky he rose to almost supreme power in the Caucasus. In old age, standing aside from the quarrels that beset the intelligentsia in the 1860s, he devoted his fervour to the movement for Georgian literacy and tertiary education and for the publication of Georgian heritage.

But by 1874 he could not refrain from attacking the new generation of internationalist radicals as 'unworthy sons' who owed their fathers respect. (In 1881, however, he perversely stood alone in acclaiming the

vulgar, melodramatic prose of Aleksandre Qazbegi.) Like Vakhtang Orbeliani and Aleksandre Chavchavadze, whose poetics he developed, he was that extraordinary oxymoron, a Romantic general; as a poet, his Romanticism was watered down by his defence of the *status quo* and by skill in traditional lyric composition. Unlike the other General Orbeliani, he loved the street lyric and the *ashugh* minstrelsy and added to the genre with such *mukhambazi* as 'Give me no wine to drink — without wine I am drunk on your charm'. His desperate, but courtly longing to console the young widow Nino Chavchavadze (although he had been betrothed in the cradle to Sopio Orbeliani) fuelled nearly thirty years of lyrical ardour.

His best and longest work, however, is an ode he revised and extended between 1827 and 1879, *A Toast, or A Night Feast after War near Erevan* (სადღეგრძელო ანუ ომის შემდგომ ღამე ლხინი, ერევნის მახლობელს), a nostalgic memory of military glory. It owes much to Zhukovsky's *The Singer in the Host of Russian Warriors* (*Певец во стане русских воинов*), itself an imitation of Thomas Gray's *The Bard*, but is rightly regarded as the epitome of Georgian patriotic verse by posterity as well as by the author, who supplied it with copious footnotes. All Georgia's tribes and past heroes and martyrs are celebrated. The event commemorated is Paskevich's campaign in 1827 (but Paskevich and that war are never overtly referred to), which, encamped on the same hill as Erekle II, echoed the last Georgian victory, Erekle's capture of Erevan: the poem is one great timeless toast to all Erekle's predecessors and their loyal servants, followed by five lesser toasts. The assembled warriors reply until dawn breaks. An elegiac mood replaces the exaltation, as Grigol emerges from youthful fantasy and memories and sees, in lines composed fifty years later, just himself and one other link to that past still alive:

> Let us rise, brothers, and drink a toast to victory!
> And today whoever cannot come back, let us remember him with a tear.
> It is over, it has vanished, like a dream, this delight of the night.
> Let us go, where the voice of the mysterious horseman calls us.
> Now where are those who were there at the hour of delight?
> Brothers and men of our age, brave men, whose sight was a pleasure to us?
> Our hearts' friends have parted from us, those whom we loved deeply
> Are hidden from our eyes and have gone: of the ancients remain you and I.

This pensive end replaces the original juvenile conclusion, when Tolabushi, as Orbeliani then called his bard, besought the warriors to transfer their energy from war to love. The final version of *A Toast*, with its hymns to the past, gave Grigol Orbeliani tremendous prestige: he was the first Georgian poet to have a definitive edition of his work printed shortly after his death. His verse has been translated into Russian by a greater poet than himself, Zabolotsky, but his prose has fallen into oblivion.

Of all the Romantic generation, however, it is Grigol Orbeliani's nephew, Nikoloz Baratashvili (ნიკოლოზ ბარათაშვილი, 1817–45), who had sufficient genius, mystery, and Romantic attributes to attract attention outside his own land. Despite a tiny *œuvre*, fewer than forty short lyrics, one extended poem, and a few letters (and 400 pages of bureaucratic reports), he is the greatest of the Georgian Romantic poets. He was born to an impoverished nobleman working for the Russian army, and was educated at state expense at Tbilisi's College for Sons of the Gentry, a hotbed for the first generation of Georgian radicals. He was influenced by idealistic pedagogues such as Solomon Dodashvili, who composed histories, grammars, and summaries of philosophy for his pupils and led them into ill-starred political opposition. Baratashvili was one of the first Georgians to fire a modern nationalism with European Romanticism. The tragic quality of his poetry was determined by early physical injury — his lameness — as well as by the catastrophic failure of the 1832 conspiracy, in which he was a schoolboy participant. Eventually he had no option but to become deputy governor in the disease-ridden Azeri town of Ganja; the love of his life, Ekaterine Chavchavadze (Griboedov's sister-in-law), married Prince Davit Dadiani. Poetry became his sole outlet. He died of malaria, unmourned and unpublished. His influence was long delayed, until the Georgian literary journals, notably *Tsiskari*, were established. Posthumously, as his lyrics were rediscovered by the next generation and published between 1861 and 1876, he came to be idolized: his longest poem, the historical *Fate of Georgia* (ბედი ქართლისა, 1839), which he wrote at the age of 22, became famous as one of the most inspiring and articulate laments for his or any other crushed country, while *Merani* (მერანი, 'Pegasus', 1842) fascinated later Georgian poets as a mystic, apocalyptic vision of the future. Baratashvili wrote odes as powerfully as Shelley and contemplated death with the sensuousness of Keats. He

evolved a language all his own, obscure but sonorous, laconically modern, sometimes splendidly mediæval, with pseudo-archaisms. The Georgian fusion of Persian and European was perfected by Baratashvili, who gave the sensibility of Lamartine a Sufi mystique, and who anticipated Symbolism with his cult of the azure sky and his apocalyptic foebodings.

His love-poetry reached its zenith with his last and most unhappy obsessive love for Ekaterine Chavchavadze: the passion of the short lines is transmuted by sound-play worthy of Keats or Lermontov. Conventional imagery is transformed by rhythm and assonance:

> With beautiful voice,
> Sweet singing,
> Ethereal girl, you delight the soul.
> You make eyes move,
> Wound the heart
> And soothe it with a smile.

Rejection gave Baratashvili the intensity for which he is known: poems such as 'The Orphaned Soul' (სული ობოლი, 1839) spoke for generations that felt doomed to self-pity:

> Let no one speak of the woes of the orphan,
> Let no one complain of his lack of kin.
> Pitiful only are the orphaned in soul,
> It is hard to find the peer he has lost.
> The heart that loses friends or relatives,
> Will just as quickly find a replacement,
> But the soul, once orphaned,
> Accursed, eternally endures, disconsolate.

The idea of the orphaned soul infuses not only Baratashvili's, but most Georgian verse to this day. Sublimated into a mystic cult of nature and into a tragic view of history, however, Baratashvili's disconsolate *Sturm und Drang* mood rapidly developed into a hypnotic visionary frame of mind, whether contemplating the rivers of Kartli, the sky, or the end of the Georgian monarchy. While Baratashvili had only slight knowledge of French poetry, and none of German, within a few years he relived all the stages of European Romanticism, from the sentimental communion with nature in early Goethe and Lamartine to the political verve of Shelley and

the intimations of immortality and mortality of Wordsworth and Keats. Love, the glorious past, and nature are all temples threatened with demolition — one poem of 1841 begins with hope and ends with despair:

> I found a temple standing in the wilderness, to shelter in;
> It was lit by an eternally unquenchable lamp.
> David's lyre was played there by an angel
> And the sound of hymns of heavenly sisters was heard...
> Its remains and traces were suddenly destroyed!
> Had time put its evil eye on it?
> No, the lying treacherous world had hated it,
> All that I had left was the dying flame from the lamp.
> Love could no longer rebuild my temple.
> Nowhere could I light its extinguished lamp.
> Thus had hostile fate slammed the door of solace
> And I shall walk, humble, homeless, as an orphan.

The more Baratashvili despairs of human happiness, the more he is fascinated by superhuman figures, such as King Erekle II and Napoleon, who are beyond joy and misery, and whose final defeat he sees as a line they have drawn under a sufficient list of victories. Napoleon, in a poem of that name (1838), is made to say:

> 'Napoleon cannot overcome his rivals.
> However powerfully or skilfully a man rules,
> I still cannot learn from him, nor he equal me,
> The grave itself would be too small for me if I had a peer.'

The country itself is orphaned after the death of the superman: 'The Tomb of King Erekle' (საფლავი მეფის ირაკლისა, 1842) declares:

> I pay respect to your testament, spoken in advance.
> Do you recall the time before your death you spoke to orphaned Georgia?
> Behold, your royal idea has come to pass
> And we your sons are eating its sweet fruit.

The 'sweet fruit' is not wholly an irony: Baratashvili's tragic view of the world does not exclude a new generation's bringing, like himself, 'enlightenment and pleasant sounds to the fatherland'. In 1839 Baratashvili unfolded this mystical view of King Erekle into his greatest work, a

poem of 400 lines, *The Fate of Georgia* (ბედი ქართლისა), which has something of Grigol Orbeliani's rhetorical pathos (Baratashvili knew the early version of *A Toast*). But here the dead king, speaking as a father to his counsellor on the eve of surrendering his kingdom to Russian suzerainty, acquires a numinous authority as powerful as that of Hamlet's father in its demands on the listener. The River Aragvi rushes romantically through the tragic arguments for surrender, in a contrast of indomitable nature and doomed man which Vazha Pshavela's poetry is to develop. Like Vazha Pshavela, Baratashvili has Shakespeare's ability to conduct a dialogue between defeated kings and fate.

In parallel to historical heroes, Baratashvili evolved a view of himself as an apocalyptic horseman, his horse being an unbridled Merani, 'Pegasus'. A most compulsive poem of 1842 begins and ends with the verse:

> My Pegasus runs and flies without paths or traces,
> Behind, an ill-fated black raven caws at me.
> Ride on, Pegasus, your gallop has no limit
> And give my thoughts that shine in black to the breeze.

In *Merani* Baratashvili created the most dynamic poem in the language, with a mythological hero and a dream landscape worthy of his contemporary Gérard de Nerval and his 'Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie'.

Baratashvili wrote more conventional nature poems, but they are the first in Georgian using the European conventions that fix first a landscape, a wild river or a city park, in the reader's vision and then fix the poet's feelings to that landscape: in nature, as in love and historical poetry, he is a Romantic *à la lettre*. Probably Aleksandre Chavchavadze learnt from Baratashvili to combine painting and feeling in his *Gogcha*. But a fourth genre, anticipating the Symbolists, arises out of Baratashvili's mystic cult of the azure sky: it may be inspired by Aleksandre Chavchavadze's invocation of black in a love poem of the 1820s 'The dark colour, the colour black' (ფერსა ბნელს, ფერსა შავს):

> The dark colour, the colour black
> I have always loved,
> No other colour
> Do I love, I swear to heaven.

The same rhythm and obsession with colour runs through one of Baratashvili's last lyrics of 1845, 'Sky colour, azure colour' (ცისა ფერს, ლურჯსა ფერს), in which Romantic longing for the world beyond the grave moves into a Mallarméan Symbolist cult of the infinite:

Sky colour, azure colour,
First created colour
And not of this earth
I have loved since boyhood.
And now that my blood
Is chilled,
I swear I do not love
Any other colour.
Beautiful to my sight,
I love the sky colour;
Coming through the heavens
It shimmers with harmony.
A nostalgic thought
Draws me to the sky's edge,
That melting in magic
I should join the azure sky.
I shall die, I shall not see
A parental tear,
Instead the azure sky
Will shed heavenly dew on me.
When around my grave
The fog hangs,
The scintillation will offer it up
To the azure sky.

Such promising poetry makes Baratashvili's untimely death not a culmination but an interruption of a creative career: the only other insights into his development come from a few surviving touching letters to his sister. In 1852 just four of his poems were published in *Tsiskari*: his autograph collected poems had, ironically, been bequeathed to Ekaterine Chavchavadze, now Dadiani and 'queen' of Mingrelia, whom the rejected Baratashvili had dismissed as senseless and heartless. Through her, in 1858, the poetry became known to the young Ilia Chavchavadze, who 'raved for an entire week', made them famous to the whole nation, and

himself decided to be a poet as well as a lawyer. Together with Rustaveli, Baratashvili was the first Georgian poet to incite such enthusiasm and invite translation, a process he has resisted, though Pasternak's free Russian versions are recognizable poems.

The sheer inimitable power of Baratashvili, like that of Lermontov in Russia, seemed to halt poetry in its tracks and redirect writers into greener fields of prose. Only in the twentieth century, when Galaktion Tabidze combined Baratashvili's Pegasus and azure sky into the dynamic symbol of Blue Horses, could his achievement be built on.

18: The Birth of Modern Prose and Drama

PROSE in Georgia was hindered by mundane factors: the severity of Tsar Nicholas I's censorship, the tiny population of Tbilisi in the first half of the nineteenth century (a mere 50,000), a city which slowly recovered from the Persian invasion only to become more a Russian-Armenian than Georgian centre. Georgian writers lived either in Russia or Tbilisi: their potential readers were in the villages and sleepy country towns. Poetry survives in manuscript; novels require a press, media, a readership. Only under Count Vorontsov and Bariatinsky, in the 1850s and 1860s, did censorship relax, education in Georgian (at least to secondary level) become universal among the gentry, and national consciousness reawaken (largely in the university of Saint Petersburg), so that enough readers were available to support prose-writers and their journals. The abortive *Literary Supplement* of 1832 lasted only five issues. Not until 1852 did *Tsiskari* (ცისკარი, 'Dawn') appear. (It closed in 1875.) With intermittent periods of official oppression, internal wrangling, and economic problems, Georgian writers had a choice of outlets and even a source of income. The weekly *Droeba* (დროება, 'The Times') first came out in 1866, to be published thrice weekly and then daily in the 1870s). In 1869–72 the monthly *Mnatobi* (მნათობი, 'The Luminary') appeared (to be resurrected much later). The democratically inclined monthly *Krebuli* (კრებული, 'The Collection') lasted from 1871 to 1873. In 1877 *Iveria* (ივერია, 'Iberia'), first a weekly, then a daily, began its long existence. The populists had their monthly journal *Imedi* (იმედი, 'Hope') from 1881 to 1883. Eighteen eighty-three saw the first children's journal, the weekly *Nobati* (ნობათი, 'The Tocsin'), followed by *Jejili* (ჯეჯილი, 'Green Cornfields') which lasted under Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tseretlisa (ანასტასია თუმანიშვილი-წერეთლისა) from 1890 to 1923. From 1885 to 1891 the weekly *Teatri* (თეატრი, 'The Theatre') survived. In 1883, the illustrated weekly *Kvali* (კვალი, 'The Trace [or Furrow]') began life, followed by the monthly *Moambe* (მოამბე, 'The Herald', 1884–1905). Kutaisi also struggled to be a cultural centre: the weekly *Shroma* (შრომა, 'Labour') lasted from 1881 to 1883, and the monthly *Kartuli Biblioteka* (ქართული ბიბლიოთეკა, 'Georgian Library') began there in 1883.

Georgia's printing-presses had a strangely inert life. The presses that were repaired in 1804 in Tbilisi, and Solomon II's 1803 press in Imeretia, rarely rolled except for official proclamations. The Georgian-language presses in Saint Petersburg and Moscow produced very little. Only in 1850 did a press fall under the control of a private association or writer, such as Giorgi Eristavi. Not until 1880 could books be printed in Kutaisi (and Batumi in 1890).

Although Georgia's cultural development was hindered by a lack of any university institution, nevertheless Saint Petersburg and, to a lesser degree, Moscow and Kharkov became important centres where Georgian students were exposed to a wider range of stimuli than they might have found in Tbilisi. The establishment of Russian *gimnazii* and the reopening of the Tbilisi theological seminary (albeit under Russian supervision) were instrumental in preparing a Georgian intelligentsia that could profit from European ideas. Even a Russified system sheltered Georgian nationalism: Platon Ioseliani, one of Georgia's first professional historians and literary scholars, taught in the theological seminary. Vorontsov's apparently frivolous 'diversions' all contributed to enlightenment: the establishment of Italian opera made Tbilisi the eastern outpost of a culture that now stretched all the way to San Francisco. Music familiarized the Georgian public with the themes of Walter Scott and Dumas fils, obviating the restrictions imposed by translation or literacy.

Aleksandre Chavchavadze and Nikoloz Baratashvili died before the fruits of Vorontsov's conciliatory vice-regency could be enjoyed. Anxious to reconcile Georgian opinion after the repressions of 1832, pandering to their vanity, in view of Shamyl's rebellion in the Caucasus, Vorontsov patronized the infant *Tsiskari*, encouraged Georgian-language theatre, and did everything Saint Petersburg would allow to curry favour. While Russian Romantic and radical opinion preferred the untamed Caucasian highlanders, classically and conservatively minded Russians saw the Georgian aristocrats as the only bulwark to protect Russia's southern imperial borders. Most Georgians were grateful: Melania Badridze, who signed herself «будущая грузинская писательница», 'future Georgian writer', exclaimed with joy at the Europeanization of Tbilisi and credited Vorontsov with 'removing the Asiatic rust' from the Georgian soul. The irredentist Romantic General Aleksandre Chavchavadze more soberly

suspected that all Vorontsov's concessions were a means of russifying Georgians. Nevertheless, the 1850s were a period of reconciliation in which a new prose literature could germinate.

The lesser Romantics and former rebels lost their importance. Other pupils of Solomon Dodashvili, such as Davit Machabeli (1814–73), were uninterested in poetry after imprisonment and, when they recovered inspiration, found themselves mismatched with the times. The doyen of the first Idealist-Romantics, Solomon Razmadze, was largely occupied translating Pushkin, while Mikheil Tumanishvili (მიხეილ თუმანიშვილი, 1818–75), who had once edited with Nikoloz Baratashvili the Russian-language *Anthology of the Tbilisi Grammar School* (*Цветок тбилисской гимназии*), turned to criticism, encouraging more gifted writers to create realistic prose and drama. Such encouragement, together with the example of the new Russian prose of the late 1840s, inspired by Balzac and Dickens, finally bore fruit at the end of the 1850s in the then firmly grounded monthly *Tsiskari*: Lavrenti Ardaziani's novella *Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili* (*სოლომონ ისაკის მეჯღანუაშვილი*), Grigol Rcheulishvili's short story 'The Widow's Lemons' (ქვრივის ლიმონები), and, most significantly, Daniel Chonkadze's *conte*, *Surami Fortress* (*სურამის ციხე*).

Lavrenti Ardaziani (ლავრენტი არდაზიანი, 1815–70) was the eldest of six sons from a poor family. He was educated by Dodashvili and Platon Ioseliani in the Tbilisi seminary (which refused him certification and so doomed him to drudgery as a government clerk). He was the first of the 'deacons' sons' to whom aristocratic writers were so condescending. He made a late impact with a prose version (from the Russian) of *Hamlet* in 1858: his major work is a light-hearted, ironic first-person life-story told by Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili, his only novella's the eponymous hero, a poor cobbler's orphan who becomes by canny exploitation a rich but loveless *parvenu* trader. The story grows out of Ardaziani's contempt, expressed in a poem of 1859 called 'Money' (ფული), for wealth he was never to know, 'besmirched by Judas' blood, conniving at evil'. But it is a surprisingly light-hearted, even affectionate, study of emotional destitution in inverse proportion to the enrichment and commercial ferment of Vorontsov's Tbilisi. The story's artistic Achilles' heel, as so often in the new Georgian social critique, is the 'positive character' Aleksandre Raindidze ('son of a knight'), juxtaposed with Mejghanuashvili ('son of a

cobbler'), and preaches an ideal of love, nature, and hard work in the country. But the novella's publication in 1861 saved *Tsiskari* from critics, dismayed by the predominance on its pages of recipes for pork in vinegar over reputable literary prose. Unfortunately, Ardaziani's later work, such as *Travels on a Tbilisi Pavement* (*მოგზაურობა ტფილისის ტროტუარზედ*), or his novel of true love versus commerce, *The Meek Woman* (*მორჩილი*, 1863), had nothing new to say and lack the verve of his novella. His career cut short by pneumonia, Ardaziani had still established an uncompromising popular (*საერო*) language for prose narrative, which he contrasted with the ecclesiastic (*საღმრთო*) language of the classics he knew so well. 'The popular language has been developing: we have established mementos of it all around us, plain to see,' he asserted in an essay (*Tsiskari*, 1859, 9).

Grigol Rcheulishvili (გრიგოლ რჩეულიშვილი, 1820–77) won popularity and notoriety on the pages of *Tsiskari* between 1857 and 1861 by ignoring reality and setting stories in a vaguely historical Georgia, where his heroines could have dramatic love-lives unhampered by facts. His talent was too modest for his Jacobean material: in 'Princess Anuka' (ანუკა ბატონიშვილი) the heroine, married to the Kakhetian nobleman Levan, falls in love with her steward, confesses to her husband, who is disguised as a priest, and dies in a convent, not before a fourteen-year-old boy has stabbed himself for love of her. The protagonist of 'Princess Tamar' (თამარ ბატონიშვილი) is rescued by, and then denied to, her lover, Shalva, because her own mother, Queen Rusudan, has fallen in love with the hero. More successful and light-hearted was 'The Widow's Lemons', in which a widowed princess tells the concerned King Erekle that she uses lemons not to preserve her beauty but to tell her fate, whereupon the king finds her a husband. While critics rightly dismissed Rcheulishvili's histrionics, and the Kakhetian nobility protested at the slur on their ancestor, there is no doubt the Georgian reading public had at last sensational psychological fiction: the antiquarian Khakhanashvili recalls weeping when 'Princess Tamar' was read to him in his childhood. Before the century was out 'Princess Tamar' had twice been dramatized. Rcheulishvili bequeathed to Georgian novelists a deplorable formula of carelessly researched history and meretricious romance, but he taught them to woo their readers.

Of all the pioneer works, the greatest was Daniel Chonkadze's (დანიელ ჭონქაძე, 1830–60) début and swan-song *Surami Fortress* (*Tsiskari*,

1859–60). Chonkadze was only 30 when tuberculosis killed him. Born in Dusheti, a mixed Ossetian-Georgian community in the highlands, to a peasant family, his attitude to the aristocracy and to life has the harshness, even anger, that is to fuel another peasant highlander, Vazha Pshavela. Educated at the seminaries of Vladikavkaz and Tbilisi, Chonkadze wore himself out as teacher and church official. The author of an unfinished Russian–Ossetic dictionary, he is virtually a founder-father of Ossetic literature: he taught Ossetic in Stavropol and much of his work was on Georgian and Ossetic folklore. The mixture of folklore, history, political protest, and melodrama in his one masterpiece is, unlike Ardaziani's and Rcheulishvili's, completely homogeneous: superbly written and constructed, the work merits its frequent dramatizations. In the 1980s it was voluptuously filmed by Parajanov. The fortress of Surami is introduced as a ruin, and the narrative, told by one of the local boys as a summer evening's entertainment on the river-bank, takes the reader back to the drama that dooms the fortress and the chief characters. The crumbling fortress represents the end of serfdom: while Chonkadze has chosen an appropriate political symbol for the times, his allegory has overtones of highland folklore, witness the Pshavian verse 'In upper Batsaligo it is snowing' (ზენ ბაცალიგოს თოვლი თოვს):

> Tinibek, your tower's
> Right-hand corner is crumbling.
> A raven has sat on top,
> In the foundations a snake moves.

Here the tyranny of the castle's lord, who robs the weak and enslaves the women, destroys the love between his two serfs, Durishkhani and Gulisvardi ('rosebud'). Durishkhani, like Ardaziani's Solomon, is freed and corrupted by wealth that releases him from serfdom, but Gulisvardi is driven by Durishkani's betrayal of her to take a revenge that destroys him, his offspring, and the castle that ruined their lives. Chonkadze's work upset the older gentry: Aleksandre Orbeliani denounced its melodrama, but was more deeply shocked by the author's intransigent denunciation of serfdom, an abuse which the most radical Georgian aristocracy had consented to abandon in 1858 only after they had studied Tsar Alexander II's *reskript* in the Russian-language *Kavkaz*. Serfdom's victims continue to cry out in the eloquent finale to Chonkadze's short tale:

> They say that at the place where poor Zurab was walled up the fortress of Surami is damp and a liquid like tears seeps out, and that on moonlit nights a woman with her hair undone comes up to this point and calls out, weeping: 'Surami fortress, I wanted to see you. My Zurab is there. Look after him for me.'

One older man, however, can take even more credit for modernizing Georgian literature than these three early prose-writers. The driving force behind *Tsiskari* and its new authors was Giorgi Eristavi (გიორგი ერისთავი, 1813–64). He single-handedly created and directed a Georgian theatre and wrote its first actable comedies, in which he himself took leading parts. He created a literary journal and, under the pseudonym *glukharich* (Russian for 'son of the deaf' or 'capercaillie'), wrote the first literary reviews. He had a brief education in Moscow, and was then befriended by the Russian dramatist Griboedov. He translated parts of the latter's *Woe from Wit* (*Горе от ума*), and his own verse comedy shows Griboedov's beneficial influence: Eristavi too uses naturalistic, flexible verse for the text and takes up the motif of insanity as a stigma imposed on rebels by a vindictive society. His early lyrics echo the gentle Romanticism of Grigol Orbeliani: Eristavi's youthful verse clearly belongs to the Romantic generation. While it lacks his mature irony, Eristavi's first published poem, *An Ossetic Tale, or Zare and Qanimat* (ოსური მოთხრობა, ანუ ზარე და ყანმათ, 1832) on the 'Romeo and Juliet' structure, has a passion missing from his comedies and even his later lyrics. He sets his ill-starred lovers against the background of the desperate fight of the Georgian and Ossetic mountain tribes against Shah Abbas; the relevance to the conspiracy he was engaged in is obvious. Despite Eristavi's sensitive position as a loyal civil servant, he revised and published the poem in 1852.

With other schoolboys of the nobility in the 1832 anti-Russian conspiracy, betrayed by Iase Palavandishvili, Giorgi Eristavi spent a year in prison and four years as an exiled infantryman in Poland, where he learnt Polish. Mickiewicz's Romanticism gave Eristavi's poetry a more virulent pathos. Back in Georgia, he married and became assistant to the Russian viceroy. His position in Vorontsov's office gave him more opportunities for, than obstacles to, free speech: he countered his satire against russification with loyal acts such as a poem of 1855 'The Lament of Georgians on the Death of His Imperial Majesty Tsar Nicholas I',

perhaps the only outpouring of grief for the much-loathed tsar, apart from the tears of General Dubelt, chief of police, to be noted in the entire Russian empire. In the 1850s Eristavi took charge of the Georgian theatre in Tbilisi, founded *Tsiskari* and edited twenty-four of its issues. But unlike other aristocrats who capitulated to Russian rule, Giorgi Eristavi expressed his indignation in three short comedies. The plotting is sketchy, but the characterization is sharp and the dialogue witty: this is the first record of Georgian as spoken in the streets of Tbilisi. Eristavi's extraordinary ear is demonstrated by the fact that he began writing comedy far from the sounds of his native language, while serving in Poland.

His first attempt (1839, published 1861) is a fifty-minute verse drama in two acts (nine scenes) *The Madwoman* (შეშლილი). Its cast centres around a matriarch, Anakhanum, and her obedient daughters-in-law, making it something of a Georgian *Doll's House*, especially in its portrayal of Taso, the loving and energetic daughter who refuses to be a bartered bride. An old feudal world fights a new European set of ideas: the priest Ioram sets out the traditional view:

> How can this world be praised,
> Inconstant, hard to live in?
> But because it is created by God,
> We must carry out his will,
> He has ordained for us marriage,
> Regeneration and multiplication.

and the old women recall:

> We never asked our hearts,
> Whom we wanted to marry, for whom we yearned,
> When they led us up to our husbands in the church.
> Whomever fate gave us to,
> It also gave our hearts to him alone.

But the emotionally effusive younger generation — Taso, her fiancé Beglari, and his friend Vakhtang (whom Anakhanum has chosen as Taso's husband) — are bent on self-assertion. Nevertheless, Eristavi's Romanticism is a little archaic: his Beglar complains like a seventeenth-century Persian:

> Woman, as inconstant as the autumn,
> Where did you learn this devilish undermining of men?
> Who gave you an angel's face and a demon's soul?
> Did you think nobody would punish you in this world?
> Rib of man, deceiver, light fluff of dreams,
> Resplendent as a snake, wasting men's hearts and
> crippling their minds.

In Part 2, Taso appears as mad as Shakespeare's Ophelia, or Chekhov's Nina: Eristavi anticipates the end of *The Seagull* by having the females of the cast playing lotto while the hero and heroine are prostrate and insane with frustrated true love. But *The Madwoman* is too patently indebted to Griboedov, and it hovers between being a comedy of avarice and a melodrama of love.[67]

Eristavi's best plays were proven by performance. *The Lawsuit, or Semicolon* (literally 'Full Stop and Comma') (დავა, ანუ ტოჩკა და ზაქეტაია, 1840) launched the Georgian theatre on 2 January 1850. It reuses some of the material of *The Madwoman*: Beglar, a young poet-hero, one third Chatsky, one third Romeo, one third Eristavi, is carried over, together with his most lyrical monologue. The overtly Shakespeare-Griboedov plot, where young love is obstructed by reactionary parents, is enlarged to show corrupt lawyers profiting from the stupidity of the old: the audience must also have been reminded of Russian classical comedy — for example, Kapnist's *Chicanery* (*Ябеда*). But although the plot is clumsily contrived, with the servants' love interest patterned on that of their masters, Giorgi Eristavi shows great skill in catching each character's idiolect, ranging over the whole diapason from Romantic posturing to provincial dialect and Russo-Georgian, the chimerical jargon of Tbilisi's market. Unlike his models, Eristavi assuages his audience and gives his Beglar and Nina a happy ending, but only after some unpleasant home truths from Sarkis, the Armenian court interpreter:

> God help the Georgians,
> They have empty heads,
> And even their children
> Are a comma missing!
> You should see them when they have money,
> They all have big hearts,

But when they're broke, it's a semicolon.
When they ask us for money
They are all honest Georgians,
But if we ask for our loans, it's semicolons!

The Lawsuit was Eristavi's own favourite. With the author taking the part of Prince Amirindo, it was first performed 3 May 1850 at Tbilisi's Manège theatre. Its fate testifies to the precarious state of the new Georgian literature: the autograph was lost for nearly eighty years; despite offers of a reward, not one copy could be found when Eristavi's son Aleksandre was preparing a posthumous edition of his father's work, and the copy that turned up in the 1870s, dated 1840, was very faulty.

The Family Settlement (*გაყრა*, 1849) shows a still more degenerate nobility, abandoning, like the Russian gentry after their failed revolt of 1825, all ideals, exploiting their serfs, feeling nothing but envy and anger. Eristavi balances them with a younger generation educated as Europeans, but in this bitter comedy they, too, are corrupt idlers. The third force of his plays is the Armenian money-lenders and Russian civil servants who exploit feuding gentry (*The Lawsuit*) or quarrelling brothers (*The Family Settlement*). These comedies had popular success and the viceroy's active encouragement. *The Family Settlement* was first performed for charity by a cast of aristocrats — Eristavis, Orbelianis — in 1850 to a packed hall in Tbilisi's grammar school, and the resemblance of the characters to Eristavi's own family and friends was scandalous. The play was published the same year in both Georgian and Russian; it anticipates by three years a Russian play of the same title (*Раздел*) and theme by Pisemsky.

Apart from lyrics and journalism, Eristavi also left a bewildered account of a journey to London in 1862 to inspect machinery. But his reputation rests on the comedies; they have something of the denunciatory power of the Russian Realists, even though they make the crude moral impact of eighteenth-century comedy. Some younger Georgians rejected Eristavi for his very strengths: Giorgi Tsereteli, for instance, in an article 'I Saw and Disliked It' (*ვნახე და მეწყინა*, 1873) wrote, '*The Lawsuit* as a comedy isn't worth mentioning as literature... It is just scenes collected from the street, linked together God knows how... G. Eristavi has... spent his life within four walls and when he hears the sound of talking in the street, looks out of the window.' Not until Davit Kldiashvili appeared did

the Georgian theatre find a second playwright so able to listen to the street from his window.

The Georgian theatre was launched: its most enthusiastic supporters came from Gori, 50 miles west of Tbilisi. One of them, a brilliant young civil servant, Zurab Antonovi (*ზურაბ ანტონოვი*, 1820–54), was forced to flee to Tbilisi and find patronage with Eristavi after a dramatic feud in which he had desecrated a money-lender's family graves. Antonovi himself became Georgia's second dramatist with his seven short farces, among them: *I Want to be a Princess* (*მე მინდა ქნენა გავხდე*, 1851), *Has Uncle Really Married?* (*განა ბიძამ ცოლი შეირთო*,1852), *Drifting among the Writers* (*ტივით მოგზაურობა ლიტერატორთა*, 1854), and the unperformed *Eclipse of the Sun in Georgia* (*მზის დაბნელება საქართველოში*). Antonovi used personal experience to bring out the clashes of gentry, merchants, and working people in a provincial town: the street was the set. A new drama had been born. But disaster struck the infant theatre: Giorgi Eristavi was forced to abandon the theatre in November 1854; Antonovi, sick and impoverished even though performed, died at the age of 34 in December, and in the era of prose and journalism that followed, the theatre languished. In 1856 Vorontsov withdrew his subsidy. Many of Antonovi's plays have been lost: the seven comedies lay unpublished until 1875.

One of Eristavi's protégés was Ivane Kereselidze (*ივანე კერესელიძე*, 1829–92): he managed to keep Tbilisi's theatrical society stumbling through two more seasons, but although he married an actress in 1857, he moved away from drama to give the journal *Tsiskari* new and more radical editorial directions, acting as a focus for the new generation of prose writers and radicals. He was the main force behind this journal (as well as several others, such as *The Ploughman*, *გუთნის დედა*, 1861–72) until the censors and hostile older generation of aristocratic writers forced its closure in 1875:[68] Kereselidze was ruined by the journal's debts, and died in obscurity, in a rented room. Like many great editors, he was a persistent, but weak, writer of political allegories in verse and prose, 'The Shepherd's Love' (*მწყემსის სიყვარული*, 1855). But until 1860 he wrote plays which served at least as grist to the actors' mill. His verse is best at its most ironic. To the ritual question 'What Joy will the New Year Bring Me?' (*მაშ, რათ მიხარის ახალი წელი*, 1859) he gave an unseasonal answer:

For me the New Year will be
The day that I see my fatherland
Having the dark veil lifted from its face…
Whoever should see the fatherland's good fortune,
Whatever child lives to see that time,
Let him come to the grave and call to me —
That's where I want to spend my New Year holiday.

Kereselidze's most important act, however, was publishing Ilia Chavchavadze's aggressive critical attack on sentimentalism and on the aristocratic translator Revaz Eristavi, thus starting the famous twenty-year battle of Georgia's 'fathers and sons'. The battle ranged on many fronts, not all ideological: for and against the preservation of the old Georgian letters ჱ, ჳ, ჭ, ჵ (ey, wi, ô, q), the adherence to 'three styles' defined by Anton I, the prestigious high and middle styles both antiquarian pompous artifices, the low being spurned as vulgar. The 'fathers' were too old or uninspired to win the war; only Grigol Orbeliani made a last-ditch stand in 1873, using the accusation of ingratitude as his ultimate weapon.

19: The Luminaries: Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli

THE watershed in the nineteenth century divides those born before and after the conspiracy of 1832 into 'fathers' and 'sons', a term indebted to Turgenev's novel of that name, but indicating a much more acrimonious and irreconcilable division. If the old generation was resigned to the political *status quo*, to preserving national character and values in an imperial structure, and to literature as pleasing instruction, the new generation was radical on a Russian pattern (whether liberal or socialist), internationalist in sympathy (if still national at heart), and saw in literature an instrument of political and moral change. The new generation's leader and outstanding writer was Ilia Chavchavadze (ილია ჭავჭავაძე). He is the most revered of Georgian writers and civic leaders, so much so that he is known just as Ilia. He was born in Qvareli, eastern Georgia, in 1837, murdered in 1907, and canonized by the Georgian Orthodox church in 1987. An idyllic childhood formed his ideal of family life; the vineyards of Kakhetia fixed an image that recurs in his fiction or journalism, of a necessary fermentation, after which wine can be bottled and matured — a strange mix, a little like Tolstoy's, of radicalism and conservatism that would irritate his opponents but perpetuate his authority.

As a poet Chavchavadze was soon convinced, in his words, 'Not only for sweet sounds | Did heaven send me to earth, | Heaven assigns me and the people bring me up: | Earthly for heavenly, I speak to God so as to move my people nearer Him.' After attending the Tbilisi *gimnazia*, where earlier poets — Baratashvili and Grigol Orbeliani — had been pupils, he studied law in St Petersburg (1857–61). As a *tergdaleuli* (თერგდალეული, 'one who has drunk from (i.e. crossed) the River Terek'), Ilia thus became the archetype of the new Russian-educated Georgian intellectual.

He made a precocious, stunning entry into literature with Georgia's first intellectually and æsthetically satisfying novella, *Is He Human?!* (*კაცია-ადამიანი?!* 1858–63). A portrait of tyrannical, degenerate stupefaction among the rural gentry, it rivals Saltykov-Shchedrin: it combines loving detail, black humour, and savage indignation with narrative skill. Set at the time when emancipation of the serfs was imminent, it shows the

grotesque Prince Luarsab Tatarkidze and Darejan, his hideous wife of twenty years, in their ramshackle filthy house surrounded by rubbish and pig dung, bullying their servants: Luarsab's only thought is the menu for his next meal. Chavchavadze made Luarsab's recurrent question, regardless of all threats or problems, a part of Georgian idiom: 'That's all very well, but what have we got for supper tonight?' (ყველა-ყველა და ამაღამ ვახშმად რა გვაქვს?). The gruesome Gogolian tableau is first broken by a flashback, the story of the young Luarsab coerced and cajoled into marriage, and then turns into a narrative that stirs the reader's sympathies for this exemplary pair of degenerates: more and more desperate to conceive, Darejan finally consults a peasant-herbalist and dies of the medicine; the distraught Luarsab cannot long survive her. Between laughter and tears Chavchavadze extracts a moral:

> Reader… Luarsab and Darejan were born from your loins and suckled by your breasts. Be offended or not, as you like. If you laugh at them, you will have been laughing at yourself, if you weep for them, that is a good sign — you are apparently upset that we are like them, the idea of reforming yourself has taken wing. God grant that it should be so.

On his return to St Petersburg, Chavchavadze meant to use Russian and European ideas of literature as a tool for moral and political change: as a standard-bearer for some of Herzen's and Chernyshevsky's ideals, he was seen as a dangerous radical. His critique of the establishment (whether Grigol Orbeliani or Giorgi Eristavi) for 'wanting to wrap Georgian literature in a dead man's shroud' began a war between 'fathers and sons', in which the sons were soon known as 'those who have drunk the Terek' or 'the first group' (პირველი დახი). Factionalism now set in: each generation was to form its own group (დახი, *dasi*), to oppose with a new radicalism what it saw as reactionaries, and Chavchavadze, together with his ally Akaki Tsereteli, was to endure the same bitter opposition in the 1880s and 1900s that he had led in the 1860s. To spread his ideas, Chavchavadze founded a monthly journal, *The Herald of Georgia* (საქართველოს მოამბე, 1863): it survived the censor's strictures for just twelve issues.

Married in 1864, Chavchavadze had to earn a living in the civil service and neglect literature for seven years, until Alexander II visited Georgia and the 'fathers and sons' polemic burst out in a series of

'responses' and 'responses to responses'. Chavchavadze moved back to Tbilisi and in 1876 founded another mouthpiece, the newspaper *Iveria*. A new well-spring of prose and poetry burst forth.

His narrative poetry exalts self-immolation, whether for the nation, as in *King Dimitri the Self-Sacrificing* (მეფე დიმიტრი თავდადებული, 1878), or for religious redemption, as in *The Hermit* (განდეგილი, 1883). Chavchavadze is formulating his own political morality when he tells of King Dimitri asking his people's advice and taking only the high priest's counsel, to submit to a Mongol khan for execution rather than let his country undergo a punitive invasion. The historical episode is realigned on the axis of Gethsemane and Golgotha:

> So many innocents would undergo torment
> That the stones would weep for the fate of the poor.
> My country's agony would be on my head,
> King Dimitri's name would be abhorrent.
> For what? Sparing me fear involves
> Deserting my people, letting them perish.
> A king knows his duty. Shame on the shepherd
> Who runs and leaves his sheep to the wolves.

The king dies in a powerfully composed final scene which combines both Transfiguration and Crucifixion:

> The executioner, his bare arm gnarled
> Like a juniper root, stood by the block.
> Between the two the king was flung,
> Gazing to God, pallid, appalled.
> Aghast at the axeman and the pomp,
> Bitterly he surveyed the scene.
> Mortally weakened, nearly fainting,
> He trembled as though about to drop.
> He summoned his spirit and daunted his fear,
> Then heard the sound of violent sobbing.
> Amazed, he saw his nobles gathered,
> All who had shared his journey here.
> The high priest too was loudly weeping.
> Their grief would squeeze the tears from rocks.
> They reminded the King of house and home,
> Of kith and kin, of land and people.

The King broke down. His heart, as tough
As iron, faltered. Spirit succumbed.
He covered his eyes and to the vizier
He groaned, 'O spare me, this is enough.'
Then horrified by what he'd said,
He shouted, 'Hey, hangman,' and proffered his neck.
The executioner aimed the axe
And with one blow removed his head.

The Hermit is a more ambiguous piece: the monk who has sworn to renounce all carnal pleasures is tempted to touch a sleeping shepherdess who has taken refuge in his cell. He flees in horror, but it is unclear whether his vow is unnatural or his religious zeal inadequate.

Capital punishment is the topic of Chavchavadze's most powerful short story, 'On the Gallows' (სახრჩობელაზე, 1879). A miller, who was once a drover, stumbles on a public execution and recognizes the victim as one of two homeless boys whom four years ago he had sheltered and fed, only to be robbed by them. His disbelief and revulsion at the execution are as graphically conveyed as the feelings of Dostoevsky's Idiot. Despite the crudity of the plot, in which the condemned man's brother reveals all and returns the stolen money, this abolitionist story was so influential on Georgian public morality that in 1906 the government could find nobody willing to act as hangman in Tbilisi and terrorists had to be reprieved, an event unique in the world's annals.

Chavchavadze's greatest prose piece is *The Otariani Widow* (*ოთარაანთ ქვრივი*, published in *Iveria* in 1888). The story is the polar opposite of *Is He Human?!*, and the stoic, virulently independent widow and her hard-working, self-oblivious, righteous son are examples of tragic endurance. Both widow and son are alone, feared by the villagers, but loved and admired from afar. The son dies falling off a hayrick, the widow freezes to death on his snow-covered grave, but the young Prince Archil and his sister Keso, who employed Giorgi, are left with an indelible example. Chavchavadze forgoes easy caricature, rhetoric, and moralizing to produce what is perhaps the best-written and most moving narrative fiction in Georgian. There are echoes of Turgenev's Bazarov in Giorgi's stoic acceptance of death while the undeclared aristocratic love of his life looks on helpless; there is all the skill of Leskov in creating an archetype

of the nation's moral strength, but for all these overtones this is Chavchavadze's most original and perfect composition. The heroine of *The Otariani Widow* anticipates Solzhenitsyn's in 'Matriona's Yard'.

Ilia Chavchavadze's rather unorthodox ecstatic Christianity also imbues his national liberalism. His lyric talent is less intense than his idealistic aspirations, but devotion to public causes, expressed through his journals, such as *The Herald of Georgia* and newspapers (for example, *Iveria* from the 1880s), made him at first a rebel against the previous generation of Georgians who had integrated with Russian society and by the 1870s, together with Akaki Tsereteli, the unofficial national leader. His *A Traveller's Essays* (*მგზავრის წერილები*, 1861–71) set out a programme of national revival. He led regenerative activities in every direction — the Propagation of Literacy, the Agricultural Bank of Georgia — although many ventures were hindered by fractious juniors who wanted a more economic and less spiritual programme. After 1905 Ilia allied himself with the liberals in the Russian Duma and State Council and fought for causes such as the abolition of capital punishment.

All the more gruesome, therefore, was Chavchavadze's murder at Tsitsamuri as he rode home to Saguramo: the crime is still unsolved. The Left blamed the tsarist secret police, the *Okhrana*, while the Right blamed social democrat bands answerable to Orjonikidze and Stalin. Perhaps the killers were in the pay of both sides, who loathed Chavchavadze's disinterested Christianity. Like Tolstoy's in Russia, his status as the nation's conscience hindered both social revolutionaries and the tsar's governors-general in waging their ruthless internecine war. Chavchavadze's murder is still a burning issue in Georgia; his writings are regarded as above ordinary literary criticism. Ilia can be credited, as can Akaki Tsereteli, with creating not just a language, but the ethics of intellectual debate, polemic, and reporting, as well as a standard style for narrative prose.

Next to Ilia in talent and prominence was a rather less political animal and more cantankerous individual: Akaki Tsereteli (აკაკი წერეთელი, 1840–1915), born near Sachkhere in western Georgia, is the second of the three Georgian writers of the late nineteenth century renowned enough to be known by their Christian names. He was a descendant of Solomon I of Imeretia; his family had been leading noblemen at the court of the last Imeretian kings and survived the collapse of the kingdom only to live in

rural isolation, a decay which fired Akaki's life-long indignation (despite his affection for his parents). Akaki went to school in Kutaisi, and after abortive service in the Russian army and a hasty marriage, returned to Georgia a *tergdaleuli* — in other words, steeped in Russian and European culture. In Tbilisi, however, because of his dour individualism, he had an uphill struggle with new literary circles. His refusal to be a civil servant made him Georgia's first full-time professional writer. Like Chavchavadze and other *tergdaleulebi*, he proclaimed a utilitarian view of poetry characteristic of the Russian 'civic' poets of the 1860s:

> I want the mandolin
> To serve justice,
> Affirm a pure idea
> Warm the heart with purity…
> So that the oppressed, thanks to this song
> Should have their eyes dried,
> And the oppressor with a blow to the heart
> Should be penetrated by an arrow.

But an innate idealist's Romanticism prevented him from regarding poetry as a mere instrument of social change. His verse, melodious and simple, long on sentiment if short on originality (Václav Černý has called it 'Heine without the irony'), attracted critical praise — 'exemplary', his 'Secret Letter' (საიდუმლო ბარათი, 1860) was called — and won wide popularity, especially when set to music. Some of his lyrics have become urban folksongs, their authorship forgotten:

> My poor self, you are doomed,
> My harp, no fine sounds can come from you,
> My heart, you have not been struck sweetly,
> Because my beloved is my enemy.

A song such as 'Suliko' (სულიკო, 'Little Soul', 1895) is extremely popular to this day and plays the same role of unofficial anthem as 'Waltzing Matilda' for Australia. The catchy melody that Varenka Tsereteli composed for 'Suliko', Stalin's favourite song, has completely obliterated the allegorical pathos of the text, and only the first few of its fifteen stanzas are still sung. The lost soul originally stood for a lost love and for a lost national spirit:

> I sought the grave of my beloved,
> I could not find it, it had been lost.
> Broken-hearted, I lamented,
> Where are you, my Suliko?
> In the thorns I noticed a rose
> That had grown up as an orphan.
> With trembling heart I asked it,
> Isn't that you, Suliko?

The end, rarely sung, is a mystical sublimation, in which the trite Persian trinity of rose, nightingale and star takes on a novel Christian twist:

> 'This one [beloved] is spread as three,
> As star, nightingale, and rose.
> Because you on earth
> Loved them as one.'
> I was given a sign. No longer do I search
> For my beloved's coffin and grave,
> No longer do I complain to the earth,
> No longer do I shed burning tears.

Longer poems, like the historical *Tornike Eristavi* (თორნიკე ერისთავი, 1884), despite their familiar, didactic aim of exhorting contemporaries to live up to the heroism of their forefathers, showed a talent for graphic and dramatic narrative, which set Akaki above his fellow writers. Tornike Eristavi, as that Byzantine phenomenon the *hierostrategos*, the monk and general in one, fascinated Tsereteli, as in Russia it fascinated Leskov (*The Enchanted Wanderer*, 1874): the union of religious hermit and military leader exemplified the ascetic bravery that both writers saw as the only way to save a country surrounded by unbelievers and enemies. By saving the Byzantine empire in AD 979 from the rebellion of Bardas Skleros, the monk-turned-general Tornike, won the wealth and the right to build the Iviron cloister on Mount Athos: he is thus the primary Georgian hero. From such edifying narrative poems evolved historical verse drama, such as *The Kakhetian Boy* (პატარა ქახი, the sobriquet of the young King Erekle II). The play has no theatrical merit, but its shepherd's monologue, set to music by Sulkhanishvili, has taken on a life of its own as an operatic aria:

> They fall on the enemy like panthers
> And I am hiding with the sheep.

They shed the enemy's blood mercilessly,
Their furious souls are filled with loathing,
While I, like a girl, shed tears here
And my poor soul is struck with love.
And at what a time? Just when
Another and most important duty stands before us.

Typical of Tsereteli is the mix of a traditional patriotic call and of folk motifs, the contrast of shepherd and warrior.

Tsereteli's non-fictional writing, like that of Ilia Chavchavadze, gave him the status of a civic and political luminary. From 1868 to 1900, Akaki also wrote a steady stream of short stories, some historical, some fabulous, some reminiscent of Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* in the author's guiding role and narrative competence, denunciation of decaying gentry and sympathy for the oppressed peasantry: together with a folk poem or fable, they appeared in almost every issue of *Akaki's Monthly Collection* (აკაკის თვეური კრებული, 1897–1900). His earliest *Tsiskari* piece, 'The Devils' (ეშმაკები, 1868), subtitled 'A Real Story', is one of his best: set at a holiday village near Petersburg, it combines the best of Gothic love-romance with Turgenevian observation and geniality, and evokes nature and the supernatural with the same skill as Hoffmann: it is let down (typically in Tsereteli's work) only by an ending packed with coincidence and melodrama. It is important, for, like 'Suliko', it shows the diseased Romantic worm of lost love that spoils the fruit of Tsereteli's civic writing. Quite different, in time and genre, is Tsereteli's most famous story, *Bashi-Achuk* (ბაში-აჩუკი, Turkish for 'bare-headed', 1896), an edifying historical tale of defiance of Persia in the seventeenth century. It slants history to show Kakhetian popular resistance to their Islamicized rulers and invents a heroic 'Robin Hood' figure; like *The Kakhetian Boy*, it has improbable disguises and histrionic postures. But the narrative energy and graphic scenes, which have made it a popular film, make it a major piece of fiction for children, if not for disbelieving adults.

Like fermenting wine for Chavchavadze, for Tsereteli surging mountain streams were a metaphor for the course of human life: *Bashi-Achuk* opens with the man and horse trying to ford the raging Aragvi (as man battling against oppressors and nature). Likewise Tsereteli's autobiography opens with an evocation of the rushing tributary of the

Rioni as the dynamic rush of childhood that will become the calm river of old age. The autobiographical *The Story of my Life* (ჩემი თავგადასავალი, 1894–1909), a classic portrait of a rural gentile childhood and a mid-nineteenth century grammar school in the Russian empire, is the most enduring and the best prose narrative in Georgian literature. One of the world's great autobiographies, it illustrates a whole national character:

> In our country, using a wet-nurse and sending a baby to the village was a historic custom; kings and rulers used to send their children to be brought up by princes, while the nobility used the gentry, and the gentry the peasants. More often than not, even princes had their children brought up by peasants. It must not be thought that parents were heartless in those days or that they loved their children less than modern mothers do. There were quite different reasons and quite a different basis for it: parenting and fostering bound together the different callings in life, quite apart from the parent–godparent relationship. Even links of blood and flesh did not seem so close as the parent–foster bond. Not just the wet-nurse's own children or close relatives but their distant kin were ready to sacrifice themselves on any occasion for the sake of the foster child. The foster child would permanently protect these people: thanks to this bond, right up to the last century in our country there was a more humane and noble relationship between high and low estates than in other lands. It goes without saying that this was the excellent reason why I too had been sent to the village. And blessed be the custom! I cannot help confessing that if there is anything good and decent left in me, then it is largely because I was entrusted to the village and grew up with peasant children.

Tsereteli grasped the meaning of every childhood memory and game:

> One of the older boys would be the broody hen, the rest of us would be the chicks; we would form a circle, start a round dance, and spin round. The hawk would come to snatch away a chick, the broody hen would fend him off as long as she had the strength. Finally the hawk would attack, now at one end, now at the other, would break the circle and snatch a chick. Then the chicks would scatter and hide all over the place and the unhappy broody hen, keeping her scattered brood hidden and settled, would attack the hawk, make him surrender, and get back the chick he had snatched. Again the broody hen would start clucking and scuttling, collecting the chicks and forming a circle. True, the broody hen always won, but the poor bird never had any rest and was in constant

> torment. I didn't like this game, although every day, after all sorts of other games, we used to end with this game. I was sorry for the broody hen and I often asked my nurse, 'What wrong did the broody hen do to the hawk to make him snatch her chicks and give her no peace?' 'He wants to eat them,' nurse used to reply and would start laughing. I don't know whether this game, which is no great source of exercise, was invented on purpose to illustrate something, or whether it came about simply by chance, but when I marvel at it today, it very much reminds me of our country's fate. Our life and our history act out the 'hawk game': Georgia was the broody hen with its lifelong torment, and its various regions were the chicks. Enemies attacked us like hawks, snatching away now one region, now another, but in the end Georgia nevertheless got back the region it had lost and formed a strong circle, united in a round dance. At the time I didn't understand this, but there was something about the 'hawk game' I couldn't stop angering me and gnawing at my heart. Although everyone wanted to play it, nobody really loved it. Once, when I got back home, my nurse noticed I was upset and said to me, 'What's happened? You haven't been playing the "hawk game", have you?'

Tsereteli's mother had some of the selflessness of Chavchavadze's *Otariani Widow*; his father had a disturbing touch of the semi-human Luarsab:

> Being always tied to his mother's apron-strings had left its mark on my father, so that wilfulness and perversity became the habits of a lifetime. He hated hunting, which was the main pastime of the gentry then: he was irritated by people running about and he spent all his time at home. He did nothing indoors; he used to say, 'Man was created for peace and rest.' He did not work and he didn't make others work. He loved sleeping and he wasn't bothered if he saw a servant with nothing to do spending the whole day in the house lying about stretched out on his side. He was fond of his food, liked to eat well, and was always calling out, 'Hurry up, don't let anyone in the house go hungry, great or small, give them all enough to eat.' He was by nature extremely kind and didn't even know what envy or malice were. But he was capable of suddenly losing all control over something quite trivial, and then he was merciless, whether the victim was distant or close to him.

Tsereteli's portrait of Kutaisi grammar school[69] moves from Dickensian horrors to inspiration, which came, as for so many Georgian intellectuals, from another dispossessed national:

> This was the Pole Rodziewicz, who had once been a professor but had been dismissed for drunkenness and had found himself an inspector's post at Stavropol. He was dismissed from Stavropol and transferred to us as a mathematics teacher. This drunken teacher paid no heed to his subject, neither to algebra, nor to geometry, nor to trigonometry, nor to physics. He left us to our devices as far as these subjects were concerned, and, when we found anything difficult to understand, then we would ask him and he would explain it to us beautifully. The extraordinary thing is that we knew his subjects better than anything. Somehow he realized that we had closed and undeveloped minds and he would chat to us about completely different things: he was trying to make us more alert... We were so sorry for him that we didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. Two days later he came in, very shamefaced. For a long time he uttered not a word but finally he began: 'Boys! In ancient Greece slaves were made drunk on purpose and their sons were forced to witness their bad behaviour, so that they could see with their own eyes what an abomination is a man who gets drunk: he loses his mind and becomes like a beast. The day before yesterday I showed you something similar. Try to meet the demands of life, put up with its troubles and it won't destroy you as it has destroyed me. What am I now? Do you think I don't sense that I am physically crippled? But thanks be to God, this physical handicap has left my heart and soul still pure and unbesmirched.' He went on talking to us like this right until the class ended and then he left us. Almost all of us were crying and after that day we felt even more sorry for him.

In the last third of the work Tsereteli's profound insights into the formation and inheritance of character peter out: he is tantalizingly reticent about his entry into, and discord with, the Georgian intelligentsia.

Not until 1879 did a public Georgian-language theatre open, with Barbare Jorjadze's farce *What I Sought, What I Found* (*რას ვეძებდი, რა ვიპოვე*).[70] For half a season Akaki Tsereteli oversaw this revival. In 1880, together with Ilia Chavchavadze, he at least nominally ran the Georgian Dramatic Society. But it was the versatile aristocrat Dimitri Qipiani (დიმიტრი ყიფიანი, 1814–87) and members of his family who for a decade provided the resources in acting, direction, and even writing, to sustain the revival.[71] Akaki's interest lay elsewhere. In 1881 he led yet another commission to publish an authoritative edition of Rustaveli. Much of the 1890s was devoted to systematic collection and publication of folklore,

which began to leave its mark on his own writing. His marriage to a Russian and his fierce independence, which led him to prefer genteel penury to earning a living in the Russian civil service, was finally expressed in his own journal *Akaki's Monthly Collection*: he was a poor collaborator. But he won public support for his political poems and stance (and spell in prison) during the 1905 revolution: he enraged the censor with satirical journals, such as *The Clown* (ხუმარა). Unlike Chavchavadze, he had no taste for party politics and did not stand for election to the Russian Duma. His death in 1915 was rightly perceived as the end of a Realist, radical and above all principled school of Georgian culture.

20: Lesser Luminaries: Populists and Pedagogues

THOUGH some of Akaki Tsereteli's work won popular acclaim, he was more a standard-bearer for the intellectual establishment, an élite who had in the 1860s been merely the rebellious 'sons'. Round the twin stars of Ilia and Akaki a whole constellation revolved. The oldest was an unusual figure, a 'father' who became a 'son', an aristocratic Romantic who ended as a populist lauded by the young Stalin: Rapiel Eristavi (რაფიელ ერისთავი, 1824–1801). He belonged to one of the oldest families, the Aragvi dukes (*eristavebi*): though linked by marriage and education to the Georgian intellectual aristocracy, the *tergdaleulebi*, he owed his outlook to the mountain landscapes of Kistauri (ქისტაური) in Kakhetia, the village where he was born and died. (He had a reputation as the village's most brilliant verse improviser.) From 1847 to 1870, a high flyer in the reformist viceroy's civil service, he helped set up the Georgian Museum, contributed articles in Russian to the journal *Kavkaz* ('The Caucasus'), and published a story in Russian, 'A Man in Rags' (Оборванец, 1855): these works attracted the Russian public by their fluent Russian and by the anthropological and historical material Eristavi gathered from his travels all over Georgia. Some of his articles pioneered research into Georgian folk culture: after the cholera epic of 1848 he recorded spells (შელოცვა) used by the peasants to ward it off. Despite his official status, which he resigned for a time in 1870, Rapiel Eristavi in articles on such topics as serfdom in Mingrelia 'was the first among us to bear witness for the unjustly oppressed' (Ilia Chavchavadze). Like his sister Barbare Jorjadze (ბარბარე ჯორჯაძე, 1833–95), Rapiel Eristavi tried vaudeville, one example being his play *If a Woman Moves, She is Stronger Than Nine Pairs of Oxen* (დედაკაცმა თუ გაიწია, ცხრა უღელი ხარის უმძლავრესია, 1870). Unrequited love inspired lyrics, such as 'Why Do I Love You?' (რისთვის მიყვარხარ, 1858). In 1863 he married a Gurian princess. This change of scene made him a spokesman for all Georgia's peasants, and, once he embarked on agrarian reform, his attitudes became ever more radical. Advocacy, journalism, scholarship, the Georgian theatre, lexicography, even a brief venture into the wine trade, absorbed his energies: in 1895 his literary jubilee was fêted by poets, among them the young Jughashvili [Stalin]:

When the laments of the toiling peasants
Moved you to tears of pity…
Then, o Bard, a Georgian
Would listen to you as to a heavenly testament.

His ethnographic work is valuable, but his best is a handful of lyrics. The death from typhus in 1878 of his sister Ana, while nursing Russian casualties in Turkey, only strengthened his stoic positivism. His most affirmative lyric, 'The Khevsur's Homeland' (სამშობლო ხევსურისა, 1881), which, together with Qazbegi's work, set the pattern for Vazha Pshavela, shifted the focus to the highlander as the national and human ideal. The poet returns to his roots, and the poem preaches stoic loyalty:

The land where I was born, grew up and shot arrows,
Where my forbears lie with their coffin boards,
Where from youth I am accustomed — that is my homeland.
I prefer the black rocks, covered in snow and ice,
Where the vulture nests, the crystal waters thundering down waterfalls,
The ibex and chamois are good enough for me, their meat is savoury.
If I am free to wander the valleys, my soul longs for the mountains,
The bare crags like diamonds call my heart towards them,
I prefer dark death there, life in the valley is bitter.
If in the valley they gave me rank, uncountable wealth,
A palace with golden throne, an army, and a ship at sea,
I wouldn't want them, I swear on my life.
Neither homeland nor mother's breast can be exchanged for another,
Both are sweet, brother, I prefer to have both before my eyes,
Like the Lord, there is one homeland on earth.

Each verse has the refrain:

I would not change the bare rocks for the tree of immortality,
I would not change my homeland for another land's paradise.

Rapiel Eristavi vainly strove to reconcile Georgians' virtues and vices — for example, in his poem 'Wine' (ღვინო, 1868): 'Wine, the source of evil, | Wine the medicine for impotence… | The remitter of our sins, | The cross of life, of both worlds.' His writings are felt to have consolidated national identity, and because of his ability to move with the times, from the benign rule of a viceroy to the harsh mistrust of a governor-general's

administration, and to take a more and more separatist and egalitarian stance, he ended as a public figure acclaimed even by revolutionaries. Vazha Pshavela's brothers particularly appreciated the fellow highlander in Rapiel Eristavi who had expiated the crimes of his noble ancestors against the people. The ethnographer Tedo Razikashvili wrote:

From Pshavia I, a Pshav, address you
Now descending from the summits,
I shall sing your verse to the zither,
Flowing tears burn my eyes.
I begged Vazha as I came down,
Perhaps he could tell me who it was:
He showed me your picture,
A monk with visible greatness…
The five brothers Razikashvili
Pay their respects to you,
We have drunk a toast to your life,
We have emptied the ram-horns.

Yet another luminary in the civic constellation around Tsereteli and Chavchavadze was Anton Purtseladze (ანტონ ფურცელაძე, 1839–1913): because *folie de grandeur* and an aggressive voice grated on critical opinion, he is still underestimated. Of the 1860s 'sons', he was the most radical, to the point of nihilism. Unlike his contemporaries publishing in *Tsiskari*, he had not succumbed to the intellectual sophistries they had learnt while studying in Russia. Purtseladze, too, had crossed the Terek to serve in Oriol, but he had not figuratively drunk its waters. He accused the Georgian intelligentsia of preferring words to work. To quote Soprom Mgaloblishvili's memoirs, 'he couldn't stick to any one literary genre… he changed them like clothes'. Purtseladze was a great denouncer of poets, from Teimuraz I 'as Nero' to Nikoloz Baratashvili — 'the reader's throat remains dry, his heart empty, because you don't get a crumb to feed your mind'. He praised only Chonkadze's *Surami Fortress*, for its bloodthirsty dismissal of the past.[72] Such virulence rebounded on Purtseladze. But he persistently defended rebels. His major work rehabilitates Giorgi Saakadze, the devious and impulsive seventeenth-century patriot: *Giorgi Saakadze and His Time* (გიორგი სააკაძე და მისი დრო, 1868) is a treatise which he later turned an unperformable five-act play. Purtse-

ladze's historical novel *Matsi Khvitia* (მაცი ხვიტია, 1870–1) is still read. Despite the crude psychology — all peasants are noble and hard-working, all landowners idle and malevolent — his stories have more appeal: the title of 'Woe to the Just' (ვაი მართალთა, 1871) sums up the message. One story, 'Marta' (მართა, 1865), became popular. Hatred makes it effective:

> [Prince Rostom] was certainly a clever man, and didn't lack good looks or learning, but he was so calculating that he weighed everything up, and if he saw no clear profit in a business, he wouldn't touch it.

The degenerate aristocrats are contrasted with the submissive peasant girl Marta, whom Prince Iliko barters with a money-lender for a gun dog.

Revolutionary fervour also moved Niko Nikoladze (ნიკო ნიკოლაძე, 1843–1928), but this was channelled less into words than into ideology and action. Nikoladze was above all Georgia's most effective revolutionary, the climax of his activity being negotiations in the mid-1880s with Alexander III and his government that reduced terrorist activities and saved Vera Figner from the gallows and Chernyshevsky from exile. Nikoladze was responsible for building an oil-refinery in Poti and establishing contacts for Georgian intellectuals all over Europe (while gaining a law doctorate in Zurich), notably with senior socialists such as Louis Blanc. His sarcasm was more ingenious and amusing than Purtseladze's. He was at his best in journalism such as 'A Thought on Likhi Mountain' (ფიქრი ლიხის მთაზე, 1871), where he likens Tbilisi to an old whore, the wide, paved avenues, parks and theatres being her make-up, while the markets are her blackened teeth, and the cemeteries and war-ravaged fields her raddled body. His attacks on the older generation have rhetorical power:

> Our people ought to put up a monument to the older generation and have it inscribed: 'Here is buried the generation which spent its life in blindness and because of its blindness trampled new life underfoot.'

Much of his best writing was, however, in French and Russian, a fact which helped later Georgian thinkers to break free of parochialism. Although he was a member of the 'second group' (მეორე დასი) with Giorgi Tsereteli, Nikoladze's ideals remained socialist. Despite living to see Georgia's independence crushed by Bolsheviks, both Russian and Georgian, he stayed in Soviet Georgia, retreating into a world of theory, preaching education and reform instead of revolution.

Figures such a Purtseladze and Nikoladze were an inspiration to a new type of writer, known contemptuously as 'deacons' sons'. Like the Russian *raznochintsy* (*déclassés*), who were often sons of priests, they shared their father's education, but had to find work as teachers or journalists. Typical of this class was Niko Lomouri (ნიკო ლომთათური, 1852–1915), who was inspired to write while training at the Kiev seminary (where he was influenced by the Russian radical populist (*narodnik*) movement) and at the same time stimulated other Georgians studying in Kiev (including Davit Kldiashvili, then at military college). Lomouri could only make a living as a schoolteacher — for the gentry in Tbilisi, then in Gori at technical college and in the girls' pro-gymnasium, finally in his own village infants' school. Nevertheless, he was inspired to write and made an impact with his first story, 'Flame' (ალი, 1879), sneered at by Purtseladze but praised by Chavchavadze. It tells very effectively, from a boy's point of view, an unpretentious story of the dispossession and expulsion, by the ruthless rich, of a peasant widow and her son. Lomouri's publisher, Zakaria Chichinadze (ზაქარია ჭიჭინაძე), declared 'Flame' to be the first prose for nearly two decades to equal Chavchavadze's *Is He Human?!* Further stories of peasant life, often aimed more at children than adults, preaching the need for enlightenment, won a following over the next two decades.

Niko Lomouri's contemporary Soprom Mgaloblishvili (სოფრომ მგალობლიშვილი, 1851–1925) was also a teacher of clerical origin who came from Gori; he published stories of peasant life in journals such as *Droeba*. In his more aggressive work a part is usually played by a *narodnik* figure leading peasants on to new perceptions. Mgaloblishvili's autobiographical work *From the Past* (წარსულიდან, 1898–9) and his memoirs, unpublished until 1938, are more interesting. The story 'Tsetso the Night Drover' (ღამის მეხრე ცეცო, 1882) is still anthologized. Living in the inauspicious village of Dzaghliskhevi ('dog's gorge'), the young Tsetso exemplifies peasant endurance, and the story ends with the triumph of his marriage.

Few working-class or peasant Georgians were lured into literature by the democratic propaganda of the 'deacons' sons'. The few include the peasant Ioseb Davitashvili (იოსებ დავითაშვილი, 1850–87), a self-taught poet whose score of poems (which have a folk nuance) were much lauded by Chavchavadze (who wrote a biography of the unfortunate poet) and by

Tsereteli. His lines have become the material for classrooms or songs: 'Queen of Georgia Tamar, | Clad in beauty, peer of the rising sun'; 'I was the King's hunter, I made my sword cut, | I made myself a rock against the enemy attacking the king'; 'I am a worker, and a worker's arm, I know and believe, is blessed | And whoever does not know the worker is to be spat at.' But Davitashvili's popularity is a marginal factor.

The really influential associate of this generation was Iakob Gogebashvili (1840–1912), a pedagogue, children's writer, and journalist through whom every Georgian since 1880 has learnt to read and write: Gogebashvili's *Mother Tongue* (დედა ენა, 1876) has gone through countless editions, even after Gogebashvili's death, expanding and contracting with the prevailing ideology. It did more to create Georgian writers and to consolidate the language against russification, especially in the school system, than any work of pure literature. It is the fruit of the society that Gogebashvili helped to found, the Society for the Propagation of Literacy among Georgians (ქართველთა შორის წერა-კითხვის გამავრცელებელი საზოგადოება). Moving from alphabet to literary texts, with a whole gallery of improving and encyclopaedic passages, the book is a model of infant-teaching. It became the pattern over the next hundred years for primers in the dozen or so new literary languages of the Caucasus. Gogebashvili also wrote fairy stories and historical fiction for children. His other great work was a miniature encyclopaedia for older children, *The Door to Nature* (ბუნების კარი, 1868), which builds fable, zoology, and pathos into a fascinating and informative edifice.[73] Channelling his efforts through the Society for the Propagation of Literacy, he was that rare phenomenon, a useful and successful idealist. Perhaps the best-loved of all the constellation of intellectuals around Chavchavadze, he was affected less by the assertive Russian radicals of the 1860s than by a Christian background in the seminaries of Gori and Tbilisi.

Despite the dominance of utilitarian writing, Romanticism did not entirely die out in the 1860s: it throve in the west of Georgia, particularly in Guria, a region known for its inhabitants' rebellious independence, wit, and obstinacy. Based in Kutaisi, which he made fashionable as a cultural centre, Mamia Gurieli (1836–91) maintained a Romantic image as much by his military bearing, his clothes, and his powers of declamation as by his writing. More a visionary than an actual practitioner, he exerted a

posthumous influence on those Symbolists, such as Galaktion Tabidze, whose bias was towards musicality and a Verlainean dreaminess. But one Kiplingesque poem, 'Human' (ადამიანი), cut straight through to the Georgian reader: Galaktion Tabidze compared it to a sharpened sword:

Anyone who wants to be my reader,
Woman, man, or fiancée,
I have one thing I implore from you,
I ask you to fulfil this request:
Whatever entry you choose into life,
And a benign conscious destiny
Accompanies you at this time. Don't forget,
That you are only human!
Be beautiful, be peerless,
Rich, wise, brave, and clever,
But never abandon the thought
That you are only human.
Chance has given you many possessions,
Made you a lord, created you fully in your prime.
Then you ought all the more to remember,
That you are only human.
Perhaps, noble soul, fate has not loved you,
Has killed your heart, made you sad,
Don't be downcast, arise, be strong,
Remember that you are human.
Let circumstances change,
Though the people's voice shouts you down,
Be constant to yourself, times will come,
They will know that you are human.
May you have justice as life's goal,
And love for your brothers as your duty,
Never forget your homeland,
If you wish to become human.

21: *Melodrama, Revolt and Commercial Literature*

THE first truly popular writer in Georgia to win a reading public among the newly literate classes of the expanding cities and to depend entirely on the market for his income was Aleksandre Qazbegi (ალექსანდრე ყაზბეგი, 1848–93), born to the wealthy feudal lord of Khevi (around Mount Kazbek) General Mikeil Qazbegi-Chopikashvili (ყაზბეგი-ჩოფიკაშვილი). The influence of his nurse aroused his creative interests; the death of his father plunged him into poverty. A student of agriculture in Moscow, he led a dissipated youth, distinguished only for his solo sword-dancing. Venereal disease, poverty, and Tolstoy's radical ideas drove him to outlandish actions: he returned home in 1870 and spent seven years as a transhumant shepherd in the Caucasus. Few sheep could have had such an aristocratic shepherd. Undoubtedly, Qazbegi was obnoxious and often obtuse in his behaviour and ideas: his fellow shepherds and their dogs disliked him for teasing them with a bear on a chain and were puzzled by his nights spent writing by candlelight surrounded by fascinated sheep. Qazbegi recorded this period in an assertive pseudo-ethnographical essay, *Memoirs of a Former Shepherd* (ნამწყემსარის მოგონებანი, 1882–3). He insisted that the native peoples — Circassians, Chechens, Georgians — of the high Caucasus had the secrets of the good life. Ruined once more by trading in recruits for the Russian army, disliked by his kith and kin, Qazbegi sold his sheep and descended to Tbilisi as a writer. His passion for the theatre produced a score of plays adapted from French and Russian sources, but only his dancing was applauded. The publication of his ethnographical study *The Khevi People and their Way of Life* (მოხევეები და მათი ცხოვრება, 1880) was a breakthrough. Using several pseudonyms, the aptest being Mechkhubare, 'troublemaker', Qazbegi tried other genres.

In the novella, however, Qazbegi struck gold. Between 1880 and 1885 he wrote all his important prose for journals (mainly *Droeba*) at a frenetic pace, finishing a story while its first part was being printed. He turned the peoples of the gorge and the high valleys of Mtiuleti, those who lay directly in the path of Russia's drive to the south, into new representatives of the national struggle. Georgian history, legend, and fiction all centred on the great aristocrats of Kakhetia, Kartli, and, to a

lesser extent, Imeretia, together with their vassals, the peasants loyal to them, and their church. The mountain tribes' early Christianity had been obliterated by paganism and by aboriginal Caucasian values of blood-feud and tribal loyalty to the shrines: once the central state had collapsed, they came down to the Aragvi or Alazan valleys to defend the motherland only at certain crucial moments. Qazbegi made them the metaphor of the nation's passionate intransigence, just as Vazha Pshavela made the Pshavs and Khevsurs symbols of mankind as a whole against fate. Qazbegi acknowledged his debt to his region in a letter to a shepherd:

> If anyone reads my writings or finds anything to entertain him in them, if he isn't offended and goes to the end, the reason for all this is my past, my shepherding days and life with you over seven years, which made us share the same feelings, and our hearts share the same complaints, and pointed us to the same goal.

Shepherds' memoirs confirm the scenes of the prose: one, looking for lost sheep, came across Qazbegi 'standing apart watching the goats which had gone up on to high crags and were leaping from rock to rock, disporting themselves; the dogs were barking, not letting me pass… but Aleksandre was so carried away that he heard neither my calls nor even the dogs barking.' In the story 'The Parricide' (მამის მკვლელი) we read:

> Truly the wild goat, bounding on to a high plateau, was a spectacle that made you forget everything else: it seemed to be carved from stone and to be one with the rock, and its horns, lit up by the sun's last rays, stood out clearly against the horizon.

In 1881 Qazbegi achieved fame with *Elguja* (ელგუჯა), a dynamic short novel with a fictional hero (Elguja) of the very real 1804 mountain peoples' rebellion against the Russians: many characters are based on Qazbegi's forebears and their associates. The plot is laden with ethnographical and historical material, melodramatic to a fault, with *Sturm und Drang* extremes of love and defiance and a Romantic exaltation of the primitive over the civilized. In the first version Qazbegi had Elguja killed by Cossacks, at the end of what is now chapter 1. The typesetters threatened to strike and the novelist postponed his hero's death.[74] Elguja's end in the final version is none the less dramatic for being delayed: it compares with Tolstoy's *Hadji-Murat*:

> The crazed Cossacks were now in confusion, for they could not imagine that one man had dared to take on such a host, and the moon, hidden by clouds, no longer gave enough light for them to see what was happening.
>
> But when the clouds cleared and the moon lit up the countryside, the host saw just one man holding a dagger and swinging it mercilessly and ruthlessly. The Russians closed in and cut off his path.
>
> Elguja fought. He tried to make a run for it, but several men with swords drawn blocked him. They looked at each other as though they were eyeing him up. The highlander tensed himself, leapt across them, but after blows from several daggers he collapsed, felled, by Matia's side.

The popularity of Qazbegi's violent stories among the Tbilisi middle classes brought him neither wealth nor acclaim from the respected makers of opinion, except from the veteran Grigol Orbeliani, who rightly acknowledged *Elguja* as the first truly popular modern Georgian novel. (*Elguja* was banned as a book in 1884.) Critical recognition lagged: Qazbegi remained embittered to the point of incoherence. He replied to belated and reluctant praise from Iona Meunargia, a reviewer:

> Thank you, Sir, for your assiduity, but do not forget that when you bow down trembling before words that are a gift from heaven, those who wish to repeat them can offend what is most holy, flesh tormented on earth, the blood shed for the repentance of sins. And if they are stained, they must have their hands washed to carry out the sacred mystery, if they lack a lively imagination, a prepared mind and the purity that comes from an independent soul... I don't write in order to earn an immortal name... I saw that our people badly lacked stories from our life. I saw that the highland region of Georgia was barely considered to be Georgian, and I tried to make these people known to Georgians, to acquaint the public with their innermost feelings, which they have since ancient times devoted to the common cause.

Qazbegi was passionately involved with his heroes: he was often found holding imaginary conversations with them or weeping at their deaths. Of Qazbegi's other stories from the past of the wild Khevi, the most enduring is *Gocha, the Chief* [*Commander and Priest*] *of the Khevi* [*Valley*] (ხევისბერი გოჩა, published in the daily newspaper *Droeba* in 1884), a novella Qazbegi insisted was just a retelling of folklore. What Vazha Pshavela did for the Khevsurs and Pshavs, Qazbegi did for their

neighbours, the Khevi tribes: he invested their culture — Hellenic pagan, shamanistic, with a veneer of Crusaders' Christianity — with universal tragic force, and brought into the epic of their folk legends the structures of Greek tragedy. Parricide and irresistible erotic attraction are as persistent a theme in Qazbegi as they are in Aeschylus (or, for that matter, in Dostoevsky). Qazbegi introduces the idea that is to inspire twentieth-century Georgian literature: that the conflicts of Greek myth are still being fought out in the mountains of Georgia. The seventeenth-century Khevisberi Gocha, after a fierce battle, judges a traitor, only to find that his own son Onise is responsible for letting the enemy through. He has to acquit the suspected traitor and stab Onise to death for desertion: Onise, carried away by a moment of love, had let the enemy through in the battle against the feudal lords. But the community's imperative and the gruesome finale are too much for Gocha: in an effectively hushed ending, he goes mad:

> Some time passed, the khevi settled down. Life took its usual course.
>
> Only the Samtvero forest became a place everybody avoided, because Gocha, his mind gone, settled there and gave no rest to anyone passing by, asking them for news of his son. He invited everybody into his house and told them that he was expecting his son back from a long journey. Then he would begin to threaten that he would find out what had happened to Onise and he would end with frightful growling.

Qazbegi had, like Vazha Pshavela, devised the basic plot-structure of a clash between the massed tribe, the *temi* — 'the community is bigger than me and bigger than you,' says Gocha — and its exceptional leader-turned-rebel. He invested the conflict with a personal rage.

Rage and madness interrupted Qazbegi's career too. In 1885 he took to solitude and drink and spent his last three years in a psychiatric asylum, where he died in 1893, in the same year and of the same disease as Maupassant, to whom he is, at his best, comparable. In 1927[75] his niece, Sopio Tarkhnishvili, argued strongly (and plausibly) that Aleksandre Qazbegi's five-year prodigious output came from purloining the unpublished works of his elder brother, Dimitri, who had died of pneumonia in 1880. But Dimitri's one published work ('Harmful Souls', მავნე სულები, 1872) shows no talent: clearly, the spirochaetes in the spinal chord had transformed Qazbegi, like other syphilitic writers, and released a flood of temperamental creativity. In his last months he underwent torments worse

than those he had subjected his invented characters to. A letter he sent to Anton Purtseladze reads:

> I've ended up a healthy man in hospital, and they try to persuade me I'm mad. I tell them I'm cleverer than them and they don't believe me. One came in and I told him and I convinced him I hadn't gone mad, it's they that regard me as mad who are mad, it's a joke. I badly need to see you and some money at the same time. I am in great need and what I have is yours [i.e. if you have anything]. If you were to come, I'd be freed from torture. Your fellow *Mokheve*, Mochkhubaridze ['son of troublemaker']

If Aleksandre Qazbegi ended, however unhappily, the first Georgian to make his living as a writer, yet another type, the writer whose work is enriched by other professional skills, was born: Giorgi Tsereteli (გიორგი წერეთელი, 1842–1900). A contemporary, distant relative and schoolmate of Akaki Tsereteli, he is, despite his versatility (he was trained in physics and mathematics and was an amateur archaeologist and naturalist), chiefly known for his prose works. Often autobiographical, they are a painstaking record of country life as the great reforms of the Russian empire broke down the old relationships of peasant and master. At the age of 21 Giorgi Tsereteli declared his mission: 'The writer is the sympathizer of society's torment and pleasures… he must show it the means he thinks best to get rid of its defects.' His student activities in St Petersburg put him in Kronstadt prison for two months; returning to Georgia in 1863 he found work as a schoolteacher and joined the 'sons' and Ilia Chavchavadze as one of their most energetic journalists, the founder of *Droeba*, then in 1868 of *The Country Newspaper* (სახოფლო გაზეთი) for the peasantry. He then moved, with Sergo Meskhi and Petre Umikashvili, to form a 'second group' (მეორე დასი), giving economic, capitalist development priority over moral and political goals. Giorgi Tsereteli began the long campaign to establish Tbilisi University. He spent from 1873 until 1877 in western Europe studying technology, returning to contribute to Russian-language newspapers in Tbilisi and Saint Petersburg, to run the Society for the Propagation of Literacy, to revive the Tbilisi theatre and to search for oilfields in Imeretia. Widowed in 1891, he married another editor, the redoubtable children's writer Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tseretlisa: they then founded the weekly newspaper, *Kvali*. *Kvali* was ceded in 1897 to the next generation of rebels, the Marxist 'third group' (მესამე დასი), for whom

Giorgi Tsereteli had considerable sympathy. His death at 58 was hardly surprising; his works, mostly ephemeral and never collected, would fill a score of volumes. What survives best is his realistic fiction. His masterpiece is a semi-autobiography, *A Flower of Our Life* (ჩვენი ცხოვრების ყვავილი, 1872). It sees rural disintegration through the eyes of Dito Kveladze (დიტო ქველაძე), whose school experiences are like Akaki Tsereteli's.

Giorgi Tsereteli continued this chronicle as a rambling satire on the 1860s in *A Traveller's Notebooks, or Kikoliki, Chikoliki, and Kudabzika* (მგზავრის წიგნები, ანუ კიკოლიკი, ჩიკოლიკი და კუდაბზიკა, 1867–73). The work is built around a journey from Kutaisi to Svanetia: the conscientious mouthpiece and narrator, Saghata, accompanied by the three eponymous heroes, tours grotesquely impoverished estates where feudalism has not yet died, trying to awaken conscience. He tries to shame the egotistical Kikoliki: 'Is this a time for young people like ourselves to seek happiness in a warm bed? Must our hearts' desire be a beautiful wife and a nice piece of gristle?' Chikoliki is only more of a hypocrite, while the most colourful of Giorgi Tsereteli's tragicomic caricatures, Kudabzika ('hornet's tail'), an impoverished landowner, is a boastful meddler on a horse 'that looks like a water-rat that has just surfaced'.

Later works are strengthened by a plot; they are also undermined by Giorgi Tsereteli's fondness for overwrought melodrama and for too strong a contrast between the innocent oppressed peasant and the corrupt landowner oppressors. So strong is the whiff of corruption, personal and social, in a novel such as *Gulkani* (გულქანი, 1868) that after the publication of a few chapters the censor confiscated the manuscript, and the work was resumed only in the 1890 and fully reconstituted in the 1920s. Tsereteli's mature works followed the same pattern: the story 'The Grey Wolf' (რუხი მგელი, 1888) shows landowners stealing the forest from Ossetian peasants: although the 'wolves' are literally stoned to death, the wolf-cubs, their sons, the ending implies, will be still worse. The most ambitious of Tsereteli's fiction is *The First Step* (პირველი ნაბიჯი, 1890): despite its banality and shallow psychology, which dismayed even contemporary critics, this novel has Zola's qualities — it is full of well-researched sociology and well-engineered sensationalism. The working classes of the port of Poti, entering the steam age, on the brink of capitalist revival, contrast with a depraved establishment of money-lenders and officials in a

series of seductions, abductions, and murders: *L'Assommoir* meets *Nana* on the Black Sea. Such readable and informative fiction won Giorgi Tsereteli a popularity later eclipsed by more flamboyant Realists.

The later Realists owed their more dramatic colour either to direct experience of low life or to the strong influence of French and Belgian urban prose and German *Naturalismus*. Writers in the ever more Marxist *mesame dasi* ('third group') had the knowledge and the motive to stress the horrors of a Georgia groaning under paramilitarized Russian government and ramshackle capitalist industrialization. As Turkey was reduced to invalid status in the war of 1875 and both Circassia and Dagestan were totally pacified, Russia's rulers had no reason to placate the Georgians. From the 1880s until the crisis of 1905, oppression encouraged the aggressive *mesame dasi* to make their writing more denunciatory and naturalistic prose to become more virulent in its evocation of suffering. Fiction among the Marxists became close to sociological and historical narratives based on real experience and documentation.

One of the most interesting set of experiences and documentation is bequeathed to us by a writer from a poor peasant family on the Black Sea, Egnate Ninoshvili (ეგნატე ნინოშვილი, real name Ingoroqva, ინგოროყვა, 1856–94.) He was expelled from a seminary as a student and from a village school as a teacher, and worked as telegraphist and typesetter in a Rothschild oil-refinery and at a manganese mine, wrecking his health and dying of tuberculosis in 1894. For a short time friends sent him to study at Montpellier; on his return he became secretary to Prince Grigol of Guria. There he studied the archive of the 1841 revolt and produced a short novel which contains more facts than any factual account of the peasant uprising that was so easily crushed. The reader's trust in Ninoshvili's sources is weakened by the operatic love-story and the main protagonists' gory ending, but the savage indignation and feel for location give this work, and Ninoshvili's other stories, the power to shock. He is often compared to Maxim Gorky, whom he met: Ninoshvili could match Gorky's experience and ideology, if not his ear for speech or his eye for a scene.

Shio Aragvispireli (შიო არაგვისპირელი, pseudonym of Dedabrishvili 1867–1926) was a more literary and cosmopolitan figure, better able to use work experience as material. The sixth son of a priest, he was educated in the Tbilisi seminary and a Warsaw veterinary college, where he

formed a League for Georgia's Freedom. After imprisonment, he worked as a veterinary inspector in the Tbilisi slaughterhouse: he was ousted as a whistle-blower in a scandal about contaminated pork. He used his observations in a series of short stories from 1895. They won popularity for their hyperbolically grim contrasts of oppressed underlings and decadent overlords. Typical is 'It's Earth' (მიწაა, 1901): a consumptive Georgian convict is sent to Siberia and flogged to death for refusing to throw away a bag of Georgian earth he has kept for his grave. Aragvispireli was a Europeanized writer, over-indebted to Maupassant and the demonic Przybyszewski, but his origins, his idealization of the primitive, and his pessimism aligned him with 'highland' writers like Qazbegi. A Maeterlinckian drama *Prince Shio* (შიო თავადი, 1905), which took a Symbolist view of Georgian history, failed; his one novel, a sentimental fairy-tale, idealizing the love of a princess and a goldsmith, *A Fractured Heart* (გაბზარული გული, 1920), pleased Soviet critics, who abhorred his earlier gruesome Expressionism. His later years were fallow.

The *mesame dasi* ensured that the theatre, though more heavily censored than publications, became more biting. By the 1880s Georgia had professional actors and a repertoire of foreign plays, notably Shakespeare in the resonant translations of Ivane Machabeli (ივანე მაჩაბელი, 1854–98?). Machabeli studied in Germany and France; he never visited England, but made Shakespeare his life's work: to this day his are the standard versions for the Rustaveli Theatre's repertoire. Despite Machabeli's work for charities, such as orphanages, and extensive journalism, he managed to produce, from 1886 to 1898 *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, as well a few plays by Molière and Goldoni, in resonant, speakable verse that trained a whole new generation of actors on material far more subtle and demanding than anything in their repertoire hitherto. Machabeli left his house one day in 1898: he was never seen again. But he had laid the foundations for the strongest edifice in modern Georgian culture.

The first dramatist to build on this sophisticated level was Davit Kldiashvili (დავით კლდიაშვილი, 1862–1931). He served in the Russian army until forced to resign in the 1905 revolution, but all his best work belongs to the first half of his life. He is said to have forgotten his Georgian while studying in Kharkov and to have had to relearn it. Nevertheless, he is

regarded as an exemplary prose stylist. His prose, such as *Soloman Morbeladze* (სოლომან მორბელაძე, 1894), revolves around the degeneration of the country gentry and the miseries of the peasantry. His plays, however, especially *Irine's Happiness* (ირინეს ბედნიერება, 1897) and *The Misfortunes of Darispan* (დარიხპანის გასაჭირი, 1903), are fundamentally French comedies of the 1840s set in Imeretian villages at the turn of the century. *Irine's Happiness* is a two-act play with a striking scene of sexual harassment: Irine, secretly engaged to a poor man, is pursued by the rich Absalo, who happens to meet with her father's approval. The second act sees Irine forced to give in to pressure: the play ends in tears. Conversely, *The Misfortunes of Darispan* is more of a comedy: Darispan has four daughters to marry off, in competition with others, including Pelageia trying to marry off her Natalia. The key role is played by an amateur matchmaker, their friend and relative Marta: the girls, not with the best of grace, run through their party tricks in front of the one-and-only prospective groom, Osiko, who turns out to be already engaged. Parents and daughters leave in fury. Darispan's brave front collapses:

> When you can hardly find one man in need of a wife for so many girls… I can't stand any more. Child, let your mother take charge. Go on foot, go by cart, go on horseback if anyone has asked for you, do your own looking for my son-in-law… If we've lost all hope of marriage, we are finished and that's it. We are completely finished.

The gentler social comment of the plays is tempered with enough satirical good humour to make them theatrically viable to this day: above all, Kldiashvili had an ear for dialogue and an ability to construct scenes which made him, compared to Giorgi Eristavi, a professional dramatist.

By the 1890s Georgian literature was self-sustaining: its readership was big enough to make it economically viable: journals existed without subsidies, writers could be full-time professionals.[76] It was backed by a core of academics, although the nearest to tertiary education in Georgia were the three seminaries of Kutaisi, Gori, and Tbilisi, and a handful of technical and teachers' training colleges. Literary scholars and philologists, like Aleksandre Tsagareli (ალექსანდრე ცაგარელი, 1844–1929), Petre Umikashvili (პეტრე უმიკაშვილი, 1838–1904), Aleksandre Khakhanashvili (ალექსანდრე ხახანაშვილი, 1864–1911), had begun the enormous task of recovering the past, by printing and elucidating mediæval Georgian texts.

Nikolai Marr, son of a runaway Scots adventurer and a Gurian peasant girl, began in the 1890s to illuminate the past with studies of Georgian culture's Armenian and Byzantine connections. The Georgian church was not quite intellectually dead: Patriarch Kirion II (1855–1918) published a series of increasingly professional historical and ecclesiastical studies. As Georgian society approached 1905 and few believed that Russian dominance would last more than a few decades, it seemed fully prepared intellectually for autonomy, cultural and political.

With hindsight, there was one ominous note: a precocious adolescent signing himself 'Soselo' published six poems in *Iveria* and *Kvali*. One, particularly embittered, entitled 'Feuilleton' (ფელეტონი) appeared in *Iveria* on Christmas Day 1885:

> Over this land like a ghost
> He roamed from door to door;
> In his hands he clutched a lute
> And sweetly made it tinkle;
> In his dreamy melodies,
> Like a beam of sunlight,
> You could sense truth itself
> And heavenly love.
> This voice made many a man's heart
> Beat that had been turned to stone,
> It enlightened many a man's mind
> Which had been cast into uttermost darkness.
> But instead of glorification
> Wherever the harp was plucked,
> The mob set before the outcast
> A vessel filled with poison…
> And they said to him: 'Drink this, O accursed,
> This is your appointed lot.
> We do not want your truth
> Nor these heavenly tunes of yours.'

Ioseb Jughashvili (Stalin) (იოსებ ჯუღაშვილი, 1878–1953) had made his convictions of human ingratitude very clear. We may read the Machiavellian thinking in King James VI of Scotland's lines three hundred years previously:

Since thought is free, think what thou will
O troubled heart to ease thy pain.
Thought unrevealed can do no ill
But words past out turn not again.
Be careful aye for to invent
The way to get thine own intent.

One can marvel at James VI — like Stalin, 15 years old when he wrote verse — voicing the paranoic philosophy of the future Soviet dictator. All the more ironical that Chavchavadze, who published Stalin's morbid lines, may have been murdered eighteen years later on the latter poet's orders. The young Stalin had considerable talent, which he deserted after writing a very original poem,[77] 'Old Ninika' (ძოხუცი ნინოკა), which he must have later recalled in his last, tired years in the Kremlin:

Our Ninika has grown old,
His hero's shoulders have failed him...
How did this desolate grey hair
Break an iron strength?..
But now he can no longer move his knees,
Scythed down by old age,
He lies down or he dreams or he tells
His children's children of the past.

The hopes of the last generation of Georgians under tsarist rule for a free literature would be dashed by such prematurely disillusioned intellectuals, who turned away from literature to the seizure of imperial power.

IV
THE REDISCOVERY OF ROOTS 1880–1914
Vazha Pshavela and Heroic Folk Poetry

22: *Vazha Pshavela*

THE transition to the twentieth century was not simply chronological, nor was it ideological. If we take 1905 as the year when the Russian empire entered the twentieth century, then the same phenomena affect Georgia as Russia — most writers joined one of two camps. One camp, of Realist, populist prose-writers, believed literature to be a tool for revolution; the other camp, of cosmopolitan 'Symbolist' verse-writers, believed in Art for Art's Sake, a slogan which, in Georgia, was perhaps more shocking than any other radical view, and was more shocking than in any other Christian culture. But a third factor which marked the entry into a new era is peculiar to Georgia: the poetry of Vazha Pshavela and the flood of folk verse from which Vazha's own work stems and to which he led his readers. Both Vazha's work and the newly discovered folk verse deeply influenced everything that followed.

Although he was born in 1861 and his verse and prose shares concerns and themes with the work of Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha amounts to far more than just another poet great enough to be known by his first name alone. As the Georgian Futurists admitted, when repudiating all the past, 'Vazha stands outside time and space.' He is qualitatively of a greater magnitude than any other Georgian writer, and the roots of his creation lie elsewhere, partly in a hitherto unknown aboriginal Caucasian folk culture, partly in pre-Christian, Hellenic beliefs, and partly in an intuition of other nations' cultures — all as inexplicable in nineteenth-century Pshavia as Shakespeare's learning and philosophy were in sixteenth-century Warwickshire.

Vazha Pshavela ('a lad from Pshavia') is the pseudonym of Luka Razikashvili (ლუკა რაზიკაშვილი). He was born in 1861 in Chargali. The

Razikashvilis were leading tribesmen of the wild mountain communes of Pshavia. Vazha's father was a priest, although, ever since the collapse of the unified Georgian state in 1225, pagan traditions had reasserted themselves in Pshavia. With a cantankerous father and poetically effusive mother, Vazha and two of his four brothers were creative individualists: Niko Razikashvili (ნიკო, 1866–1927) was a poet of talent, though more conventional, known by the nickname Bachana (ბაჩანა, 'shortie'); Tedo (თედო, 1868–1922) was an outstanding ethnologist and collector of folk poetry. Vazha had a rough education in the Kakhetian centre of Telavi, and then in Tbilisi and Gori. Poverty forced him to abandon a year of university study at St Petersburg. He was a hunter and boxer all his life, but had an extraordinary memory for poetry, spoken and written. By 1886 (the one happy year in his life), he had married and was a village school-teacher to a class of forty children.

In 1888 he returned to Chargali to live as a peasant, occasionally riding to Tbilisi with poems in his saddle-bag. His early poetry shows a debt to Ilia Chavchavadze and Rapiel Eristavi, especially the latter's 'Khevsur's Homeland' (ხამშობლო ხევსურისა), but his first 'burst' from 1885 to 1890 is very original, culminating in the half-comic narrative poem *Gogotur and Apshina* (*გოგოთურ და აფშინა*, 1887), and a grim heroic poem, *Aluda Ketelauri* (*ალუდა ქეთელაური*, 1888), which introduces the theme of conflict between individual morality and the commune's imperative. Aluda refuses to dishonour an infidel Ingush tribesman he has killed:

> Aluda does not cut off
> Mutsali's right hand. Instead he says,
> 'It's wrong. Man whom I have killed,
> God let your body rest in peace.
> The least I can do for you
> is leave your arm and right hand joined.
> Let your hand on your heart go back to dust;
> the stone wall's door shall not have your hand
> hanging up to gladden it.
> Good people must have brought you up.
> God prolong the days of your kin.'…
> Ketelauri was enraged,
> his face took on a wolfish hue.
> He struck his sabre with his hand,

> a beam of sunlight glanced from it,
> he swung it over the bullock's neck;
> the head rolls off on to the ground,
> as Aluda entreats the spirit:
> 'Hold this not to be a sin from me,
> thy child. The unbaptized hero,
> Mutsali have this from my heart.'

Vazha Pshavela's complete identification with highland customs suddenly lurches towards Christianity in a violent curse of blood feud:

> Whoever thirsts for enmity,
> let his house-door open wide,
> let his heart be a dam of blood,
> let his feet stand in the pool,
> let him drink not wine but blood,
> let him have it for his bread,
> let the sign of the cross be made
> as though he stood in the house of God,
> let him have a wedding in blood,
> let his vows be made in blood,
> let him invite the wedding guests,
> let him gather round a crowd,
> let his bed be made in blood,
> let him lay his wife by his side,
> may he have children in plenty,
> many boys and many girls,
> here too let him dig a grave,
> let him bury the corpses here.
> You who have killed will be killed in turn,
> the kinsfolk will not spare the killer.

From the start his poetry merged the native folklore and dialect of Pshavia and the high Caucasian frontier lands of Khevsuretia with European literary traditions and literary Georgian. He devised a harsh, laconic language, tempered with hypnotic incantation, which took little heed of the standardized narrative style of metropolitan circles; his poetry was built on a core of Hellenic tragedy which lived on in the folklore of the Pshavs and Khevsurs. His steely native pessimism evolved, under the influence

of Goethe, the Bible, and Shakespeare, into a complex, articulate vision of idealistic man battling indifferent nature. Elements of German Romanticism (itself close to folk culture) combine with Schopenhauer's belief in a malevolent will: one fine short lyric, 'Tell the lovely violet' (იას უთხარით ტურფასა, 1903) mourns for an unborn soul, a poem, or love:

> Tell the lovely violet,
> The worms will come and eat you up,
> Even the head, my beauty,
> That you lift up so elegantly.
> If you believe life to be
> The open door to paradise,
> Don't come, hide in the earth,
> It isn't worth coming.
> Don't see the sun, you will regret it,
> Does the sun shine all the time?
> Earth, you take in trust
> This, my beautiful violet,
> You protect it, be a parent to it,
> As is your wont.

Vazha wrote some patriotic work, such as the narrative poem *Bakhtrioni* (ბახტრიონი, 1892), celebrating the descent of the highlanders to defend the nation, but he would not harness his poetry to furthering the Georgian national struggle. Nor did his language contribute to standard modern Georgian: it is based on the mountain dialects of Pshavia and Khevsuretia. The syntax is compressed, and the narrative style abrupt, even dislocated. The Tbilisi literary establishment, except for Ilia Chavchavadze, at first dismissed Vazha as a maverick. His philosophy mingles pagan awe at the inhuman powers of nature with a Euripidean view of tragedy, and this jarred with the outlook of a small Christian country struggling to re-enter an optimistic European intellectual world.

Vazha was no mean ethnologist and collector of folk poetry: he is one of the few poets to succeed in making literature out of such poetry. Poems such as *Aluda Ketelauri* fed back into folk culture and were as likely to be heard from a shepherd as read in print. Aluda's isolation reflects Vazha's own loneliness. Horror at the outside world, whether mountain blood-feuds or the political oppression of the Russian empire, was fed by

personal tragedy, and his poetry becomes more and more intransigent: in 1880 he lost an eye from anthrax; in 1902 his wife died in pregnancy. (Vazha remarried in 1904.) While he lived like an impoverished peasant, his poetry reached a zenith with *Host and Guest* (სტუმარ-მასპინძელი, 1893), where the clash between laws of blood feud and laws of hospitality drives the hero and heroine to isolation and death. Zviadauri, a Khevsur Georgian, while hunting, stumbles in the mist on Joqola, a Chechen and a blood enemy. Joqola does not recognize him and offers him hospitality. The villagers recognize their enemy and take him to the cemetery

> to sacrifice him to their dead,
> so that he might in the other world
> be the dead hero's obedient slave,
> plait him bark and draw him water.

Joqola is outraged by this breach of hospitality; his wife stands guard over Zviadauri's body. Ostracized by their fellow Chechens, they are condemned to die. Here nature itself is seen, with a new twist to the Romantic pathetic fallacy, presenting the same cruel and irresoluble dilemmas:

> This is the wrong that nature does us,
> the cause of our eternal grief:
> evil and good, it kills them all,
> no one has it ever spared…
> The river thunders and it rages,
> breaks off boulders and sweeps them away.
> Today the river is wreaking evil,
> it does not know for what it howls.
> It fears no pain, it knows no death:
> only one thing does it know—
> gushing of tears, howling out loud,
> an endless and unsmiling scowl,
> weeping alone, weeping alone.

If Vazha had one driving impulse, it was rage. His rage at life drove his second wife and children to cower for nights in the cowshed. His poetry expresses rage as an intransigent refusal to compromise: Vazha's, and Georgian poetry's, supreme achievement is *The Snake-Eater* (გველის

მჭამელი, 1901), a Georgian *Faust*. Its hero, Mindia, evolves from folk myth into an archetype of the poet-shaman unable to coexist with family or community, which make demands on him that would force him to break vows and thus lose magic powers. Mindia is captured by wizards, who eat snake-flesh to sustain their powers. Mindia, desperate to die, thinking this food is lethal to him, finds instead he has gained magic understanding of birds and plants. He escapes to become the village shaman, but is prevented by nature from felling trees or killing game:

> He took his axe up to a tree,
> said, 'This is the one that I must fell,'
> swung the axe and in mid-swing
> heard the tree beseech him, 'No,
> don't kill me, Mindia, I beg,
> don't blot out my life, don't stun
> a helpless and defenceless tree,'
> His arms went limp, he blankly gazed up at the sky…
> He urges others: 'Men, don't do
> a sinful thing; don't fell trees,
> make do with stubble or dry twigs.'
> No one listens: his advice
> seems to them a madman's speech.
> 'God made trees to meet our needs.'
> And to this day who thinks twice
> to spare the aspen or the beech?

Marriage and a family demand firewood and meat: wife and children make him break his vows. He loses his powers, and, when war breaks out, he leads his still trusting tribe into disastrous defeat. This particular Faust has no salvation except suicide, leaving nature triumphantly alone:

> The moon shed its light upon the ridge,
> where alone the wild goats live,
> and fixed in its beams the suicide
> with the hue of a mourning girl.
> And the soft breeze wafted to and fro,
> carefree, singing a peaceful song.
> It brushed its wings on the sword's sharp point,
> which jutted out, a bright red tongue
> stained by the juice of the human chest.

> It began to frolic over the green,
> whistling cheerfully, proud and free.

Vazha's heroes are, of course, autobiographically based: one may see in him a national prophet, a Romantic pantheist, a Symbolist rejecting the cosmos. Each major hero represents a different stage in the poet's evolution. Aluda Ketelauri, the impetuous youth condemned to exile for breaking the community's laws, is Vazha in the 1880s; Joqola, the host who has to die because two imperatives, hospitality and vengeance, clash, is the more passive Vazha of the 1890s; Mindia, the poet misunderstood by a community and wife who begin by worshipping and end by damning him, is the Vazha who was conceded immortality but denied understanding in his own lifetime. All these heroes are cast in the same mould. They embody the virtues of the tribe and yet are set apart — by a tide of feeling, by conflicting rules, by magic powers conferred on them — and destroyed by the community.

Vazha's heroes are not just self-personifications: they belong to a timeless tradition. Vazha is one of very few poets to fuse folk tradition with a personal lyric vision. Aluda, Zviadauri, and Mindia were subjects of many Khevsur folk poems. The basis of the story — Aluda drinking to the soul of his dead foe, Zviadauri unflinchingly enduring ritual sacrifice, Mindia returning from captivity to marry, rule, and die by his own hand — can be found in Caucasian folk poetry, Chechen as well as Khevsur. Vazha enlarges on the myth to make a psychological plot. Aluda's revolt and expulsion, the loyalty of the Muslim Joqola to the Christian Zviadauri, the conflict between Mindia's magic and his family's hunger for meat and fire, are Vazha's invention. Nor does folk poetry worship nature so intensely. For Vazha, as for Shakespeare and Lermontov, there is a natural doctrine. Nature is a hierarchy which erupts when human hierarchical structures are broken. The pathos of Vazha's lyrics lies in man's unrequited love of nature, the rocks 'as lovely to behold as a woman's breasts'. Nature remains aloof. It cannot endure the feel of blood on its surface, it denies man access to the high peaks, the *sajikhve*, where the ibex live. It reacts to human disorder, like the heath to King Lear, with cleansing cloudbursts. Vazha's best prose and verse centre round the anomaly of nature's perfection and man's flaws. The heroic ideal is not the self-sufficient ethos it had been for Georgian literature or folk poetry.

Vazha's values are Khevsur: stoic endurance and devotion to tradition, but there are rebellions, like the outburst against blood feuds in *Aluda Ketelauri*. Love gives no consolation: men and women live apart, men to fight, women to mourn. Villagers live surrounded by enemies, their weapons their only friends. Enmity is a passion indistinguishable from love, feeding on the bloodshed. The very word *mteroba* (მტერობა, 'enmity') means readiness to fight the good fight. Even love of country has a flavour of *odi et amo*: addressing Georgia, Vazha declares:

> I could not be sated with your love,
> Nor you with hatred for me.
> I could not betray you nevertheless,
> Even if I were to tear at my flesh with my teeth.

Yet despite this violent, austere doctrine, Vazha articulates the tenderest and most turbulent love of nature, expressed in a hierarchical scale that descends from stars to the wooded groves, from eagles to songbirds, from beeches to meadow grasses: a gamut where man has no place.

Vazha's language is not only laconic dialect: it exploits the full consonantal musculature of Georgian, its assonance and rhythms are strident. He makes rhyme, so easy yet crucial in Georgian poetry, merely incidental. The eight-syllable folk verse is transformed by rhythmic flexibility into a very variable medium.

Vazha had success with prose and drama. His best prose, miniature stories tempering cruelty by sentimentality, is directed at children and sees the world through the eyes of animals, sometimes vulnerable, like a roe-deer fawn in 'A Roe-Deer Fawn's Story' (შვლის ნუკრის ნაამბობი, 1883): the end of this early version of *Bambi* has reduced many a child to tears:

> My poor mother tried to get up, kept reaching out, but collapsed to her knees, fell, and rolled over. I died, my body weakened, when the ghastly hunter pulled out his sharp dagger and plunged into my mother's throat. Blood spurted out and splattered the trees… Now he's plunged his dagger into the teats that I sucked, and ripped them out. He's stood on her neck and pulled. I began to weep. My heart was broken. I stand aside half dead; I weep and this is my consolation: I walk and complain to the trees, the mountain, and the rocks, I shall complain to the water and the grass, but no mother appears, I see my mother no more, I am an orphan and who knows who will protect me, who will stain their hands with my blood?

Sometimes Vazha's characterization is anthropomorphic, like that of the jays in 'The Jays' Wedding' (ჩხიკვთა ქორწილი, 1893), a drunken parliament of fowls that ends happily, though nearly spoilt by a quarrel between the eagle, the woodpecker, and an opportunist fox. While the symbolism of weeping deer and arrogant eagle ties in with his verse, Vazha's prose is a lesser achievement. His short dramatic scenes are little more than an ethnologist's reconstruction of Pshavian ritual drama. Vazha's influence, especially on Symbolist poets of the next generation, stems from the cosmic vision of the longer poems and from such profoundly despairing lyrics as 'Tell the lovely violet'.

Vazha died of pleurisy in June 1915 on a visit to Tbilisi: his stature was now acknowledged by all. After Ilia in 1907 and Akaki in January 1915, Georgia's last colossus was collapsing. As Vazha lay dying, newspapers published bulletins, and crowds of well-wishers gathered outside with tributes, medicines, and letters. The affection he aroused can be inferred from a well-wisher's letter:

> Our pride, dear Mr Vazha Pshavela, I've just read that as well as pleurisy you have a bad spleen. If the doctors don't forbid it, try this simple well-tried remedy. Take a tablespoon of rock-salt, put it in half a glass of cold water; the next night, at first cock crow, wet your hand with this salt water and rub as you read this prayer three times (though I don't believe in the prayer, it seems you must rub the spleen at the same time): 'Three days, three mornings, three cock crows, O spleen, shrink, melt — this is God's command.' Then dip your hand in unheated honey and rub it in until the hand touches raw skin.

Vazha's niece Nina, a chip off a very hard block, expressed her concern more ominously. In her last letter to him she wrote out 'The Eagle' (არწივი, 1887) Vazha's most famous short poem. Once an allegory of Georgia, it now symbolized the author among doctors:

> I saw a wounded eagle,
> It was warring with crows and ravens,
> The wretch tried to rise up,
> But could no longer stand,
> It was dragging one wing on the ground,
> Its chest was bleeding.

Woe to your mothers, crows,
What a time for me to fall into your clutches,
Otherwise I should have seen your feathers
Scattered, spread all over the fields.

Nina added: 'Don't think getting over this illness will be so easy. You've fallen into their clutches and they won't let you go. Soon you'll see your feathers scattered, spread over the fields. Well, uncle, come and see us, if this illness doesn't go through you like a rifle shot.'

By 1950 four major Russian poets had translated Vazha; his influence began to spread. Pasternak's reading of *The Snake-Eater* affects his own Faustian *Dr Zhivago*. Osip Mandelstam (who spent in all nearly a year in Georgia) was, however, the first outsider to recognize the importance of Vazha Pshavela;[78] he translated *Gogotur and Apshina* in 1921 and in 1922 published (if only in a Rostov-on-the-Don newspaper) an article 'A Few Things about Georgian Art' (Кое-что о грузинском искусстве), proclaiming Vazha as 'a real hurricane of the word, passing over Georgia, ripping out trees by the root... bubbling with the concrete, the palpable, the everyday... he seems to rip words with his teeth, using the temperament of Georgian phonetics, which is passionate enough as it is.' 'The new Georgian poetry,' complained Mandelstam, 'has endured Vazha Pshavela as a storm, and now does not know what to do with their inheritance.' In Georgia, it was not until the collapse of Symbolism after the Russian invasion of 1921 (and the execution of Vazha's son, Levan) that twentieth-century poetry and prose began to build on the heroic and folk themes which Vazha had introduced into literature. More effectively still, in the 1970s, *Aluda Ketelauri, Host and Guest*, and *The Snake-Eater* were merged into one stark and terrifying Symbolist film by Tengiz Abuladze, *Invocation* (ვედრება, known as *Мольба* in Russian).

23: Folk Poetry and its Relevance to Literature

THE corpus of Georgian folk poetry that has now been collected and published is equal in volume to the corpus of classic literary texts: some scholars would argue that in its cultural importance and poetic quality, Georgian folk poetry excels. As in Russia, folk poetry and literature in Georgia appear to inhabit separate worlds; there are fewer bridges betwen the two than we find, for instance, in English, French, or German cultures, where a Romantic belief in the primacy of the folk and constant exchange between the two cultures has made them mutually comprehensible.

Literature draws the Georgians close to the major cultures, Greek, Persian, and Russian, round them; folk poetry ties them to their Caucasian neighbours, to the unwritten lore of the nations to the north and the north-west, to Svan, Mingrelian, Abkhaz, Circassian, Nakh (Chechen, Ingush, and Batsbi) and Ossetic poetry. The links between the Georgian heroic epos and other autochthonous Caucasian folk poetry, the Chechen heroic ballad, the *illesh*, for instance, are almost unexplored, but still important, for once folk poetry surfaces again in the written culture, we need to understand its tribal affinities. In Vazha's work purely Georgian heroic poetry is the most important source; but a magical episode from the famous common Caucasian folk cycle, the Nart epic[79], is one element reflected in his poem 'The Wooden Shoulder-Blade' (ხის ბეჭი).

Reading Vazha Pshavela is, above all, a bridge to understanding the semi-pagan, semi-Christian world of the folk poetry which engendered him. The words *jvari, khati, batoni, ghmerti* (ჯვარი, ხატი, ბატონი, ღმერთი) lose their Christian meaning of 'cross, icon, Lord, God': *jvari, khati* denote the shrine where the community (*temi*) worships and sacrifices animals to local deities, *ghmerti* being in Hellenic terms Zeus, *mze* — the sun, *kviria* (კვირია, from Greek κύριος) — Saturn, and *batonebi* (ბატონები) — minor spirits. Sacrifice brings peace to the dead in their Elysium, while enemies may be despatched to serve dead heroes in the netherworld. Fundamental obligations, hospitality and blood feud, are absolutes, and no clash between them can be resolved. The community, virtually outside the state ever since the days of Pompey's legions (except in the twelfth and twentieth centuries), was governed by its adult males, who chose a

khevisberi, elder of the gorge, as colonel, chief, and priest. The 'deacon', relict of the church, is no more than a medicine-man and spell-caster. This yeomanry of shepherds and cattle-herdsmen only once or twice a century descended to the valleys to fight for fellow Georgian-speakers and less nominal Christians: otherwise, the outside world was met only for barter or under siege. Vazha turns this heroic lost world into a golden age which is approaching its end; at the same time it stands at the dawn of humanity, its heroes Promethean battlers against cruel gods. That adamant rebellion against the gods is the real rage in Vazha's poetry. Amirani, the Georgian Prometheus, is the subject of one of Vazha's earliest poems.

Georgian folk poetry, especially the heroic poetry of the Pshavs and Khevsurs, is the key not only to Vazha Pshavela, but to many twentieth-century writers, whether we are dealing with the Wagnerian fantasies of Grigol Robakidze or the 'bandit' novel created by Mikheil Javakhishvili. The discovery of Georgian folk poetry began slowly. In the eighteenth century poets were aware enough to echo in their own verse what they had heard from their nurses or peasants; but only after 1860 were conscious attempts made to collect and record it in the field. Folk poetry is by definition not literature, but it has an important relationship to it. Literary texts seep, over the centuries, down into the folk — the Rustavelian and even Amirani cycles are examples. Once literate writers travel and record folk poetry, they introduce it into the literary corpus. Conversely, the moment folk poetry is recorded, it begins to die. The literate observer brings literacy and the concept of personal authorship with him. Georgian folk poetry began to perish in the decades when it was first seriously collected by Vazha Pshavela and his brother Tedo Razikashvili; demographic and political changes did the rest. The slaughter of the First World War, the Bolshevik terror and urbanization, the terrible death rate of highlanders in the Second World War depopulated the mountains.

The essential purpose of the highlander's heroic poetry (*sagmiro leksi*, საგმირო ლექსი), recited to music by a *mtkmeli* (მთქმელი, 'speaker'), often a woman, was to mourn. It might be a four-line aphorism on the vicissitudes of war, or an account several hundred lines long of the hero and his *mziri,* warrior band, and their often fatal end. The longer poems are lays: they are narrated elliptically, laconically: they may be detritus of a lost extended cycle. The *sagmiro leksi* is related to the *samgloviaro leksi*

(სამგლოვიარო ლექსი, 'mourning poem'): the hero, as if from Elysium or at the moment of death, recounts his end. The *sagmiro leksi* too is often narrated in the first person, occasionally in the second, but also in the third, often switching within the same poem. Narrative or lyrical recital texts can be reduced to their source, *xmit natirali* (ხმით ნატირალი, 'voiced weeping'), for all genres might be sung by chorus alternating with soloists. They all lament: the death of the hero is the centre of gravity, whether it begins or ends the poem. The role of woman as reciter among the Pshavs, Khevsurs, and Tush is to be both custodian of oral poetry and mourner of her untimely dead kinsmen: hence the confusion of heroic commemoration with lament.[80] The Pshavs and Khevsurs make no distinctions between ritual and non-ritual, and use the terms *samgloviaro* ('mourning') and *mosagonari* ('commemorative') interchangeably.

Even in a lighter mood, folk poetry defines heroes. The poetry that teases shepherds reflects the conviction, expressed in the definition of 'man' in a Tsova-Tush–Georgian dictionary[81], that a man is 'one who does not go among sheep'. Shepherds lack the charisma that Hellenic or Christian legends give them. In Tush poetry the shepherd is made to say:

> I'm not fed up with the mountains,
> Nor do I long for the valley,
> Nor to sleep and lie with beautiful women,
> Nor to talk with them.
> I prefer the red-eyed ewe
> And tugging at her forelock.[82]

The same ethos, an admiration for those that live in danger, the same gravitation to death, the same eight-syllable line, discrete narration, a corpus of images and incidents, link all Georgian heroic poetry, both folk poetry and Vazha Pshavela's. The hero has a constant quality: he knows the necessity and the enormity of his own death, whether he is dying or returning victorious. Even at his triumphs, he is never far from the laconic solemnity of the fatalist. The Khevsur enemy calls out to his enemy:

> If I missed you, Aptarauli
> May you long be alive.
> If my shot hit you,
> May you be my underling.[83]

This anticipates the opening exchange of shots and challenges in Vazha's *Aluda Ketelauri*:

> 'Haven't I hit you, heathen dog?'
> Mutsali called out to his foe.
> 'Don't you believe it, heathen dog,
> I am a vassal of Gudani shrine.'

In such a world, Christianity overlays, rather than supplants, pagan beliefs: it merely provides symbols, oaths, a calendar, terminology, and above all a national identity by which friend and foe can be distinguished. In Georgian folk poetry, pagan gods, spirits, and shrines live on intact in the flimsiest of disguises. The Georgian hero never forgets his semi-divine predecessors, who fought demons as he now fights hostile Caucasian tribes: he is always aware of the afterlife and his kinsmen in the underworld. Any supernatural powers he ascribes to the shrine (*khati*), the rough dry-stone *salotsavi* (სალოცავი, 'place of prayer'), where his village commemorates the dead and propitiates the gods. Only the shrine's power makes a hero *davlatiani* (დავლათიანი, 'favoured by fate').

In folk poetry a loose, often internecine, confederation is periodically driven to unite against the onslaught of Turkic or Mongol invaders or other autochthonous highlanders, Ingush, Chechen, Lezgi, Tatar:

> Tush, Pshav, Khevsur,
> Let us form a common army,
> Do not betray one another,
> Let it be the enemy that we strike.[84]

Though the Georgian hero never leaves his gorges nor sees the adored Queen Tamar or Tbilisi, these remain a central symbol in his centrifugal world. Queen Tamar is an ideal monarch fused with a divinity (from which perhaps the queen's name derives). In Pshavia, by Lashari shrine stands Tamar's shrine. In one poem, 'The Pshavs Make War on Mitkho' (ფშავლების გალაშქრება მითხოზე), Tamar aids her people against the Chechens, like a sun goddess, by preventing dew from falling:

> Don't brag, Pshavs,
> That the shrine of Lashari is with you,
> On its left stands Kopala [ქოპალა],
> On the right is Lashari shrine,

> The woman that has come,
> They said is Queen Tamar,
> She has veiled the sea,
> So that no dew should fall.[85]

The queen is thus on a level with the demi-god Kopala (one of the servants of the sixty-nine *ghvtisshvili* (ღვთისშვილი, 'sons of God'): Kopala meets his death destroying demons. In other poems Queen Tamar appears leading a *lurja* (ლურჯა, 'blue-grey') horse shod with gold. In her epitaph, 'I was Queen Tamar' (თამარ დედოფალი ვიყავ), goddess and queen are indistinguishable: she is credited with setting limits on the sea, bringing dry land closer, making demons pay for apanage, exacting tribute from Isfahan, attacking Istanbul and Derbent with the sword. Here Georgian folk poetry and literature have a common hyperbolic cult. But in folk culture the monarch's servants themselves have divine attributes. The more archaic, the more miraculous their birth and death. Khogais Mindi, like an annually resurgent corn-god, involves the universe in his death:

> Khogais Mindi was dying,
> The sun went red, waned,
> The sky thundered, the earth rumbled…
> Hawk and peregrine, eagle,
> Fell, wings and all, from the sky.
> The game on the high bare crags,
> Prepare to weep.[86]

(The similarities to Joqola's and Aghaza's deaths in Vazha's *Host and Guest* are obvious.) Khogais Mindi is a warrior from Arkhoti, a rocky salient of Khevsuretia on the north flank of the Caucasus, stranded in Chechen lands. His expedition is lured to a Chechen fort by the women, who then summon an army to despatch the expedition. The Chechens give Mindi, their most mortal blood-feud enemy, his sword back, so that he may fight them to the death:

> Mindi killed twelve,
> He stood still, threw down the sword.
> The dogs [Chechens] didn't hesitate,
> They felled the dead man with a salvo.[87]

The code of the Khevsurs forbids the hero to kill more than twelve of his enemy: Mindi accepts death.

Much of the symbolism in the struggle with outside forces is surprisingly universal: note the snake as a giver of wisdom. Khogais Mindi, the subject of several fine archaic poems, in one *zghapari* (ზღაპარი, 'fairy story'), drinks snake-blood to escape captivity and finds he can understand birds and mammals. Here is not just the core of Vazha Pshavela's *The Snake-Eater*, but a tie to the brothers Grimm and their 'White Snake' or similar themes in Pliny and Philostratus. A poem of historical origin about the rebellion of Zurab Eristavishvili is saturated with primitive imagery:

> At ancient Lashari shrine
> On the dry mountain an old oak stood,
> A golden chain was tied to its crown,
> It reached like a staircase to the sky.[88]

Zurab sheds a cat's blood, using this magic to uproot the oak, break the chain, and destroy the shrine's powers. Oak, golden chain, and cat vividly recall Pushkin's 'oak, golden chain, learned cat', which he transposed from his Russian nurse's fairy stories to open *Ruslan and Liudmila*.

Dragons play a minor part in Georgian heroic poetry, and maidens in need of rescue are even rarer. Communities, not women, have to be saved. Magic from sources, such as witches, outside the community is also rare: only Torghva, a Khevsur hero is given 'floating armour' by the wife of a sorcerer, so that, wherever he is struck, the armour shifts to absorb the blow. The snake is not so much magical as a harbinger of ruin and death, the earthly counterpart of the raven:

> In upper Batsaligo it is snowing,
> In lower Batsaligo it is dry…
> Tinibek, your fort's
> Right-hand corner is crumbling,
> A raven has perched on top,
> A snake is burrowing in the foundations,
> Inside lies Aludauri,
> He is dying, he stays no more,
> His beautiful wife sits besides him,
> Melting like a candle.[89]

Khevsur folk poetry is underpinned by a belief in *suleti* or *shaveti* (სულეთი, შავეთი, 'land of souls', 'land of blackness'), Elysium or Hades. Here all heroes end, in an endless chain: the same names, Mindia, Berdia, Aluda, Torghva, are passed on from one bearer to another from prehistory, through Vazha's poetry, to the present day. The collective extermination of the *kai qma* (კაი ყმა, 'good young man') is the theme of 'The Slaughter of the Chosen' (ნარჩევი ვაჟების ჩაკოცა):

> Death said, 'I won't put it off,
> I'll do God's command,
> I shall have followed
> The stream from source to the end,
> I shall have slaughtered the men of Arkhoti.'[90]

A list of victims follows: Aludauri, Mindia, Ushisha, Berdia, Totia, with their attributes and totem symbols (wolf, eagle, panther), linked to their names in folk and in Vazha's work. Their death is a metamorphosis:

> Death said, 'I shall send down to Elysium
> An army of chosen men,
> First I shall bring them a cask of ale,
> I shall pass them round a brass bowl.'

The moral is not to fear death, an ascetic moral drawn with sweet irony:

> To a man, his own death
> Seems like sleep itself,
> The torrent of blood that has flowed
> Seems like the sweat of delight,
> Being carried out on a litter
> Seems like mounting a horse.[91]

Such poems are linked to ritual invocation of the souls of the dead, asking for *shendoba* (შენდობა, 'grace') for the shrine's vassals. Vazha's own ethnographical essays of the late 1880s, such as 'The Festival of Apkhusho' (აფხუშოობა) and 'Commemoration of the Dead and the Rites' (ხალარჯობა და რიგები)[92] describe bullocks and sheep awaiting slaughter while men sing a *mosagonari* 'I beg you, ravens' (თქვენი ჭირიმე, ყორნებო), in which the dead hero ironically commits his body to the carrion-eaters. Poetry of the living enhances the communion of dead and living:

I cannot last without songs,
I have said grace for the soul of a dead man.
The dead eat bread and drink wine,
They will not utter a song.[93]

The dead in *suleti* have only a precarious existence: they depend on invocations, sacrifices, and grace from the living, as the mythological 'Poem of Suleti' (სულეთის ლექსი) shows:

On all auspicious days
They await sacrificial beasts.
Whoever has no one to remember him
Sits at table with his face turned away;
Who remembers them,
By him are they blessed in spirit.

The whole focus of the hero's and author's philosophy in Vazha's *Snake-Eater* is to invoke such blessings on the dead. Native Pshav, ethnologist, and great poet are as one:

They [the Khevsurs] aroused listeners' feelings
As a bridge to heroic tales…
They related stories to them,
They invoked grace on the heroes…
So that we say grace for dead men,
Invoke the heavenly powers.

Service of the dead extended among the Khevsurs and their indigenous neighbours to sacrificing captive enemies to the souls of the men they had killed, not just to pay the blood-price, but primarily so that the sacrificial victim (as in Vazha's *Host and Guest*) 'might draw them water and lace their sandals'. Heroic poetry can go beyond lament: it is a support system for the unhappy dead, who, even in Elysium, are considered to be 'the deprived' (უკლონი). The dead appeal to the living in such *mosagonari* poems as 'The Limit of my Desires' (ჩემთა სურვილთა საზღვარი):

I ask for grace from everyone,
O my native land,
By the life of my brothers' mother,
For them to beseech the Lord.[94]

Apart from the snake image, Khevsur poetry for all its isolation has many universal features: some Georgian folk poems, called ballads by Vakhtang Kotetishvili, do in fact remind us of the Scottish border ballad. One example is the story of a youth relating his dream to his mother, who interprets the fallen poplar, broken branches, fallen vine-leaves (and fifteen other symbols) as his dead body, crushed limbs, fallen locks of hair. Likewise the battle of crow and eagle that came back to haunt Vazha Pshavela has parallels in Russian as well as Scottish culture:

Three black crows flew to the grey-blue eagle
And said to him,
'That's enough from you, old grey eagle.'…
'O if only I had my old far-flying wings,
My lively wings, sharp talons,
I'd catch you all up, three crows,
and smash you.'[95]

Not just the battle of the lone hero with a vindictive mob, but the conflict of blood feud and hospitality so central to Vazha's *Host and Guest* stems equally from folk ballad. King Davit Aghmashenebeli's importation into Georgia of Qipchak Tatars as mercenaries must lie behind the ironic ballad 'I came across a Qipchak' (შემომეყარა ყოჭაღი) that shows the clash:

I came across a Qipchak,
On the road at the edge of the Mukhrani,
He asked me for bread and I fed him bread,
I offered him wheat-flour bread.
He asked me for meat and I fed him meat,
I offered him pheasant.
He asked me for wine and I gave him wine,
I offered him Badaga [boiled grape-juice] wine.
He asked me for my wife and I couldn't give her,
I was taking her to my mother-in-law
And how could I have given my wife,
A child raised by somebody else?
He put his arm round her, kissed her,
He tugged at her plaited hair,
The poor woman burst out crying:
'Woe to the wife of a cowardly man.'
My heart could no longer hold me back,

I drew the hilt of my sword,
Straight away he was ready for me.
He was like lightning from heaven,
But he miscalculated his treachery,
I was endowed with God's grace,
Now I swung my sword,
I trusted to the grace of Lashari shrine.
I cut down horse and man,
I saw his beard hit the wet sand,
He was unworthy, he departed
From the sight of the bright sun.
I took my wife to my mother-in-law,
While he bit the sand there.[96]

More respect is accorded to wild animals, whether the ibex that lures the hunter to leap on to a crag which he can never leave, or the panther in the most moving of folk poems, *The Poem of the Youth and the Panther* (ლექსი ვეფხვისა და მოყმისა). Both youth and panther perish in the fight and in a reputedly nineteenth-century sequel, which has the sentiments we find in Vazha's anthropomorphic animal stories, the youth's mother dreams of both her son and the animal, and in her grief decides

Perhaps the panther's mother too
Is, like me, crying day and night.
I shall leave and go to her
And give her comfort in her grief,
So that she tells me all her tales
And I shall tell her of my son,
For she is sorrowing for her son,
Killed without pity by the sword.

Such respect is rarely accorded to enemies: with the advent of the Russians, the heroic ethos evaporates. In the valleys the *kai qma* (კაი ყმა), 'the good young man', becomes a bandit. One of the finest folk poems is *The Poem of Arsena* (later to inspire Mikheil Javakhishvili), who is a mere outlaw without tragic qualities. Killing becomes a casual exploit. As one Georgian soldier's song complains:

Why don't they give a cross
To Qara-Namazi's killer?

If a stinking Russian had killed him,
They'd have made him an officer.[97]

The *kai qma* after Vazha could be recollected, but not reborn in a more mercenary age. By the First World War Khevsur soldiers had fought in the Russian army for nearly a century. Battles against Turks or Dagestani tribes fitted their ethos. Pitched against an enemy, however, for whom they felt no animosity, Japanese or Germans, their folk ethos breaks down and so does the poetry that sustains them. The philologist Akaki Shanidze (აკაკი შანიძე, 1887–1987) collected the last Khevsur folk-songs from military hospitals in 1915. As Vazha lay dying, so did the folk poetry that nurtured him. The disintegration of poetics and culture is evident even in the finest poem that Shanidze recorded:[98]

What's the news in Russia? There's a sin against God.
What man of twenty is dying on the frontier?
Who leaves bereft an officer's insignia?
Who leaves cross and medal unclaimed, that generals weep for him?
Whom do they put in a silver coffin with a gold cross on top?
It must be Tsiskarauli, free eagle of the mountain.
It's a shame, son of Davit, for you to be buried in the chill earth.
Farewell to your homeland, giant of the mountains.
You armies of Germany, may God's might rage with you.
You've killed our Koba, brought our skies crashing down.
I wish I'd said, but I can't, something befitting a brave warrior.
Germany came, stopped right on the frontier,
Threatens Russia, a massive army comes with it.
Here are Russia's generals, Russia has no fear of the foe.
They approached each other and called on God's might.
They joined battle at noon, cannon thunder.
Armies went for each other with bayonets and swords,
They played brass-band music, that's the Russian custom.
Tsiskarauli fights with a sword, eagle of the high mountains,
He has his father's fame as a man handsome in battle.
He commands his troop, he leads them on with a sword.
He attacks the Germans with a yell, a pile of corpses spreads before him.
He doesn't duck enemy bullets, but turns a wolfish face.
'Follow me, my troops, whoever has heart for battle.'
He was surrounded by a host of corpses he had slain.
The Germans don't break, army upon army comes,

Everywhere artillery fires, rifles roar, bullets rain.
Iakob Tsiskarauli, our hero, is struck by a bullet.
The heavens began to thunder, you'd say, 'It's crashing down on us.'
Mother earth wept, breaks, and opens up,
The sun felt pain, went dark, a star falls down,
Generals mourn, the host of officers weeps,
When the princes heard, they washed their faces in tears —
Everyone weeps for the youth, it is a sin against God.
Everyone is hurt by the death of a brave warrior,
By this untimely loss of a twenty-year-old officer.
Here the whole Arkhoti valley died, the high peaks weep.
You no longer have Tsiskarauli, strength of Arkhoti.
Who will lead our armies whatever the enemy's might?
Hero, where have you gone, Koba, don't you pity your brother now?
Now what will Dimitri do, who will give him support?
To whom will he give the message, 'Brother relies on brother'?
When his poor sister heard, her plaited hair came down.
His parents did not grieve, they were not fond of their son.
Into Elysium went Koba, drawn sword in his hand.
He was met by a seated host of those he had slain.
The youth is met by heroes of earlier times.
Qirchla Baburauli embraces him and kisses him on the face:
'We knew beforehand, we have slain armies with the sword.'
They gave him the place of honour, set the hero on a gold stool.
They ask him about war: 'Tell us a story of battle.'
Now you're dead, God bless you, with your stone-cutting steel heart!
You led your army, you avenged yourself on the foe.
Your name will be forever, you fought bullets with a sword.
Farewell Tsiskarauli, heavenly angel,
Who died for glory, God's pillar will stand on you.
I who have spoken these words was on the frontier,
I saw him with my own eyes scything down an army with a sword.

In the twentieth century, Georgian literary writers would have to face bullets with pens no mightier than Tsiskarauli's swords. For this reason heroic folk poetry became, not a curiosity, but a new code for the survival of literature under terror.

Other genres of folk poetry have a more tenuous connection with literature. The love-songs of urban poets form a continuum with the

'minstrel' (*ashugh*) poetry of Sayat-Nova or Ioseb Grishashvili, but the folk lyric is closely bound with ritual verse, assigned to weddings and other festivities. Religious folk poetry has a complex and still-unexplored relationship to Georgian hymnography. Musicologists, who tend to assess the age of a hymn by its lack of tonality and the severity of its counterpoint, believe that Georgian polyphony is far older than the Byzantine: in which case, such famous religious songs as 'Thou art the vineyard, | The newly planted poplar' (შენ ხარ ვენახი, ალვის ხე ახლად ნერგული), conventionally attributed to King Demetre I, may well date back to pre-Christian times, their imagery of trees and sun being adapted to the new imported monotheism. Better attested is the reverse process of assimilation: as we have seen, a number of Georgian hymns sank from a textual to an oral transmission.

A fuzzier zone is that of folk legends and fairy stories, where the interchange betwen literary and oral prose traditions, Georgian and Caucasian or Iranian, has been more complex over the centuries. Many legends suggest that the main flow has been from acounts of historical events or from literary monuments such as the *Amirandarejaniani* or *Shah-Nameh* to the spoken word. Georgian fairy stories are more closely related to a whole Eurasian community of story-telling than to the culture of any one national language. For this reason, since they are transmitted more by children's nurses than by mourning widows, they have been far less vulnerable to changes in the nation's fortunes and less influential in every literary sphere, except the modern genre of children's literature.

V
THE AGE OF INTERNATIONALISM
The Twentieth Century: The Dashing of Hope

24: Two Theatres: The Political Arena and Drama

NO century since the thirteenth in Georgian literature suffered such abrupt peripeteias as the twentieth. The violent events of 1905 which had spawned such extraordinary phenomena as the brief-lived revolutionary Gurian 'Republic' created an independent literature, in which first naturalistic prose, then Symbolist poetry became confident enough to break free of its foreign models. With the maturity of Vazha Pshavela, feelings of cultural inferiority to Russia and western Europe lessened.

The first peripeteia was not so much at the Bolshevik invasion of 1921: most Georgian writers were cajoled or coerced into acceptance and by November were corralled into a 'Union of New Literature' (ახალი მწერლობის კავშირი). Real revolution was felt when Orjonikidze purged the party, the intelligentsia, and the gentry in 1923: for the first time since 1795, the Rivers Mtkvari and Alazani literally ran red with blood. The adult males of the aristocracy and the intelligentsia, especially those associated with non-Bolshevik political parties, were systematically slaughtered: survivors went to the Arctic camps. The compensation for these dreadful visitations from Russia was small: guest appearances by Bolshevik-approved poets such as Mayakovsky and Esenin during the winter of 1924–5 helped to redirect Georgian poets to new paths. Similar visits were made by Maxim Gorky in the summers of 1928 and 1929. The relatively liberal NEP ('New Economic Plan') regime of the Soviet Union came late — in 1926 — and ended early — in 1929, for in Georgia the proletarian fundamentalism of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers found support among the party leaders. But just as Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century came to be seen as mild compared with Tamerlane in the fourteenth, so Beria, compared with the brutal but flexible Orjonikidze, appeared apocalyptic once the Great Terror was underway. Between 1936 and 1938 a quarter of the members of the Union

of Writers were destroyed. The main factor in the destruction of literature between 1929 and 1954 was not that a quarter of all writers and half of the greatest were killed, but that the survivors were terrorized into silence or incompetence, and the bookshops were filled instead with the worthless prose and verse of their replacements, agents of the secret police — GPU or NKVD — for whom the reward of betrayal was the prominence, and even the houses and possessions, of the writers they had helped to liquidate. After 1921, much Georgian literature seems a bleak dead pile of semi-literate propaganda and lies, out of which we must retrieve the living core of real prose and poetry.

Unlike the Russian diaspora, the Georgian intelligentsia in exile, which left with the Menshevik government, its gold, and its archives in 1921 to settle largely in France, was too small to create a successful cultural centre abroad. Journals mostly foundered on lack of readers and funds, and there was almost no fiction or poetry of importance printed abroad: the most worthwhile literature was historical, such as Zurab Avalishvili's work on the Crusades, or autobiographical, such as the memoirs of the militant General Kvinitadze. Even *Bedi Kartlisa*, a Paris-based magazine that achieved some permanence by the 1950s and published a great deal of fine scholarship, as well as the occasional literary gem disinterred from the past, up to the 1980s, found itself having to compromise with Soviet Georgian feelings in order to exist securely.

Only in the years between 1924 and 1930, between Orjonikidze and Beria, was publication of real literature possible; even in the 'thaw' years after Stalin's death the habits of fear, the thinning of the repressed elder generation, meant that little of the new literature could compare with what had been forgotten and was now being partially retrieved. The pressures of Russification were ever stronger, so that in 1972 one minor ex-Futurist in exile, Davit Gachechiladze, could write, with no overt irony: 'Meanwhile Georgian writing had the general features of Soviet literature: approved writers became producers in a major branch of industry. The same Soviet mind-set of the 1930s that determined that one republic should produce heavy engines and another cigarettes, also decided that Georgia, with its rich and turbulent history, should specialize in the historical novel, a genre particularly prone to hypertrophy and vulgarization.'[99]

The monolithic organization of Soviet writers into a closed and party-controlled union was inaugurated in Georgia in the extraordinary assembly of writers of 27–9 June 1932,[100] which put an end to individuality and inspiration for over twenty years. Literature was now to be centrally commissioned propaganda. From the 1930s novels swelled into monstrous block-busting trilogies, their authors paid by the printed sheet, the print-runs depending on official approval, not demand.

The benefits to literature of repression and party control were less noticeable. They lay in the fact that talented writers found safe shelters such as translation, thus giving Georgian a database of works from all over the world and, in some cases, finely written work which gave non-polyglot authors new genres and ideas. Other talents, such as Vakhtang Kotetishvili or Akaki Shanidze, like Zhirmunsky or Tynianov in Russia, moved away from the literary text towards folklore or linguistics, fields that were fertilized by neophytes of genius. Standard Sovietized academies did at least result in such major resources as the eight-volume *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language* (1954–64) and a series of dictionaries and grammars of the old language and the modern dialects: the support system for a literature was built up even while its creative talent was diminished. While Stalinist Russification meant that the battle fought by the greatest authors for a purer and richer Georgian language was harder to fight, it at least gave access through the Russian language to a mass of other literature. As Soviet rule collapsed in 1989, the retrieval of the repressed past grew into a flood. However, new voices have drowned in a different tyranny of demagoguery and national chauvinism.

Most of the literature of the twentieth century that is worth discussing belongs to two lamentably short periods of anarchy or multilateral pressures: 1905 to 1921, and 1924 to 1930. Parallel to those periods, but also enjoying a third flourish in the 1970s and 1980s was the Georgian theatre, a theatre, however, remarkable for its reliance more on foreign than native repertoire. Two directors were outstanding.

The first was Konstantine Marjanishvili (კონსტანტინე მარჯანიშვილი, 1872–1933, also known by the Russified surname Mardzhanov), born to a well-to-do literary family in Qvareli, eastern Georgia. He is regarded as one of Stanislavsky's most talented followers, an important contributor to the post-revolutionary evolution of the Moscow Arts Theatre, but above

all, in a brief interlude in the early twenties, as the most prestigious and professional of Georgia's theatre directors.

He worked his way around Russian and Siberian provincial theatres as an actor, then a director, until in 1906 his versatility was recognized by the Moscow Nezlobin troupe (many of them taught by Stanislavsky and the MAT). As a director, Marjanishvili's technique was to guide the actor in finding an instinctive path to realizing 'outer truth'. In 1910, looking for ways to jolt his theatre into new paths, Stanislavsky invited Marjanishvili at the same time as Gordon Craig to renew repertoire and production techniques. Marjanishvili was fascinated by Craig's use of puppets; he returned to his native country to stage *Oedipus Rex* in the same stylized way. In 1913, however, he broke with Stanislavsky — for a variety of reasons that included conflict of ego, left-wing sympathies, an interest in decadence — and formed his 'Free [*svobodny*] Theatre'.

For largely financial reasons, the Free Theatre lasted a mere year, but made an impact with its pursuit of 'synthesis', its contacts with Rachmaninov and Shaliapin, and its Georgian flavour in choreography and plasticity. Marjanishvili's triumph was his production of Oscar Wilde's *Salomée* in 1917: it was reinterpreted by audience and critics as a politically apocalyptic as well as decadent work. It was performed even during revolution and civil war in Kiev, Moscow, Petrograd, and Tbilisi. In his brief years at the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi, Marjanishvili did his best to collaborate with his demonic junior Akhmeteli. His restrained *Hamlet*, however, did not find favour, motivated as it was by his conviction that 'there's enough suffering in life without showing it on the stage'. In the late 1920s Marjanishvili formed a provincial touring theatre, centred on Kutaisi and Batumi, with a largely Russian and Bolshevik repertoire that won awards, if not full acclaim, at the Moscow Olympiad of 1930. One of his last productions was Shaw's *Saint Joan*, approved as a 'good anti-religious show'. Marjanishvili was lucky to die of illness on 17 April 1933 before the political climate worsened. The Marjanishvili Theatre of Tbilisi continues his eclectic and somewhat conformist traditions.[101]

The second outstanding director was Sandro Akhmeteli (სანდრო ახმეტელი, born Aleksandre Akhmetelashvili, ალექსანდრე ახმეტელაშვილი, 1886–1937). The greatest Georgian theatre director, he was the real founder-director of the Rustaveli Theatre. Like many Georgian literati, he

was the son of a priest, and the mountain landscapes and tribal neighbours of his native Kakhetia in eastern Georgia profoundly influenced the spectacular massed casts of his stage productions. His versatility was striking: taught at grammar school by the writer Barnovi, he had a profound knowledge of world literature; he had perfect pitch; he was a formidable boxer. Taking refuge from an unfortunate 'shotgun' marriage, he studied law in Saint Petersburg until 1916, but was from the beginning a theatrical outsider determined to break in. In 1915 he produced his first manifesto, condemning the theatre of Tbilisi as one that 'had to be destroyed, to be made softer, more temperamental, more fiery, emotional, stentorian, bold, heroic'. When the Menshevik government of Georgia formed a national theatre incorporating almost anyone in the country who had ever acted, Akhmeteli went home and led younger actors in a coup against the establishment. After 1921, Konstantine Marjanishvili had also returned to transform Tbilisi's provincial stages into a cosmopolitan professional theatre; the two men collaborated with respect and unease, but Akhmeteli's corporation, 'Duruji', after a river in Kakhetia, proved too violent for Marjanishvili: by 1926 Akhmeteli had ousted him and was in sole control of the Rustaveli Theatre. Akhmeteli's tyranny was legendary even by theatre-director standards: all members of Duruji had to pledge:

> 1. To have no brothers, sisters, parents, friends outside the corporation.
> 2. My convictions, feelings will accord with the corporation's welfare…
> 6. I sacrifice my life and future to the will of the corporation. Any treachery… is to be cruelly punished.

Akhmeteli literally nursed his actors, but fined, reprimanded, and dismissed them for the slightest infringements. His relations with the Bolshevik authorities were difficult; revolutionary and 'left', he was also formally experimental and expressionist. The corporation had to be disbanded by 1927, as Beria's secret police opened a dossier on it as a potential conspiracy. But Akhmeteli's productions were winning fame and protection in Moscow and Leningrad. His masterpiece was *Lamara,* a play by Grigol Robakidze, a Nietzschean reinterpretation of mountain folk legends. It was produced very much like a Wagnerian opera at Bayreuth and enhanced by Akhmeteli's legendary skills at lighting, choreography, and mass movement.

Lamara was to be a prize-winner at the 1930 Moscow Drama Olympiad and to win the Rustaveli Theatre an invitation to tour America. But the theatre's future was bedevilled by the later defection of the author to Nazi Germany and by scandal surrounding other Akhmeteli productions — licentious versions of Mérimée's 'Carmen', *Carmencita*, and of John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*. One was denounced for eroticism, the other for grotesquerie.

Akhmeteli's affair and second marriage to the young actress Tamara Tsulukidze, formerly married to one of his troupe, and his overweening arrogance helped to break up the theatre. Beria is said to have been personally ordered out of a rehearsal. Georgian writers, particularly the young proletarians, were refused access to the stage: Akhmeteli's catchphrase was 'wretched Georgian literature, wretched Georgian writers'. He would collaborate only with the verse dramatist Sandro Shanshiashvili, and even Shanshiashvili was used mainly as a translator.

The great productions of the 1930s were politicized reinterpretations of the classics. Notable was Schiller's *The Robbers* (under its earlier title *In tyrannos!*) as a play about the struggle for power, rather than about mere parricide; extraordinary was Akhmeteli's *Julius Caesar*, which interpolated scenes from *Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens* to make a highly topical anti-Fascist spectacle.

The critics of the mid-thirties were no longer free to voice anything but disapproval of unorthodoxy. No Georgian writer would defend Akhmeteli; half his actors began to sabotage or denounce him. Beria removed him from his post in 1935; he was arrested on 19 November 1936, tortured until virtually paralysed and mute, then shot, on 28 June 1937, as a foreign spy. Tamara Tsulukidze was arrested, but with her extraordinary strength and luck returned in 1956 from the camps to revive the Akhmeteli tradition in the Rustaveli Theatre. At the same time, the brave curator of the Tbilisi Theatrical Museum turned out to have saved from the NKVD for posterity many of Akhmeteli's production notes.[102]

In the 1980s, under Robert Sturua (რობერტ სტურუა, 1936–), the Rustaveli Theatre began to enjoy the international acclaim Sandro Akhmeteli prepared it for: its *Richard III* and *Don Juan* (Molière) are the same radical rereading and updating of a text that Akhmeteli excelled at. The theatre is now more 'actor-led' than Akhmeteli would have allowed,

but it finds itself in its old political quandary, acclaimed more abroad than at home, accused of spurning its native dramatists for the cosmopolitan.

The theatre has proved to be exceptionally resilient: in 1993–4, in the desolate aftermath of Georgia's civil war, Robert Sturua succeeded in putting on and taking to Moscow audiences a Russian-language version of Davit Kldiashvili's *Irine's Happiness*. In April 1998, when Tbilisi was still short of electricity or of theatre-goers able to afford tickets, it was to audiences of Georgian exiles and migrants in St Petersburg that Sturua gave the opportunity of seeing, after an absence from the stage of nearly seventy years, perhaps the greatest Georgian spectacle, Grigol Robakidze's *Lamara*.

25: *Narrative Prose and Mikheil Javakhishvili*

FOR many established writers, even in 1905 and 1917 the times had not changed: those writers (and their readers) who still drew on Georgia's history for edifying adventure stories with some erotic and violent titillation turned a deaf ear to revolutions, world wars, independence, and invasion, let alone to Symbolism or Futurism. Socialist Realism, when finally imposed, was to them welcome recognition of their limited aesthetic horizons. Among such writers, the archetypical dinosaur was Vasil Barnovi (ვასილ ბარნოვი, 1856–1934). His family, the Barnaveli, were refugees from the Meskhi community in Turkey and were saddled with the Russian form of the name, but he was a Georgian, the son of a priest. As a child he lived in Khevsuretia, where his father suffered the rivalry of the pagan *diakonozi*, an experience which led Barnovi to contrast Christian ideals and pagan sensuality in his most sensational plots. He was educated in the Tbilisi seminary and then at the theological academy in Moscow, where, taught by Russia's greatest historian, Kliuchevsky, and graduating with distinction, he was at the age of 25 offered a Russian bishopric. Georgia and its past, however, drew him irresistibly back.

But Barnovi found Georgian history too poorly documented to be material for anything but fictional imagination. Earning a living as a teacher at seminary, school, and eventually university, he became in middle age a productive novelist, very popular in the first twenty years of this century. For his historical novels he plundered mediæval chronicles. They are informative and dramatic to a fault, but vitiated by heavy-handed Romantic interest and naïve dialogue and psychology. Their chief merit is in laying a broad foundation for a genre that became the mainstream of twentieth-century Georgian prose. Best known are the short story set in the disastrous year of 1795, 'The Dawn of Isani' (*ისნის ცისკარი*, 1901), the novel *The Faded Crown* (*მამჭრალი შარავანდედი*, 1913), and *Giorgi Saakadze* (*გიორგი სააკაძე*, the patriotic seventeenth-century rebel, 'the great prefect', 1925). Finally, in 1929, Parkinson's disease and the humiliation of censorship drove him to stop writing. Barnovi also tried his hand, with less success, at village novels and the Zola and Korolenko genre of contemporary sociological reportage. His rich vocabulary and

rhythmic prose style, however, influenced the next generation of prose-writers, especially those who had been his pupils and devotees.

A tiny corpus of Georgian women writers, hitherto confined to children's stories, followed in the same genre. The first of any note was Ekaterine Gabashvili (ეკატერინე გაბაშვილი, 1851–1938), an aristocrat who wrote about the sorrows of village schoolteachers and peasant life with condescending sentimentality; in the twentieth century she abandoned fiction for autobiography, remarkable enough to win her a place in the Pantheon. Other women who won grudging acceptance for their writing at the turn of the century were Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tseretlisa, Dominika Eristav-Mdivani, and Barbare Kherkheulidze. One woman only, Anastasia Eristavi-Khoshtaria (ანასტასია ერისთავი-ხოშტარია, 1868–1951), tried to set her work in her own times from a feminine view and direct it at educated adults. She began as a teacher in her birth-place, Gori. In the 1890s Akaki Tsereteli encouraged her to write and to move to Tbilisi: her first novel, the four-hundred-page *On the Slippery Path* (მოლიპულ გზაზე, 1897), followed by the compact *The Wheel of Fate* (ბედის ტრიალი, 1901), had success. Eristavi-Khoshtaria's novels and stories follow one pattern: they trace the career of a Georgian noblewoman, thrown into turmoil by the collapse of the old economic and moral orders in the mid-nineteenth century, defending her ideals of free work and truthful love against a corrupt background and clay-footed heroes. *On the Slippery Path* focuses on Ketino, an artist, who escapes marriage to Okro, finds her vocation abroad, but returns mortally ill to her true love, Paliko. In *The Wheel of Fate* the idealistic Sidonia endures disillusionment as her husband Geno bullies peasants and seduces servants. Here too death intervenes: maddened peasants lynch Geno. Anastasia Eristavi-Khoshtaria's novels end with the bereaved rejecting suicide in order to raise their child for a better world. There are few references to any identifiable place or time; characters are referred to largely by their pet-names; clichés recur: 'he went white as mistletoe', 'his joy knew no bounds'. Nevertheless, she had narrative drive and noble aims and could suspend disbelief. After the Soviet invasion, she became a 'living classic' and wrote little, except ideologically corrective introductions to reprints of her work. She remains the one woman novelist of note in Georgian, which says more about the female condition in Georgia than do all her volumes.

Under Communist rule, only the older generation of women writers maintained any position. Nino Nakashidze (ნინო ნაკაშიძე, 1872–1963), an acquaintance and translator of Tolstoy, had enough prestige to keep her children's magazine *Nakaduli* (ნაკადული) going through all the convulsions from 1910 until 1928. She broke out of the mould of children's writer only once with a play, *Who is to Blame?* (ვისი ბრალია?, 1908). While Leninism supposedly encouraged the entry of women into literature, Stalinism and Georgian customs blocked them. Women's role was confined to writing improving children's stories, and until 1945, by which time the male population of the USSR was desperately depleted, no female writer achieved prominence in Georgia. By the mid-1930s there were only nine, and those primarily wives of writers, in the first 200 members of the Union of Writers. Their only consolation for forced obscurity was that none of them was purged in the Great Terror.

A whole group of prose-writers, who were only in their thirties when the twentieth century showed its teeth, adapted their professional expertise, often in politics, and their naturalistic style to serve new causes. Typical of such limited talents was Niko Lortkipanidze (ნიკო ლორთქიფანიძე, 1880–1944), who was both novelist and playwright. He was born near Kutaisi, studied mining in Kharkov and Austria, and returned in 1907 to teach German in Tbilisi and Kutaisi schools. He entered literature with grotesque fiction from village life in Imeretia, 'The Furious Master' (მრისხანე ბატონი, 1912), and progressed to historical novels, such as *Bad Times* (ჟამთა სიავე, 1920). His talent lay in graphic, almost cinematic scenes, condensed into powerful short pieces such as 'The Woman in a Headscarf' (თავსაფრიანი დედაკაცი, 1926). Lortkipanidze adapted quickly to Soviet canons, celebrating industrialization with predictable offerings, such as a treatment of the 1905 revolution *From Paths to Rails* (ბილიკებიდან ლიანდაგზე, 1928). One of the first to write with an eye to the film camera, his brisk, crude stylistic flourishes have strongly influenced modern Georgian prose. He also wrote drama, original and adapted: *Keto* of 1914 is an agreeable comedy which is still performed.

One of the most spectacular, if ineffectual, revolutionary figures signed himself 'Uiaragho' (უიარაღო, 'unarmed'): born Kondrati Tatarishvili (კონდრატი თათარიშვილი, 1872–1929), he was a priest so turbulent that he was excommunicated by the exarch of Georgia in 1906 and ended up

in 1913 as a geology student in Brussels; only after 1921 did he return to Georgia. His reputation rests primarily on a single melodramatic tale, *The Mameluke* (მამელუკი, 1912), published in the same almanac of the Georgian Society for Belles Lettres as Lortkipanidze's 'Furious Master': a captive Georgian rises to be a mameluke (Turkish viceroy of Egypt), but at the cost of death renounces Islam and his rank when in battle he realizes the Venetian he has killed is another Georgian in exile.

Leo Kiacheli, the pseudonym of Leo Shengelaia (ლეო ქიაჩელი-შენგელაია, 1884–1956), was, like activists of the previous generation (for example, Niko Nikoladze), a revolutionary first and a writer second. A naïve, pure-hearted man who inspired much affection, he refused, despite a life that embraced Russian invasion, collectivization, the Great Terror and the Second World War, to express any disappointment in the way his dreams of a socialist Georgia had been realized. Adopting Maxim Gorky's principles and aesthetics, he devoted his life to fictionalizing great moments he had witnessed, notably the events of 1905, a process he began with *Tariel Golua* (ტარიელ გოლუა, 1915) and finished with *Blood* (სისხლი, 1927). *Tariel Golua* was held up in Soviet Georgia as a model for socialist realistic prose; *Blood* shows real literary talent in an episode based on the author's own part in a mass break-out of revolutionaries from Kutaisi prison. In the 1930s Kiacheli became the first Georgian writer to write for the cinema. His co-operation with the director Nikoloz Shengelaia led him to celebrate the horrors of collectivization: in literature Kiacheli then became an orthodox Realist and won mass approval with sentimental trash such as *Gvadi Bigva* (1941). The eponymous hero, a rogue reformed by the party's trust and gift of a buffalo, ends as the saviour of the collective's sawmill from the saboteur. Kiacheli's earlier work has at least documentary value: any deception is involuntary.

The only great writer among those novelists who began, like Leo Kiacheli, as activists and for whom literature was above all a means of political action, was Mikheil Javakhishvili (მიხეილ ჯავახიშვილი, 1880–1937). He was born, for all his aristocratic temperament, in a farmer's family. He went to horticultural college in Yalta and travelled in France and North America before returning to Georgia, joining a nationalist group, *Eri* ('the people'), publishing an enormous amount of serious journalism, principally in his paper *The Peasant* (გლეხი). His primary

interests were socialist and revolutionary and led to his being exiled. He worked in the Red Cross on the Turkish front during the First World War. Back in Georgia at the time of independence, he belonged to a National (ეროვნული) Socialist Party, which opposed the governing Mensheviks and their Federalist-Anarchist rivals but made common cause with them in opposing the Russian Bolshevik take-over of 1921: Javakhishvili was active in organizing the retreat of the Georgian army and government through Batumi. He decided not to emigrate, however, and turned to fiction — he had made occasional forays with short stories of dramatically lovelorn women, such as 'Eka' (ეკა, 1905). In 1923, when the Russians cracked down on the first Georgian Communist government's 'nationalism', Javakhishvili was sentenced to death: after six months in prison, he was saved from Orjonikidze's executioners by the Union of Writers and by a deputation led by politically acceptable scholars such as Pavle Ingoroqva (პავლე ინგოროყვა, 1893–1983).[103] Javakhishvili was one of the very few members to survive the 'liquidation' of the Popular Socialist Party. After participating in the (relatively) right-wing journal *Kavkasioni* (კავკასიონი) in 1928, together with Geronti Kikodze (გერონტი ქიქოძე, 1886–1960) Javakhishvili formed his own élite group, Aripioni (არიფიონი, 'the good companions'). Aripioni was quite out of joint with the times in its determination to maintain the 'continuity of past, present, and future culture'; Javakhishvili's own prose works were published in its journal, also called *Aripioni*, and the grouping maintained a 'fellow-traveller' distance from proletarian literature.

Like Dostoevsky, Javakhishvili was not destroyed but transformed into a major writer by his close brush with the executioner. His release brought a torrent of prose, astounding in quantity and quality, from 1924 to 1930. The first of these works, perhaps his most inventive and vivacious novel, was *Kvachi Kvachantiradze and his Adventures* (კვაჭი კვაჭანტირაძე და მისი თავგადასავალი, 1924). It is the story of a swindler, a Georgian Felix Krull, who can also be interpreted as an inverted Don Quixote, a cynic operating against an idealist background. Kvachi is in turn seducer, insurance fraudster, associate of Rasputin, bank-robber, film-maker, revolutionary, and pimp — an international con-man, through whose eyes we see Europe and Russia as nothing but a rogue's hunting-ground. We leave Kvachi in Istanbul, a refugee from the Cheka, married

to a rich widow who owns a large brothel, but weeping for the Georgia he will never see again. Kvachi is said to be based on real prototypes, one of them an officer, Simonika Pkhakadze (სიმონიკა ფხაკაძე), who was once engaged to marry Rasputin's daughter. Javakhishvili the novelist plays a minor role in his own work as a naïve insurance-inspector. The abrupt, sardonic prose brims over with inventiveness.

The stories and novels of Javakhishvili's best years contrast country and city life, tsarist and Soviet times, but they are not merely black-and-white contrasts. Javakhishvili had a liking for rogues and outlaws which overrode Soviet canons. Official ideology saw the gentry whom the outlaw exploits as the enemy, but was horrified by the bandit as a proletarian ideal. Javakhishvili's skill as a writer lies in incorporating folk phraseology into the normalized narrative language. His plots have a common ground: primitive energy, whether the Khevsur tribesmen's stoicism in *The White Collar* (*თეთრი საყელო*, 1926) or Kvachi Kvachantiradze's ingenuity, captivates an autobiographical, pliant narrator or dominates a once-powerful, once-genteel hero.

Mikheil Javakhishvili's most typical and influential novella was *Jaqo's Dispossessed* (*ჯაყოს ხიზნები*, 1924): revolution deprives Teimuraz, a former squire of land and power, but he loses his beloved wife, Margo, to an atavistic upstart Jaqo. The story ends on a conventional upbeat, with the desolate Teimuraz hoping beyond hope and serving the village co-operative, but Javakhishvili's underlying pessimism and anarchy belie any superficial conciliation with the new world. His achievement, which few orthodox Soviet writers other than Bulgakov matched, was to combine the theme of a social upheaval, which the narrator accepts, with a private upset, which the reader is left free to lament.

Javakhishvili rarely tried other genres. *Kvachi Kvachantiradze* was dramatized in 1927 for Akhmeteli's Rustaveli Theatre — a tribute to the novelist — but was scrapped when a leading 'left' critic, Platon Kikodze, denounced Javakhishvili's novel as pornography. The play has been lost. A play with a similar hero, *Qvarqvare Tutaberi* (*ყვარყვარე თუთაბერი*), by Polikarpe Kakabadze (პოლიკარპე კაკაბაძე, 1895–1972), was staged in 1928: it was the most outstanding Georgian comedy for two decades.

In his youth Javakhishvili wrote verse; the remnants of his archive suggest that verse remained a secret outlet for his inner thoughts. 'I Still

Haven't Said What I Have to Say' (*მე ჯერ არ მითქვამს ჩემი სათქმელი*), a poem of 1927–8,[104] is a rare and dangerous document: it reveals what the writer felt about his mission and the times' constrictions:

> Today I am forty-seven.
> I survey my past with shudders and doubts:
> Haven't I paid tax to the collector,
> Hasn't what I've dedicated been enough?
> Fate has led me across rope bridges.
> Swaying, I've crossed yawning abysses.
> I've tormented and been tormented, I've barked and been barked at,
> I've enraged and been enraged and I have been cursed.
> And it has brought me to a bright temple.
> I've written, I've burned incense and musk in tribute.
> Suddenly the rope bridge has broken under me
> Somewhere the tower I built has collapsed.
> The sound of bells has stopped too early.
> I still haven't said what I have to say.
> My skull is still full,
> Deeds not done are still inextinguishable.
> And if I couldn't haul heavy rocks,
> If I couldn't find anything beyond the Rioni,
> I have yoked six buffalo in pairs,
> My wife, Keto, and the Aripioni,
> Let nobody else come… Let them seek elsewhere
> A barren hill, the heavenly heights.
> They've abandoned me like an orphan, they've thrown as a memento
> Jaqo's Dispossessed, the fallow grounds.
> Sing me hymns with one voice, Aripioni,
> Whether you are near or far, Sandro and Ilo:
> 'Glory to your patience,
> Javakhishvili who came too early.'
> I have one thing only: remaining an orphan
> Give me your hand, perhaps you can adopt me
> Woe, would that I had your patience,
> Javakhishvili, who came too late!
> Somewhere the rope bridge broke under me,
> Somewhere what I left undone has crumbled.
> Leave me, I don't want it… It's too early to go —
> I still haven't said what I have to say.

No Rustaveli will appear today.
So let our hoarse voice be good enough for you.
Whatever the poet's breast brings up,
That's all it can do, use it.
Today I am forty-seven…
I still haven't said what I have to say.
God, help me, do not leave me yet,
I still have plenty of things not done to do.

In 1928 another short novel, with an original narrative voice, full of apparently casual switches of narrator, *Givi Shaduri*, was published: the eponymous hero tells to the author a story, like Teimuraz's in *Jaqo's Dispossessed*, of a life turned upside down: Givi is falsely imprisoned by a prosecutor who wants to sleep with Givi's wife. Givi is released, but is deprived of his revenge by the authorities, who have already shot the corrupt official. Givi's life, family, and values collapse. *Givi Shaduri* was poorly received; the next story *The Gatecrasher*, literally *You Invited Me* (დამპატიჟე) caused a storm: 'gatecrasher' is the nickname of another idler, a parasite, Okropiri ('golden-mouthed'), whom the authorities billet on the naïve gardener Teodore. Okropiri robs Teodore and seduces his daughter, reducing the old man, whose happiness is now gone, to reflect:

> Animals have ticks, bees get a fungus, moss and mistletoe cling to trees, ivy winds round rocks, and so they live on other creatures' sap. Doesn't mankind have the same arrangement?

The sad ending, despite the arrest of the mysterious intriguer who planted 'the gatecrasher' on a hard-working gardener, was seen as Javakhishvili's libel against socialism; to charges of libel were added pornography and gratuitous sensationalism.

True, a pattern of rebellion, violence, and sexual passion all intersecting traditional taboos can be seen in many of Javakhishvili's stories. Sometimes it is jocular. Invariably it is expressed with an uninhibited political irony which makes Javakhishvili seem more a French than a Caucasian or Soviet writer. Elizbar, the hero of *The White Collar* is irritated to despair by his sophisticated, highly sexed, but stupid cosmopolitan wife, Tsutskia, who looks 'like a cat that has stolen the meat' and believes 'modesty is a left-over from the bourgeoisie':

> When I was going off prospecting for copper, I said, 'Enough. It has to stop. I'll come back and tell her: "Tsutskia, goodbye." If she starts complaining, I'll put her on a chain and bolt the door on her. Let her think about the destiny of Fascism. Let her coo at Lloyd George. Let her grumble at Mussolini. Let her count Briand's days, assess the situation tomorrow (she has as many -isms as -ations, God, I'd forgotten). Let her weigh her future and just for once think about the morrow, just for once let her think!'

Prospecting in Khevsuretia, Elizbar finds a new wife, as submissive as Tsutskia is truculent — the fertile Khatuta, steeped in tradition, with a dowry of forty cows. But, as in so much Georgian prose, the stranger's entry into the mountain paradise is disastrous. The villagers fire their rifles at the first aeroplane that appears and their houses are bombed. The violent conflict of the old and the new was never set out so frankly; Elizbar realizes that his success in finding copper ore is a disaster:

> I straightaway grasped the reason for their fear: another country would burst into this country. A road would be hacked through, wires would be strung up, police would come and government, courts, taxes, machines, steam, electricity, and a thousand Satanic things would appear.

The love-story ends idyllically: Khatuta is successfully transplanted to the city. But the reader cannot forget the disaster about to happen to the highlanders who have given the hero his new wife. They are now outlaws.

Often Javakhishvili's plots are as melodramatic as Qazbegi's. 'Rabid' (ცოფიანი, 1926) is typical: a father shoots his son when he finds out that the son will not marry because he loves only his sister. To spare the family name, the father then jumps to his death, claiming that his son was suffering from rabies. (If the modern Russian novel in general, and Dostoevsky in particular, is a literature of parricide, the modern Georgian novel, and especially Javakhishvili, is a literature of filicide.)

Javakhishvili's masterpiece, on which he spent years of research and rewriting (a Russian, as well as a Georgian version) is *Arsena Marabdeli* ('Arsena of Marabda', 1933–6). Here too the hero is betrayed by his father. The novel is based on the life of a real bandit, Arsena, a hero of Georgian folklore. Although this work of fiction has real anthropological value, Javakhishvili's main theme is tragic necessity that makes Arsena an

outlaw — the historical connection leading the mediæval knight to degenerate into the nineteenth-century bandit. Arsena himself is saturated with poetry and with his own ideas, so that he articulates many of the author's thoughts: 'Russia is galloping after Europe and the bleeding body it is dragging after it on a rope is Georgia' was an utterance that would cost the author dear when Stalin revalued the role of the Russian empire. Critics were aghast at the energy Javakhishvili had put into a character who would be as much an outlaw under Soviet as under tsarist rule. It was not enough for them that Javakhishvili was another Stendhal, not only in his mastery of the language, but in his need to transcend moral clichés in making the adventurer the incarnation of the author's own intransigence. Javakhishvili's integrity was his ideological crime.

All of Javakhishvili's work won great popularity from the common reader and bitter attacks from a cabal of Communist critics and proletarian writers. The latter felt Javakhishvili's personal survival to be an unconscionable anomaly: they accused him of corruption, misrepresentation, slander, and subversion — even his nephew's being a tram conductor in Thessaloniki was used against him. His artistic credo transcended his critics and the times: Javakhishvili's notebooks show the primacy of artistry over ideology:[105]

> An author's value is doubled if he achieves three things: 1) he refuses to torment the Georgian language; 2) he does not graze wherever he sees grass; 3) he doesn't choke the plot with alien material but takes the narrative like an arrow to the end and clothes it only in organic material.

Javakhishvili's sense of humour passed over the party's head: the domineering metropolitan Tsutskia of *The White Collar*, with her reversal of sexual roles, was declared a libel on the women's movement. In 1930 Javakhishvili clashed with Malakia Toroshelidze (მალაქია ტოროშელიძე, 1880–1937), the 'Trotskyist' president of the Union of Writers and commissar for education, after the latter's wholesale ban on classics. When Beria came to power, Javakhishvili for a short time gained favour and medals: in 1933 the government even supplied to his house the electricity that had been cut in most of Tbilisi; *Arsena Marabdeli* went into several new editions and was dramatized and filmed.[106] But the novelist could not bend low enough, despite attempts at a Socialist Realist

novel, *A Woman's Burden* (ქალის ტვირთი, 1936): the heroine, a Bolshevik but bourgeoise Iudit, loves a Stalinist underground worker, Zurab; at the height of the 1905 uprising he orders her to go ahead with her betrothal to a gendarme officer, Avsharov, whom she is to kill. The plot is typically Javakhishvilian in sexual attraction between revolutionary workman and upper-class heroine. The Russian version of the work was condemned by the Soviet ideologist Vladimir Ermilov: he said it gave Bolshevism the aura of pure terrorism and made gendarmes too chivalrous.

Beria resented Javakhishvili's refusal to seek his advice on portraying Bolshevik activities in pre-revolutionary Georgia. Javakhishvili was suspected of warning the poet Robakidze of impending arrest. In 1935 he was trapped into praising André Gide on the latter's visit to Georgia (although the two never met): when Gide's *Retour de l'URSS* and the book's praise of Georgian writers reclassified both Gide and Javakhishvili as hostile, Beria accused the latter of links with enemies of the people. Those already under arrest, including the novelist's friend, the luckless Trotskyist publishing official and *femme fatale* Lidia Gasviani, were forced to incriminate Javakhishvili as a counter-revolutionary terrorist. In secret Union of Writer 'courts' Javakhishvili protested that he was a 'sacrificial lamb'; when Paolo Iashvili shot himself in the Union building, the novelist was the sole person present to praise the poet's courage. On 26 July 1937, the presidium of the Union voted: 'Mikheil Javakhishvili, as an enemy of the people, a spy and diversant, is to be expelled from the Union of Writers and physically annihilated.' One brave friend, Geronti Kikodze,[107] walked out of the hall rather than raise his hand in assent. Javakhishvili was arrested on 14 August 1937 and beaten in the presence of Beria until he signed a 'confession': he was shot on 30 September. His property was looted, his archives destroyed, his brother shot, his widow turned into a recluse for the next forty-five years. Twenty years later, rehabilitated and reprinted, Javakhishvili's won an unassailable reputation:[108] his vivid story-telling, straight *in medias res*, his buoyant humour, subtle irony, and moral courage merit comparison with those of Stendhal, Maupassant, and Zola. In modern Georgian prose only Konstantine Gamsakhurdia could aspire to the same international level.

Of all the other contributors to *Aripioni* only Basil Melikishvili (ბახილ მელიქიშვილი, 1904–30), had he lived, could have rivalled Javakhishvili.

Educated in the college for the nobility and then in a seminary, he came to prominence in 1928, the last year of relative literary freedom in the USSR, with a fantastic story, 'The Swallow with the Smoked Chest' (მკერდშებოლილი მერცხალი), followed in 1929 by a reworking of a folk fairy-tale, 'The Amputated Finger' (მოკვეთილი თითი). A handful of other prose pieces attracted attention, another handful remain unpublished. In 1960 Melikishvili's body was reinterred and in 1963 'The Swallow with the Smoked Chest' was disinterred, but his collected work has yet to appear.

The one member of the Aripioni organization to live a full span, Shalva Dadiani (შალვა დადიანი, 1874–1959), spent most of his energy and talent serving either a peripatetic theatre of propaganda or the historical novel in the nationalistic traditions of Barnovi. When that talent was spent, his novels and plays glorified Stalinism. In 1928 he published in *Aripioni* a story as original in structure as it is hackneyed in its message, 'A. T. E.' (ა. თ. ე.), whose letters stand for the forces that have governed the lives of Georgians: Aphrodite, Themistes, Elo — that is to say, pagan love, a Christian priest whose name means destiny, and Elo, a modern muse. 'A. T. E.' is organized as a game of marbles (*kenchebi)* into five white and two black, to symbolize the victory of optimism: two architects, on their way to restore the church of Jvari as a museum meet a girl, Elo. The transformation of the ancient temple into museum and the new cult of hydroelectric dams, they all understand, make socialism the third stage of human development after Christianity and paganism. Dadiani never let his narrative ingenuity endanger his future by unorthodox thoughts.

Javakhishvili's younger rivals also failed to sustain their originality: Demna Shengelaia (დემნა შენგელაია, 1896–1980) in his novel of 1926 *Sanavardo* (the word means 'the pleasure gardens' and is also a toponym, a foul marsh in Imeretia) matched Javakhishvili's *Kvachi Kvachantiradze* as a portrait of Gothic degeneracy and degradation among the aristocracy. Its ominous epigraph is taken from *The Passion of Saint Shushanik*:

> The people who live in this region are full of disease, suffering from gout and jaundice, pockmarked, emaciated, and mangy; they have erysipelas, swollen faces, and short lives, so there are no old people in those lands.

Shengelaia shows the same verve and sardonic satire as Javakhishvili. He has a far blacker fantasy, but he fails to move his anti-heroes far from

their home ground, or to vary the disgraceful tableaux in which they figure. His style has the same cinematic, anecdotal brevity, but the novel runs out of breath before it reaches a third of *Kvachi Kvachantiradze*'s length. The influence of Andrei Bely's or Boris Pilniak's Expressionist manner is overwhelming. The characters of *Sanavardo,* like frogs in their marsh, end in blindness, deafness, and panic, as menacing demons of the future arrive. For all its lack of steam, it is the only other Georgian novel of 'vile bodies' inventive enough to stand comparison with Evelyn Waugh. In the 1930s Shengelaia, alas, abandoned grotesquerie for prosperity as a manufacturer of Socialist Realist propaganda fiction, historical and topical. In old age he became less original. His story 'The Treasure' (განძი, 1958) echoes John Steinbeck's 'The Pearl': Shengelaia's hero surrenders the gold he has found to the authorities, but too late to save his wife.

26: *Dreaming Poets: Grishashvili, Robakidze and the Blue Horns*

IOSEB GRISHASHVILI, born Mamulaishvili, (იოსებ გრიშაშვილი-მამულაიშვილი, 1889–1965) was by international standards more a part of popular, than of literary culture, and was therefore, even under totalitarianism, the most indestructible of twentieth-century Georgian poets. A mason's son, his roots were among the shopkeepers and tradesmen of old Tbilisi: he worked first as a theatre prompter, then as a compositor. While he translated from Armenian and Azeri Turkish (and even learnt French), he boasted that he knew no Russian. He was thus a purely 'native' *ashugh*, in contrast to the eighteenth-century polyglot Armenian Sayat-Nova, whose biography he wrote and emulated. Grishashvili's lyrics intentionally followed the tradition of the folk *qarachoghlebi* (ყარაჩოღლები, 'black-tunics', Tbilisi's young burghers renowned for their cavalier hedonism) and *kinto*, (კინტო, the roguish street pedlars and market traders).

This genre had fallen from the literary prestige that Sayat-Nova, for instance, had enjoyed in the eighteenth century to the level of illiterate urban folklore. But since poets' names are still preserved (often in the last verse of each song), *ashugh* love-poetry can be considered at least an ancillary to literature. Many Tbilisi *ashugh* works were recorded and attributed by Ioseb Grishashvili,[109] always generous in acknowledging his mentors. They form an unbroken chain that links Sayat-Nova to Grishashvili. Most of their verse is valueless without the music designed to accompany it or, one suspects, sung by anyone except the composer-performer, although some of the verse of Ietim Gurji (იეთიმ გურჯი 1875–1940), an oil-worker in Baku, celebrating inspiration, drink, pennies from heaven, as well as Tbilisi's *belles dames sans merci*, has a vitality comparable with that of Sayat-Nova and Grishashvili.

Between 1906 and 1910 in a series of popular collections — *The Bunch of Roses* (ვარდის კონა, 1906), *Zurna* ('Chalumeau', 1908), *Don't Get Cold, Dear Barashka* (არ შეცივდეს, ბარაშკაჯან, 1909) — Ioseb Grishashvili canonized the genre of his predecessors' love-songs. But, unlike earlier *ashughs*, Grishashvili was not only a highly original inventor of new similes, but a literary poet: he associated with Ilia Chavcha-

vadze and Akaki Tsereteli in intellectual radicalism and scholarship. His poetry was published under more than 100 pseudonyms, the best-known being *khvliki*, (ხვლიკი, 'lizard'). His mild eroticism, 'The Kissing of the Dream' (ოცნების კოცნა, 1911), shocked prudish critics for decades to come:

> Kissing breaks the coffin open — inside the Muses' groans are buried,
> Even Satan seeks kisses, kisses seek life.
> Kissing destroys my air, dries the heavenly dew in the heart of the flowers,
> Burns the ice on the mountain's cheeks and spreads its wing for spring.
> The sun has dried my tears, has wrung them out, it kisses, it kisses…
> And the cloud that weeps today is the accursed bard's tears.
> The breath of kissing brought me up, kissing gave me everything,
> Kissing gave birth to me, kissing will kill me, kissing gave me my fate.[110]

The journal *Unity* (ერთობა, 1918) was appalled: 'This is excess baggage for the worker, he has no time to dream of kisses, to kiss the traces of a beautiful foot, when he groans and moans in the clutches of capitalism.' Grishashvili gave as good as he got: he also loved to quarrel in verse, a tendency which led to an exchange of hostile poems with Robakidze. But in 1916 his love of shocking the bourgeois led him to associate briefly with the Kutaisi Blue Horns (ცისფერყანწელები, *tsisperqantselebi*) poets Robakidze and Titsian Tabidze: the result was his editing a magazine of Symbolist literature, *Leila*, in 1917. Grishashvili soon lost interest in their cosmopolitan aestheticism and experimental imagery.

In 1918, when Tbilisi University began to function, Grishashvili followed courses in history and literature: he proved himself as erudite as overtly literary poets. Despite earlier radical fervour he was shocked into silence by the Soviet invasion of 1921. He published only a handful of poems until 1939 (although archives now reveal that he risked his life writing satirical, anti-Soviet verse — for instance, 'When I mentioned Lenin and Makharadze, | Even the dogs began to howl.' 1937).

For a while Grishashvili belonged to the Akademia group of prose-writers who refused to dismiss past literary standards; he relied for protection on his enormous popularity (comparable only to Galaktion Tabidze's) and turned to memoirs, translation, bibliography, and monographs. His slim but fascinating *Literary Bohemia of Old Tbilisi* (ძველი თბილისის ლიტერატურული ბოჰემა, 1927) is for the USSR an amazing exercise in literary nostalgia: it is a covert farewell tribute to a remarkable

and lamentably short-lived city culture that Soviet rule eradicated. The book had to wait sixty years for republication. It was also a confession: Grishashvili had taken the *ashugh* tradition so far that it could develop no further: the culture in which it had germinated died in 1921. The nostalgic, even apocalyptic, side of Grishashvili underlay even his early verse, such as 'In the Ruins of the Motherland' (სამშობლოს ნანგრევებში, 1912). It is hard to say if Grishashvili was then looking at the future or the past:

> I had a dream — Georgia was bathed in a sea of blood
> And a banner fluttered on the wings of the exhausted wind.
> And I seemed to be watching from a cloud the shores
> Where were buried the remains of heroes
> Who had battled until their chests were cloven.[111]

In his fallow years Grishashvili amassed the best private library in Georgia: the many volumes of his catalogue are an important Georgian bibliography. The bibliography is a critical one: Grishashvili annotated his books with laconic, often vitriolic, comments. In 1939 he capitulated to the *Zeitgeist* and wrote the required Stalin panegyrics. His essential heritage, however, is the catchy (and untranslatable) inventiveness of about 200 love-lyrics (to women and to Georgia) written between 1907 and 1920: 'I cannot give you real poems. | And if I were to, know that then, my beloved, you would die, I swear it.'

Grishashvili adapted 'minstrelsy' to a new urban world, but modern poetry, in a western European sense — poetry devoted to no aims but itself and 'giving a purer sense to the tribal words' — did not penetrate Georgia until Europe itself was in the throes of self-destruction. Imitators of Russian Symbolists, Acmeists, and Futurists at first had little success in Tbilisi (the Acmeists were a Post-Symbolist school of hard-headed eclectics). The one exception was Daria Akhvlediani (დარია ახვლედიანი, 1873–after 1912), a woman poet who briefly won herself the soubriquet of 'the Georgian Akhmatova' with a slim volume called *Tunes of Sadness* (ხვედის ჰანგები, 1912): the Tbilisi public, however, was still immune to the theatrical epidemic of lyrical self-celebration that swept Moscow and Petersburg, and Akhvlediani has been wholly forgotten. In any case, she was a recluse; removed from school on the pretext of illness, married against her will at the age of 16, she imbued her lyrics with a deep private

depression, relieved only by the political uplift considered obligatory in the 1900s. Her imagery and rhythms are mostly in the tradition of Georgian Romanticism and she could be dismissed as an anomaly, a female poet in a predominantly male culture, were it not for two poems which have something of Anna Akhmatova's bitter, sharply focused irony. One is called 'I'm Sorry for You' (ვებრალები):

> I'm sorry for you, that you love me so strongly,
> That you expect affection from me…
> O, poor man, how mistaken you are in me,
> My hand will not be caresssing you…
> O, my man, if you'd met me earlier,
> Perhaps love would have set me on fire,
> But today I'm as cold as earth, as rock,
> O, I'm sorry for you, sorry for you.

Her best poem, a stark lyric dedicated to an unknown *V.*, has no irony. Printed as an afterword to *Tunes of Sadness*, it ends:

> Just once look down on these eyes,
> Once I shall relieve my wounded soul,
> Let me die in your love —
> Just shed a tear for me in my agony.

Quite unpredictably, the convulsion that shook Georgian poetry into true modernity came from the provinces. The sleepy boulevards and cafés of Kutaisi were transformed in 1916 by a group of former local schoolboys who had returned from university in Saint Petersburg and casual study in France or Germany. They were determined not only to avoid conscription, but to foist a cult of Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine, and Russian Symbolism on the local intelligentsia. Rimbaud was perhaps the ultimate role-model for the Georgian adolescent poet. Perhaps more important still, the young innovators of Kutaisi, the future Blue Horns, were not content to accept traditional metres. They stopped mechanically counting syllables and understood that Georgian has a subtle, if still poorly understood, tonic accentuation: their venture into new metres, into syllabo-tonic verse, gave Georgian the chance to try out the percussive and flexible rhythms characteristic of English and Russian poetry.[112]

This take-over would probably not have succeeded, were it not for a natural leader, ten years older than the others, Grigol Robakidze (გრიგოლ რობაქიძე, 1880–1962). Robakidze was already a mature figure, a natural dandy and traveller. He modelled his image in the mould of the Russian poet and maestro Nikolai Gumiliov (who, like Robakidze, had spent his early childhood in Tbilisi). The two had met and exchanged letters. Robakidze, the most flamboyant manifesto-writer, poet, novelist, and dramatist Georgia was ever to know, was literally and figuratively entranced at the age of 7 by Goethe's *Erlkönig*. He studied in Germany and returned to Georgia in 1908. In April 1911 he stunned the grand old man of letters, Akaki Tsereteli, with a lecture on Nietzsche. Akaki wrote:

> Recently G. Robakidze gave a public lecture on Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, and I was present and my desires were fulfilled. I saw with my own eyes what I have longed for all my life: a Georgian intellectual, who thinks for himself and is not somebody else's gramophone!! You could clearly see that his every word was his own, feeling and ideas smelted in Georgian. The lecturer showed himself to my eyes as the first swallow, the herald of spring. Now I see that the Georgian intelligentsia too is, after a prolonged winter, on the verge of spring, and I, flown up to the seventh heaven, tell you with joy: blessed be the future.[113]

Robakidze's poise and seniority made him, in 1915, the effective founder and leader of the Symbolist Blue Horns group. At first the group consisted of just eight members. Five rose to prominence over the next two decades: Robakidze himself; Paolo Iashvili, the second most effective poseur and impresario; Titsian Tabidze, the greatest lyric talent; Kolau Nadiradze; and Sergo Kldiashvili. The Marxist Pilipe Makharadze deplored (and publicized) the appearance of a decadent journal, also entitled *Blue Horns*, in his article, 'Pitiful Wretches' (საბრალონი) in *Contemporary Ideas* (თანამედროვე აზრი, 10 March 1916). Kutaisi reeled under the blasphemies of the first issues of *Blue Horns*:

> After Georgia the holiest land is Paris. Magnify, O people, this dread city, where our drunken brothers, Verlaine and Baudelaire, Mallarmé, the guardian of the secrets of the word, and Arthur Rimbaud, the accursed youth, drunk with pride, display their crazy acrobatics.

Titsian Tabidze explained the meaning of 'Blue Horns' in the second

issue of 1916: 'blue' stood for the azure sky, independent Romantic dreaming, the establishment of a powerful kingdom; 'horns' stood for the traditional vessel for wine and drunkenness, to stimulate fantasy and intuition and penetrate the mysteries of the universe. *Blue Horns* thus had, as well as a poetic ideal, a traditional tie with folklore and the lost Georgian kingdom — it combined an aesthete's society with ethnic ideals.

The journal was followed by *Meotsnebe niamorebi* (მეოცნებე ნიამორები, 'Dreaming Gazelles', Kutaisi-Tbilisi, 1919–24), then a monthly journal, *The Archer* (მეისრისახი, 1920), and even a weekly magazine, *Barricade* (ბარიკადა 1920, 1922, 1924). 'Dreaming Gazelles', as Lado Gudiashvili's paintings suggest, symbolized the thirst to roam wild woods and inaccessible crags, while 'The Archer' was both aggressor, firing arrows at the past, and victim, or, as Titsian Tabidze put it in 1920, 'The archer's arrows are not directed just at literary opponents. Today poetry, like Saint Sebastian, should be riddled with arrows.' The group expanded with its journals until by 1919 it was virtually the same monopolistic union of lyrical poets that Russian Symbolism had been between 1904 and 1909; from 1919 its centre shifted to Tbilisi, where the Blue Horns enjoyed patronage from the radically, even anarchically, minded ministers of the Georgian government and co-operated with ever-wilder poetic happenings organized or provoked by homeless Russian Futurists. Much of the Blue Horns' poetry was mutual portraiture, tributes to each other, even to themselves, on the lines of Mallarmé's tributes to the dead, the tombeaux to Verlaine and Baudelaire. Robakidze's own unpunctuated poem, 'My Own Toast' (საკუთარი ტოსტი, 1920) is typical of the Blue Horns' surreal self-absorption at this time. Robakidze uses Heine's *Märchen* mood as a starting-point for a venture into Dadaism:

> I don't know why my thought has crumbled
> Or why sour spleen has affected me.
> It tells me a story, I suppose to entertain me,
> Like a pilgrim from distant Mecca,
> At times tired as a parrot.
> Borderline vision has taken it from me.
> If I haven't gone to the cellar at night
> Niko Pirosmani will threaten me.
> I love the Maenad's crazed breasts
> And Moira for this has become my enemy.[114]

Apart from Titsian Tabidze, none of the Blue Horns was allowed by the new Soviet authorities to be appointed to the council (სბჭო) of the first Georgian Union of Writers:[115] but they maintained their corporate identity for a while. In 1924, however, Stalin and Orjonikidze murdered the first, over-indulgent Georgian Communist government that they had installed, and terrorized the intellectuals these 'soft' Communists had indulged: Robakidze's overt Art for Art's Sake was effaced from the Georgian scene. By 1926, however, he was a deputy president of a reformed Union of Writers, whose presidium included Paolo Iashvili. The Blue Horns held on to power until the 1930s. In 1930 a new federation dominated by younger writers with proletarian credentials undermined the Blue Horns' sway. For a brief period in May 1931, Titsian Tabidze was one of five officials who expelled such prominent names as Konstantine Gamsakhurdia and Pavle Ingoroqva from the federation. The advent of Beria in 1931 doomed the Blue Horns, driving some to recant and most to their death. The history of Blue Horns, even after the rehabilitation of most of its members, has been distorted by the erasure from Soviet publications until 1989 of the very name of Robakidze.[116] His was in fact the loudest, best-educated, and most articulate voice, and to the boulevard public, his face, set off by his elegant clothes, miraculous wig, and gun-dog poise, was then the most familiar spectacle in Kutaisi or Tbilisi.

Robakidze's heroic stance was also modelled on Russian poets like the Symbolist maestro Valeri Briusov and the Acmeist Gumiliov. Robakidze drew on Wagnerian myth, while Georgian folklore intrigued him, especially such notorious and Wagnerian rites as the Khevsur *stsorproba* (სწორფრობა, 'test of equals'), where (in Robakidze's version!) a guest is honoured by being bedded down with his host's daughter and infringes her chastity on pain of death. Robakidze ascribed to the highlanders, like the Khevsurs, and to their legendary ancestors, like Mindia, a primaeval tragic heroism. But his verse developed along lines of European clarity.

Robakidze's personality allowed him to dominate post-revolutionary literary politics; he interpreted Lenin and Trotsky as elemental forces beyond morality or negation. His first extensive prose, the novel *The Snake-Skin* (გველის პერანგი, literally 'the sloughed snake-skin', but usually known as *The Snake-Skin Shirt*, 1926), portrays a British hero (Archibald MacAsh) discovering in a journey across ancient Persian sites his true

Georgian self: he is in fact a Maqashvili. The hero has to accept a primitive destiny. Robakidze put much of himself, a Georgian and European chimaera, into the work, which is full of idealized macho Georgians, not least a certain ghost of the author, Irubakidze. The absurdity of plot and characterization is mitigated by the intensity of Robakidze's aspirations. His abrupt, apostrophic style is modelled on cinematic script-writing. Unfortunately, the traveller's pursuit of his true self and the concern with breeding a superior race not only reflects Robakidze's obsessive love of Nietzsche and debt to André Gide, but also anticipates his own Fascism. Gumiliov's heroic Symbolism is also a key to Robakidze's *Snake-Skin*. One of Gumiliov's last poems begins, 'Only snakes change their skins, | We change souls, not bodies.' (Только змеи сбрасывают кожу, | Мы меняем души, не тела), while Gumiliov's verse play (unpublished until the 1950s, but probably known to Robakidze) *The Poisoned Tunic* (*Отравленная туника*) has a hero who dons a fatal shirt. Both the poem and the play have the status of unwritten epigraphs to Robakidze's novel, as its climax, 'The Snake Sloughs its Skin' (გველი პერანგს იხდის) shows. Here is the best and worst of Robakidze's Symbolism and style:

> Taba is silent. His eyes do not blink. His terrible gaze is fixed just on the reptile. The snake stretches out its head again. Then it throws its body up high. It stretches in one direction then another. Taba's eyes bore into the snake. Finally, he swoops and grabs the snake's pure body and is left with the sloughed skin. Taba holds the skin. He inspects it. 'There's nothing more magical on earth,' he says to himself. His hand plays with the thousand-eyed skin: it could be Astarte's finest neck-scarf. 'That skin is magical?!' asks Archibald, amazed. Joy makes Taba Tabai's eyes lose their sulphur colour. 'You see? The snake has left itself: it has broken free and thrown it off. That is wisdom.' Archibald's amazement is boundless. 'How do you mean?'. 'You should regard your past as the snake does its sloughed skin: done with and rejected, as they said in ancient times.' Archibald waits for more words. Taba Tabai does not go on. 'If life can be borne that way.' Archibald bends, as if he can see the weight.
>
> The Persian or Hindu or Egyptian suddenly begins firing strange words: was this an invocation? He does not take his eyes off the snake-skin. He likes the soft skin's sturgeon-like dimples (and his eyes reflect the glimmer of these dimples). Finally he stops. He looks up at Archibald. The latter's head droops. And unexpectedly he wraps the snake-skin round his neck.

> Archibald is afraid of snakes. He loathes snakes. But now he feels neither fear nor loathing. He stands mindless and, crazed, looks at his friend. Dreamers often can't feel their bodies, as if the body were someone else's. Archibald is like such a dreamer. Taba Tabai opens up the snake-skin. He mumbles to himself, 'If life can be borne this way.' Archibald says nothing. He seems to be in silent agreement. Taba Tabai smiles. There is an equivocation in the smile. Archibald puts on the snake-skin.

Before turning away from hostile critics to the bolder theatre and its more open-minded audiences, Robakidze published in 1928 a novel which had aroused only hostility — *Palaestra* (პალესტრა), a view of 'Europe through an alien eye' (or, as the rabid ultra-left critic Benito Buachidze put it, 'a Europe embellished by exotica, of cafés and their clients'). It is a farewell to independent Georgia and to the intoxication of freedom, a farewell to Georgia and its 'Fantastic Little Inn' (Фантастический кабачок) as a part of this Europe of *cafés-chantants*:

> Tbilisi had become a city of poets. In the 'Internationale' once more it was declared a city of poets: they would call out 'Poetry is only to be found in Tbilisi.' It was then that Paolo Iashvili attacked Tbilisi as Arthur Rimbaud had attacked Paris. At that time they still did not know that Tbilisi was harder than Paris to take by Bohemianism and poetry. Titsian Tabidze saw Laforgue's yellowness in the marshes and malaria of Orpiri and, like him, barked in verse at the infamous moon. He, too, thought that the ram's horn of Orpiri would begin a dithyrambic monologue like Lautréamont's Maldoror. Grigol Robakidze was then tormented by only two things: the apocalypse and Dionysus. At that time he was preparing 'The Gallows in the Lane' and 'Rhymes from Patmos'. The country really was changing and really Tbilisi was the only city which greeted this change with poetic song.[117]

Robakidze's dramatic work, such as his third play *Lamara* (ლამარა, 1925–30) — after the unsuccessful *Londa* (ლონდა) and *Maelstrom* (მალშტრემი, 1923) — also owes much to Gumiliov's post-Symbolist drama, in which legendary heroes meet their death from bearers of an inferior civilization. *Lamara*, however, in the extraordinary production by the autocratic director of the Rustaveli Theatre, Sandro Akhmeteli, was triumphant at the 1930 Moscow Drama Olympiad. Two Khevsur twins, the poet-seer Mindia and the warrior Torghva, fall in love with an enemy

girl, Lamara. Lamara cannot tell them apart and marries the warrior by mistake. She dies and Mindia is inconsolable. Following up Vazha Pshavela's *Snake-Eater*, Robakidze created a paean of praise for the nature-worshipping world of his primitive tribesmen: the play triumphed because of, or despite, its total indifference to Soviet values. Its success was the first general acknowledgment by Russians of Georgian literature's vitality. Robakidze, his wife, and their adopted daughter were allowed by Orjonikidze, Stalin's most trusted henchman at the time, to travel abroad (although Beria's GPU managed to prevent Akhmeteli's Theatre from following the dramatist, and marked both Robakidze and Akhmeteli down for death). Robakidze's *Snake-Skin Shirt* had been published in Germany (*Das Schlangenhemd*, 1928) with an introduction by Stefan Zweig; warned of his fate at the hands of Beria, Robakidze defected to Germany, where he wrote in German several novels set in Georgia. Of particular interest is *Die gemordete Seele* ('The Murdered Soul', 1933) for its 'horoscope' of Stalin, a devastating, not entirely second-hand, psychopathological study:

> Consumed with activity, Stalin sat in the Kremlin, a powerholder, not a ruler: the powerline of revolutionary forces, a being, not a human being. A power cable with the warning 'Danger of Death'... He towered, full of cruel current, undefeatable, the cold, blind fate of the Soviet land and perhaps of the whole world. When he, unflinching, occasionally crawled away from these currents, when the secret switch was off — beside himself, alien to himself, he worried as he felt all power ebbing from him — then Stalin was just Soso Jughashvili, a simple Georgian. Then he recalled far-away Georgia, of which he retained just the taste of turkey in walnuts and of Kakhetian wine, the song 'Live ten thousand years' and the Georgian curse: *magati deda ki vatire*, 'I'll make their mothers weep'.

This sketch, which emphasizes how un-Georgian Stalin's nature was, is encapsulated in a heroic self-portrait of the author as an anti-Bolshevik Svan (the Svans highlanders form the most archaic branch of the Kartvelian ethnos) with a belief in blood and sperm. *Die Hüter des Graals* ('The Guardians of the Grail', 1937) deals with Georgian resistance to the GPU. Robakidze won notoriety with an essay 'Adolf Hitler von einem fremden Dichter gesehen', which he followed up with 'Mussolini: Visionen auf Kapri'.[118] In 1945 he fled to Geneva, where he reverted to

writing philosophical essays in Georgian. With a dedication to his greatest admirer, Stefan Zweig, he published the original version of a fragment of *Palaestra*. Robakidze's defection was Beria's pretext for killing his friends: Akhmeteli, Javakhishvili, Titsian Tabidze. His departure, as much as Mayakovsky's suicide, punctured the lyrical lungs of the Blue Horns. The triumphant play *Lamara* was, however, still performed even in 1937, though with no mention of its author or first director. Robakidze died in Geneva, his name unspeakable in Georgia until 1987. Demonic, pretentious, but often inspired and convincing, his poetic prose and drama has, however, proved its worth after fifty years' ostracism.

The most individualistic of the founder-members in 1915–16 of the Blue Horns group of poets in Kutaisi was its most orthodox Symbolist, Valerian Gaprindashvili, who was born in 1890. He studied in Moscow, where he created his own suicidal Mallarméan world of mirages, doubles, mirrors, and haunted heroines. His poetics, which he called 'neck-wrapping' (ყელსახვევი), stem from contemplating his mirror image as he dresses and sensing a command to strangle himself in his cravat. His first and best book, *Daisebi* ('Sundowns', 1919), at a time he called 'the Dionysian night' of Georgia, enthusiastically introduced into Georgian the aesthetics of Baudelaire and the clarity of Paul Valéry, as well as the mannerisms of the Russian Symbolists (Briusov, Balmont). (Gaprindashvili also wrote Russian verse and translated Nikoloz Baratashvili into Russian.) Until 1923 he edited the Blue Horns' journal *Meotsnebe niamorebi* and was their most articulate manifesto-writer: his articles, such as 'The Elysium of the Lyric' (*Meotsnebe niamorebi*, Sept. 1923) asserted the solitude of the poet in a twilight, hallucinatory world, which became the theme of his hauntingly absurd poems — for example, 'The Queen of Mothballs' (ნაფტალინის დედოფალი, 1923):

> She loves my chest of drawers and searches in them for winter's sweets.
> She has convinced me that she exists,
> But manages to hide again
> When I decide to capture her.

In 1922 his cult of Ophelia as the wronged muse — 'My dream is to be Ophelia's cavalry' — followed closely on what might be called Russian poets' 'Opheliaphilia' — Pasternak's 'English Lessons' (Уроки

английского) and Tsvetaeva's 'Ophelia to Hamlet' (Офелия — Гамлету):

> I want to celebrate just one day in the year,
> Ophelia's day — as a mirage to dream on.
> The pure air goes mistletoe white in autumn.
> The beautiful woman appears in the heaven's drumming,
> The daughter of rain — sad and harmless —
> Pays tribute to the prince's crazed bride,
> The mob rushes to the renewed Jordan,
> Perhaps the woman will lead them across the waves.[119]

By 1925 Soviet literary policies forced Gaprindashvili to follow the other Blue Horns and recant his cult of the irreal and mystical: he announced, in an article 'Return to the Earth' (დაბრუნება მიწასთან), the interment of his individuality. He died in 1941.

Once Grigol Robakidze's name became unmentionable in the USSR, the man held responsible for the Blue Horns was his second-in-command, Paolo (Pavle) Iashvili (პაოლო იაშვილი, 1895–1937). Like many Georgian Symbolists, Iashvili was born in Kutaisi. His poetry first fell under the spell of French Symbolism (Mallarmé and Verlaine). Later, when he studied in Russia, he was captivated by Russian modernists, such as Andrei Bely, with whom he maintained lifelong ties of friendship. Before he was 20 he was an accomplished *pasticheur* and improviser, with a gift for producing elegant, musical verse, sonnets especially, on the spot, in both Russian and Georgian. In 1915, imitating Max Voloshin and his scandalously invented Cherubina de Gabriac, Iashvili used a woman's pseudonym, Elene Dariani (perhaps parodying the real Daria Akhvlediani), for accomplished intimate missives to Anna Akhmatova lamenting the life of a betrayed wife: parody of Akhmatova's facile formulas, Iashvili's own mischievous delinquency, and a genuine feminine side of his character make these pastiches unexpectedly interesting. Iashvili persisted with them until 1924. The formation of the Blue Horns movement in 1915–16 under Robakidze turned him, with Titsian Tabidze, into a leader of this part-Futurist, part-Symbolist, part-Dadaist group, based on the magazine *Dreaming Gazelles*. In homage to Italian Futurists, Iashvili, like other Blue Horns, italianized his Christian name to 'Paolo'. Iashvili sensed that the First World War and revolution

were cutting his links with western Europe and Symbolism. His 'Red Bull' (წითელი ხარი, 1917) shows political acumen he later lost. It is remarkable for combining the symbol of a mythological beast with the idea of numinous inspirational force, and for merging traditional Georgian folk symbolism with the apocalyptic mood of the Belgian Symbolists from whom he had learnt so much. In the extraordinary fusion, the still acceptance of a violent animal invasion, there is a glimpse of Rilke — an explanation of why Iashvili appealed so strongly to Pasternak:

> The land is crazed with fire. The bull sends its moans to the sky,
> The earth dug up with horns falls as embers into the air.
> The bull's spectre appeared in the thicket.
> The sea is hidden in gold dust…
> And we shall magnify with pure praise
> The animal of the sun with yellow horns
> Which walks the earth with fiery wings
> And we shall hasten to the banquet of flames.

When in 1918 Russian poets, such as Terentiev and Kruchionykh, fled to Tbilisi, the Blue Horns too moved to the newly independent capital, and Iashvili's poetry shifted to experimental, Surrealist modes propagated in the Russian 41° Club.[120] Although the periodical *Dreaming Gazelles* was allowed to continue publication until 1924, the entry of the Red Army in 1921 had altered Iashvili's stance. Seated on a white horse, he greeted the invaders at the city boundaries: Bolsheviks such as Lominadze were old school-friends. In any case, he saw this apostasy as consistent with his iconoclasm. He proclaimed 'Comrades, don't hesitate to get rid of old roots, it is time to turn tearful poems into golden bells.'[121] His poetry abandoned Symbolism; old ties of friendship to the new regime survived the overthrow of one set of Communists by another and kept Iashvili influential, right until the coming of Lavrenti Beria. Iashvili needed to be loved: his downfall was precipitated by insistent intimacy with powerful but ephemeral figures, whether red literati from Moscow and Paris, or leading scientists, such as the bacteriologist Gogi Eliava and the hydraulic engineer Volodia Jikia, or the discredited party leaders Aghniashvili and Lominadze. At first, in 1931, Beria protected Iashvili from the now suppressed 'Trotskyist' Left. The vicious left critic Benito Buachidze, trying to live down the unfortunate connotations of the name he had

chosen when Mussolini was admired by Futurists, attacked almost every non-proletarian writer. In his collected essays *The Paths of Contemporary Georgian Literature* (თანამედროვე ქართული მწერლობის გზები, 1934) Buachidze singled out Iashvili: 'Our modern socialist reality has not been able to enrich Paolo Iashvili's work. The fault is not modern times, but the poverty of Paolo Iashvili's poetic nature, his ideological vacuum.'

Beria had Buachidze, like all his over-eager dogs, shot: Iashvili was appointed to the party's central committee. In return, Iashvili sacrificed his lyricism and became a propagandist. But Iashvili had already provided ammunition for his own executioner. Like nearly all Blue Horns, he was marked by Beria in a speech of May 1937 for destruction. Kangaroo courts in the Union of Writers accused Iashvili of links with spies. Iashvili had been brutally hoisted with his own petard: he had little of his own to say and was fatally vulnerable to cults of the day. He himself sensed it, asking under interrogation by his fellow writers:

> What is a Soviet writer supposed to do when he is drinking wine in some dubious cellar and some drunk, a stranger, stands up and makes an insincere speech to you, praising your literary achievements to the sky and you are forced to stand up and publicly respond with a speech of thanks to a man who is very often extremely suspect?

Iashvili's poses captivated Pasternak, who made him famous in Russia. (Only in 1936–7 did Iashvili's hysterical support for the show trials and enthusiasm for the death penalty repel Pasternak.) On 22 July 1937 Paolo Iashvili shot himself with his hunting-gun in the Union building during a presidium session. The Union's plenum then passed the most extraordinary resolution:

> Iashvili was masked as a Soviet writer to divert attention from his treasonable spying activity. Against Georgian workers he was linked with the Trotsky-Bukharin bandits in sabotage to benefit the bloodthirsty Fascists. He tried to escape the Soviet people's wrath and proletarian justice. His suicide in the writers' house in the course of a session of the presidium of the Union of Writers was a provocative act arousing loathing and indignation in every decent gathering of Soviet writers.
>
> Georgian Soviet writers with all severity condemn and reject Pavle Iashvili's treacherous work and will remember his name with unbounded loathing, together with the names of every pariah, traitor, and mercenary.

The poet was rehabilitated in 1955. Iashvili's famous charm is now most evident in his early Mallarméan poses. His later poetry is impressive only when he translates: the Pushkin elegies he translated for the 1937 centenary are so moving that they express intimations of his own mortality.

The most popular of Blue Horns poets among the Georgian public and visiting Russian poets was Titsian Tabidze (ტიციან ტაბიძე, 1895–1937/8): he was born to a priest's family in Shuamta on the River Rioni; like other Blue Horns poets and Mayakovsky, he was educated in Kutaisi. He was an intimate of Iashvili and together they came under the spell of European decadence, typified for them by Oscar Wilde. Titsian studied at Moscow from 1913 to 1917, and was heavily influenced by Blok's poetry and the Belgians Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, then so popular in Moscow. Like Iashvili, Titsian Tabidze energetically promoted his own poetry, poses, and magazines, and was prominent, with Robakidze, in setting up *Dreaming Gazelles*. Later, after moving to Tbilisi to join exiled Russian Futurists like Kruchionykh and Terentiev, he staged more or less outrageous Futuristic events, largely at the notorious 'Fantastic Little Inn'. Once Wilde and the Belgian Symbolists had merged with his evocations of the malarial marshes of the River Rioni and memories of his family's ecclesiastical forebears, an unlikely synthesis made Titsian Tabidze's first lyrics truly original, even moving. His early Blue Horns poetry of 1915/16 is obsessed with ominous Chaldean sorcery. Like Georgian poets before him, he aimed to fuse east and west: 'I put Hafiz's roses in Prudhomme's vase, Baudelaire's poisonous flowers in Besiki's garden.' His 'Self-Portrait' (ავტოპორტრეტი, 1916) is an unintentionally damning sonnet:

> Wilde's profile… Light blue eyes,
> A fair-haired Infanta hides in the mirror,
> I shall soon tire of kissing an armpit,
> The waves that have dishevelled my hair are burning me.
> The whittled fingers were waiting for Massenet,
> Like fleet-footed horses wait for the race,
> Billows of different music wash over me today,
> I am inflamed by costly memories of verses.
> In an Asiatic gown, like a Pasha Effendi,
> I dream, a langorous dandy, of Baghdad,
> I leaf through Mallarmé's Divagations,
> Be as black and wretched as you like,

> Life! I hold your reins in my hands,
> To make this hell a paradise.

In the independence period (1918–21) poems like 'Birnam Wood' (ბირნამის ტყე, 1919) and 'Priest and Malaria in Coffin' (მღვდელი და მალარია კუბოში, November 1920) equal Picasso paintings: the latter poem infuses family pathos with surreal hallucination and thus shifts Tabidze's lyrics to a new, popular elegiac mode:

> The anniversary will pass…
> October, with dark stoles,
> Weeps in me my father's
> Black anaphora.
> I have laid down the last poem
> With regret,
> When alien priests on my heart
> Place a hill.
> And on his grave will weep
> An old aria,
> Dear father, a mad priest
> And malaria.
> The anniversary will pass… I don't know
> Another poem,
> Without poems I lament the memory
> Every night.
> My heart is cold, so cold,
> Like a grindstone,
> You have left me one witness
> Of your torment.
> To magnify you I have made an old aria weep,
> Dear father, a mad priest
> And malaria.
> The Chaldean is burning… He is hidden from us
> As a hot anaphora,
> A storm of all fires
> Has swirled in me.

Under Soviet rule Titsian adapted to more conventional modes: he adopted Sergei Esenin's Russian cult of the doomed country lad and mourned his future self. 'Robbers Have Killed Me on the Aragvi' (მე

ყაჩაღებმა მომკლეს არაგვზე, 1926) brings in elements of Georgian folklore, of Lermontov's 'novice monk' (Мцыри), and demon, particularly as visualized in Vrubel's paintings and in Pasternak's poem 'To the Memory of the Demon' (Памяти демона, 1917), with his whip-like muscles. Like most of Titsian's poems of the 1920s, it is built on a formula devised by Apollinaire and Mayakovsky: the conceit that unrequited love for the poem's female addressee leaves death as the only option. But the very masculine influence of Vazha Pshavela (the one Georgian poet whom the Blue Horns Symbolists always revered) also emerges in the cult of the doomed hero. It is rare for such eclecticism to make a fine poem:

I want to be the brave-hearted novice monk
Whom a panther ripped on a terrible night,
I am filled with you to the heart
And I am a flood of fallen tears.
I want to be struck down on this highway,
I want to open up this innocent heart.
Robbers killed me on the Aragvi,
No blame for my death attaches to you.

When Titsian was able to shake off premonitions of his end, he took up Pasternak's celebration of nature as an analogue of poetic creation — 'Poem-Avalanche' (ლექსი მეწყერია, 1927):

I don't write poems… it's me they write,
My life and the poem's unfold alike.
I call a poem a torrent, a landslide
That sweeps you off and buries you alive.

No wonder Pasternak treated him too as a second Rilke. The self-pity and self-destructiveness transformed by inventive musicality anticipates Dylan Thomas, whom Titsian increasingly resembled. Inspiration falters after 1926 and dies with Mayakovsky in 1930. Mayakovsky's suicide silenced Georgian poets, although in Russia it resurrected Pasternak's and Mandelstam's urge to write lyrical poetry. Despite a physical resemblance to Tiberius, Titsian dropped his decadent manner: he became a compliant *apparatchik*, expelling fellow writers from the Union, eagerly celebrating Stalin's industrialization. Like Iashvili, he was promoted then doomed by Beria. Unwilling to 'confess' in 'courts' held by the Georgian Union of

Writers' presidium, he was denounced for decadence and for loyalty to his mentor, the defector Robakidze: he was arrested in October 1937. Unlike Iashvili, he anticipated his fate. After some taunting, an article was commissioned for the journal *Literaturuli Sakartvelo,* ('Literary Georgia'): Titsian Tabidze's work was dismissed as 'political decomposition… an echo of bourgeois who were famous for an hour… German Fascist bandit art… priestly mysticism and cynicism.' Titsian's youthful indiscretions were used to blacken him: 'Through my name I shame the Titian of the Italian renaissance epoch', 'drunkenness is my element'. Once Titsian resigned himself to his fate, his fatalistic, self-centred lyric genius returned: the poems, only recently printed,[122] show a man who has given up the struggle. Take for example 'What do I want here, why have I come?' (რა მინდა აქ, რისთვის მოვედი?, 1937):

What do I want here, why have I come,
Can I say my inner thoughts?
When the swan sings with its neck thrust out,
It strikes directly your ears and temples.
Many more races will pass,
Perhaps the Pontus Euxine may dry up,
All the same the poet's throat, slit from ear to ear,
Will live in the atom of verse.
And just as Ovid used to weep.
And just as Pushkin used to weep,
Whatever the chain they put on his tongue,
Nobody can stop the poet's weeping.
From afar I look at the glacier, at Mount Elbrus,
Those two demons alone know
What fire seethes in the poet's heart
And what makes poor Titsian weep.

Another fragment concludes:

If a poet has no manliness,
If sincerity doesn't make his verse weep
Posterity will lose trace of him
And he will amaze nobody.

Meanwhile, his subordinate, the deputy museum-curator Gulevich,

denounced him for fraud and unfair dismissal; Beria had enough legal framework to have Titsian Tabidze slowly tortured to death. He is said to have stood up to interrogation and to have named only the eighteenth-century poet Besiki as his accomplice. He was one of the first repressed poets to be rehabilitated: in 1954 he was included in an anthology of Soviet poetry, although the editor pretended that he was still alive. Only in 1955 was the year of his death admitted.

Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze were at least quickly, if posthumously, rehabilitated. Far less fortunate in that respect is the poet known as Nikolo Mitsishvili (ნიკოლო მიწიშვილი, 'son of the earth', 1894–1937): only a fraction of his work is available even today. Born Nikoloz Sirbiladze (ნიკოლოზ სირბილაძე), he began as a typical Kutaisi Blue Horn. But, for better and for worse, his remarkable organizational ability marked him out. In 1921 he organized the Blue Horns' publications and publicity: he recruited Osip Mandelstam as a translator and thus brought his own poetry, and that of Titsian Tabidze and Giorgi Leonidze, to the attention of Russian readers. When Mandelstam went to Batumi to return to Russia, Mitsishvili followed, but took instead a boat to Istanbul, from where he began years of peregrination. In France, he was briefly gaoled. He then became a Communist activist, acceptable enough to the Soviet authorities, first to be allowed to publish slim volumes of poetry in both Tbilisi and Paris, and then, in 1925, to return to Georgia, where he was rewarded with editorships of both Russian- and Georgian-language periodicals. His apogee came in 1934: his panegyric was printed on the first page of Beria's anthology of poetry to Stalin and then translated by Pasternak. His nemesis came in 1937, when at a party in his house, in drunken frankness, he gave his real opinion of the Soviet leaders: he was the first Blue Horn to be arrested and shot. His poetry and prose show a surprisingly delicate and unspectacular sensitivity. His best work is his autobiographical *Epopeia* (ეპოპეა, 1928). The finest piece of Georgian documentary prose of the time, it deals with Mitsishvili's wanderings abroad and shows some of Mandelstam's acuteness of observation and original metaphorical writing. Mitsishvili's poetry is characterized by the title of his first collection, *Black Star* (შავი ვარსკვლავი, 1922): it hints that fate could have few surprises in store for him. One of his best poems 'A Farewell' (გამოთხოვება, 1920) was lovingly translated into Russian by Mandelstam,[123]

and arguably generates the motifs of Mandelstam's as yet unwritten poetry of exile in Voronezh. Mitsishvili foresees his death:

I shall go, seen off by such indifference and alien anger
That the alley-dogs will kiss me out of pity.
No lights or procession will light my way,
No virgins will strew the gaping grave with roses,
No horses will draw the coffin as is the custom:
Tired stumbling men will drag me away.
O friends, may my sins be forgiven
By whoever opens heaven's doors to my bruised body,
Limited is the list of the saintly,
And who will commend me to the revered and blessed?
Suddenly every cell of my body has been defeated,
And my blood has been poisoned by decay,
Passionate raging sin has taken away
The generous unquenchable power of ancestral seed

The last surviving member of the Blue Horns was Kolau Nadiradze (კოლაუ ნადირაძე, 1895–1991). His early poetry marked him as the most promising poet of his generation. 'Dreaming of Georgia' (ოცნება საქართველოზე, 1916) is a masterpiece of mood evocation:

Forgotten ancient fords,
Black walls of great fortresses,
Our immemorial grandeur
And the broad shade of forests of lime-trees.
You enter silently. A cool temple…
The colour of our forebears' faces.
And in the fireplace a little ash
And a black icon of the Holy Trinity.
A sign of destiny — horseshoes at the door.
Roofs covered with moss.
And the elongated yes of the Virgin,
Filled with sinless sadness.

In 1916 modernism struck: he was known as 'the troublemaker'. His early Kutaisi poetry (ბალდახინი, 'The Baldaquin', 1920) was indebted to Emile Verhaeren (then well known in the Russian empire) for its horrific city-scapes, despite the discrepancy between London's slums and Kutaisi's

sleepy boulevards. These poems had social as well as aesthetic import. Hopeless horror also imbues Nadiradze's Golgothan visions of Georgia: just before independence he called it 'Idiot homeland, burdened with a thankless task, | Aged, oppressed and tortured.' Despite his roots in the old world, because he had a language that encompassed anything, even political polemic, and because he was could write Verlainean landscape-and-mood poems with no obvious political flaws, he adapted less traumatically than other Blue Horns to Communist demands. In 1936 he subtly dealt with the tragedy now befalling poetry through past events, for example by lamenting the murder of Ilia Chavchavadze in 1907:

> From Tsitsamuri to Saguramo is a thorny little path,
> From Tsitsamuri to Saguramo are big mountains and a bottomless sky.

(Saguramo was Chavchavadze's home, and Tsitsamuri the nearby site of his assassination.) Nevertheless, in the purge of 1937 Nadiradze (and Sergo Kldiashvili) were saved only by chance: their NKVD interrogator was himself arrested and the files mislaid. In post-war years Nadiradze became a silver poet and prose-writer of patriotic contemplation and mood painting. Only in his nineties did he regain the freedom of his twenties and publish what he had suppressed seventy years before, notably a short reaction to the Bolshevik invasion of 1921, which he compared to a calvary and Golgotha set up by a group of Judases.

27: *Mythmakers under Socialism: Shanshiashvili, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia*

AROUND 1910 critics named Sandro Shanshiashvili (სანდრო შანშიაშვილი, 1888–1979) as the most promising and the most Europeanized Georgian poet, even in the hotbed of modernism, the Kutaisi *Realschule*. He had real reading to back his Kutaisi decadent's sophisticated pose, and stood aside from the younger Blue Horns. Shanshiashvili was soon noted for his dramas in verse and prose. In 1908 revolutionary fervour landed him in prison: he began writing long poems based on Greek and Semitic legends of Colchis, as well as a conventionally titled book of lyrics, *The Garden of Sadness* (სევდის ბაღი, 1909), which married Besiki to Verlaine. Travels to Berlin, Zurich (1911–12), and Leipzig (1914) brought the influence of Symbolist narrative poetry, and gave him the Germanic and modernist education that shaped the careers of Robakidze and Gamsakhurdia. During the First World War he edited the newspaper *Sakartvelo* and the magazine *Merani*. Better than any other Georgian poet he matched a Symbolist rejection of the world to fervent revolutionary positivism, the secret of his longevity. He showed sensitivity and a gift for dramatic verse in his translation of Edmond Rostand's *La Princesse lointaine* (შვიდი მნათობი, 1, 1919). The motif of 'the distant princess' had long saturated Shanshiashvili's own poetry — for example, 'Where Does the Horseman Rush to?' (სად მიჰქრის მხედარი?, 1905):[124]

> There sits the bride Zenari by the castle window,
> She watches the surrounding area, she weeps bitterly:
> Why is she in thrall to melancholy, what sadness afflicts her?
> They have abducted her lover, he is a prisoner.

Shanshiashvili's love-poetry, like the Song of Solomon, begs to be interpreted on a level other than the erotic: Zenari represents dreams incarnate, even a political ideal.

Twenty years of Shanshiashvili's lyrics are gathered in *The High Road I Have Travelled* (გავლილი შარა, 1925): his best poems, even the shortest, either tell a story — one such is the charming 'Roe-Deer and Hunter' (შველი და მონადირე, 1909) — or idealize a woman. By the 1920s

Shanshiashvili longed for the heroic: 'I sing of chivalry to fire the timid', he said in his poem 'Genesis' (დაბადება, 1922). At last, in 1930, he won notoriety throughout the USSR with *Anzor*, his adaptation of *Armoured Train 14–69* (*Бронепоезд 14–69*), a Russian civil-war play by Vsevolod Ivanov (1895–1963). The action was transferred to Dagestan, the White Army deleted, and the Chechen hero Anzor Cherbizh became an idealized heroic tribesman. The original end, in which a Chinese revolutionary lies down on the railway line to stop the armoured train, is replaced by a *lezginka* danced by Zaira, whose choice of partner decides whom the train is to crush. Ivanov's bleak Siberian realities give way to a rich, legendary Caucasian world of song and dance. Sandro Akhmeteli, director of the Rustaveli Theatre, collaborated in transforming this classic of Socialist Realism into a Wagnerian spectacle, very like Robakidze's *Lamara*. The 'Left', including the Futurist poet Simon Chikovani, attacked *Anzor* for trivializing the revolution. Despite his willingness to praise Stalin as early as 1931 ('Were I to compare you to a titanic oak'), association with Akhmeteli and Robakidze endangered Shanshiashvili in the 1937 purges. He was accused of failing to denounce others; he even tried to speak up for the doomed Paolo Iashvili, but expiated these sins by writing a 'Song to Lavrenti Beria'. His later dramas draw factually on the catastrophes of eighteenth-century Georgia: *The Heroes of Krtsanisi* (*კრწანისის გმირები*, 1942), *Imeretian Nights* (*იმერეთის ღამეები*, 1945). He also reverted to fantasizing the civil war (*October Triumph*, *ოქტომბრის ზეიმი*, 1944).

The Blue Horns had few prose-writers: apart from Robakidze, only Sergo Kldiashvili (სერგო კლდიაშვილი, 1893–1986) had serious narrative talent. The son of the novelist Davit, he set out to be a very different writer (though in 1945 he wrote a book about his father). Before studying law in Moscow, he attended the Kutaisi *gimnazia* which produced so many of Georgia's twentieth-century intellectuals: he joined Robakidze's Blue Horns poets and wrote mildly decadent verse. Under Soviet rule he converted quickly to conventional Realist prose, of which *Ash* (*ფერფლი*, 1932) and *A Cosy Country Retreat* (*მყუდრო სავანე*, 1958) are typical. His anticlerical satire met the demands of the time (*Abesalom the Ex-Priest*, *აბესალომ ნახუცარა*, 1933), but *The Adventures of Squire Lakhundareli* (*ახნაური ლახუნდარელის თავგადასავალი*, 1927) has a less bridled fantasy. His plays *A Generation of Heroes* (*გმირთა თაობა*, 1937) and *Deer's Gorge*

(*ირმის ხევი*, 1944) are patriotic, socialist, and ineffectual. Despite his conformism, he was harassed in 1937, but released when his (and Kolau Nadiradze's) interrogator was arrested.

The great Georgian modernist in prose is Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (კონსტანტინე გამსახურდია, 1890–1975). Born in Abasha, Mingrelia, he studied in Saint Petersburg, where he quarrelled with Nikolai Marr. He spent the First World War mostly in Germany, France, and Switzerland, taking his doctorate in Munich. He was briefly interned in Traunstein, where Thomas Mann sent him chocolate. He wrote a number of short stories which owe much to German Expressionism and French Post-Symbolist prose. On returning to Tbilisi, he supported the Federalist governing party and became an attaché to Georgia's ramshackle embassy in Germany; his job was repatriating First World War prisoners and placing Georgian students in German universities. After the Bolshevik coup, he edited literary journals and was for a short time associated with Akademia, a writer's group which put artistic excellence above political correctness. To publish in January 1922, in a Georgia ruled by Bolsheviks, a lyric such as 'Maria Stella' was an act of defiance:

> Night is falling, the moon's disk is filling out
> The moon's disk is silvered and embroidered
> And on the dome is lit up by Christ's cross,
> A secret beam of light spreading from Christ's cross
> And the moon of beams in bands a tender Infanta
> Awaits the magi of white clouds from the East…
> I seek divine harmony shaken into a tune,
> I seek the temple of the divinity and I ask for help.

An equally un-Socialist, but typically Georgian, theme characterizes Gamsakhurdia's first prose fiction: in his extended work, *The Smile of Dionysus* (*დიონისოს ღიმილი*, 1925) the hero-seer is undone by alien captivity. *The Smile of Dionysus* was nine years in the writing — the manuscript was lost once in Geneva and once in Tbilisi. It is an elaborate chain of incidents around the semi-autobiographical persona of Konstantine Savarsamidze, a Georgian abroad, a modern 'superfluous man' and, though Gamsakhurdia denied it, an alienated *alter ego* of the author. (Savarsamidze is the name of the Promethean Amiran's follower in the mediæval romance *Amirandarejaniani*, and the novel is, like the

romance, divided into 'gates'.) The elegance of the style and arrogance of the narrative voice rivals Montherlant; the detached, existentialist sensibility of a stranger in Paris recalls Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*. Gamsakhurdia brought unprecedented subtlety of phrasing to Georgian prose: this work has sufficed grammarians for models of every syntactic construction in modern Georgian. *The Smile of Dionysus* ends with the opening phrase of Dante's *Inferno*, which sustained Gamsakhurdia in the wilderness years of the late 1920s as the Georgian translator of Dante.

Gamsakhurdia protested to Lenin on the crushing of independent Georgia: he was imprisoned and in 1926 deported to the Solovetsky islands in the Arctic White Sea, the site of a monastery used as a concentration camp from 1919 to 1938. On his release he was hounded out of literature until the early 1930s by leftists: expelled in 1931 from the Union of Writers he had helped to found, he contemplated suicide.

When Beria (another Mingrelian) came to power and redressed the balance, Gamsakhurdia understandably felt glimmers of gratitude. These surface in his first 'socialist' novel, the badly plotted and finely written *Stealing the Moon* (მთვარის მოტაცება, 1933–6), a story of love and collectivization in Abkhazia and Mingrelia. Gamsakhurdia's irony is so strong that we can see in the novel either a protest against destruction or a thanksgiving for collectivization. Artistically, as Javakhishvili remarked in his notebooks,[125] Gamsakhurdia 'puffs Mingrelia like a bagpipe… the author doesn't follow logic, but his ear, music, metre'. The novel is full of contradictions: denouncing religion, it is full of religious feeling and vocabulary; disclaiming ideology, it is didactic. Gamsakhurdia purloined a number of Javakhishvili's ideas — such as the conflict of aeroplanes with villagers living in a timeless tribal world. This novel put Gamsakhurdia once more into jeopardy, for Beria (whose problematic childhood is evoked in the local colour of the work and who is mentioned as 'the new party first secretary') attacked it in the speech that signalled the Great Terror of 1937. The novel was not republished as a separate volume until 1990, when Gamsakhurdia's son became president and it was reprinted from the original manuscript, a version where collectivization is equated with Russification, Stalin is openly portrayed as a Napoleonic figure, and the Bolshevik protagonist is a self-willed Oedipus who rapes his mother and kills his father. *Stealing the Moon* only superficially belongs to the

genre of the panegyric novel of Beria's collectivization in Mingrelia that is typified at best by Lio Kiacheli's *Gvadi Bigva* or, at worst, by Konstantine Lortkipanidze's ghastly *Dawn of Colchis* (კოლხეთის ცისკრი, 1931–52). The 'stealing of the moon' is not so much the abduction of the beautiful heroine as the death of the old Georgia, symbolized by the cult of Saint George, the patron saint who figured briefly on the flag of independent Georgia and whom some identify with Armaz, the Moon God.

The novel's plot has a baroque complexity: an autobiographical hero, Prince Tarash Emkhvari, a learned European, returns from Germany to study fetishism: he loses everything (property, love, and life) to his wet-nurse's son, the Stalinist peasant Arzaqan Zvambaia. The symbolism is only too rampant: Gamsakhurdia believed Tarash Emkhvari's name to be a Mingrelian version of that of the pagan God Enguri, who devours the moon. Tarash cannot beget a child nor win recognition for his learning — his history is all in the past; Zvambaia wrecks his world to make a new history. The novel's action begins and ends on the 23 April (1931 and 1932), Saint George's (the moon's) day. Gamsakhurdia combines myth, ethnology, personal reminiscence, political allegory and folk legend, using all the linguistic devices of old Georgian narrative and Nietzsche's prose. On the surface an act of contrition, it reads, particularly in its original version, as a subtle anathema on both himself and his (and Georgia's) oppressors.

A flamboyant but less provocative novella of this period is *Mindia, Son of Khogay* (ხოგაის მინდია, 1937), a psychological exploration of the Khevsur myth of Mindia so crucial to the work of Vazha Pshavela (*The Snake-Eater*) and Grigol Robakidze (*The Snake-Skin*). This was not the 180° turn that Beria had demanded after his critique of *Stealing the Moon*: Gamsakhurdia was arrested for an affair with Lida Gasviani (a charismatic thirty-year-old 'Trotskyist' director of the State Publishing House). He was, however, interrogated and released by Beria, who slapped him on the back and told him that sexual relations with enemies of the people were permitted. Gamsakhurdia was now compromised and feared as a favourite of Beria. But the archives prove that in the terrible year 1937 he fearlessly refused to denounce others and spoke of the purges with irony, even disgust, reporting Orjonikidze's promise not to imitate Hitler by repressing intellectuals. His relations with tyranny resembled Bulgakov's

with Stalin, a mutual balance of respect and detestation. Like many Georgian survivors of the purges, he was forced to write on the childhood of Stalin. *The Leader* (ბელადი, 1939) is not the worst attempt at this impossible remit. The novel's first part ends with the young Soso remarking how wonderful the world is after a thunderstorm; Stalin disliked his Christ-like personification: the novel was discontinued and withdrawn from public libraries.

Gamsakhurdia then published what he called his *art poétique*, his second 'Constantine' novel, *The Right Hand of the Grand Master* (დიდოსტატის მარჯვენა, 1939). It is set in the 1010s around the legend that King Giorgi I mutilated and killed the architect Konstantine Arsakidze (კონსტანტინე არსაკიძე), who built the Cathedral of the Living Pillar (ხვეტი ცხოველი, *sveti tskhoveli*) at Mtskheta. The novel works a typically Georgian clash between illicit love and duty to the nation into a universal tragedy of Eros, art, and necessity: it suffers from the Georgian's duty to magnify past glories and from a dearth of real facts. The author's contrast of an ideal Arsakidze with an antithetical cosmopolitan sophist Parsman, like his justification of Giorgi I's ruthlessness, is uncomfortably close to Stalinist propaganda; refuge in history was too transparent a device for harassed Soviet novelists. Yet the novel is an equivocal personal testament, for the study of the tyrant and his mutilation of the architect is an allegory of the Stalin-Beria duumvirate and their enslaved writers. The approved Arsakidze and reprobate Parsman are both autobiographical *personae*. Furthermore, Gamsakhurdia reinstates his own early lyrical verse in the fine love-song he puts in the mouth of one of the builders of the cathedral:

> A reddish Laz sat on a large stone, he struck at his lyre and sang a love poem, to a tune which Arsakidze had heard in his youth. Now he barely made out the Laz words above the sound of the lyre:
>
> You have eyes the colour of the sea and you are like the sea yourself,
> If you do not pity me but marry another,
> In Spring I shall leave off sowing and ploughing,
> I shall force my way across the Chorokh and the Mtkvari,
> I shall bring fire to wherever you are and wind to your love,
> And I shall kill you, traitor, the rival husband,
> You have eyes the colour of the sea and you are like the sea yourself.

> Arsakidze deliberately lingered in the mob, in front of the curtains. Now he observed: deadly peril gave the people a longing for verse and song. The reddish Laz struck the lyre and lamented sadly. The verse was long, the lover's threats were unlimited, every stanza began and ended with the same line, 'You have eyes the colour of the sea and you are like the sea yourself.' This verse clung on eerily in his mind.

Gamsakhurdia's post-war work *The Flowering of the Vine* (ვაზის ყვავილობა, 1955) and the *magnum opus David the Builder* (დავით აღმაშენებელი, 1942–62) cover no new ground. Publication of his superb memoirs, *Flirting with Ghosts* (ლანდებთან ლაციცი, *Mnatobi*, Aug., Sept. 1963), and of his testament (*Mnatobi*, 1959, uncirculated and pulped issue) was aborted. He died in 1975 with unquestioned moral and artistic authority, refusing to be buried in the Pantheon because, in the words of his Testament:

> Although in every country Jesus and Judas are mentioned in the same breath, Georgia is the only country where they are buried side by side.

28: *The Poetry of Galaktion Tabidze, Giorgi Leonidze and Simon Chikovani*

GALAKTION Tabidze (გალაკტიონ ტაბიძე, 1891–1959), older than his cousin and neighbour Titsian Tabidze, began as a fringe poet. Preferring solitude, he took longer than the Blue Horns to attract recognition: his first book in 1914 marked him out, in Titsian Tabidze's words, as 'Chevalier of the order of loneliness'. An encounter in a park with Bachana, Vazha Pshavela's brother, was for Galaktion a laying-on of hands. His next book, *Crâne aux fleurs artistiques* (1919), heavily influenced by French Symbolists, especially Verlaine, still fashionable in Georgia, proved his superiority to every other contemporary and his totally new talent for making Georgian a subtly sonorous, almost onomatopoeic, medium for conveying mood. By the 1920s his themes of isolation, lovelessness, and nightmarish premonitions were wholly his own: they made certain lyrics — 'Without Love' (უსიყვარულოდ, 1913), 'I and the Night' (მე და ღამე, 1913), 'The Wind Blows' (ქარი ჰქრის, 1924) — as widely known as nursery rhymes, the last in particular:

O the wind, how it blows, how it blows,
The wind whirls the leaves off afar,
Arches trees, trees in ranks, trees in hosts.
Tell me where, where you are, where you are.
How it rains, how it snows, how it snows.
You're not to be found any more.
Your image pursues me, it haunts
Everywhere, every day, every hour.
From the sky drizzle far, misty thoughts,
O the wind, how it blows, how it blows.

Galaktion subsumed his predecessors into his own private world: 'The Wind Blows' raises Tsereteli's questing 'Suliko' to a Symbolist musicality and *Weltschmerz*; Nikoloz Baratashvili's *Merani* and cult of the azure transcend their historical associations and, seen through the Symbolism of Alexander Blok's blessed eternal land, enter a private apocalyptic race of mind and time in Galaktion's 'Azure Horses'[126] (ლურჯა ცხენები, 1915), a poem that had a delayed impact on the public:

Skeletal stands of lifeless trees, forests of mad faces and forces,
Disembodied run the days — quicker, crazier they run.
With hallucinatory dreams — with my azure horses
You will rest with me. Every one is in its place.
Second after second speeds, yet I cannot feel contrition,
Pillows of eternity stay impervious to tears…
No consolatory breast, no seraphic solace came:
Spiral stairs down to the dark hide the cryptic chimaeras.
Only nothing could conceal beams that formed a vault of light:
All but listless ciphers gone, in the wilderness it shone.
In skeletal forests of maddened faces crazed with fright,
Inanimate days appear and then are gone.
Only in marauding mist, overhanging the eternal land,
Above ground or in the grave, excommunicated with curses,
Like the crashing breakers, like the Fates' thread-spinning hand,
As a flashing thunderbolt blow the azure horses.

Galaktion could synthesize Russian and French Symbolism with the vision of the most Georgian of poets, Vazha Pshavela. The first four lines of Vazha's lyric on the wounded eagle attacked by crows take on new meaning when they end Galaktion's 'The Eagles Slept' (არწივებს ჩასძინებოდათ, 1916):

The eagle slept
The oak boughs drowsed.
Dark night is ripped
By shrieks of screech owls…
The forest burnt, rapid
As autumn straw.
The eagles slept,
Dreaming of war.

Formally, Galaktion was gifted, more than his contemporaries, with the ability to sustain an image, a rhythmic phrase, and an emotion: 'Snow' (თოვლი, 1916) is typical in its *fin de siècle* longing:

I deeply love the violet virgin
Spread of snow away from the bridge.

But more impressive are the latent political prophecy, the intertwining of

folk myth and literary Symbolism, and the musicality: they show Galaktion as a magus comparable to W. B. Yeats. Enjoying an affection that only he and Ioseb Grishashvili could boast of, Galaktion was accorded the rare honour of being known by his Christian name. He was at his greatest, with a plasticity of sound unequalled in Georgian, and most cryptic in the mid-1920s in nightmarish poems, topical at the time of the Tutankhamun craze but, for a socialist culture, anachronistic in their morbidity. One such is 'Graveyards' (სახაფლაონი, 1925):

> A sarcophagus opens. A Pharaoh arises. What silence. The air is blue silk.
> Orchids drift off into the Nile, while the heat groans on the sandbanks.
> He must free himself of sand, he must find the grave of Ramses.
> Once he was King. Now he is dust. To cast the passing centuries ashore,
> He must forswear hypocrisy; he must be dust and nothing more.
> Sun or simoum, the ages pass: a mummified Pharaoh counts the years.

Galaktion had reached his peak: he easily prostituted his rhythmic virtuosity to write intoxicatingly revolutionary hymns (such as 'Banners', დროშები) or narrative poems about October 1917 in Leningrad: this won him acceptance from the party, without ever forcing him into a coherent act of submission. By luck or cunning he avoided groups, even friendships, and was spared the political manœuvres and purges of the Georgian Union of Writers in the 1930s. But in 1937 Olga, his wife, née Okujava and one of a vulnerable political clan, was deported to northern Russia. Until she was murdered in 1944, Galaktion, out of callousness or caution, left her pleas for letters and money unanswered,[127] but her removal plunged him into relentless alcoholism and clinical depression. After the war occasional remissions produced extraordinarily ingenious, almost fugal poems, such as the eighty-line paean to the remote and ornate church in Racha, Nikortsminda (ნიკორწმინდა, 1947). Galaktion is praising, in the guise of the ingenuity and permanence of mediæval architecture, the elaborate, indestructible fabric of his own *œuvre*:

> Wherever there's a vault,
> The interlocking pillars
> Are so astutely wrought
> That dreams begin to fill us.
> I wonder who created,
> Whose genius created,

> What blessed gift created
> That pillar Nikortsminda.
>
> You feel the twelve immense
> Windows perpendicular
> Burn for Candlemas
> With fire not secular.
> I wonder who ignited,
> So feelingly ignited,
> And to the years confided
> Shining Nikortsminda.

Loneliness, however, remains the constant theme: almost his last diary entry, in Russian, shows the eternal child in the old man:

> If only I could recall just one human being, an older woman or a man, patting me just once on the head, in childhood or in my youth. No, I can't recall any. After all, I used to be a child in body as well as in soul.

Typical of his premature old age was the painful suicidal elegy 'You're going… you carry your distress' (მიდიხარ… ისე მოგაქვს წვალება, 1956):

> You're going… you carry your distress,
> Scything grass by the sea, as it were.
> Who said anything about your decease?
> No, this in fact is the day of your birth…
> You're going… many would envy your fate's
> Beautiful and unique fatality.
> You have been lodged by open space —
> You are the lodger of immortality.

In true Mallarméan fashion, 'Las du triste hôpital, et de l'encens fétide', he jumped to his death from the window of a psychiatric hospital onto the pavement of Chavchavadze Avenue. His archive of about 100,000 items, scurrilous caricatures, heart-rending cries of despair and fear, plans for grandiose editions of his complete works, drafts of unpublished poems, decaying in Tbilisi's Literary Museum, still awaits full investigation.

Only one of Galaktion's contemporaries bears any close resemblance to him: Terenti Graneli (Kvirkvelia) (ტერენტი გრანელი [კვირკველია], 1897–1934) expressed the same obsessive loneliness often with comparable musicality and originality. Graneli too was formed by isolation: his

mother died when he was five, his father was crippled falling from a tree. But, unlike Galaktion, Graneli was stranded on the fringe of literature. He worked as a railway conductor, a courier, and a newspaper despatcher, haunted cemeteries for inspiration, and lived on the floors of friends, such as the composer Akaki Andriashvili (აკაკი ანდრიაშვილი). Between 1920 and 1926 he published five books of lyrics (about 118 poems). He died too soon to gain either acceptance or martyrdom from the Communist authorities: by the 1930s he was quietly squeezed out of the tiny niche he had found. Although he was a cult, almost a semi-underground figure, his manuscripts have been mostly lost: not until 1979 did a volume of his collected works appear.[128] To a degree his poetry has the self-celebration typical of the Futurists (in 1928 he issued a newspaper named after himself) but the repeated use of his own name is also the trademark of the city minstrel (*ashugh*). All in all, the mellifluent morbidity of Alexander Blok's urban lyrics is Graneli's most typical strain. The titles of his first four book — *Requiems* (პანაშვიდები, 1920), *Lines of Mourners* (სამგლოვიარო ხაზები, 1921), *Graves from the Soul* (სულიდან საფლავები, 1922), *Memento Mori* (1924) — show Graneli's consistently sepulchral tone. The title poem of *Memento Mori* is representative of the poet's motifs. It ends:

> What can I do. It is black night, heavy and without help,
> I remember my village, its remote places.
> Now I want something else, something else, nameless;
> That perdition awaits me, I know for a fact.
>
> Slowly the days run out and they are hard to distinguish,
> Darling, I cannot come, the road to you is too far.
> My surname, Graneli, will remain for poetry,
> My heart and blood is a memento mori.

One other poet stood largely unsupported by any group and yet enjoyed enormous popularity: Giorgi Leonidze (გიორგი ლეონიძე, 1899–1966). He studied in the Tbilisi seminary, although it left no mark on his poetry. Despite his loyalty to his birthplace in Kakhetia (eastern Georgia), he began in Kutaisi, precociously publishing his own collection of derivative Symbolist verse, *Sapphire* (საფირონი), at the age of 17, with the reverence for Oscar Wilde typical of Kutaisi's poetry: he then joined his rivals, and became the youngest member of the Kutaisi Blue Horns poets.

A canny sense of political expediency and innate earthy optimism made him swiftly adapt his exotic idolatry to native conventions: in 'Two Bleedings' (ორი ტაბასტა, 1922) we find the two combined:

> Two purples blind me: one is Arthur Rimbaud
> The other is that of the Bagrations, on a signet with eagles.

Rimbaud taught Leonidze to pursue striking rhymes and surreal chains of evocative images, and, disowning his earlier verse, he soon found an acceptable, but individual, voice. Real talent emerged in 1925 with a flow of nature lyrics, responding with Romantic vitality to powerful forces and Kakhetian flora and fauna: to oak-trees, as in 'The Oak and the Thunderbolt' (მუხა და მეხი, 1926), or to birds of prey, as in 'Song of the First Snow' (სიმღერა პირველი თოვლისა, 1926), where he asks 'Is this snow, or has the hawk | Smashed the doves?' He extended this genre into odes like 'Solitary Tree' (ოლე, 1931): 'You stand like gallows — the mountains strangle you; | You are like a hanging eagle | With destroyed wings.' Diffidently adopting political orthodoxy, Leonidze grew more historical and patriotic: the thirteenth century and Genghis Khan provided him with the violent and colourful imagery he loved. He was drawn to tragic, Promethean figures, thunderstruck martyrs or trees. 'The Night of [the village] Ninotsminda' (ნინოწმინდის ღამე, 1926) turns the tortured St Nino into a 'panther-made-woman', her breasts as 'golden trout'.

Driving rhythms, inexhaustibly inventive metaphors, and the cult of Kakhetia's landscapes and forefathers brought Leonidze great popularity. Fluency and hero-worship were his salvation and undoing. In the purges of 1937 his incoherent terror of Beria led to panegyrics: his unfinished 150-page epic, *Stalin: Childhood and Youth* (სტალინი: ბავშვობა და ყრმობა, 1939) is remarkable for its simulated verve and a total absence of biography, factual or invented. Leonidze was to write interestingly about earlier Georgian poets: his *Baratashvili* of 1945, apart from the enforced optimism of the end, is a convincing evocation of yet another solitary natural giant. In his last years, Leonidze directed his wealth to the benefit of his native village; his lyric talent spent serving Communism, he produced agreeable childhood memoirs, evocative prose — *The Tree of Yearning* (ნატვრის ხე, 1956) was filmed by Tengiz Abuladze — and very scrupulous literary scholarship such as his study of Besiki.

If the Blue Horns were an amalgam of various modernist cults with no clear thrust, one movement did attempt an aggressive poetic policy in Georgia: the Futurists. They went well beyond the intuitive irrational associations which characterize Leonidze's work, and were in fact too revolutionary for the revolution to tolerate. They produced some of the finest and most unjustly forgotten verse of the 1920s.[129] Their leader, the sole figure whose name is widely known, was the versatile Simon Chikovani (სიმონ ჩიქოვანი, 1902/3–66), who died as a Soviet establishment figure. He was not just the most important 'Futurist' poet in Georgia; arguably he was the most original Georgian poet of the century. Though there is little that is proletarian about him, he allied himself to the rising 'Left' poets and became their star and spokesman. In 1924 he was an editor of the notorious Futurist journal H_2SO_4 (sulphuric acid). Between 1924 and 1929 he produced a brilliant series of poems, published as *Only Poems* (მხოლოდ ლექსები, 1930). Most are energetic and provocative Whitmanesque heckling and satirizing of the older generation of poets: Chikovani sported Mayakovsky's mantle.

The last section of his book, however, 'Orchestrated Versification' (ორკესტრიული ლექსალობა), contains thirteen of the most innovative and brilliant poems in the language. Chikovani combines onomatopœia, elaborate assonance, invented words, and Mingrelian, Georgian's sister-language, to create a truly musical set of hypnotic incantations, half-intelligible and quite untranslatable. Incorporating the musicality of a Verlaine with extraordinary sound mimicry, they realize a stage beyond the metalogy (*zaum'*) of Khlebnikov or the whimsy of Edward Lear. Untranslatable poems such as 'Tsira: bade baidebs, bude baidebs' were to become mantras for his readers. Only the defeat of the 'Left' in 1932 by a Stalinist literary monopoly put a sudden end to this fountain of invention: Chikovani played safe and in Georgian schools he was known for conventional achievements such as his *Song about Davit Guramishvili* (სიმღერა დავით გურამიშვილზე, 1942) of fifty-one poems, with many reminiscences of Guramishvili's *Davitiani*.

The first Futurist manifesto was proclaimed in *Rubikoni* (რუბიკონი) in January 1923: fourteen years late if we compare Chikovani to Marinetti, but in 1923 Mayakovsky was still defending Futurism in Moscow, and Kruchionykh had published *The Science of Displacement* (*Сдвигология*),

only a year before Marinetti disgraced himself with *Futurismo e fascismo*. The Georgian Futurist manifesto left no illusions: 'Nineteenth-century Georgian literature is provincial in radius; [only] Vazha stands outside time and space.' This proclamation was indebted to Kruchionykh in 1919, who was called 'the Lenin of poetry' by the Blue Horns poet Valerian Gaprindashvili in Tbilisi's 41° Club. But Futurism had already been dismissed in Georgia. Diagnosing the movement as a new disease of poetry in an article in 1913 in *Matrakhi* (მათრახი, 'The Whip') the Bolshevik P. Kalandadze (პ. კალანდაძე) wittily derived the word *puturizmi* not from the Italian *futuro*, but from Georgian *puturo* (ფუტური), 'rotten tree-trunk'. Some Blue Horns events were supportive of Russian Futurism: Iashvili's lecture, 'Light up Crowns of Gold on your Heads', introduced Vasili Kamensky's recital in the Kutaisi theatre on 13 October 1916. The Blue Horns all translated Russian and Italian Futurists: Gaprindashvili shocked the world with Aldo Palazzeschi's 'From a brothel, from a madhouse'.

One forgotten, and precocious, writer of Futurist manifestos was Nikoloz Shengelaia (ნიკოლოზ შენგელაია, 1901–43), later the founder of Georgian cinema. In a letter printed in the first issue (1920) of the journal *Barikada* (ბარიკადა, 'Barricade'), Shengelaia told its editor (Titsian Tabidze until a rift with Blue Horns removed him in 1922): 'Georgia–Phœnix. We deny what was before us; from now on Georgia begins with us.'

The main standard-bearer of apostasy, H_2SO_4, made its impact in its one issue of 1924: apart from Chikovani, authors included Zhango Ghoghoberidze (ჟანგო ღოღობერიძე, 1905–37), Niogol Chachava (ნიოგოლ ჩაჩავა, 1901–74), and Nikoloz Shengelaia. (The title is not original: the French Dadaist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes had planned in 1920 a journal $D^dO^4H^4$, which he thought to be the formula for vitriol.) H_2SO_4 was followed in 1925 by *Literature etc.*(ლიტერატურა და სხვა), also one issue only. In 1925–6 the twice-monthly *Timely* (დროული) was the Futurist organ; in 1927–8 it was *Leftness* (მემარცხენეობა), which Chikovani edited, with help from the painter Davit Kakabadze (დავით კაკაბაძე, 1889–1952).

Chikovani had lived in Kutaisi from 1911 and as a teenager had associated with Blue Horns: once again Kutaisi and Blue Horns shaped a new movement. Friendship with painters such as Lado Gudiashvili and Davit Kakabadze were more important than music to Chikovani, for they had brought back from Paris the seeds of another more visual and more

aggressive modernism. At first this took the form of dandyism: 'The worker doesn't like the nightingale, | Nor the nightingale the worker's voice,' Chikovani dared to declare in the first years of Bolshevik rule. He was arrested and nearly shot on a walking-tour of Kakhetia during the Red terror of 1924. Established in Tbilisi, he aimed his venom chiefly against Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze. Asked by Chikovani in 1926 at the Union of Writers what the Blue Horns had ever done for Georgian poetry, Iashvili generously retorted, 'we gave you the Futurists'. Chikovani's corrosive verve is expressed in the title and outline policies of his group and periodical H_2SO_4. His new poetry more than matched his aspirations: in 'Sidu' (სიდუ, 1924) he showed intuition to be primary. His orchestrated versification had begun. Theory and practice fused in a poem, 'Tsira', so haunting that it began a new intellectual oral tradition:

bade baidebs, bude baidebs,
cira muxlebze gul-pilt'vs daidebs,
aida — baidebs, aido baidebs,
cira ciba, cira c'arba,
cira c'abli c'arbenili.
cak'utxuri, cak'utxedi,
xidbogiri.
odeliodo bude, odeliodo ca,
mdinaris p'iras cxenebis mocda,
cira šindi, obobebit gadaprindi.

Only odd phrases revert to conventional Georgian and crystallize the meaning: 'Tsira puts her heart and lungs on her knees', 'horses waited by the river bank.' The rest is suggested by made-up words, their sounds, their roots, their rhythm. We sense a story-line: Tsira is abducted far away and driven to despair. Chikovani has invented comprehensible metalogy.

Equally extraordinary is 'The Boreal Wind' (ქარბორეა). Like 'Tsira', a cinematic story-line emerges from the sound pictures: a horse-thief, pursued by a rider and dogs, feels threatened by open spaces and passing time; the path leads from meadows to ploughed fields, the horse stumbles. Dawn breaks and the horse-thief falls onto a tree-stump. The poem is full of puns, including the *puturo–futuro* pun, and of communication between animal and rider. The metalogy lapses into conventional language, but the metaphors become more and more recherché. The poem ends:

papari punžiri, papari parduli, orveli cxenebis.
gaprindi, merano, mergili nagzaurs, cao da morio;
gkondes, ulaq'o, pexburtši simagre, damč'edis cxoneba!
adrinde t'orian davardna šors da karborias.

which, if translation were possible, might resemble:

Curtasseled curtained, curtasseled tasselling, fields and horseshoes.
Fly, Pegasus, pegacing journeys, heaven and stump;
Strength to you, stallion, in ball-games, blessings from the blacksmith!
Until staffs fall against a tree-stump to the far and boreal wind.

Chikovani's later verse is often a diluted version of earlier Futurist imagery, so that 'Seeking your Shadow' (შენი ჩრდილის საძებნელად, 1925)

Like a camel the shadows of yesterday come out.
The castle walls and limes roll together,
As though I had scratched up the stars with long fingernails
And nightfall like a bird approaches us.

gives rise to 'Kartli Evenings' (ქართლის საღამოები, 1946):

How good is the mountain of the sun's decline,
How fitting is the shadow of autumn.
I shall look across from the castle and from afar
Like a drover's song nightfall approaches.

The poet's Futurist verse became a treasury used for more conventional work — autoplagiarism. Chikovani was perverse and circumspect in suppressing all reference to his brilliant early work and dismissing his own musicality; he remained polemical, only within the constraints of his party position, until death.[130] He preferred to perpetuate the memory of love-poetry to his wife Marika: 'all poets love only one woman, even if they call her by different names'.[131]

Chikovani was secretary of the Union of Writers from 1930 to 1932, its president from 1944 to 1951, and deputy to the Supreme Soviet from 1950 to 1954. His crystalline mature verse is dead compared with what he suppressed. Chikovani's innovative Futurist masterpieces of the mid-1920s are a mighty handful: 1924: 'Khabo' (ხაბო); 'Buffalo Drovers' Song' (მეკამეჩეების ურმული, 1925); 'Tsira, Primitive Song Material'

(პრიმიტივი სიმღერის მასალა «ცირა»); 'About Revolutionary Meadows' (რევოლუციურ მინდვრების შესახებ); 'The Boreal Wind' (ქარბორია). His apostasy from 1930 onwards is understandable: in Beria's purges his brother was liquidated, and he saw no alternative to becoming a subservient literary *apparatchik*. He reached his nadir in 1958, when, hounding his former friend and translator, he declared at a meeting of the Union of Writers, 'I am proud that Georgia has no writer like Pasternak.'

While the early Chikovani sank from written into oral tradition, his fellow Futurists plunged into total oblivion. Demna Shengelaia, after his brilliant novel *Sanavardo*, managed to buy literary respectability at the price of his genius; Nikoloz Shengelaia found refuge in film-making. Zhango Ghoghoberidze, whose metalogical poetry is often as hypnotic a Chikovani's, was the one major Futurist to be liquidated by Beria, while Niogol Chachava — adjudged, on the slender evidence of others' recollections, to be the Georgian peer of Kruchionykh — was forced to abandon writing altogether. One Georgian Futurist, Shalva Soslani (შალვა სოსლანი, 1902–41), sought salvation by switching from Georgian to Russian; he won acclaim for the Georgian autobiographical colouring and the linguistic invention of his lyrical tale *The Steed and Ketevan* (*Конь и Кетевана*, 1931). Soslani died at the front, leaving a substantial unpublished heritage.

29: Beria's Holocaust

WRITERS in the USSR were no longer individuals after 1932: they were collective state property, as much as the peasants' horses and pigs. They underwent a comparable slaughter and their fates make no sense unless seen as part of a process of prophylactic killing initiated by Stalin and, in Georgia, carried out with exceptional verve by Lavrenti Beria. We can find some clues which may help us understand how Beria rose to power, how he maintained that power so long, and, above all, how he both exploited and formed the subjects of his satrapy, in particular the Georgian intellectuals. Memoirs of those who worked under Beria in his last phase, when he supervised the building of the Soviet atomic bomb, tend to portray him as an ignoramus who bullied and threatened engineers and scientists and only with great difficulty was persuaded to accept that universal elementary laws of physics applied to Soviet enterprises as well. Certainly Beria was an ill-trained hydraulic engineer, and, once he had risen to be the first secretary of the Georgian and Transcaucasian parties and the chairman of the commissars, much of his work involved supervising projects of which he had only a shadowy grasp. His method was to invite bidding and choose the middle way. One of the princes Machabeli (unlike Orjonikidze, Beria had no particular grudge against the aristocracy) recalls Beria summoning his highway engineers and addressing them: 'Tiflis is the heart of Georgia, Rustaveli Prospect is the heart of Tiflis: I want it asphalted. How long will it take?' 'Ten days,' replies an enthusiastic novice. 'Boasting,' snarls Beria. 'Twenty days,' says the cautious chief engineer. '*Perestrakhovka* (playing safe)', shouts Beria, who then orders the job to be done in fifteen.

The same 'bidding' method was cunningly used by Beria in his approach to the unruly intellectuals on whose support previous Soviet leaderships had depended, as a method of securing first their naïve support and then their frenzied self-destruction.

Beria's second technique was borrowed from Ezhov (whose subordinate, after all, he was from 1936 to 1938). This was to attack a person and an institution by targeting the second in command; Beria used, with great success, the stress and frustration of the Number Two to incriminate

the Number One and, then, most subordinates. Thus he eliminated his chief in the Transcaucasian GPU, S. F. Redens, and finally supplanted his All-Union superior, Ezhov. This technique, systematically applied to engineers, scientists, theatre directors, and writers in Georgia, explains the patterns of survival and victimization in hydroelectric stations, bacteriological institutes, theatres, and poetic groupings of Georgia.

We must credit Beria with a phenomenal energy and shrewdness which tempered his rapacity and sadism; his economic management of Georgia, especially in lessening the impact of collectivization and in harassing and overseeing prestigious hydroelectric works, was impressive. His infiltration of every aspect of the party and government organizations with his own hand-picked NKVD operatives (most of them, like himself, under 35 at the time) proves his ability. But in literature and the arts the ill-read and ill-educated Beria[132] seems an unlikely Maecenas. Stalin had in his boyhood been a promising, even original, poet, had read widely as a student priest, and had even, as a party functionary, showed a gift for prose of a catechismic genre. Beria, on all accounts, was uncomfortable in both his native languages (Mingrelian and Georgian). Like most Georgian GPU and NKVD officials, he made Russian his natural medium, but even in that language he seems to have been unhappy with the written word. Beria's masterpiece of Stalinist falsification, his *History of the Bolshevik Party in the Caucasus*, was in fact written to his specifications by the commissar for education, Eduard Bedia, and a party subordinate, Pavle Saqvarelidze. Beria used Bedia as a ghost writer in both Russian and Georgian, and when Beria left Georgia for Moscow in 1938, both Bedia and Saqvarelidze became ghost writers in the fullest sense of the word.

Yet Beria was fascinated by the arts, above all by artists and writers with whom he could identify: dominant directors and manifesto-writers, natural leaders, womanizers. From 1927, when he first dominated the Georgian Cheka, Beria built up dossiers on all the leading figures in literary groups, the conservatoire, the university, targeting most for destruction and a few for survival in a cat-and-mouse game that kept him amused for a decade. Unlike most of the Kremlin leadership, Beria was a cat that liked to live with mice. His conflicts and links with the Georgian artistic world were forged at parties and during altercations which extended over neighbouring courtyards and balconies. He liked to walk into theatre rehearsals, he liked to summon writers to private meetings.

One such meeting was held in late summer 1937, after Paolo Iashvili had been driven to suicide and a dozen prominent writers, such as the novelist Mikheil Javakhishvili, arrested as enemies of the people. Niko Chikovani (the nephew and foster-son of the former Futurist poet Simon Chikovani) recalls that the assembled survivors were taunted and teased. 'Some of you', said Beria, 'still have undeclared links with enemies of the people. I omit the surnames [*Propuskaiu familii*].' The phrase *propuskaiu familii* was repeated throughout the evening. In the archives of Galaktion Tabidze there are scraps of paper dating from this meeting, on which are repeatedly scrawled the words, *Propuskaiu. Chistka. Ol'ga.* ('I omit. Purge. Olga': Olga Okujava was Galaktion's wife, seized in the terror.) At the end of the meeting Beria called the Blue Horns poet Titsian Tabidze over and said: '*Sredi propushchennykh familiy, gospodin Tabidze, i vasha* (Among the omitted surnames, Mr Tabidze, was yours)'.[133]

If Stalin liked to play with the telephone, Beria much more enjoyed personal confrontation, just as he preferred to kill his subordinates in person with his revolver, rather than by proxy with a signed warrant. His treatment of the novelist Konstantine Gamsakhurdia was especially devious. But Gamsakhurdia in his wit, courage and cunning was a figure of considerable stature and an opponent who gave such good sport that Beria was reluctant to kill him. As a Mingrelian, Gamsakhurdia was a fellow-countryman of Beria's; moreover, he appeared to have direct access, via Sergo Orjonikidze, to the Kremlin, and Stalin read his novels. Beria's public critique of Gamsakhurdia was balanced by some private understanding of which we still know very little. (There is curious proof that Beria could separate personal and political links: in 1921 he had married Nino Gegechkori, then just sixteen-and-a-half, even though she had just been hosed down by water cannon after she had taken part in an anti-Soviet demonstration in Tbilisi.)

One of the main talents required of a GPU officer, particularly a protégé of Ezhov, was a creative and dramatic one: the ability to fabricate plots and assign to each of the accused a role and an outline confession. Beria's work, culminating in the mass denunciations, arrests, tortures, and executions of 1937, shows an outstanding theatrical talent that makes him a Mike Leigh of the secret police. It is no accident that his first major attempt at a purge outside the party involved the Georgian theatre.

We must ask ourselves how such an exceptionally repulsive and isolated creature won such a degree of acceptance from the Georgian intelligentsia. True, when Beria was appointed, even before their positions were directly threatened, many figures in the Transcaucasian power structure refused out of personal disgust to work with him, moved to Moscow, or attempted to discredit him. Beria, unlike the leaders of previous Communist administrations in Georgia, was untrammelled by any ties of kith, kinship, or friendship that might stay his hand; in a Transcaucasian society few figures could hold power in politics or the arts without being a member of a network: leaders were paralysed and deterred from any decisive punitive action against that network. Undoubtedly, Beria's rise was sanctioned by Stalin for this very reason, and Beria knew how to make up for this deficiency of kith and kin by bringing in his own *oprichnina* from the GPU.

What is at first puzzling, however, is the ease with which he won acceptance in 1931 and 1932. The explanations are to be found in two contradictory qualities of the Georgian intelligentsia: its gregariousness and its factionalism. They were gregarious literally, as a neighbourhood in the streets on the hill slopes above Rustaveli Prospect and the university. They were gregarious in that they felt themselves to be the natural friends of those in power, whether Menshevik or Bolshevik. Previous administrations had fallen precisely because Stalin had felt his party leaders succumbing too easily to the nationalism, feasting, and rhetoric of the poets and artists whose company and hospitality they could not live without. The old Bolsheviks Petre Aghniashvili (პეტრე აღნიაშვილი), Giorgi Qurulashvili (გიორგი ყურულაშვილი), Beso Lominadze (ბესო ლომინაძე) were schoolmates and family friends of Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze; the contamination of former Symbolists by socialist dogma was reciprocated by the spread of hedonism, tolerance, and individualism in the party. When Beria came to power, for a short time poets deluded themselves that there would be a process of mutual adaptation. Beria joined in parties, attended recitals; in 1934 he made Paolo Iashvili and Malakia Toroshelidze members of the Transcaucasian Central Committee; the poet Galaktion Tabidze and critic Davit Demetradze (დავით დემეტრაძე, 1890–1937, later Beria's chief stage-manager among the writers) became members of the Georgian Central Committee; even the feckless Titsian

Tabidze and the Union of Writers' lawyer Beso Zhghenti (ბესო ჟღენტი, 1903–76) were put on the Tbilisi Soviet. By the time they realized the price of this *rapprochement*, it was too late to call off the deal.

Apart from flattery, Beria seemed to bring relief. However solicitous the previous regime had been, its inclination from 1929 to 1931 had been leftwards. The literary establishment was bullied into deferring before a new generation of particularly inept proletarian writers; the classics of Georgian literature were effectively banned. With some logic, Pilipe Makharadze argued that Rustaveli was a protagonist of feudalism and that Ilia Chavchavadze was a bourgeois idealist. This logic attacked the whole literary ethos and national feeling of the intelligentsia: it was responsible for the virtual silence of many figures, for Grigol Robakidze's defecting to Germany in 1930, Paolo Iashvili's becoming a publicity agent for the hydroelectric engineer Volodia Jikia, Titsian Tabidze's sinking into idleness, Gamsakhurdia's saving himself from suicide by translating Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Beria, on coming to power, immediately rescinded the ban on the classical heritage, and prepared massive celebrations of the centenaries of both Rustaveli and Chavchavadze: he seemed a saviour both from Trotskyist fundamentalism and Russian chauvinism. Commissions were showered on writers. With the formation of the Union of Writers on an All-Union model, the proportion of national wealth expended on the arts was greatly increased: they were allowed a living 'taking in each other's washing': inter-republican readings and expeditions, mutual translation were forms of bribery which Beria used to contrast with the old system of private hospitality and public ostracism.

The Georgian writers were all the easier to conquer because they were so divided. Just before Beria's accession to power, the old Writers' Federation had undergone a series of purges, in which a court of five established figures, notably the poets Paolo Iashvili and Titsian Tabidze, sat in judgement over others (Gamsakhurdia, Javakhishvili) and effectively deprived them of a living. The files of the Union and Federation of Writers for the 1920s are a long list of petty quarrels and intrigues in which party figures had to be called in to mediate: estranged wives would be called whores and gypsy writers by their husbands, even major figures such as Mikheil Javakhishvili and Sergo Kldiashvili would have trivial altercations about the Union's bar committee which needed intervention

from commissars and first secretaries to adjudicate. A drunken remark, access to the Union's Ford car, being introduced to a visiting foreign sympathizer as an interpreter, not a writer, led to life-long feuds to which Beria's purges eventually gave fatal outcomes. With its initial solidarity in 1923, the Union had some successes in co-ordinating writers' efforts to mitigate the worst of Orjonikidze's blood-letting, which was devastating Georgia's intelligentsia. Now the writers' community had degenerated into fissile, highly unstable groups who, given any chance to curry favour, forgot the common interest. With the sole exception of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, none appeared to see the threat that Beria represented. The stenograms of the meetings,[134] even in 1937, show an unbounded belief that one only had to hunt with the hounds not to be classified as a hare.

To begin with, Beria chose his hares singly, selecting the most prominent in each sphere. The director of the Rustaveli Theatre, Sandro Akhmeteli, was one of the first: Akhmeteli's second in command, Akaki Khorava, was suborned as a Judas, first wrecking stagings by drunken performances and then denouncing Akhmeteli in print. Once removed from his official posts, Akhmeteli took refuge among his admirers in Moscow, only to find that Beria, unique among all the republican leaders, had powers of extradition, which he used to bring the unfortunate director to Tbilisi, where he was imprisoned with a number of others on fantastic charges of espionage for the British and plots to murder Beria and Stalin, tortured until he was mute and paralysed, the final touch from Beria being an auction of all his goods in the theatre, ostensibly for the benefit of his eighteen-year-old son.[135] Innovative theatre was silenced at a stroke: the orthodox Stanislavskian Marjanishvili Theatre reigned supreme. Akhmeteli's fate was an example to all creative mavericks, but Akhmeteli's estrangement from, and contempt for, Georgian writers (*neschastnye gruzinskie pisateli*, 'wretched Georgian writers', he used to say, referring to their loss of originality and their forbearance towards authority) meant that they failed to grasp the relevance of his fate.

Beria's second target was the leader of the Blue Horns, Grigol Robakidze. Despite Beria's objections, however, Robakidze and his wife had secured exit visas, ostensibly to supervise the translation of his Wagnerian prose into German, and had decided not to return. This hardened Beria's resolve to deal with the rest of the Blue Horns.

Beria's technique included a well-established Ezhov tool for incrimination: the distinguished foreign visitor. In 1935 Georgian writers were made to compete for the honour of offering hospitality to André Gide, who was brought to Tbilisi, Tsqaltubo, and Sukhumi with a party of French Communists and fellow-travellers. Gide primarily used the USSR as Narcissus used the pond, but he saw just enough objective reality to make his book *Retour de l'URSS* classifiable as a Fascist slander a year later. All those Georgian poets whom Gide had declared himself to be in love with, and who had given him dinner and fulsome praises, were now automatically indicted as Fascist agents. Part of Javakhishvili's indictment was the allegation that he had remarked, 'André Gide has some good ideas.' Paolo Iashvili was made to admit that hospitality to visiting dignitaries was a sycophantic recidivist disease from which he suffered. Paolo Iashvili penned the immortal lines 'To the Traitor André Gide':

> May our air become fire around you.
> May your barbarity be implanted like poison…
> Do you recall the man whose thirty pieces of silver your actions echoed?
> Treacherous, black-faced Trotsky's cur, following your master…
> Black singer of the crows.
> You will go to Hitler's open camp, respected in his band.

But to no avail. Beria's files had implicated virtually every Georgian writer not just with the overthrown party leadership, but with the other professional cadres with whom writers had been encouraged to associate. When the hydroelectric engineer Jikia was indicted, with him went all the poets (Titsian Tabidze in particular) who had been ordered to write about the drainage of the Rioni marshes on the Black Sea. Nothing that Georgian poets did could exempt them from the mass damnation that Beria had prepared for May 1937. In fact, one's judgement on the reasons why certain poets survived and others perished in the USSR under Ezhov must be Calvinistic. Those that were damned were damned from the start, no matter how many poems they dedicated to Stalin and Beria, no matter how virulently they called for the death penalty for Zinoviev or Bukharin. Those that were saved — Pasternak, Bulgakov, Akhmatova in Russia, or Gamsakhurdia, Galaktion Tabidze in Georgia — were saved even if they refused to sign petitions for execution, even if they persisted in expressing

their reservations. Stalin and Beria, like Calvin's or Jansen's God, had decided that a small élite had to survive in a state of grace, a nominal roll of elect intellectuals, and it may be that the latters' strategies of evasion, blackmail, or compromise were irrelevant.

Beria had for three years become fond of the word *perestroika* (in Georgian, *gardakmna*), an act of submission which he demanded in a Tolstoyan sense of internal reform. In 1935 and 1936 the journal *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (ლიტერატურული საქართველო) became his mouthpiece and steadily more space was devoted to Beria's review of progress in the *perestroika* of writers, abuse alternating with encouragement. Giorgi Leonidze was the first of half a dozen Georgian writers to compose a work on the childhood of Stalin. The idea met with Beria's approval and initiated a discussion on whether the novel or the narrative poem was the most difficult genre to celebrate the Leader's childhood years. It was typical of Beria's bidding-system, to which almost every writer tendered and in which the middle version, neither innovative nor excessively conventional, became accepted. In 1934 virtually every Georgian capable of composing verse had contributed to a luxuriously produced anthology on Stalin; in 1935 tenders were open for 'artistic biography', and by 1939 those that survived had all produced a novel or a poem.

Beria reminded Georgian writers that the Germans were burning Heine, but he was reprinting Rustaveli. He insisted on the supremacy of his patronage above all other reasons for writing; his speeches become more and more detailed analyses of the defects and merits of contemporary prose and verse. By the end of 1936 what was not attributed to Beria in *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* was dedicated to him. The young sycophant Grigol Abashidze (გრიგოლ აბაშიძე, born 1913) wrote 'To Lavrenti Beria':

> You are everywhere, wherever coal is cut
> Or open meadows heartily ploughed,
> You lead in front and in our land
> Stalin's idea has become fact
> And so much will come with joy,
> Will come, and again you will lead it,
> So that traitors and loathsome Januses may be destroyed.

The great blow came on 15 May 1937, with Beria's report to the party. Under a photograph of Beria in NKVD uniform came a long survey of

achievements in politics and economics, ending with the educational and cultural front. The list of works published or aborted was like that of citrus- and tea-bushes planted or uprooted, coalfields worked or abandoned. Basing his reports on his commissars' summaries — it is unlikely that the leader read more than the odd dedication or damning quotation — Beria gave a breakdown of achievements in poetry, prose, drama, and criticism, listing each sector group by group (since 1932 the very label of 'group' had been an indictment for the crime of 'grouping') giving an assessment of their improvement from their pre-1921 days, naming works and persons worthy of praise or condemnation. But the condemnation was stronger than the praise. First he attacked the Blue Horns:

> They comprised Iashvili, T. Tabidze, V. Gaprindashvili, N. Mitsishvili, G. Leonidze, and others. As early as 1916 this group became known as the Blue Horns, a sign of creative singing, but in real life this device was frequently illustrated by drunkenness and feasting [*laughter in the hall*]. The Blue Horns' activity in Georgian literature was a belated echo of western European and Russian bourgeois-decadent literature.

A similar attack on the Akademia group took care of Gamsakhurdia and other prose-writers as a 'centre of anti-Soviet chauvinism'; the Left group of 1924, said Beria, 'was characterized by formal innovation, petty-bourgeois rebellion'; the mention of their journal H_2SO_4 brought forth sycophantic laughter, but Beria went on to praise them:

> They have freed themselves of their past characteristic mess and have moved over the last five years to positions of Soviet literary ideas. Shengelaia has written a new novel devoted to Comrade Stalin's youth, Chikovani has given us good poems.

Nearly all those mentioned in the Left group were guaranteed personal survival, even though their relatives and friends were to perish. But Beria's special venom was reserved for critics who had, in his view, tolerated the present state of affairs by undue friendliness to fellow writers. The first of the major arrests following this speech was of Benito Buachidze (ბენიტო ბუაჩიძე, 1905–37?), the critic who had terrorized non-proletarian Georgian writers with his hard-left criteria. Ironically, his strictures were plagiarized by Beria, but Benito was the first critic in Georgia to be held personally responsible for the existence of non-

conformist literature. The choice was diabolically clever. Those writers who had suffered under Benito were as pleased as they were frightened by his fate; other critics were only too anxious to prove themselves loyal servants of the supreme literary critic. Beria, the scenario writer, had accordingly found a producer for his great play in the hitherto mild and ineffectual critic Davit Demetradze.

To Davit Demetradze, as a prominent member of the secretariat of the Union of Writers, Beria entrusted the conduct of a number of sessions from May to October 1937, in which all the writers mentioned in Beria's speech were induced to participate, so as to incriminate themselves and others. Clearly, several members of the Union were now effectively employees of the NKVD. But they were amateurs and the meetings they conducted were incompetent attempts to match the intimidation of professional NKVD interrogation. Attendance was virtually compulsory: after reading Beria's speech, only two members of any note in the Tbilisi branch failed to turn up: Georgia's most popular poets, Galaktion Tabidze and Ioseb Grishashvili. Their absence is inexplicable without some personal guarantee of exemption. Galaktion, despite his Baudelairean inspiration and Blokian poetics, had been declared *persona grata* by Beria in 1935 and kept his distance from his fellow poets and their Russian sympathizers; he encouraged rumours that he was an irresponsible alcoholic, to the point of rubbing vodka into his hair before any public occasion. His archive has lines declaring himself 'too tired to go near the writers' palace | Where Beria's wolves growl.' Grishashvili, now more bibliophile than poet, was indiscreet enough, even now, to write poems mocking the name of Lenin. These writers' tactics of abstention were exceptional. Everyone else was subjected to sessions of sleeplessness, some meetings going on from 7 p.m. until 3.30 in the morning.

The ritual was to adulate, cite and paraphrase Beria's speech and to demand clarification and confession from those named in it, above all self-incriminating evidence of links to the engineer Jikia, the theatre director Akhmeteli, the bacteriologist Gogi Eliava, and alleged Trotskyists such as Lida Gasviani and Malakia Toroshelidze, the Union's former president. Each concession by a victim was met with demands for further incrimination, until the unfortunate poet was left with no defence from the NKVD agents in the foyer. One by one, Blue Horns poets

incriminated themselves, or exculpated themselves and incriminated others. Nikolo Mitsishvili was arrested in the course of the proceedings. On 22 July 1937, during a presidium session to consider his expulsion, Paolo Iashvili suddenly pulled out a hunting-gun he had concealed and shot himself dead with a blast from both barrels. Mikheil Javakhishvili paced the foyer in distress, repeating: 'He was a real man.' Another member, it is reported, said: 'I'd happily drink the blood from his skull.' Members of Javakhishvili's family report a conversation just before this fatal session in which Paolo Iashvili told Javakhishvili that he was not afraid of being shot, or even of Beria's imprisoning him, or worse, his wife and daughter: he was afraid of something far more terrible, being turned by torture or moral blackmail into an informer and NKVD agent. Javakhishvili had attempted a more virile self-defence; unlike Iashvili, he saw the futility of resisting when his work was sufficient indictment.

Paolo Iashvili's now estranged brother-poet Titsian Tabidze tried a different tactic: he gave up defending himself and walked out of the proceedings. But this proved no obstacle to Beria.

The limits to Beria's power are shown by the fact that these proceedings destroyed most of the major writers of Armenia, Abkhazia, and Ossetia, but virtually no Russian writers were named except for a few already arrested: L. L. Averbakh, Ivan Kataev, Aleksandr Voronsky. Less explicable, however, is the survival of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. He intervened to defend Titsian Tabidze from abuse, refused to speak unless renegade Blue Horns such as the infamous turncoat Ali Arsenashvili or the NKVD agent (and panegyrist of collectivization) Konstantine Lortkipanidze were silenced or reprimanded. When Gamsakhurdia did speak, he used savage irony about the healthiness of purges. His anecdotes were shocking: he told the audience how stupid it was to prune Georgian walnut-trees just as Russians pruned fir-trees. He reported an assurance he had from Orjonikidze that dissident intellectuals would not be sent to concentration camps, since this would be an imitation of Hitler. The altercations clearly show that the president, Sandro Euli, (სანდრო ეული, 1890–1965)[136] and the secretary, Davit Demetradze, loathed him and yet were unable to pin him down. Gamsakhurdia had been named by Beria as someone with a Fascist aura; but behind the scenes there was almost certainly a personal understanding with Beria, who was perhaps amused by the spanner he had thrown into his own underlings' work.

Gamsakhurdia undoubtedly had an ideological link with Beria: they both detested the previous regime of Makharadze and Orjonikidze and probably both believed that those two were physically responsible for the assassination of Ilia Chavchavadze in 1907. Beria was unable to have Makharadze killed, presumably because of Stalin's intercessions on behalf of certain old Bolsheviks, but he and Gamsakhurdia collaborated in the rehabilitation of Chavchavadze from fundamentalist prohibition. Whatever the reasons, the mutual stalemate between Gamsakhurdia and Beria found a strange echo in the uneasy balance in the 1970s and 1980s between their successors, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, president of Georgia in 1990–1, and Eduard Shevardnadze, who likewise had hidden reasons for not plucking out an intellectual thorn in the regime's flesh.

On 10 December 1937, when the proceedings were over and a quarter of the Union of Writers were slaughtered, Beria addressed the survivors in a pre-election speech. He wound up his fantastic plot by linking all his victims — engineers, theatre directors, poets — in a vast conspiracy to spread typhoid in Kakhetia, sell Ajaria to the Turks, and kill Lavrenti Beria. The intelligentsia were told that, as under capitalism, they could only be 'the defenders of their owners' and would now have to learn 'more deeply the great Russian culture and language' [*applause*]. His gratitude was sparse; his chief producer, Demetradze, was denounced as a traitor and saboteur and shot. This may be because Demetradze was only a blunt razor-blade, or it may be because Beria discovered an act of compassion committed by Demetradze: when Iashvili had blown his brains out, one of the shocked younger members of the Union, Irakli Abashidze (ირაკლი აბაშიძე, 1909–92), burst into tears. Beria demanded of Demetradze a list of all those who had reacted with compassion to Iashvili's act of provocation and, to Abashidze's relief, Demetradze omitted to mention his moment of weakness.[137]

In a demonstration of party strength, Kandid Charkviani (კანდიდ ჩარკვიანი) was moved from the party secretariat to take over the rump of the Union of Writers; the intelligentsia soon understood themselves to be a branch of the party, for when Beria left for Moscow, Charkviani took over the reins as first secretary of the Georgian party. The submissive survivors of the Union of Writers lost only a further seven members in the repressions of 1940. Beria as literary critic had been successful beyond

the dreams of most critics; every writer he had disapproved of had ceased to write. The survivors were to produce little of value. Even Konstantine Gamsakhurdia could only take refuge in grandiose historical novels set in a Germanized mediæval Georgia. Apart from his novel *Beladi* ('The Leader'), a portrayal of Stalin as the infant Christ, he published, however, two ironic comments when the storm had abated. One was an article, 'Daydreams Have Outstripped Reality' (ოცნებამ გაუსწრო სინამდვილეს). The other was a translation of Dante's *Paradiso*. In autumn 1938 Lavrenti Beria moved to Moscow: there he found his workload enormous and his opportunities for literary criticism limited, and it was to the far less inventive Andrei Zhdanov that Stalin entrusted the enforcement of the party line in culture.

30: *Literature after the Great Terror*

BERIA'S departure for Moscow at the end of 1938 led to a strangely liberal interlude, exemplified by Ivane Ioseliani (ივანე იოსელიანი, 1892–1945) who had been silent for sixteen years. Orphaned at the age of 5, he had followed the usual pattern of a Kutaisi intellectual, from *gimnazia* to revolutionary socialism, prison, tuberculosis, and St Petersburg University. His individuality showed when he became an army officer who crossed over to the Bolsheviks in revolutionary Petrograd. His stories published between 1915 and 1923 are based on his life, with the same realistic studies of misfit sons of the gentries that we find in Giorgi Tsereteli. Javakhishvili had praised him mildly in a newspaper article (now untraceable) as an 'unpretentious talent', which was enough to persuade Ioseliani to give up literature for anonymous journalism. He was known to a close circle for a virtuoso gift of oral improvization, but only broke his silence in 1939 with a fine, free-thinking short story, 'Teimuraz III'. In the last days of the Menshevik government, Teimuraz, a middle-aged descendant of the Bagrations, comes to Tbilisi from Moscow, determined to learn his native language and history. As the British military mission prepares to abandon Georgia, causing a riot by hanging their underwear to dry on the balcony of the Hotel Majestic, Teimuraz begins to dream of a restored monarchy. The departure of the British mission and all his wealth is a fatal shock to Teimuraz's dreams: his funeral is Tbilisi's 'last parade of long sleeves, head-scarves, ancient swords and daggers, and of ladies in traditional headgear'. Nostalgia, mockery, and immediacy of recall carry only the slightest veneer of political correctness. Ioseliani followed this with a bland war-time story, *Kasiani's Bullet* (კასიანის ტყვია, 1941), contrasting Russian *émigré* and peasant. His last sketch, however, *Akaki Tsereteli's Last Years* (აკაკი წერეთლის უკანასკნელი წლები) is superb documental prose. Unfortunately, Ioseliani's works fell into obscurity, with not even a reference in the Georgian encylopaedia.

The enormous toll of young Georgian men at the front in 1943 deprived literature of a whole generation of writers. Post-war Georgian prose was in the hands of survivors, such as Gamsakhurdia, whose talent

had fossilized. But at least one of the new generation killed in action with the Red Army showed real promise: Mirza Gelovani (მირზა გელოვანი, 1917–44) had attracted attention at the age of 16 with his childlike wonderment at nature. Some of his war poems transcend patriotic heroics and invest the horror of war with a naïve enjoyment that dimly recalls Apollinaire's fascination under fire. Just before dying, Gelovani wrote 'Here, where others' (იქ, სადაც სხვები, 1943):

> Here, where others become like stone,
> In the rain of fire, in the flurry of bullets,
> I have not lost that loftiness of mine,
> Which you so much loved in me.
>
> And at the staggering of the deadly bullets,
> Reaching out like tongues of fire in the night,
> I stare greedily with child's eyes,
> As you shudder in fear for me.[138]

The first poet, however, of proven genius to emerge after Beria had departed for Moscow was Lado Asatiani (ლადო ასათიანი, 1917–43). Protected by terminal illness from fear of repression, he emerged like a bolt from the blue at the end of the 1938 purges with lyrics that show no constraints or ideology. Like Ivane Ioseliani, Asatiani was a swallow who did not make a summer. For a very brief time, until war in June 1941 awoke official vigilance, his song-like celebrations of everyday pleasures, believable tributes to friends, to Georgia and its classic poets were published, and they revived a lively colloquial Georgian and gentle irony. The innocent hedonism is infectious ('A Joke', ხალაღობო, 1940):

> Though my wife is beautiful, I want one more beautiful,
> Exploding like a peach tree,
> Waving her wings like a merlin.

But Asatiani has intimations of mortality 'Before death…' (ვიდრე სიკვდილი…, 1941):

> Before death wraps me in a dark gown…
> For the last time lay me down in my wooden cottage…
> For the last time without grumbling leave me thus,
> Before death stiffens my restless soul.

In the war years, Soviet poets were commissioned to celebrate not their own lives but heroic battles of the past as examples for the future: Asatiani evoked the eighteenth-century battle of Aspindza with unique dramatic verve, but official distrust of Georgian nationalism (Aspindza was a battle where Russian troops left the Georgians in the lurch) cut the print-run to ten copies. In any case, Asatiani's real concern was his own demise, as a recently unearthed poem,[139] 'To Mother' (დედისადმი), shows:

> All the great households have fallen,
> Nobody will make the mastiff gnaw at the chain,
> Though once they fortified you with wine,
> Today nobody will even give you water to drink.
> The fortresses and towers are turned to ash,
> The song 'Live for Ever' no longer roars out.
> I know well, soon I shall die,
> I cannot keep up with this century.
> Oh I know this and that is why I want
> To look at you for a final time,
> Mother, pure as Christ's icon,
> And to make you look at these torments.
> And like my very first babbling
> With widespread arms and open eyes,
> Unforgettable mother, at the time of death
> I want to repeat your name.

Nothing to match Asatiani's poetry had been, or would be, published in Georgian for a decade.

Other talents who emerged at the same time as Asatiani, such as Irakli Abashidze or Ioseb Noneshvili (იოსებ ნონეშვილი, 1918–80), were soon led — by war, fame, and the need for acceptance — into the usual channels of patriotism, socialist optimism, literary functions, and poetic clichés: their value is in inverse proportion to their official role. Translating Russian poetry, however, made them technically impressive: Irakli Abashidze's rhetorical celebration in verse (*Palestina, Palestina!*, პალესტინა, პალესტინა!, 1961) of a journey to Jerusalem in 1960 to 'discover' the supposed portrait of Rustaveli uses all the stage tricks he had learnt from rendering Mayakovsky's longer poems into Georgian.

Completely but cannily obscure was Niko Samadashvili (ნიკო სამადაშვილი, 1905–64), who remained all his life an accountant, unpublished until 1967. Until the mid 1990s his poems were undated and uncommented: now their text and his reputation are firm. 'The Last Christians — Bethany' (უკანასკნელი ქრისტიანები – ბეთანია) was chosen as the title poem for the collection (*Bethany*, also the name of an ancient monastery-church in a wilderness south-west of Tbilisi) published in 1973. It shows how out of joint Samadashvili was with the prevailing ideology and how original was his private interpretation of words:

> We made our way down and Bethany
> Turned its back on us, hid in the woods.
> We had not sinned, may God know it,
> By besmirching the purity of the hedgerows.
> The river in the gorge shuddered as we came
> — It was the tears of abandoned children.
> We were going together up the slope
> For some reason silent, somehow undestined…
> The path was barely visible, at times high above on the hillside
> The experience that had roused excitement was fading,
> Behind us, because of the shrine, howled
> The wolf of Varazi, its face racked with fever.
> It is hard to be always soured in heart,
> To exorcise someone with a coarse yawn.
> Unrepentant we were leaving the temple,
> The last Christians.

Quite unlike Samadashvili, Ana Kalandadze (ანა კალანდაძე, 1924–2008) made an instant impression in 1945 with her short and personal lyrics. Rarely more than eight lines, they portray intimate moods, without obvious autobiographical source but with delicate impressionism. Much of her work can be compared to a diary, reluctantly opened: 'So what is silence, prolonged and burning? | My protection from heartbreak.' Over forty years her poetry changed little: the yearning became more affirmative, contemplation of others' lives ousted her former solipsism. From the 700 or so poems she published it is now possible to extract some sort of consistent philosophy, for all the reticence and stoicism. The rare outbursts of defiance never amount to more than a couple of lines in a

poem and were subtle enough not arouse the antagonism of authority: she also exploited, like Russian poets, the *apparatchik* attitude that a woman poet cannot be expected to write ideological propaganda and may safely be left to express her inner feelings. Yet, Kalandadze has lines that show her as adamant in opposition as the female saints she emulates, Saint Shushanik, Saint Nino, and especially the martyred Queen Ketevan, all of whom underwent the maximum of suffering with the minimum of words:

> The bronze pot was thrown to the executioner,
> The executioner of human feelings hummed.
> The prayer spoken by blue lips followed the wind,
> The wind blew…
> They burnt with fire the queen, her clothes ripped from her,
> She was an unbending queen.

The Kalandadze philosophy may be found in two lines:

> You pour out poison, that is your way,
> But why should I open my mouth to it?

She asserted her right not to celebrate Soviet socialism but to revert to private feeling and musicality; the example of her verse has been as influential as its filigree technique. A typical early poem, *Mulberry Tree* (თუთა, 1945) exemplifies her oriental stylization of western emotionalism:

> I wish the mulberry would burst into the house,
> I wish it would lay its hand on my head…
> The tall tree, the emerald green tree
> Will always call me, strike my eye…
> What whispering my ears can hear!
> What whispering! Tormenting, burning…
> I wish the mulberry would come in the house,
> I wish it would put its arm round my waist.

Her analytical work in the Institute of Linguistics on languages of the North Caucasus may have some bearing on the precision and minimalism of her language, reversing the usual Georgian technique of rhetorical expansion and compressing the maximum into an aphoristic minimum of words. Her last poems were sparser still, often no longer than a Japanese haiku, bereft of rhyme or constant metre.

Like the Russian theatre, the Georgian theatre was crippled by the Great Terror: new plays were rarely more than political or patriotic pageants. Some are theatrically effective, such as the two historical dramas by Levan Gotua (ლევან გოთუა, 1905–), *King Erekle* (მეფე ერეკლე, 1942) and *Davit Aghmashenebeli* (დავით აღმაშენებელი, 1944). Gotua, perhaps because of his arrest in 1940, preferred to set all his work in the distant past. He showed his gratitude for his release by writing plays about the victories of the Second World War, but his public appreciated his colourful and melodramatic historical novels and short stories.

The resurrection of the Georgian novel after Stalinism took much longer: true, literate, genuinely popular authors emerged in the 1960s. They no longer preached ideology, but enforced optimism and sentimentality kept them conventional. The repressive literary establishment in Georgia, as in other non-Slav republics of the USSR, was slower to thaw out than in Russia. Only in poetry do we see a real shift: in the work of Murman Lebanidze (მურმან ლებანიძე, 1922–2003), Mukhran Machavariani (მუხრან მაჭავარიანი, 1929–), and Tariel Chanturia (ტარიელ ჭანტურია, 1932–) the ice could be heard breaking even at the end of the 1940s.

Lebanidze was a returned soldier, then an editor of a literary journal (*Dila*, 'Morning') before joining the Communist Party. His prestige and protected status allowed him to foster liberalization discreetly. His own patriotism was sublimated in Robert Burns and Rudyard Kipling, whom he translated into Georgian. But he never took defence of his country or fellow poets to the point of dissidence. Lebanidze succinctly but subtly summarized the humanity with which he performed his unpleasant duties as critic and arbiter in a prose poem of 1964, 'Me' (მე):[140]

> I have an amazing hand.
> A chicken killed by me flaps about for very little time, just an hour and a half,
> A piglet stays alive for twenty-four hours,
> A pig doesn't really die…
> Last year a young pig covered with soot had me running a whole little backyard, made me lose my knife in the thorns and forced me to use a new knife to kill it…
> My mother tells me today (squatting, she holds a basin in her hand, hands me my third cigarette — I can't get hold of it, I am using all four limbs to pluck the chicken I have killed):

'If you had killed a man at the front, he wouldn't be dead yet.'
I was last at the front twenty years ago.

Mukhran Machavariani has enjoyed more prestige as a poet. From the start, his verse, influenced by Walt Whitman, was designed for public performance: he celebrates love and nature repetitively, even banally. But Machavariani's sincerity linked him in the public mind with Ana Kalandadze, at a time when there was a dearth of apolitical lyrics. The young poet's boldness in finding new phrases for a tired official ideology — cries such as 'Communism will not be brought by horse and carriage or by oxcart' — was a coded rebellion against the establishment. He scandalized the tribune of the Union of Writers in 1949 by this new tone for old subjects. His poem *Saba*, on Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's hopeless mission to France and Rome (1713–6), was a typical subject-matter for Communist poetry under Beria: moments from the lives of great patriotic poets. But its grotesquerie seemed blasphemous. It opened:

Orbeliani was made to wait for Louis XIV and...
Number fifteen came in like a man.

Thirteen Louis are listening from the walls,
Louis Quatorze is fond of a kitten,
The King's deafness has deprived the people of a voice,
The King has more pity for a cat than for the people.

The King listened to Saba's speech about something:
'Oh... Oh... Oh,' he said
And it was as if he regretted it.

But nothing came of it
(Saba's voice was like a cat's miaow)
What the Georgian ambassador
Brought, he straightaway took away from
That famous Versailles.

In fact Machavariani's daring was officially sanctioned: as the cold war deepened, it was important for Stalin to demonstrate that help could no more be sought from the west now than two centuries ago. Machavariani, however, continued to develop the Ludovician theme with poetry about Molière and reinforced his patriotic realism with a series of verses on the

1932 rebellion. His later talent was dissipated in translating Bulgarian poetry and in demagogic interventions when Soviet rule collapsed.

Tariel Chanturia has a less naïve and more equivocating talent, more indebted to western poetry. He was closely linked to the journal *Tsiskari*, from its foundation in 1957: it is hard to say whether he established the journal or the journal him. Chanturia's poetry often commemorates the dead and emphasizes their likeness to the living: his commentary and pastiche of François Villon's *Petit Testament* (brilliantly translated into Georgian by Davit Tserediani (დავით წერედიანი) in the 1960s), and an ambivalent lyric about Mozart and Salieri show Chanturia's conviction that the poet must be both rogue and seer. In 1978 he wrote:

I too am a little bit a Salieri,
I too am a little bit of a Judas!
Oh yes, have mercy on me
So that I kill the Cain in me and
The Salieri.

Sadly, the Salieri element came to the fore in the vicious polemics that Chanturia indulged against less fervent nationalists in the early 1990s, and we must remember that his verse of the 1970s shows intelligence, wit, and honesty, and an awareness that the living cannot match the dead. A poem published in *Mnatobi* in February 1979, dedicated to the memory of Paolo Iashvili and others, shows Chanturia's real pathos when he sees Georgian poetry as a chimney beyond repair:

A thousand mornings, a thousand evenings,
A thousand-fold smoke from a thousand chimneys
Seek through the village the king of chimneymakers:
'Man, I needed a master-chimneymaker!'

Again you hear the cock crow in the village,
Throughout the village the dogs bark,
Smoke rises again from the chimney,
But nowhere can the king of chimneymakers be seen.

You seek in vain, you wait in vain
For the master clown and generous giver,
Through the high throat of the high chimney
The king of chimneymakers has reached the heavens.

In the 1990s he became a rabble-rousing nationalist; recently his poetry (easier to find on the internet than in print, though a selection is available in a recent anthology) has reverted to its laconic, aphoristic irony, enriched perhaps by his disillusionment. A typical lyric is 'e=mc²', arguing that people, preoccupied by apocalyptic prospects (AIDS, extinction of species, Georgia's unheated winters), now know nothing.

A few poets of this generation have won fame posthumously. Perhaps the greatest of these forgotten figures is the Khevsur Gabriel Jabushanuri (გაბრიელ ჯაბუშანური, 1917–1968): in 1944, with other villagers from Arkhoti, he was resettled on lands left vacant by the Ingush after they, together with the Chechens, had been deported en masse to Kazakhstan by Georgian NKVD troops, on Stalin's orders. Jabushanuri was overcome by the desolation of deserted villages and abandoned dogs, and virtually all his poetry is a lamentation, sometimes in Biblical, sometimes in Khevsur folk epic style, sometimes in a dramatic free verse of his own devising, for the fate of the Ingush. Even after the Ingush were allowed to return in 1956, the topic of their deportation remained officially tabu and generally unpopular. Jabushanuri's verses were periodically published in the 1960s, but they were never endorsed or reviewed: very few readers were able to appreciate the immediacy of his language or the generosity of his sympathies for a traditional enemy's ordeals. Jabushanuri lived an itinerant life: by the time he was offered a room by the Writers' Union, he was unable to cope with a fixed abode. In his last years he wandered the city in rags, pursued by mobs of stone-throwing children. Only in 1991, a year of few publications, was an attempt made to print a comprehensive selection of his verse under the title *Hoy, Ingushetia's Clouded Sky* (ჰოი, ღილღოს დაღრუბლული ცაო). Most of his texts, stories as well as ballads, are now available on the internet: a new sense of common victimhood has made it easier for Georgians to understand what the Ingush suffered and thus to accept Jabushanuri as 'the mourner of Ingushetia's ruined villages', and his poetry as modern Lamentations of Jeremiah: 'the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths,' in the words of the poet's epigraph to one of his stories.

31: *From Thaw to Deluge*

THERE was no immediate resurgence for the Georgian novel after the death of Stalin and the execution of Beria. De-Stalinization and the 'thaw' were a liberating force only in Russia and the Slav republics of the USSR; Khrushchev's famous speech of 1956 to the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party had tragic consequences in Tbilisi. That year the statue of Stalin was pulled down: crowds of students and ordinary townspeople came to protest at what they saw as an act of Russian chauvinism, not so much the dethronement of a tyrant, as a desecration of their culture and language. The demonstration grew rowdy; someone tore down and publicly defecated on a portrait of a leading 'reformist' Communist, Anastas Mikoyan; at this point a KGB unit opened fire, and hundreds of Georgia's young intellectuals were slaughtered in a hail of bullets. The government of Mzhavanadze, whom Khrushchev installed as his 'viceroy' in Tbilisi, was determinedly anti-intellectual: writers, artists, and actors were spurned and ousted from key posts like the directorate of theatres or editorship of journals. The new party circles had no ideology except obedience to Moscow, and connivance with the criminal underworld. In Moscow, where Khrushchev engaged in dialogue with Russian writers, encouraging Tvardovsky and his journal *Novy mir*, tolerating the cult of Anna Akhmatova, using Solzhenitsyn as a battering-ram against the party establishment, literature was in ferment, even if the old intolerance reared its head in the vicious persecution of Pasternak. But in Georgia no such dialogue took place between Mzhavanadze and Georgian intellectuals. Ideas fermented only in the bold Russian-language monthly *Literaturnaia Gruziia*, founded in 1957: but its most adventurous publications in the 1960s, under the editorship of Mikheil Mrevlishvili, were about Russian, not Georgian, writers in Georgia: Giorgi Margvelashvili's daring publication of poems by Mandelstam and letters by Pasternak to Georgian friends marked new departures in Soviet literature and were, presumably, underwritten in Moscow, not Tbilisi.

By the time of Beria's execution in late 1953, Georgian literary journalism had shrunk to just two major periodicals — the weekly *Literary Georgia*, which stayed under its Stalinist editorial board until

1963, and the monthly *Mnatobi* (მნათობი, 'Luminary'), which only began to respond to Moscow's thaw in 1962, when Vano Tsulukidze (ვანო წულუკიძე) became its editorial secretary. The Union of Writers' and Communist Youth Union's more innovative monthly *Tsiskari* began only in 1957, in the same year as *Literaturnaia Gruziia*. Only when Shevardnadze took over the reins of government did real diversity blossom: the quarterly *Kritika* (კრიტიკა) emerged in 1972; *Saunje* (საუნჯე, 'Treasure') a bi-monthly journal, largely of newly translated European literature, became Georgia's most sought-after periodical after 1974; *Gantiadi* (განთიადი, 'Dawn'), a monthly based in Kutaisi, appeared in 1975. These belated flowers attracted all Georgia's writers and readers until the economic collapse of 1992 deprived them of funds for paper.

But the Russian spring of 1954–6 came to Georgia almost twenty years too late: in that interval the old literary functionaries, such as Irakli Abashidze, held on to power and thwarted the attempts of younger talent to gain access to the limited media available. In Georgia book-publishing remained under direct party and ministerial control throughout the 1960s and 1970s, whereas in Russia and the Ukraine some power over literary publications had been delegated to the republics' Unions of Writers.

The real removal of Stalin's shadow over Georgian culture came only after Khrushchev's fall in 1964, long after Stalin's statues had been pulled down; finally Brezhnev was persuaded to rid Georgia of Mzhavanadze's corrupt regime and replace it in 1972 with the rule of a ruthless interior minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze's policy relied from the start on courting intellectuals in an effort to balance Georgian aspirations with Moscow's suspicions. From 1970 to 1985 Shevardnadze tried to save Georgia from Moscow's relentless pressure to russify education and government. He also dissuaded the intelligentsia from violent protest against the cruder manifestations of Russian chauvinism and did not hesitate even to execute intellectuals who took resistance too far. In the 1970s writers were offered the most coveted jobs in the arts; Georgian literature recovered a little of the courage and ingenuity it had last shown in the 1920s. But Shevardnadze's real love was for the pictorial arts, for theatre and the cinema, and these were the forces that, with his financial and political support, broke Georgia's isolation and once more drew the attention of Europe to Georgian imagination and expressive skills.

Georgian theatre continued to view its writers as did Sandro Akhmeteli — 'wretched Georgian writers' — and thus commissioned few important contemporary scripts. The most successful contemporary dramatist has been Otia Ioseliani (ოტია იოსელიანი, 1930–): his comedies *Until the Ox-Cart Turns Over* (სანამ ურემი გადაბრუნდება, 1969) and *Six Old Maids and a Man* (ექვსი შინაბერა და ერთი მამაკაცი, 1971) were theatrical and witty enough to fill theatres in East Berlin, but his serious drama with its socialist moralizing, such as *Man is Born Only Once* (ადამიანი იბადება ერთხელ, 1962) has had no more international appeal than his earlier novels and stories of heroism and sacrifice in the Second World War.

Real literary genius in the Georgian theatre lies in the work of Revaz Gabriadze (რევაზ გაბრიაძე, 1936–), director of the Tbilisi Puppet Theatre. Gabriadze is famous for his fluent three-dimensional animation and stage sets: the foreign audience, fascinated by the puppets' choreography, often overlooks the ingenuity of the scripts. Gabriadze began his career in the cinema of the mid-1970s, writing scripts for popular comedies, such as Shengelaia's *Crackpots* (შერეკილები). But his puppetry in which he mastered all the arts — graphic, manipulative and literary — brought him renown. He daringly adapted *La Traviata* as *Alfred and Violetta* to parody both Dumas fils and Soviet reality. He took Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* to mirror the civic corruption in Tbilisi. After independence, his puppet theatre has often been the only functioning theatre in Tbilisi: in the 1990s his greatest comic production was *The Autumn of my Spring* (ჩემი გაზაფხულის შემოდგომა), in which Boria, an outspoken, even foul-mouthed bird, defends the oppressed against the forces of law and order. Gabriadze's biggest international success is a tragi-comic epic *The Battle of Stalingrad: A Requiem* (სტალინგრადის ბრძოლა: რეკვიემი), so inventive and so moving that it deserves to stand alongside Shostakovich's *Leningrad* symphony as a testimony to human suffering.

Despite his cosmopolitan material, Gabriadze's roots are provincial:

> I come from Kutaisi and my city belongs to the Mediterranean Sea. Kutaisi, Colchis are stones and laurel, stones and boxwood, stones and cypress, stones and the stone-tree [Zelkova, *dzelkva*]. There, trees move stones apart. In the country around Kutaisi you can act Daphne and Chloë with ease: you just have to make sure no electricity pole is in the field of vision — no problems. There are quiet springs, there is a fantastically beautiful spot, Sataplia [სათაფლია, 'the place for honey'].[141]

Some of the fantastic, gently ironical fairy-tale material Gabriadze uses for his puppets he has published as short stories, for instance 'The Alien Bird' (უცხო ჩიტი, 1978), or *Chito GK-49-54: Doctor and Patient* (*ჩიტო ГК 49-54: ექიმი და ავადმყოფი*, 2003). The latter, a sentimental tale of a sailor driven so mad by disappointment in love that he pretends he is a car, and of the equally tragically widowed doctor who puts up with him, is known in English as *The Forbidden Christmas*. The mask of fantasy and innocent child's play conceals a very knowing and daring nihilistic dramatic talent which survived the 1970s and 1980s because Gabriadze was at the periphery of literature, because he was assumed to be a children's entertainer, and because of the hard currency his theatre earned.

Since Stalin's death, the cinema has been the one field where Georgian genius has excelled its former self. Like Gabriadze's puppet-theatre, Georgian cinema proved a means for regenerating literature. The film director Goderdzi Chokheli (გოდერძი ჩოხელი, 1954–2007) began writing, at the same time as his first film scripts, haunting short stories such as 'A Letter to the Fir Trees (წერილი ნაძვებს): a sick old man finds a fir tree growing out of his shoulder; he nurtures it, regardless of his own health, crossing the country to a fir forest in the south, before returning home to bury himself so that the tree can take root. Many poems have self-immolation as their theme: 'Your body is mightier than my body, so I entrust my bones to you after death,' runs a poem entitled 'Look after me, mother earth'. He produced in 1990 *The Twilit Valley* (ბინდისფერი ხეობა) — a collection of lively and graphic stories and sketches set in his native mountain region, Gudamaqari. His films, stories and poems are darkened by a melancholy that often deepens into clinical depression.

In Russia, the process of rehabilitation had brought a handful of wraith-like writers back to literature and provoked the resignation, even suicide, of those officials of the Union of Writers who had denounced them. But in Georgia, where virtually no writer, once arrested, had survived the terror, the Union of Writers and its organs remained in the hands of the same gang that Beria had established, and prose-writers were slow to innovate. Giorgi Shatberashvili (გიორგი შატბერაშვილი, 1910–65), who had begun with a precocious agitprop novel of collectivization, *The Enemy*, (*მტერი*, 1933), achieved wide popularity with his short story, 'The Sun of the Dead' (მკვდრის მზე, 1959) in which a brave villager achieves

legendary status. Nodar Dumbadze (ნოდარ დუმბაძე, 1928–84) made a very cinematic idyll out of student and country life, *Me, Granny, Iliko, and Ilarion* (*მე, ბებია, ილიკო და ილარიონი*, 1960), so acceptable that he was invited to write a positive novel about the life of Soviet frontier guards, *Don't Be Afraid, Mother* (*ნუ გეშინია, დედა*, 1971), and became a secretary of the Union of Writers from 1973 until his death, a promotion that diminished his creativity and destroyed his physique. The best that can be said of these dwarf talents is that they built up a voluntary readership for real literature. Non-fictional prose is arguably more imaginative, for instance the memoirs of youth, pre-revolutionary radicalism, and exile published from 1955 onwards by the great scholar, linguist, and non-Marxist radical Tedo Sakhokia (თედო სახოკია, 1868–1956), who had by a miracle survived the terror of the 1930s unscathed except by insomnia.

The efforts of original prose-writers were surpassed by translators, who were, once Shevardnadze first came to power in 1972, free to publish in Georgian works unsympathetic to a Leninist regime. Evelyn Waugh was translated by Juliet Bakradze-Mchedlishvili, (ჯულიეტა ბაქრაძე-მჭედლიშვილი) with none of the cuts enforced in the Russian version by Maria Lorie. Even James Joyce's *Ulysses* was one third translated, and innocently bowdlerized, by Niko Qiasashvili (ნიკო ყიასაშვილი, 1926–96) in 1983. Spanish as well as English became widely known among translators in Tbilisi, so that the Magical Realism of Gabriel García Márquez has left its mark on major Georgian writers.

The other refuge for suppressed talent was children's literature; here the predominant writer was Revaz Inanishvili (რევაზ ინანიშვილი, 1926–91): his graphic lyrical prose was initially directed at adults, but his fondness for wildlife, nature, and child protagonists, as well as a simple fairy-tale narrative style, made him Georgia's best-loved children's writer. Collections of short stories such as *Where the Story-Teller Lives* (*სად ცხოვრობს მეზღაპრე*, 1970) have a lyrical freedom that was not yet available to writers aiming at adult readers.

The slaughter and arrests in the first wave of 'de-Stalinization' of 1956 had thinned the ranks of future writers. One of the most promising survivors was Guram Rcheulishvili (გურამ რჩეულიშვილი, 1934–61). His short stories have a strong autobiographical restlessness, contrasting an idealistic hero with a selfish, hedonistic crowd. 'The Feast of Alaverdi [27

September]' (ალავერდობა) is regarded as a masterpiece. But Rcheulishvili drowned at sea and the handful of stories collected in *Pan-Pipes* (სალამური, 1965) is only an unfulfilled promise.

The first real novelist to match Javakhishvili for narrative power and for making legend out of history was Chabua (Mzechabuk) Amirejibi (ჭაბუა (მზეჭაბუკ) ამირეჯიბი, 1921–) He began late with the unremarkable short stories of *The Road* (გზა, 1962). Most of his life was spent as a prisoner in Siberia, and much of that time on the run, under a false identity, an experience which he transformed into art. He achieved sensational success for the magazine *Tsiskari* and fame for himself with one substantial novel of over 700 pages, *Data Tutashkhia* (დათა თუთაშხია, 1972–5), which took a decade to write and the advent of Eduard Shevardnadze to get past the censors. Like many Georgian novels, it is the story of an eponymous outlaw and folk hero, Data Tutashkhia, but it achieves narrative tension and interesting ambiguities by having a gendarme, the detached and imperturbable double of the bandit, Count Szegedy, for a narrator. This narrator often passes the story-telling on to other participants. *Data Tutashkhia* is a thriller and, in a way, a spy-novel, with justified Dostoevskian pretensions to dealing with the fate of an individual and national soul. The hero, modelled on the pagan god Tutashkha (perhaps from the Mingrelian for 'day of the moon', in other words a Saint George figure in the Kartvelian pre-Christian religion), one of several Promethean prototypes in the Georgian pantheon. Data Tutashkhia eventually rolls wounded into the sea, but his body is never found and his persecutors can never relax. The epigraphs to the novel, a sort of Mingrelian Genesis and Apocalypse, establish the hero as a God who loses his divinity in order to save those he comes into contact with, an inverted Christ.

A fundamental moral paradox underlies the novel. The alien gendarmerie in pursuit of the bandit have to corrupt, rob, and incriminate so many of Tutashkhia's countrymen and associates, while he has to counter their traps by releasing or snatching these instruments of authority from the clutches of officialdom, that in the end the bandit is a force for good and the police a force for evil. Apart from the inverted picture of the outlaw, already established by Javakhishvili's Arsena, Amirejibi develops Dostoevsky's idea of the intimate dependency of criminal and pursuer,

locked into a joint pursuit of truth and deeply troubled by the paradoxes their consciences throw up. The novel is not just one of pursuit (about which Amirejibi knows more than any living novelist) but a celebration of the violent and primitive mountain ecology of the north-west Caucasian peoples and their impenetrable forests. Amirejibi also uses the notorious interpenetration of policemen, informers, and criminals in the Russian empire at the beginning of this century to create a vexing moral ambiguity and to hint at the moral disintegration of the empire which fails so spectacularly to catch the bandit who defies it. Paying a barely perceptible lip-service to Soviet affirmative canons, Amirejibi won popularity by combining national mythology with a frank defence of free spirit.

Given the Flaubertian thoroughness of his writing, the death of his son in the tragic collapse into criminal chaos of the newly independent Georgia, it was astounding that in 1995 Amirejibi published his next novel *Gora Mborgali* (გორა მბორგალი, '*frenzied*', or '*infuriating*'), begun in 1978. It too concerns the unity between a fugitive from justice and the prison warder pursuing him. Based more closely on Amirejibi's own experience from childhood to middle age, its plot begins with the death of Stalin and uses material familiar to readers of *Gulag Archipelago*. Its epigraphs are from the Bible, from the Georgian chronicles, its scenery a snow-covered Siberia and its prisons. Despite its autobiographical basis and despite a vision of Siberia comparable with Solzhenitsyn's, the novel, however readable, is a disappointment after *Data Tutashkhia*. In 2003, after a serious operation that no one expected him to survive, Amirejibi completed his latest novel, a historical reconstruction *George the Brilliant* (გიორგი ბრწყინვალე) about King George V of Georgia, who in the 14th century gave Georgia a short-lived break from the devastation wreaked by the Mongols and their Iranian vassals. The king speaks in the first person, the narrative language finds a path between anachronistic modernisms and the obscurities of real 14th century Georgian. Given the paucity of documentation, historical fiction has always been easy, even facile, in Georgian literature, but *George the Brilliant* has a prophetic relevance to the present, which raises the novel to the level of real literature. It is likely to appeal to modern Georgians by its assertion that the mediæval heroic spirit of its minor characters is undying, but one must still conclude that Amirejibi was never greater than in his first novel.

A far more fluent writer in the resurrection of the Georgian novel is Otar Chiladze (ოთარ ჭილაძე, 1933–), whose first novel coincided with Amirejibi's both in time and in its use of myth. He is the brother of Tamaz Chiladze, (თამაზ ჭილაძე, 1931–), a more facile writer. In the late 1950s Otar Chiladze's poetry asserted total alienation from Soviet themes: it was obsessed with Orphic and other myths. Only after twenty years as a poet did he surprise the public by venturing straight into the novel. The links, however, are organic. His poem *Three Clay Tablets* (თიხის სამი ფირფიტა, 1963) on motifs from Gilgamesh, king of Uruki, is to lead straight into his second novel: Chiladze combines pagan harshness with the mood of tenth-century hymnographers:

> How simple is man!
> How little he stays, to become earth
> And with what helpless voices he shrieks,
> Calling life something and defending it.
> But nobody runs away anywhere,
> Everyone begins life from the beginning
> And, like a great clay puppet,
> The heat holds the city in its hand.[142]

While he could be classified as a historical novelist and, like Javakhishvili or Gamsakhurdia, appears to be attempting the same synthesis of myth and history as Thomas Mann, in fact he begins the genre anew. Indeed, he differs from Amirejibi too, for the elements of research and autobiographical input are subordinated to free invention: outer events and mythological details take second place to the closed world of his characters. Chiladze's first novel (over 500 pages), *A Man Went Down the Road* (გზაზე კაცი მიდიოდა, 1972–3) goes back to Hellenic and Georgian myth, imagining the ancient Georgian site of Vani in pre-history, its first part dealing with the meeting of Jason and Aeëtes, father of Medea. The second and third parts of the novel focus on Parnaoz, first of all a dreamer, then an exile, who on his return unwittingly dooms those around him. The myth itself is only a springboard for a novel about the tragic clash of two sexes and two races, and a reason to imagine Georgia at the dawn of history, when the major city of Colchis, Vani, was a sea-port. The leap of imagination required, as well as the grim view of human nature, makes Chiladze comparable with William Golding.

Chiladze's later novels have the same pattern of ill-starred Orphic redemption: the second, *Everyone that Findeth Me* (ყოველმან ჩემმან მპოვნელმან, 1976 — the unspoken half of the quotation is 'shall slay me'), covers the whole of the nineteenth century in the village of Uruki — the village is ominously named after the capital of ancient Sumeria, a connection with the mythological epic of Gilgamesh which lies behind much of Chiladze's poetry, the key to appreciating his prose. Beneath a four-generation family saga and a catalogue of dementia, the novel explores, despite a superficially upbeat ending, the same hell of relationships as in his first work, this time through the biblical legend of Cain and Abel. Major Kaikhosro Makabeli forces himself on a submissive widow Ana, driving away her menacing Tatar lover. For most of the novel Kaikhosro degenerates into an oppressive patriarch, terrified by the prospect of being killed in revenge for his usurpy, loathed by his grandchildren. Fragments of goodness, such as the tame deer the villagers feed, are destroyed. The coming of the railway, as in Chekhov's stories, brings change and even hope. The journey of one grandchild to find his brother in Siberia also leaves us with a Chekhovian ending, as the searcher, Aleksandre, returns with his brother's orphaned girl to bring up. Chiladze's genius is in the maintenance of a fascinating but unbreathable atmosphere, in which even his most horrific characters, such as Iagori, the grave-digger-cum-rapist, are given utterances that force the reader to ponder. The theme of the fear of death is strengthened by surrounding the degenerating Kaikhosro with a gruesome trio of incompetent Job's comforters — doctor, priest, and grave-digger — while the most animate beings in the house are a clock and a doll. Although the novel has *longueurs* that western editors would have removed, there is no doubt of its genius and its moral force, which Chiladze summarizes with a Kakhetian proverb: 'The devil takes over abandoned churches.'

Prose dried up the flow of Chiladze's verse: throughout the 1970s ever-shorter lyrics are sapped both of length and of hope by his long narratives; nevertheless, what the novelist is reticent about, the poet speaks openly about:

> We are moving away, every moment moving away…
> And with branches of forbidden sadness
> We batter down the shutters of each other's souls.
> It is as if nothing had any sense left,

Neither loyalty nor expectancy,
Because we have remained heroes to the end
And couldn't notice that our support had collapsed,
That we had tortured our souls, not our bodies,
And we have killed this weakness in ourselves,
By which power was and is given
To man.[143]

The Iron Theatre (*რკინის თეატრი*, 1981) moves on to three decades centring around 1900: it shows a conflict of life and art comparable to that depicted in the work of Thomas Mann. Here, real figures, Georgia's writers and activists, figure on the periphery and make the novel more typical of its historical genre in its mix of fact and fiction. Each of the six chapters has its characters rise and fall, so that life in fact appears to be the stage. The narrative is less controlled, events are seen through the minds of the characters, the author retreats only to comment. His fourth, somewhat autobiographical novel, *The March Cockerel* (*მარტის მამალი*, 1987), explores perennial predicaments in a contemporary setting: the trauma afflicting Niko, a boy who accidentally witnesses a tragedy and whose entire life is altered by what he sees. For all the contemporary psychological realism, the Orphic mythological elements and the dense poetic prose still dominate:

> The house again seemed deserted; in some distant nook someone had clearly lit a light, if only a night-light, and its faint, restless glimmer reached as far as the veranda. Niko, his breath held, walked round the evilly creaking veranda, went into the house, and hesitated for a little by the door, perhaps so that his eyes could get used to the ambience. (Niko felt he had come across a labyrinth — one room followed another, endlessly). Thus Niko was bewildered, he was so disoriented by fear, that he kept coming and going through the same doors, meeting the same oppressive emptiness, and every room was full of the same chilling, undisturbed darkness and with the colourless, barely throbbing tatters of a saturated, exhausted light.[144]

Chiladze is a playwright of some interest. His first play, *Tsate's Red Boots* (*წათეს წითელი წაღები*), was scheduled for performance by the Rustaveli Theatre in 1970, but was taken out of production and could not be published until 1986 in *Khelovneba* (*ხელოვნება*, 'Art'). Its first

performance was only in 2007, when its relevance to Georgia's present political predicaments had in fact become even stronger. The court of a new king, in pre-historic Lazica, beset by usurpy and treachery, has to make a choice, whether to be autonomous or accept Roman suzerainty. In November 1990 Chiladze published in *Mnatobi* a second full-length play, unpunctuated by changes of act or scene, *The Labyrinth* (*ლაბირინთი*), with the same lamp flickering in the darkness as in *The March Cockerel*: now the silence is broken by distant drunken voices. Two identical old men, vaguely dressed as hospital or prison inmates, clearly straight out of a Beckett play, reflect on life's meaninglessness. The characters are mostly unnamed: there is virtually no action, except for casual incursions from the crowd, a man and woman in love, and a drunk. The play is mainly *Waiting for Godot* with no Godot. Life, the first old man asserts, is throwing beans at a wall, living like a silk-worm, spinning your own shroud. The incursions are bitterly interpreted as parodies of tragic myths: as the unhappy lovers leave, the first old man comments, 'Jason has taken our Medea.' Myth, speech, and hope combine in a slightly less gloomy finale:

FIRST OLD MAN Man generally speaks in dreams. Haven't you understood yet?
SECOND OLD MAN How could I not? Deer bark, wolves howl.
DRUNK That is how I have survived.
SECOND OLD MAN Ostriches run, sparrows fly.
FIRST OLD MAN But man speaks.

In 1995 Chiladze published the novel *Avelum* (*ავლუმი*), in mood his grimmest, in themes his most topical, and in discourse his most European work. Avelum, the hero's name, with deliberate irony, is also the Sumerian word for free citizen. The novel identifies the country, Georgia, in particular Tbilisi, between the massacres of 1956 and 1989 with the ensuing civil war of 1991, with its intellectual hero. Both show the disastrous collapses of the 'empire of evil' and 'the empire of love'. Just as Avelum loses his Russian mistress to marriage, his French beloved to her own free spirit, and then his family to war, so Georgia loses its links to the outside world and disintegrates. Avelum, a poet, then a novelist, is very close to his author-narrator, and his disillusionment and destruction are chronicled in obsessive detail. As well as being a wry study of a love

affair between a disillusioned Soviet writer and a deluded foreign girl, this novel is a vivid recreation of the physical, cultural and psychological trauma that Georgians have undergone in the post-Soviet catastrophe.[145] In 2003 Chiladze published *The Basket* (გოდორი), in some ways a return to his earlier motifs, in that four generations trace similar paths, but like *Avelum* in that contemporary Georgia becomes a hell in need of a new Virgil. The initial anti-hero Razhden Kasheli, the bastard baby in a basket, is half-Russian, half-Georgian and becomes a Bolshevik killer who conceives a passion for his daughter-in-law, the scion of a principled intellectual: the subsequent interbreeding of NKVD executioner and intellectual is an interpretation of the whole course of Soviet communism, here realised through a plot centring on incest. *The Basket* treads new territory in that the reader is not allowed any certainty about events: characters who are killed or kill themselves resurface, and even the fact of incest may be only an unrealised intent. These 'magical realism' elements have taken aback some admirers of Chiladze, but it is notable that, despite the anti-Georgian mania in Russia, *The Basket* has been translated into Russian.

Otar Chiladze's works are sometimes marred by excessive fluency, arbitrary plotting, lax sententiousness and excessive demands on his readers' erudition, but his genius justifies the description of him by Aleksandr Ebanoidze, his translator into Russian, as Georgian literature's 'sole candidate for the Nobel prize'. His fine lyrical and narrative verse attains the originality and mythopoeia of his best prose. His prose has also appeared in French, German and Danish; his verse has been translated by Iuna Morits and Bela Akhmadulina into Russian, but he still awaits international recognition.

Guram Dochanashvili (გურამ დოჩანაშვილი, 1939–) is the third 'living classic' in the eyes of Georgian readers. His prose is based on fairytale in style and substance (notably the inculcation of virtue) and has a strong Christian, in fact evangelical vein. It won him such popularity, particularly with younger readers, that he seems to have encountered no hostility from a socialist Union of Writers. His heroes are good and loving, bent on quests. He avers his debt to Rustaveli and Cervantes. His rhythmic prose often breaks into verse, sometimes biblical, e.g. beatitudes and magnificats. His hero Vaso Kezheradze reiterates a motto: 'You

become better than you are, cleverer than you were.' To this day his first major novel *The First Raiment* (სამოსელი პირველი, 1975) is the subject for raves on teenage internet chatrooms and is constantly being reprinted. His recent work, such as *The Ruined Rock Church* (ლოდი ნასაყრდალი, 2002) has failed to build on his talent (and even his teenage admirers, who resemble British Tolkien fanatics, agree). Its linguistic experiments, with reinvented verb forms, and its *Tristram Shandy*-style quirks of alternative endings and continuations can be tiresome. Dochanashvili has written numerous short stories: one of 1973, such as 'The Man who was very Fond of Literature' (კაცი, რომელსაც ლიტერატურა ძლიერ უყვარდა) is a classic of gentle irony: a young journalist sent round town with a questionnaire to find out how people spend their spare time is totally foxed by a photographer obsessed with fine literature. The story's last word, the neologism *chamomalaborantes*, 'they demoted me to technical assistant', has entered the language. Dochanashvili is also a fine film librettist, *Me, Granny, Iliko and Ilarion* being a typical 'feel-good' script. (He has been for over 20 years the chief script editor of Georgian film studios.)

More popular prose, based on the life and language of the urban reader, has never, since Javakhishvili's time, found a writer of real genius. Revaz Mishveladze (რევაზ მიშველაძე, 1940–) is a facile and prolific writer of short stories that at least have the merit of reproducing the everyday concerns and the speech of Tbilisi's students and young professionals. A university lecturer in Georgian literature in the 1970s, Mishveladze also worked for the KGB, which raised his stature in the Union of Writers. But he had a well tuned ear for the speech habits and the everyday minutiae of those on whom he reported: as a result his stories record both colloquial urban Georgian and social mores of the 1980s. Mishveladze's responsiveness enabled him to switch from Stalinist Russophilia to wild, 'democratic' nationalism within days of the April 1989 massacre, which he immediately documented in his fiction, and in the politically and morally convoluted years that followed he has been able to reflect the chaos of prejudices and hurt in his readers' minds. In his pulp fiction Mishveladze has cleared a field for better and younger writers to cultivate.

While Ana Kalandadze has no 'school', the generation of women poets that followed owe the attention they receive to the trail she blazed. Lia Sturua (ლია სტურუა, 1939–) is perhaps the most significant, although

very self-celebratory, public, and expansive, relishing the female role as one 'who, asked for bread, provides a harvest'. Unlike Kalandadze, who relishes intricate subtle rhyme, Lia Sturua prefers free, blank verse to celebrate her Whitmanesque self. 'A Song' (სიმღერა[146]) is typical of her somewhat random inventive poetics:

My song,
The last sound of weeping,
In widow's black,
Like a woman drained with grief,
Is not much, just threefold,
But it has driven itself mad,
The birthplace of seven singing men,
Which now stands like a sealed house,
But if a voice is raised,
Doubtless, it will be the first
And so hollowed out
That it is like a finger-nail stroking silk.
Now this icy summit
Cannot be attained by the second and third voices,
From the stinging cold and height
They die there of the sweetness,
So that the fig-trees grow from their mouths
And cling on in fluttering blue tongues
On the mountain that reaches the sky,
Honey is mingled in the ice
By the humble second and third...
But the seventh voice
I can neither imagine nor invent,
My fantasy cannot attain it,
If I hadn't conceived a violin in my body
Instead of a child,
If the sharp point of operatic voices
Hadn't stuck in my throat
Like a pure fish bone,
If I hadn't trampled underfoot
The soprano's flame-coloured roses,
Then bloodstained birds would be perching
On the the summit of the seventh voice,
All of our sins,

Which tell me no sweet songs,
To pick from the mandoline's velvety belly,
Fling me down before the icy summit,
At the same time, apart from any honey,
If I have succeeded in this,
Then I shall no longer be just a woman,
But the homeland of seven singing men.

In recent years she appears to publish mainly on the internet, and while her handling of language remains just as rhythmic and ingeniously metaphorical, bitter irony has replaced the former vitality. 'Democracy,' one poem opens, 'is worth half a pretzel for a poet', and the image of Sisyphus's rock has replaced the images of honey, harvests and songs.

The positive aspirations of *perestroika*, unfortunately, were soon crushed. The massacre in Tbilisi of 9 April 1989 and the subsequent crumbling of Russian rule brought Georgia not into a new independence but a hell of demagoguery, criminality, hysteria, and civil war. The survival, let alone renascence, of its literature became doubtful. The Union of Writers played a leading part in switching loyalties from the pro-Russian communist apparatus to an intolerant theocratic nationalism. The most positive result of this change was a brief freedom of the press, which resulted in the leading Communist writers' monthly *Mnatobi* printing, from 1990, book by book, a new translation of the Bible by leading Georgian scholars and ecclesiasts into modern Georgian — a project financed and organized largely from abroad. Secular literature, however, reverted to witch-hunting reminiscent of the worst days of Beria.[147] Many poets, like Tariel Chanturia and Mukhran Machavariani, got off the pedestals from which they had preached tolerance and had propagated a universal culture, to call for national purification and their opponents' destruction. Facile story-writers veered from one political pole to another in a matter of weeks and achieved real popularity, their past apparently expiated. By some horrible irony, the two most influential figures in this chaotic period both have pretensions as writers. Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939–93/4), son of the great novelist, was, in the 1970s, a samizdat poet with interesting, if phoney, surreal verse that reflected his study of T. S. Eliot and his absorption in the theories of Rudolf Steiner. In 1973 he circulated three issues of an underground magazine, *The Golden*

Fleece (ოქროს საწმისი), which gave much information about the deportations of 1926, the destruction of Georgia's monuments, and the corruption of the early 1970s. Imprisoned as a dissident, released as a turncoat, then emerging from pariah status to be elected president in 1990, he published in an enormous print-run a book of essays, full of theological ravings on Georgia's divine mission, which cast serious doubts on his sanity. The paramilitary leader who overthrew him in 1991/2, Jaba Ioseliani (ჯაბა იოსელიანი, 1926–2003), has a background even more unlikely: a bank-robber reprieved by Stalin, then a prison godfather for much of his life, he became a theatre academic and then a competent drama-producer and critic. Once in power, he published an earlier story, based on real events in 1918, *The Hospital Train* (სანიტარული მატარებელი, 1992): a train carrying returning and wounded Georgians is stopped by Russian Bolsheviks in the north Caucasus and a terrible atrocity is committed. The work had talent, and once Jaba Ioseliani, outwitted by Eduard Shevardnadze, was no longer a war-lord, but yet again a prisoner, he returned in 1997 to literature with a much-praised (in macho quarters) autobiographical novel *The Land of Lemonade* (ლიმონათის ქვეყანა). On his release from prison in 2001 he published in Russian very frank memoirs *Three Dimensions* (the overlapping dimensions being criminality, academia and politics).

Corrupt government, a ruined economy, and an intelligentsia depleted by emigration augured poorly for a revival of Georgian literature. Nevertheless, violence and civil strife abated after 1992. Prose and poetry were published, even though all but a handful of authors had to publish at their own expense.

One positive note was the rediscovery of the Georgian diaspora. The Turkish state relaxed its rules on the use of non-Turkish alphabets and, encouraging political and economic ties with Georgia, allowed thousands of Turks of Georgian descent to revive or re-learn their forefathers' language. A key publication has been *Our Compatriots' Georgian Language* (ჩვენებურების ქართული, 1993) by Shushana Putkaradze (შუშანა ფუტკარაძე), a vocabulary, ethnological study and collection of texts based on extensive research among Turkish Georgians. Research and publication were financed by Levan Abashidze, then ruler of the Ajarian autonomous government in Batumi.

32: *After the 'Rose Revolution'*

THE overthrow of Shevardnadze's government by Mikheil Saakashvili and his allies in autumn 2003 is not directly responsible for a revival in Georgian cultural life. Increased political and economic support from the West and a campaign against petty corruption did, however, boost the morale of the educated classes, and the improvements in the economy have allowed independent publishers to pay popular authors, presses to print their books, and readers to buy them. While the new government has few cultural interests (it made a determined effort to confiscate the building that housed the Union of Writers), its informal censorship has been restricted to controlling the popular media, and literature has retained the freedom of expression that Shevardnadze allowed.

As a result a new generation of poets, novelists and even playwrights has been able to earn a modest living (often supplemented by appearances at European literary festivals) and a popularity which stems as much from the enthusiastic use of the internet in Georgia's main urban centres. Of the new generation now able to find a market for novels in print, the most prolific and perhaps the most interesting is Aka Morchiladze (აკა მორჩილაძე, born 1966, real name Gio Akhvlediani, გიო ახვლედიანი). In the last fifteen years he has published some 25 books of fiction, and as, by Georgian standards, they are bestsellers (in 2003 Morchiladze sold 15,000 copies), he may well be the only Georgian writer able to earn his living purely by writing. Typically for the new generation, he is much more oriented towards English language and literature than Russian. He is extremely versatile, and the adjective 'post-modern' is virtually defined by his techniques. His fantasy-land, Madatov island (*A Return Flight to Madatov*, გადაფრენა მადატოვზე და უკან, 1998) is populated by famous and notorious characters from Georgian literature and reality. Like Akunin in Russia, he can be accused of churning out clever historical pastiches of detective fiction. But he is linguistically inventive: his *Down with the Maize Republic* (ძირს სიმინდის რესპუბლიკა, 2003), a 'rogue' novel about Georgian expatriates in London, while denouncing socialist realism, is an experiment in reproducing the new Tbilisi jargon, where English roots replace Russian roots to be combined with Georgian affixes in Georgian syntax. His inventiveness may sometimes seem a little strained, and he is

in danger of being a cult figure, like Terry Pratchett in England. Indisputably, his most powerful work is one that has made him famous, *A Journey to Karabakh* (მოგზაურობა ყარაბაღში, 1992, reprinted 2004), which is essential reading for anyone trying to understand the sudden collapse of a once orderly society into gangsterism, drug-running, warlord rule and total alienation. Of all recent prose work in Georgian this stands out as the most graphic representation of a hell of anarchy, narrated by one of its denizens. One of his recent books, its 900 pages more a compilation than a novel, *Santa Esperanza* (სანტა ესპერანსა, 2004) about an imaginary Georgian archipelago, a sort of Caucasian Hong Kong, invaded by criminals and madmen, has been published in German. His British orientation is demonstrated by the English title of a recent novel, albeit based on characters from Georgian and Russian literature, *Maid in Tiflis* (2007).

Other young prose writers who require a watching brief include Davit Kartvelishvili (დავით ქართველიშვილი, born 1976), whose short stories of 2003 *Diaries for Miranda* (დღიურები მირანდასთვის) are saved from sentimentality by the exquisitely economic style, and Zurab Karumidze (ზურაბ ქარუმიძე, born 1957), whose *Wine-Red Sea* (ღვინომუქი ზღვა) of 2000 is seen as a Georgian *Ulysses*, and is a *roman à clé* for today's Tbilisi: its lack of a linear plot has earned the novel more esteem than acclaim.

Some older writers unable to publish in Soviet times have come to light in the last few years: Marsiani (მარსიანი, real name unknown, born 1953) published his highly innovative, but markedly erotic *The Mating Season* (პეპლობის თვე) in 2003 (it was written in 1982).

No doubt the energetic translation into Georgian of the most sensational and innovative of the world's modern literature has helped to spawn new writers. In the bewildering array of new writing, perhaps the most intriguing figure is Lasha Bughadze (ლაშა ბუღაძე, born 1977). In 2008 he won a BBC World Service regional prize for a play written in English, *When Cabbies are Attacked*, which will make him the first contemporary Georgian writer to make an impact in the English-language world. (Another play of his, under the title *Comédie française*, has been published in France.) In Georgia he made an impact with an adaptation of Goethe's *Faust* called *Nugzar and Mephisto* (ნუგზარი და მეფისტოფელი, 2007): Nugzar, a failed architect, understands that the fulfilment of desire

is not the purpose of life and reneges on a pact with a devil: the play was named as the best theatrical event of 2007. Earlier, Bughadze's satirical political play *Soldier, Love, Bodyguard and President* (ჯარისკაცი, სიყვარული, დაცვის ბიჭი და პრეზიდენტი, 2005) was described by shocked critics as a scandalous optimistic tragedy. Most shocking of all, to Georgians as well as Russians, however, is Bughadze's story 'The First Russian' (პირველი რუსი) about Iuri (Giorgi) Bogoliubski, the first consort of Queen Tamar (12th century), an impotent pervert given to bestiality, drink and treachery: the story is included in a collection called *The Third Storey* (მესამე სართული, 2006), the bestseller in Tbilisi that year, despite 'The First Russian' being denounced by both the Catholicos and Parliament for its excessively obscene anti-Russian gibes. Bughadze, also a prominent TV presenter with a regular Monday book programme, is eagerly read for his novels *The Last School Bell* (ბოლო ზარი, 2004) about love, criminality and violence in a top Tbilisi school, and *The Golden Time* (ოქროს ხანა, 2006) on Georgians emigrating and returning. However sensational and attention-seeking, he is, nevertheless, a major writer in the making.

Although a representative selection of living poets has appeared in a 366-page publication, *1990–2004: an Anthology of Contemporary Georgian Verse,* the new generation of poets depends much more on public appearances and on radio than on print to reach their public. Following the success of Ana Kalandadze and Lia Sturua in achieving recognition as major poets, and the general loss of prestige among Georgian male intellectuals, so many of whom are associated with the debacles and disgrace of politics in the early 1990s, women poets have come to the fore. They are noticeably influenced by international feminism and the work of women, such as Sylvia Plath. The most notable among them is Maia Sarishvili (მაია სარიშვილი, born 1968). She is a mother and primary-school teacher who infuses surreal, sometimes morbid, vision into assertive protests against women's subordination. She rejects the tyranny of metre and rhyme, and has an impressive rhythmic structure to her lyrics. Her most striking element, especially for Georgian women with their tradition of inhibited allusiveness, is a strong physicality, an acute sense of the working of the body as well as the emotions, as a sane centre in a demented outside world. Her work promises more than it has yet achieved, and deserves close monitoring.

Among male poets, Shota Iatashvili (შოთა იათაშვილი, born 1968) is outstanding: his work is improvisatory and declamatory in the American Ginsberg style, and he relishes provocative paradoxical assertions, many of which are witty and unforgettable. Like Paolo Iashvili in the 1920s, he has invented a female alter ego, Diana Vachnadze (the pseudonym was admitted only in 2005), to explore other forms of lyricism. (Under the name of Diana Vachnadze, Iatashvili pretending to be the editor, a weird epistolary novel *Nata or the New Julie* (ნატა ანუ ახალი ჟული), a mannered study of depression, appeared in 2003.) In some poems, such as 'Drawing a line between Meteorology and Poetry', Iatashvili makes serious proclamations of originality, and some short lyrics, e.g. 'The Aviator' (მფრინავი), have a political wisdom unexpected in a poet with a gift for clowning:

He flew off and turned out to be right:
They praised him, blessed him, bent his neck down.
He flew off again, and again turned out to be right:
They gave him a reception and didn't grudge him bread, water and
A comb for his wing and plumage.
He flew off a third time and this time, too, he turned out to be right:
They put up with him, tolerated him.
He flew off a fourth time and turned out to be in the wrong:
They called him a silly plagiarizer of an angel.
But he still flew off a fifth time —
They fired at him,
They killed him.

Clearly Iatashvili has potential to become a major poet.

The youngest poet to have made his mark is Rati Amaghlobeli (რატი ამაღლობელი, born 1977), a philosophy graduate whose experimentation with language, from archaic forms, to lists of rare words, to puns on the names of the alphabet, lead one to compare him with Velimir Khlebnikov. His vision of the world can be almost extra-planetary and, when he is carried away, Whitmanesque, as in 'So-called Cain's Harvest, or the Death of Logic' (ასეც ქვია – კაენის მოსავალი, ანუ ლოგიკის სიკვდილი), into celebrating the richness of the world into which death dissolves us, he impresses one as the most original voice writing in Georgian. The poem, ever more excited, ends in an ecological ecstasy:

And tart plums and small apricots and bullaces and
Sour plums and peaches and large apricots and cherries and
Morello cherries, not raw, but as preserves,
As jams, which means we get the fruit pulp
As a compote and
Anyway who can count how many things
We get from nature and
Unite in our physical organization,
Which makes visible and palpable our invisible ghost,
Which after physical death gives back,
Everything that was received in the course of a whole life
Reprocessed back to the earth,
And becomes once again invisible,
Like that teleological body
Which I was constantly moulding into a whole and
Which was shattered and scattered in ten thousand bits and elements,
Because it is as though something expired in me, something died —
An old person, as aged as history.

The most controversial poet, young only in the sense of 'Young Turk' — sometimes called a 'mad anti-poet', sometimes 'the uncle of contemporary poetry' — is Kote Qubaneishvili (კოტე ყუბანეიშვილი, born 1952). He often publishes himself, sometimes as a diary or notebook, in Macaronic language punning between English, Russian and Georgian. Much of his work consists of surreal aphorisms, sceptical to the point of cynicism about contemporary events and people, but sparkling with wit, albeit scurrilous, even obscene. He is the darling of teenage chat-rooms (though disliked by those who love the idealism of Dochanashvili) for his 'kotestrophes' and 'koteclysms'. He is printed in newspapers and on T-shirts, but his verse and videos are best seen on his own site www.kote.ge. The fact remains that, for all his unevenness, negativity and even vulgarity, he is the wittiest and subtlest person writing Georgian at the moment. As the following quatrain proves, he also has more political relevance and astuteness than all his colleagues put together:

ic'q'eba isev t'q'viebis cvena, || *etershi rcheba rusuli ena,*
gadzvirebula keri da kat'o, || *gasashvebulad ver modis nat'o* ...
Once again bullets begin to fall, || the Russian language remains on the air,
Barley and bran have gone up in price, || NATO cannot come to liberate …

ENDNOTES

[1] Vol. 1 of Kekelidze's (კორნელი კეკელიძე, 1879–1962) work was revised by M. Tarchnischvili and published in Rome in 1955 as *Die Geschichte der kirchlichen Literatur*.

[2] Apart from the collections of the British and Bodleian libraries mentioned in the bibliography, outside Tbilisi the most important collections of Georgian books and periodicals are to be found in Moscow (The Russian State Library) and in Helsinki University Library, which, as a depository library in the Russian empire until 1917, has the most complete, accessible and well kept collections of Georgian materials for the nineteenth century.

[3] In western Georgia Byzantine Greek influence must have been predominant, while central and eastern Georgia are more likely to have received their literacy and Christianity through Armenian or Syrian intermediaries.

[4] Until the disintegration of Georgia in the 14th cent., and often afterwards, the term 'Kartli' referred not just to the central Georgian province (or kingdom) around Tbilisi, Mtskheta, and Gori, but also loosely to the whole of Georgia. Thus context must determine how ქართლი is translated.

[5] We call this earliest recorded Georgian *khanmeti* (ხანმეტი, 'extra *kh*-') because it uses ხ- (*kh*) as a pronominal prefix. Another archaic feature is the insertion of conjunctions between directional prefix and verb. A less archaic Georgian is called *haemeti* (აჲმეტი), for its systematic use of the prefix *h*-. Some manuscripts show erasures of these prefixes, a procedure we suppose to indicate updating. However, *khanmeti* and *haemeti* may be dialect variations and not merely chronologically differentiated stages in the evolution of the language. All dating of Georgian texts on internal evidence is provisional.

[6] See W. Boeder, 'Die georgischen Mönche auf dem Berge Athos', *Bedi Kartlisa*, 41 (Paris, 1983), 85–95.

[7] See კ. დანელია, რამდენიმე საკითხი ბიბლიის უძველესი ქართული თარგმანის ისტორიიდან, *უწ. შრომები*, 183 (Tbilisi, 1978), 111.

[8] A *laura* is an eastern type of reclusive monastery, consisting of monks living in detached cells under a superior.

[9] The publication in Georgia of a scholarly synoptical edn. of the early Georgian Bible translations has begun with Genesis and Exodus, see ბ. გიგინეიშვილი, ც. კიკვიძე, *წიგნი ძველისა აღთქმისანი, ნაკვეთი I: შესაქმისაჲ, გამოსლვათაჲ* (Tbilisi, 1989). More vols. have since appeared.

[10] See ს. ცაიშვილი, *ბოლოსიტყვა, ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1989), vii. 634.

[11] See *ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1987), i. 244–5.

[12] For full texts and commentary, see ლ. ხაჩიძე, *იოანე მინჩხის პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1987).

[13] See *ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1987), ii. 196.

[14] See *ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1987), i. 512-4.

[15] See *ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1987), i. 518-9.

[16] See *ქართული მწერლობა* (Tbilisi, 1987), i. 520.

[17] ი. ლოლაშვილი, *არეოპაგიტული კრებული* (Tbilisi, 1983) refutes Ш. Нуцубидзе, «Тайна Псевдо-Дионисия Ареопагита», *Вестник АН Грузинской ССР* (Tbilisi, 1942), xiv, and E. Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aéropagite* (Brussels, 1952).

[18] See ქართული მწერლობა (Tbilisi, 1987), i. 185.

[19] See M. van Esbroeck, *Les plus anciens homéliaires géorgiens* (Louvain, 1975).

[20] For a full bibliography of original Georgian hagiography, see the 3rd app. of ვ. შანიძე, ძველი ქართული აგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები, v (Tbilisi, 1989), 202–76.

[21] See J. N. Birdsall, 'Evangelienbezüge im georgischen Martyrium der hl. Schuschaniki', *Georgica* (Jena, 1981) 4, 20–22.

[22] See J. Gippert, 'Daemonica Irano-Caucasica', in *Gedenkschrift O. Klíma* (Prague, 1993).

[23] 8 manuscripts of the Passion survive, none of them earlier than the 17th cent.

[24] Note that Georgian მოწამე, like Greek μάρτυρος, means both 'witness' and 'martyr'.

[25] A succinct summary of complex opinions is given in ქართული მწერლობა, ლექსიკონი-ცნობარი (Tbilisi, 1984), 30–8.

[26] This widely held view is backed up in Natela Vachnadze's very fine monograph, ხერაპონ ზარზმელის ცხოვრება როგორც ისტორიული წყარო (Tbilisi, 1975), with Russian résumé.

[27] By metaphrasis in this context we mean a standardized, ornate version of an original clerical text.

[28] The use of the *kh-* prefix to mark both direct and indirect third-person objects, the interpolation of conjunctions between prefixes and verbs, and the use of a pre-Arab lexicon suggest extreme archaicism. See ბ. გიგინეიშვილი, მოქცევაი ქართლისაჲ-ს ქრონოლოგია, მნათობი (Aug. 1988), 134-44.

[29] See also R. Albrecht, 'Das Leben der heiligen Makrina auf dem Hintergrund der Thekla-Traditionen', *Studien zu den Ursprüngen des weiblichen Mönchtums* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 38; Göttingen, 1986).

[30] The evidence is adduced by J. Gippert, *Zum Status des Mittelpersischen im südlichen Kaukasus*, forthcoming.

[31] I owe this interpretation to ზ. კიკნაძე, ფარნავაზის სიზმარი, in მაცნე (ენის), 1 (Tbilisi, 1984).

[32] D. M. Lang, *The Balavariani* (London, 1966).

[33] A fuller study (in Russian with résumé in English) of Georgian, Greek, and Arabic versions, arguing the transmission of the work from east to west via Georgian will be found in Е. Г. Хинтибидзе, *Грузинско-византийские литературные взаимоотношения* (Tbilisi, 1989), 197–296.

[34] Translation R. H. Stevenson, *Amiran-Darejaniani* (Oxford, 1958).

[35] See რ. ჩხეიძე, ცისკარი (Feb. 1991), 139–51; (Mar. 1991), 126–37, for the argument that the 8th–7th century BC Mtskheta bronze waistband with hunting-scene, and many other archaeological finds, show episodes from the *Amirandarejaniani*. Was Mose Khoneli using very old folklore motifs; how inextricably is his Amiran linked with the Caucasian Prometheus? Chkheidze sees Mose as having revived dormant folk motifs.

[36] The beginning recalls the onager and the palace in the *Shah-Nameh*, but also the Georgian chronicler Leonti Mroveli's story about King Parnavaz of Kartli being led by a deer to a treasure in a cave, and the role of the hunted deer in Georgian and Svan myths of Dali, in folklore the wife of Amirani.

[37] A striking echo of the folk verse, 'It is good for a young warrior,when the half-light of morning has broken, To put on his chainmail shirt in readiness: "I'm off to war".' See ვ. მაღალფერაძე, ქალის სახე ამირანდარეჯანიანში, ცისკარი (May 1991), 134–40.

[38] Tr. O. Wardrop, *Visramiani*, (London, 1914).

[39] For this comparison I am heavily indebted to J. Gippert, 'Towards an Automatic Analysis of a Translated Text and its Original: The Persian Epic of *Vis u Ramin* and the Georgian *Visramiani*, in *Studia Iranica, Mesopotamica et Anatolica*, 1 (Prague, 1994).

[40] In an unpublished commentary prepared by David Barrett for Olavi Linnus, the Finnish translator of Rustaveli.

[41] An edn. reportedly almost entirely destroyed by angry clerics who threw every copy they could into the river. A near-perfect copy is held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. A facsimile edition was printed in Tbilisi (1937, 1975).

[42] A much later dating, in the mid-13th cent., has been argued by Kekelidze, on the grounds that the disillusion with life, expressed so often by characters in the narrative, must reflect a less happy time; if so, then the worship of Tamar is the same cult as Dante's of Beatrice or Petrarch's of Laura, of the fortunate dead whom the poet survives and who can thus inspire perfect love.

[43] For an acerbic discussion of Rustaveli and Christianity, see ა. გაწერელია, რუსთაველი და ქრისტიანობა, მნათობი (Mar. 1991), 110–23.

[44] See P. Dronke, *Mediæval Latin and the Rise of the European Love-Lyric* (Oxford, 1968), i. 15–19, where he integrates Rustaveli with mediæval European concepts of *amour courtois*.

[45] Two *shairi*, perhaps accidental, are found in prose of the classical period: in a rhymed couplet of two 16-syllable lines the chronicler Leonti Mroveli relates how 'Berasp, Lord of the Snakes, was bound in chains and tied to a mountain inaccessible to man.' The form is found in a few lyrics, such as 'Davit Aghmashenebeli's Epitaph' (ქართული მწერლობა (Tbilisi, 1987), ii. 207).

[46] Of the following translations into English, the first is not superseded: M. S. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin* (London, 1912; repr. 1966); K. Vivian, *The Knight in the Panther Skin* (London 1977); R. H. Stevenson, *The Lord of the Panther-Skin* (Albany, NY, 1977). Little criticism in English is available: see C. M. Bowra, 'Rustaveli' in *Inspiration and Poetry* (London, 1955); W. Boeder, 'Strophenstruktur und Textkohäsion bei Rustaveli', in ფილოლოგიური ძიებანი (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1995).

[47] Mar [Saint] Abdul Masih is a Christian Arab martyr, whose Passion survives in Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic texts as well as Georgian: that Shavteli should have written a verse hagiography of him is not surprising. It is odd that his *Praise of Davit and Tamar* is to this day published as *Abdulmesiani*.

[48] Although two 13th-cent. ms. exist, the second hymn is missing and the ninth may not be the last.

[49] See editor's arguments in ნ. მელიქიშვილი, იოსებ ფლავიოსი (Tbilisi, 1986).

[50] Rusudan lived 1195–1245.

[51] The best edition is now რ. კიკნაძე, ჯამთაალმწერელი, ახწლოვანი მატიანე (Tbilisi, 1987).

[52] Discussed in З. Панаскертели-Цицишвили, *Великий врачеватель и глава мудрейших* (Tbilisi, 1986).

[53] See И. Ш. Гагулашвили, *Грузинская магическая поэзия* (Tbilisi, 1983).

[54] This sequel is, however, included in all the canonical edns. of Rustaveli's poem: quatrain 1662 in Aleksandre Baramidze's edn. (Tbilisi, 1988).

[55] Even Teimuraz's grandsons Giorgi and Erekle had tragic fates, although Erekle after Russian exile ruled in 1688 as Nazar Ali Khan, the Shah's viceroy in Kartli.

[56] See ზ. ავალიშვილი, *თეიმურაზი და მისი პოემა წვალება ქეთევან დედოფლისა: დამატება. სამი ისტორიული ხაბუაო* (Paris, 1936). Summarized in: Z. Avalishvili, 'Teimuraz I and his poem *The Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan*', *Georgica*, 4 (England, 1937), 17.

[57] Vsesviatskoe is now the north-western Moscow suburb of Sokol: the church still stands but most of the cemetery has been destroyed.

[58] ა. ბარამიძე, ივ. ბერძენიშვილი, *არჩილიანი* (Tbilisi, 1936-7), i, ii.

[59] For the texts of Dodorkeli and Orbelishvili, see ა. შანიძე, *ძველი ქართული აგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები* (Tbilisi, 1989), v.

[60] e.g. Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* or Voltaire's *Zadig*.

[61] Against clerical opposition, King Vakhtang VI brought a typographer, Mikhail Ungrovlakheli, and a printing press to Tbilisi from Wallachia. Between 1709 and 1722, 21 titles were printed, mostly liturgical and in the mediæval *khutsuri* script; two exceptions in the modern *mkhedruli* alphabet include Vakhtang VI's own edition of Rustaveli's *Knight in the Tiger Skin* and a small encyclopaedia. The type-founding work was crude, but the printing and binding equalled the best in Europe at the time. Press runs were small, and few examples survive. Printing in Georgia was revived in Tbilisi in 1749 by King Erekle II, whose interest lay in canonical liturgical texts and standardizing the language. He set up a press in a ten-room building by his mint: a Turco-Armenian typographer and later a Georgian, Kristepore Kezherashvili, ran the press. Before the Persians sacked Tbilisi in 1795, some 40 titles, all liturgical, but for an account of printing being reimported by the King from Constantinople, and a 128-page curiosity, *The Wisdom of China*, translated from Russian, were printed in runs of up to 1,000.

[62] See ა. ბარამიძე, *ვახტანგ მეექვსე* (Tbilisi, 1975); ბ. დარჩია, *ვახტანგ მეექვსის პოეტური სამყარო* (Tbilisi, 1988).

[63] For a complete understanding of Sayat-Nova, see the late Charles Dowsett's extraordinary work, *Sayat' Nova. An 18th-century troubadour* (Louvain, 1997).

[64] See ჯ. პოჯი [Poggi], *იეზუიტები და საქართველო, მაცნე* (Tbilisi, 1991), 2, 71, for accounts of Jesuits such as Louis Granger and Gilles Henry in the early 17th cent. Hitherto Georgian Kings had used Greek and Farsi as their languages of diplomacy.

[65] Anton's achievement is assessed in ხ. დევდარიანი, *ანტონ კათოლიკოსი*, in *მნათობი* (Oct. 1989), 108–15. Seit Devdariani wrote a three-volume history of Georgian thought: unfortunately, after his judicial murder in 1937, only the chapter on Anton survived.

[66] Note the sexual ambiguity of the Georgian term, literally 'plough's mother' for a male role. Despite Aleksandre Chavchavadze's loaded elegy, poems with the same title with no *double entendre* were later written by Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli.

[67] Unfortunately, another Eristavi, Revaz (1827-1899), translated a Russian narrative poem *The Madwoman* (*Безумная*, 1830) by Ivan Kozlov and gave it the same title in Georgian as Giorgi Eristavi's play: its sentimentality enraged the young Ilia Chavchavadze, and his contemptuous attack on the author in the May 1861 issue of *Tsiskari* was the opening shot in the war of Georgia's 'fathers and sons'.

[68] It reopened, a shadow of its former self, in 1887.

[69] This remarkable school is depicted, as it was in the 1850s, also in Giorgi Tsereteli's fictionalized autobiography, *A Flower of Our Life* *ჩვენიცხოვრების ყვავილი* and in Nikoloz Nikoladze's *Memoirs* [*რჩეული ნაწ.*, Tbilisi, 1931, i, 31–2]: 'We were taught religious faith, natural sciences (zoology, botany, mineralogy), history, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, rhetoric, and pietics; languages — Russian, Georgian, Turkish, and French. These four languages were compulsory for all pupils. When we moved to the fifth class, they asked us whether we intended continuing our studies at university. Those who did had to start studying Latin, those who didn't had to begin religious law. The teachers were all Russians (seminary clerics), mostly extremely aged or drunken.'

[70] Georgia's first truly modern woman-writer Barbare Jorjadze (Rapiel Eristavi's sister) has been discredited, partly because she harassed Ilia Chavchavadze and his generation for deserting the 'high' style and manners of aristocratic literature and partly because her farces and the drama *Envy* (*შური*) satirized greed with even more snobbery.

[71] Dimitri Qipiani gave most of his energy to politics and translation, but his son Konstantine (1849–92) acted on the Tbilisi stage and published in Russian in Moscow; a second son, Nikoloz (1846–95), a lawyer, left Georgia to become professor of Russian in Brussels, but published articles on opera, as well as studies of Georgian speakers in Iran, and a biography of his father.

[72] See *ცისკარი*, 1863, 3, 436.

[73] David Barrett (in a letter to me, 27 Sept. 1993) pointed out that *The Door to Nature* shares illustrations with a similar school-reader by Zachris Toprelius for Finnish schoolchildren.

[74] The playwright Davit Kldiashvili recalls: 'They sent the page-setter Diomide Kiladze and two typesetters to see Aleksandre in the office and asked him not to kill Elguja but to continue his story. . . . Aleksandre told me, 'After a little hesitation, since they wouldn't leave me alone, there and then I reworked the feuilleton's ending and wrote underneath "to be continued".'

[75] See *მნათობი*, 1927, 5, 7 & 8.

[76] The enormous range and quantity of Georgian journalism can be assessed from *Указатель к статьям и материалам в грузинской периодической печати, 1852–1910* (Petrograd, 1916); and from *ანალიტიკური ბიბლიოგრაფია* for various journals (Tbilisi, 1952–75).

[77] Publ. in *კვალი*, Tbilisi, 28 July 1896.

[78] See Д. Рейфилд, 'Полный брожения и аромата сосуд: грузинская поэзия в переводах Мандельштама', in *«Отдай меня, Воронеж...»* (Voronezh, 1995), 287–97.

[79] See Ш. В. Дзидзигури, *Грузинские варианты нартского эпоса* (Tbilisi, 1986). The Nart epic is thought to be ultimately of Iranian origin, introduced to the Caucasus by the Ossetes; but Circassian and Abkhaz scholars insist that it is fundamentally aboriginal Caucasian. Its stories centre around an earth-goddess, Satanei, and her semi-divine offspring. The Georgian variants of this folk epic are found primarily in the folklore of those tribes who live next to the north-west Caucasian peoples.

[80] See ქ. სიხარულიძე, *ხალხურ პოეტურ ჟანრთა გენეტიკური კავშირი, ქართული ფოლკლორი* 1 and 2 (Tbilisi, 1964).

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[82] დ. ქადაგიძე, ნ. ქადაგიძე, რ. გაგუა, *წოვა-თუშურ-ქართულ-რუსული ლექსიკონი* (Tbilisi, 1984).

[83] მ. ჩიქოვანი, *ქართული ხალხური პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1979), viii. 304.

[84] ი. ხორნაული, *უშავ-ბუცხურული პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1949), 154.

[85] მ. ჩიქოვანი, *ქართული ხალხური პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1974), iii. 82.

[86] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1975), iv. 106.

[87] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1975), iv. 33.

[88] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1975), iv. 32.

[89] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1972), i. 57.

[90] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1975), iv. 245.

[91] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1975), iv. 35.

[92] ქ. სიხარულიძე, *ხალხური სიბრძნე* (Tbilisi, 1965), iv. 167.

[93] *ვეფხვისტყაოსანი* (Tbilisi, 1956), vii. 34, 71 ff.

[94] მ. ჩიქოვანი, *ქართული ხალხური პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1973), ii. 64.

[95] ibid. (Tbilisi, 1976), v. 749.

[96] A. M. Астахова, *Народные баллады* (Moscow, 1963), 255.

[97] ვ. კოტეტიშვილი, *ხალხური პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1961), 91–2.

[98] ibid., 227.

[99] ა. შანიძე, *ხევსურული პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1935), i. 191.

S. Chotiwari-Jünger, *Die Entwicklung des georgischen historischen Romans: Micheil Dschawachischwili, Konstantine Gamsachurdia, Grigol Abaschidse, Tschabua Amiredshibi, Otar Tschiladse* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993) surveys the whole phenomenon.

[100] Not until 19 Sept. 1934 did the first congress of the Union take place.

[101] Marjanishvili's chief productions were as follows. 1910 (with Gordon Craig) Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Moscow Arts Theatre. 1911 Knut Hamsun, *In Life's Clutches*; Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*, Moscow Arts Theatre. 1912 Leonid Andreev, *The Life of Man*, Kiev; Sophocles *Œdipus Rex*, State Theatre, Tbilisi. 1913 Offenbach, *La belle Hélène*, Svobodny Theatre, Moscow. 1919 Lope de Vega *Fuente Ovejuna*, Solovtsy Theatre, Kiev (and 1922 Rustaveli Theatre, Tbilisi). 1922 Suppe, *Boccaccio*, Comic Opera Theatre, Petrograd. 1925 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Rustaveli Theatre, Tbilisi. 1928 Shaw, *St Joan*, Second State Georgian Theatre, Batumi, Kutaisi. 1931 Ibsen, *The Master Builder*, Korsh Theatre, Moscow. 1933 Schiller, *Don Karlos*, Maly Theatre, Moscow (posthumously).

[102] Akhmeteli's chief productions were as follows. 1920–3 Shanshiashvili, *Berdo Zmania*, Arts Society, Tbilisi. 1923 Wilde, *Salomée*, Rustaveli Theatre, Tbilisi. 1926 Leoncavallo, *Pagliacci*, Opera Workshop, Tbilisi. 1926–31 Robakidze, *Lamara*, Rustav-

-eli Theatre. 1927 Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Rustaveli Theatre (banned). 1927–8 Mérimée (adapted), *Carmencita*; John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World,* Rustaveli Theatre. 1928–32 Vsevolod Ivanov, *Armoured Train 14-69*, adapted by Shanshiashvili as *Anzora*, Rustaveli Theatre. 1930 *Anzora*; *Lamara*, Zeliony Theatre, Moscow. 1933 Schiller, *The Robbers [In tyrannos]*, Rustaveli Theatre. 1935 Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Rustaveli Theatre (banned).

[103] In 1936 Javakhishvili met Orjonikidze in the Kremlin to receive a medal; he told him, 'If I'm alive today and have become a writer, you should be thanked.' Orjonikidze had trouble remembering his good deed, a rarity, for he had refused other pleas from the Union, for instance that Vazha Pshavela's son, Levan, should be spared.

[104] First publ. in his *თხზულებანი 8 ტომად* (Tbilisi, 1977), v. 452–3.

[105] Quoted by the author's daughter, ქეთევან ჯავახიშვილი, *მიხეილ ჯავახიშვილის ცხოვრება* (Tbilisi, 1991), 142.

[106] A radical versification and dramatization for Akhmeteli's Rustaveli Theatre was carried out by Sandro Shanshiashvili, who, much to Javakhishvili's fury, took the credit: the novelist saw the reworking as plagiarism. The poet Ioseb Grishashvili recommended that in the film Arsena should be played by an actor resembling Douglas Fairbanks.

[107] Typically for those perverse times, the defiant Geronti Kikodze survived, while the proletarian sycophant Platon Kikodze (პლატონ ქიქოძე, 1905–37) was shot.

[108] The standard study is ტ. კვანტალიშვილი, *მიხეილ ჯავახიშვილის შემოქმედება* (Tbilisi, 1987).

[109] See his *Литературная богема старого Тбилиси* (Tbilisi, various edns. 1927–89). A selection will be found in *ქართული პოეზია თხუთმეტ ტომად, ქალაქური პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1985), xvi (*sic*!).

[110] ი. გრიშაშვილი, *ჩემი აღმართი* (Tbilisi, 1989), 63-4.

[111] ibid., 95.

[112] For a more technical analysis of the new rhythms, see ა. ხინთიბიძე, *ქართული ლექსის ბუნებისათვის* (Tbilisi, 1976).

[113] *თეში*, 6 June 1911. Cut from the Soviet edn. of Tsereteli's collected works, it was printed in *განთიადი* (Tbilisi/Kutaisi, Jan. 1988), 149–50.

[114] ibid., 142

[115] The only other writers of any greatness included were Galaktion Tabidze, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, and Ioseb Grishashvili.

[116] The consequences are such absurdities as ნ. დუმბაძე, *ქართული სიმბოლიზმი* (Tbilisi, 1973), where not a hint of Robakidze's existence is dropped in a 200-page history of the Blue Horns.

[117] *ფალესტრა* (Tbilisi, 1928), 4, 71.

[118] For a fair portrayal of Robakidze in Germany, see N. Sombart, *Jugend in Berlin, 1933–43* (Frankfurt/Main, 1986).

[119] Quoted in გ. ხერხეულიძე, *თანამედროვე ქართული პოეზია (ოცდაათი წლები)* (Tbilisi, 1977), 67–8.

[120] This was supposed to be the maximum temperature the human body could endure.

[121] ა. აშვილი, *პოეტი და ადამიანი, ერთტომეული* (Tbilisi, 1965), 18.

[122] They were first printed in book form in ტ. ტაბიძე, *ლექსები, პოემები, პროზა, წერილები* (Tbilisi, 1985), 225–6.

[123] See note 78

[124] Quoted by ვ. აფხაძე, *მახსოვს მარადის* (Tbilisi, 1988), 191.

[125] Cited in ქ. ჯავახიშვილი, *მიხეილ ჯავახიშვილის ცხოვრება* (Tbilisi, 1991), 142.

[126] Blue, *lurja*, a common horse's name in the highlands, denotes a steel-grey colour.

[127] See ო. ოყუჯავა, *ღიაურები, მიმოწერა გალაკტიონთან* (Tbilisi, 1987).

[128] ლ. ალიმონაკი (ed.), *ტერენტი გრანელი, რჩეული* (Tbilisi, 1979).

[129] For a full discussion of Georgian futurism see ვ. ხიგუა, *ლიტერატურა და ტრადიციის ბარიერი* (Tbilisi, 1988), 210–81.

[130] See the interview, publ. just before his death, in the periodical *Вопросы литературы* (Moscow, Jan. 1966), 76–9.

[131] See ნ. შატბერაშვილი, *სიმღერა «ედარობის ოქროპირზე»* in *ქართული ენა და ლიტერატურა სკოლაში* (Tbilisi, 1987), 1-4, 12; and ვ. ქურდიანი, *ფუტურიზმი და სხვა*, ibid., 14-130. I am heavily indebted to both authors for interpretations of the 'metalogical' poems.

[132] 'Beria never read a book,' claimed Grigori Arutinov (Harutiunian) at the Party Central Committee Plenum (4 July 1953) after Beria's arrest, see *Известия ЦК КП СССР* (Moscow, 1991), 2, 181a.

[133] Told to the present writer by Niko Chikovani, Tbilisi, Aug. 1990.

[134] For a full account of these meetings, see D. Rayfield, 'The Death of Paolo Iashvili', *Slavonic & East European Review*, 68 (London, Oct. 1990), 631–64. The important archives recording secret meetings of the Union of Writers are *fond* 8, *opis'* 1, file 2 in the Georgian Central State Archives for Literature and Art (ს.ს.ლ.ხ.ც.ა.), Tbilisi.

[135] See Н. Урушадзе, *Сандро Ахметели* (Moscow, 1990).

[136] Sandro Euli, from genuinely poor peasant stock, rose to power through the leftist Association of Georgian Proletarian Writers and was entrusted with supervising the purges of the Union: his own poetry and prose is worthless.

[137] Irakli Abashidze rose to be first secretary of the Union of Writers from 1953.

[138] ა. სულაკაური, *ქართული პოეზია* (Tbilisi, 1984), xv. 450.

[139] *განთიადი* (Tbilisi/Kutaisi, Jan. 1988), 3.

[140] ვ. ლებანიძე, *კრებული—1981 (პროზა)* (Tbilisi, 1982), 12.

[141] Quoted in Russian in А. Н., Д. Н. Замятин, *Русские столицы Москва и Петербург* (Moscow, 1993), 111–2.

[142] ო. ჭილაძე, *რჩეული თხზულებანი* (Tbilisi, 1986) ii. 477.

[143] ibid., iii. 515.

[144] *მარტის მაისი* (Tbilisi, 1987), 206–7.

[145] For extracts (in German) and discussion of *Avelum*, see articles by K. Lichtenfeld and Otar Tschiladse in *Die Horen* (Berlin, 1998), ii. 164–82.

[146] *მნათობი* (Apr. 1988), 64.

[147] See D. Rayfield, 'Georgian: Language of Abuse and Abuse of Language', in B. G. Hewitt (ed.), *Caucasian Perspectives: Selected Papers on Caucasian Linguistics* (from the 5th SCE Colloquium, 1990) (Munich, 1992), 265–77.

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