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LANDMARKS IN GEORGIAN LITERATURE

BEFORE embarking on my main theme, I should like to pay grateful tribute to those who have made possible the existence of a Chair of Caucasian Studies—albeit a personal one—at this great School of the University of London. We think first of all of Oliver and Marjory Wardrop, the talented brother and sister whose magnificent translations and unceasing advocacy first placed Georgian literature on the map in this country. Sir Oliver was for many years a member of our own Governing Body, and it is a matter of regret that he died the year before his efforts resulted in the creation of a permanent post in Georgian here in London, to which I was appointed in 1949. I must pay tribute also to my teachers, Professor Elizabeth Hill of Cambridge, who originally bade me go east to the Caucasus for inspiration, and to Mr. Andro Gugushvili, who with great patience taught me all the Georgian language I ever knew.

I owe a great debt to my Soviet Georgian and Russian friends in university and public life, who have made my path easy in innumerable ways, and enabled me to pay three visits to Soviet Georgia over the past five years, without which my knowledge of their exciting and rapidly developing land would have remained purely theoretical. Some people complain that Soviet institutions and colleagues are difficult to deal with. I personally have never found this to be the case; indeed, I am proud to record that two telegrams of congratulation on the inauguration of my tenure as Professor of Caucasian Studies were received today at this School from Tbilisi, one from the Georgian Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations, the other from the Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. I would also express special pleasure at the presence in our midst

of Mr. Valeri Barnovi, grandson of one of Georgia's famous novelists, Vasili Barnovi (1856–1934), renowned for his realistic portrayal of the life and customs of old Tbilisi and the impact of the Russian Revolution on Georgian life and ways.

Finally, I must say how delighted and proud I am to see in the audience my own Mother, without whose support and encouragement neither this lecture nor any of my other work could ever have been undertaken.

* * * *

Long before the Georgians possessed their own alphabet and literature, they were versed in the learning and lore of the Greek and Iranian worlds, as well as having myths and legends passed down by word of mouth. These myths include that of Prometheus, and the story of Medea and the Golden Fleece. Ancient sources contain references to centres of higher education in Colchis, organized on the Greek model, while pious writers of the Middle Ages make it clear that a holocaust of Zoroastrian books took place when Georgia was converted by St. Nino in the fourth century. Records of the Byzantine and Persian campaigns in Lazica during the sixth century speak of state archives containing treaties between the Lazic kings and neighbouring powers, doubtless written in Greek.

A major break-through in our knowledge of writing and epigraphy in pre-Christian Georgia occurred in 1940, when two stone slabs with inscriptions were discovered not far from Mtskheta. One of these was a bilingual epitaph of a Georgian princess named Serapita, with closely corresponding though not quite identical texts in Greek and Middle Iranian, the latter written in an unusual form of Aramaic which has been called the Armazi script. Decyphered and published in 1942 by Professor Giorgi Tsereteli,[1] Serapita's

[1] 'Armazis bilingva', in *Bulletin de l'Institut Marr de Langues, d'Histoire et de Culture matérielle*, xiii, Tbilisi, 1942, pp. 1–83, Plates I–IV.

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epitaph, dating from about A.D. 150, is touching in its restrained dignity and pathos, and deserves to rank as the most ancient connected literary text from Georgia:

> I am Serapita, daughter of Zevakh the younger, *pitiakhsh* (chief minister, viceroy) of Farsman the king, and wife of Iodmangan the victorious, winner of many conquests, master of the court of Ksefarnug, the great king of the Iberians, and son of Agrippa, master of the court of King Farsman. Woe, woe, for the sake of her who was not of full age, whose years were not completed, and so good and beautiful that no one was like her in excellence; and she died at the age of twenty-one.

Though the date and circumstances of the invention of the Georgian alphabet have often been disputed, the facts seem incontrovertible. Christianity, we know, became the official religion of Armenia and Iberia early in the fourth century, and also spread rapidly into neighbouring Caucasian Albania. After a century of worship from Greek and Syriac texts, the need for religious books in the vernacular became pressing throughout Christian Caucasia. With the encouragement of the Byzantine Church, a commission was set up under St. Mesrop (Mashtotz), an Armenian cleric, who worked with local informants and produced amazingly precise phonetic tables of the sounds in the Armenian, Georgian, and Albanian languages. On the basis of these, but following where applicable the general order of the Greek alphabet, systems of writing were evolved for all three Christian nations and put into use early in the fifth century. The inventors of these outstandingly accurate and elegant alphabets tried to reproduce as far as possible the appearance of contemporary Greek uncials; comparison of a page of the Codex Sinaiticus or Codex Alexandrinus with the oldest known Georgian or Armenian inscriptions and codices makes this immediately evident. It also seems that account was taken of the distinctive Armazi variety of Aramaic script featuring on Serapita's epitaph and one or two other inscriptions, though Georgian writing, unlike Aramaic, runs

from left to right, and represents generally speaking a complete break with Georgia's pagan past.

Once equipped with an alphabet of their own, the Georgians set to work to adorn public buildings with carved inscriptions, and to evolve a literature both original and in translation. The monumental carved *khutsuri* inscription on Bolnisi Sioni cathedral dates from 492–3, and the mosaics from the Georgian cloister built by Peter the Iberian near Bethlehem are somewhat earlier. From Armenian, the Georgians soon translated the Four Gospels and Psalms of David, to be followed by other Biblical and liturgical texts. Many of these early redactions, which go back in some instances to lost Syriac and Greek originals, are exceptionally interesting and preserve readings not witnessed elsewhere. In the Passion of St. Eustace the Cobbler, put to death by the Persian governor of Tbilisi in 545, we find a curious formulation of the Ten Commandments, and an account of the life of Christ which recalls Tatian's *Diatessaron*, a Gospel harmony of the second century, and suggests that the Georgian Church in early times possessed a *Diatessaron* of its own. The apologia of Archdeacon Samuel in this Passion of St. Eustace is of great value, as showing how the Christian faith was expounded among Persian and Georgian Christians in Sasanian times.[1]

Pride of place among the first original works of Georgian literature belongs to the Passion of St. Shushanik, composed by the martyr's father-confessor Jacob of Tsurtavi between 476 and 483. The background of the saint's life is well known from historical sources. Shushanik's father, Vardan Mamikonian, was the hero of the Armenian national rising of 451 directed against the Sasanian king Yezdegird of Iran. Shushanik married the Georgian duke Varsken, lord of Tsurtavi, a strategic castle on the frontier between Armenia and Georgia. Varsken became an apostate, abandoning

[1] D. M. Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, London, 1956, pp. 94–114.

Christianity for Mazdaism to ingratiate himself with the Persian court. Shushanik's refusal to follow him in this step infuriated her ambitious husband, who tortured and humiliated her for seven years, until she finally succumbed and died.

Jacob of Tsurtavi's treatment of this tragic and dramatic theme is highly effective, with its thorough mastery of the narrative form, vivid characterization, and use of realistic detail. The proud and high-born Armenian lady, her drunken scoundrel of a Georgian husband, his good-natured but rather ineffectual brother, who intercedes for Shushanik, but cannot prevent the final tragedy—these characters come to life as creatures of flesh and blood. The secondary figures, such as Varsken's Persian factotum, an oily hypocrite with a wheedling, lachrymose voice, are also infused with this life-like quality, which makes itself felt in numerous details, as when a junior deacon tries to encourage Shushanik in her torments. 'He attempted to cry out: "Stand fast!", when Varsken cast his eye upon him. He just managed to call out: "Sta . . .", and then was silent and hastily took to his heels and ran away.' This text is important both for study of political and social relationships and religious conflicts in fifth-century Georgia, and for its realistic description of everyday life. The health and hygiene of dwellers in that low-lying region of the Mtkvari valley are described in lurid terms. 'In the summer time, the heat of the sun burns like fire, the winds are torrid and the waters infected. The inhabitants of this region are themselves afflicted with various diseases, being swollen with dropsy, yellow with jaundice, pock-marked, withered up, mangy, pimply, bloated of face and brief of life, and nobody attains to old age in that district.'[1]

This vivid realism, combined with patriotic and religious fervour, is also in evidence in the Passion of St. Abo, a perfumer from Baghdad, put to death by the Arab governor

[1] Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, p. 55.

of Tbilisi in 786. His life was written by a Georgian contemporary, Ioane Sabanisdze, partly to inspire his own countrymen to further efforts through the heroic example of this Arab stranger who chose martyrdom for the sake of Georgia's own Christian faith. Abo's Passion is impregnated with the simple unquestioning faith of early Christianity, and contains valuable historical data, including an account of the Turkic Khazars who lived by the Volga and adopted the Jewish faith, and were visited by St. Abo during his travels.

A different, though equally interesting group of hagiographical documents is concerned with the lives of early Georgian hermits, monks, and anchorites. These are no dry chronicles of monastic trivialities; they breathe a warm, human spirit, and are characteristically Georgian in their sympathetic treatment of human foibles. One readable collection, known as the Lives of the Syrian Fathers, was compiled and revised by Catholicos Arsenius II of Georgia between 955 and 980. These Syrian Fathers, thirteen in number, arrived in the Caucasus at various times between the end of the fifth and the middle of the sixth centuries, and brought with them the rules and precepts of Syrian and Egyptian monasticism, which they helped to implant in Georgia.

Hermits though they were, the Syrian Fathers were by no means misanthropic in outlook. St. Iese of Dsilkani, for instance, obliged his parishioners by diverting the River Ksani to flow through their town. Several of the Fathers were distinguished by love of animals. Ioane Zedazneli made friends with bears near his hermitage, while St. Shio employed a tame wolf to guide the donkeys which brought supplies to his lonely grotto. St. David of Garesja and his disciple Lucian in their desert abode in Outer Kakheti received milk and curds from three tame deer. The cellar of their cave was infested by a fearsome dragon with bloodshot eyes, a horn growing out of his forehead, and a great mane on his neck. Eventually God sends a thunderbolt which

burns the dragon to a cinder. St. David—and this is another typically Georgian touch—protests vigorously to Heaven against this violence to one of his own protégés, and has to be pacified by an angel sent especially by the Almighty Himself.

Other endearing touches are found in the Life of St. Gregory of Khandzta by Giorgi Merchule, written in 951, in which we read of a Bishop Zacharias who was annoyed by a blackbird persistently pecking at his ripe grape-vine. Zacharias makes the sign of the cross over the bird, which immediately falls dead; repenting of his severity, the bishop makes the sign of the cross once more, and the blackbird revives and flies off to its nest. A discerning reader can extract from these *Vitae* countless facts about daily life in medieval Georgia. Sometimes it is necessary to read between the lines, as in the Life of St. Serapion of Zarzma, where the monkish biographer's criticism of a hostile peasantry discloses the existence of resentment among the poor farmers at the prosperity of the monasteries, which monopolized the best land and conveniently forgot their vow of poverty.

The beginnings of Georgian historical writing are themselves connected with stories of early saints, besides containing accounts of the origin of mankind deriving from the Book of Genesis and other conventional sources. The earliest Georgian chronicle, known as the *Conversion of Iberia*, was composed in the seventh century and preserved in the Shatberdi codex copied in 973–6; it centres on the mission of St. Nino and the events which attended the adoption of Christianity in Georgia in the fourth century. Between 790 and 800, Juansher Juansheriani wrote a History of King Vakhtang Gorgaslan. These ancient historical works are valuable for their information, both authentic and legendary, about Georgia's early history and for their echoes of Iranian and Armenian heroic tradition.

Another group of Georgian histories dates from the eleventh century, when Sumbat son of David composed a history and

genealogy of the Bagration house, in which he attempted to establish their descent from David and Solomon of Israel. Probably about the same time, Leonti Mroveli (archbishop of Ruisi) composed a *History of the First Fathers and Kings*, dealing with the era of Georgian history prior to the fifth century. Differences of opinion still exist concerning the epoch and identity of Leonti Mroveli, a central figure in Georgian historiography. Lively interest was aroused by the discovery in 1957 of a secret refuge in the Trekhvi caves, built during the Seljuk invasions, and having a dated inscription running:

> I, Leonti Mroveli, with great labour built this cave for the icon of the Lord God and against adverse times, to provide shelter for the children (i.e. the Chapter) of Ruisi Cathedral in the time of desolation wrought by the Sultan Alp-Arslan, in the 286th Koronikon (= A.D. 1066).

This inscription, published with commentary and illustrations by Givi Gaprindashvili in 1961,[1] provides weighty evidence in favour of placing Leonti Mroveli and his writings in the eleventh rather than in the eighth century. In spite of this, Professor Cyril Toumanoff[2] and one or two others still regard Leonti Mroveli as an eighth-century author. It is, of course, possible that Ruisi was blessed with two outstanding archbishops, both named Leonti, with a gap of three centuries between them, but it seems for the time being more logical to identify Leonti the historian with Leonti of the Trekhvi caves, who flourished around 1066, during the reign of King Bagrat IV of Georgia (1027–72).

The chronicles of Leonti, Sumbat, and Juansher helped to form the nucleus of the vast official corpus of Georgian history, known as *Kartlis tskhovreba*, or 'The Life of Georgia'. As time went by, new works were added to keep the corpus

[1] Givi Gaprindashvili, 'Leonti Mrovelis 1066 ds. samsheneblo dsardsera Trekhvis kvabebidan', in *Bulletin of the Social Sciences Department, Academy of Sciences, Georgian SSR*, 1961, no. 1, pp. 239–62, Plates 1–6.

[2] C. L. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Georgetown, 1963, pp. 24, 418.

up to date. The final revision was made by King Vakhtang VI early in the eighteenth century, and separate histories of the individual kingdoms and principalities were composed later in the same century by Vakhtang's natural son, Prince Vakhushti (1695–1772).

Meanwhile, Georgian literature became further enriched by contact with the treasury of early Christian and Patristic literature. Georgian monks founded cloisters and libraries in all the main centres of the Christian East, including Palestine, Mount Sinai, the Black Mountain near Antioch, Cyprus, and also Mount Olympus, Mount Athos, and Bachkovo (Petritsoni) in Bulgaria. As early as 440, Peter the Iberian, a rich and pious scion of the Georgian royal house, was building pilgrim hostels and monasteries in Jerusalem and the Judaean desert near Bethlehem. Peter the Iberian was later prominent in the monophysite cause, in opposition to the canons of the Council of Chalcedon (451). It is this Peter, considered one of the most formidable theologians of his time, who has since been identified by the late Ernest Honigmann and by Shalva Nutsubidze as author of the spiritual writings known as the works of 'Dionysius the Areopagite'.[1]

Many important works of Eastern literature and wisdom reached the Georgians through direct translation from Arabic. Most important of these is the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, known in Georgian as *Balavariani* or *The Wisdom of Balahvar*. This book contains, in modified form, an account of the conversion of Gautama Buddha, the Bodhisattva prince, his Great Renunciation, and his missionary journeys. It was popular among the Manichaeans of Central Asia, who transmitted it to the Arabic literary world of Baghdad; it was then translated into Georgian in the ninth century. It is an epitome of all the arguments in favour of the ascetic life and rejection of the joys of this world. The Georgian version was rendered into Greek by St. Euthymius the

[1] Shalva Nutsubidze, *Istoriya gruzinskoy filosofii*, Tbilisi, 1960, pp. 84–144.

Athonite (955–1028), and then from Greek into Latin and thence into the main languages of medieval Christendom.[1]

These Georgian Athonites, who founded the Iviron Monastery on Mt. Athos about the year 980, made a remarkable contribution to Georgian literature and culture. Euthymius and his successor, Giorgi the Hagiorite (1009–65), revised virtually the whole corpus of Georgian ecclesiastical literature by reference to Greek manuscripts available to them through the great libraries of Constantinople. Euthymius rendered into Georgian many important books overlooked by previous translators, including the Revelation of St. John the Divine, and codified Georgian Church law according to the Byzantine canons. Giorgi the Hagiorite tells us that much of this work was done at night by candlelight, after a full day spent in administering the Lavra and in religious exercises.

> The blessed Euthymius went on translating without respite and gave himself no repose; day and night he distilled the sweet honey of the books of God, with which he adorned our language and our Church. He translated so many divine works that nobody could enumerate them, since he worked at his translations not only on Mount Olympus and Mount Athos (which works we can list in detail), but also in Constantinople, and while travelling, and in all kinds of other places.

The unshakeably orthodox doctrines of the Georgian Athonites are well expressed in a spirited dialogue between Giorgi the Hagiorite and Patriarch Theodosius III of Antioch, in which Giorgi declared:

> Most Reverend Lord, your words are: 'I sit upon the throne of Peter, chief of the Apostles.' But we Georgians are the heirs and the flock of him who was first called—that is, St. Andrew—and who called his brother; by him we too were converted and enlightened. What is more, one of the Twelve Holy Apostles, namely Simon the Canaanite, is buried in our land, in Abkhazia, at the place which is called Nicopsia. Through these holy apostles

[1] D. M. Lang, *The Wisdom of Balahvar: A Christian Legend of the Buddha*, London, 1957.

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we received the light; and since we came to know the One God, we have never renounced Him, nor has our nation ever turned aside into heretical ways, but we curse and anathematize all apostates and renegades. We stand firmly based on this rock of orthodoxy, and on the precepts which were proclaimed by these Holy Apostles.[1]

The story of St. Andrew's mission to Georgia is now thought to be mythical, but no more so than many other respectable traditions current in medieval Christendom.

The work of the Georgian Athonites was worthily continued by Ephrem Mtsire (1027–94), translator of the works of St. John Damascene, Ephraim the Syrian, St. John Chrysostom, and Dionysius the Areopagite, and author of an original biography of Simeon Metaphrastes, as well as being a leader of the Georgian monastic community on the Black Mountain close to Antioch; also by Arsen Iqaltoeli (d. 1125), the learned Rector of Iqalto Academy near Telavi in Kakheti. Excellent work was also done at the Monastery of the Cross near Jerusalem, built on the site of another ancient foundation by St. Prochorus the Georgian, a disciple of Euthymius, about the year 1030. This monastery became the centre of Georgian culture in the Holy Land, and the remains of its valuable library, including some 160 manuscripts, are now preserved in the Greek Patriarchate.[2] The Monastery of the Cross is associated with Georgia's national poet, Shota Rustaveli, who is said to have retired to Jerusalem as a monk, and died and been buried there. A coloured fresco, freshly uncovered in the monastery buildings, shows Rustaveli in rich court dress kneeling in an act of obeisance, no doubt during a pilgrimage in the course of his earlier secular life.

Towards the end of the eleventh century, the Church's monopoly in literature and learning was being challenged from various quarters and subjected to severe strain. With

[1] Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, pp. 161, 167.

[1] R. P. Blake, 'Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens . . . à Jérusalem', in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 1922–6.

the emergence of Georgia into the international arena, and increasing contacts with the brilliant civilization of contemporary Islam, Georgian philosophers and poets became impatient of the rigid trammels imposed by the churchmen. The Georgian kings, like contemporary Persian and Turkish sultans, were great patrons of arts and letters, and favoured court poets and story-tellers equally with monastic chroniclers and other holy men. Ioane Shavteli wrote a verse panegyric of King David the Builder under the title *Abdul-Mesia* or 'Slave of the Messiah', while Chakhrukhadze composed a magnificent ode to Queen Tamar and her consort, David Soslan. The cycle of picaresque tales of adventure known as *Amiran-Darejaniani* was put together in prose form by Moses of Khoni,[1] while Sargis of Tmogvi adapted the passionate and deeply felt story of the loves of Vis and Ramin from the Persian version by Fakhr al-Din Gurgani, itself an elaboration of an old Parthian romance, as Professor V. Minorsky has shown. Vis and Ramin are slaves of relentless fate at its most inexorable—'Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée'—and their long-thwarted, often despairing passion may be compared with that of Tristan and Isolde. In the case of Vis and Ramin, however, torment is followed by married bliss, in which the lovers are portrayed as passing no less than eighty-one years together. (The Persians and Georgians are, of course, famed for their longevity!) To give some idea of the emotional force of this classic work, we cite Ramin's lament over the body of the departed Vis, in the translation by Sir Oliver Wardrop:

> O beloved friend, more to be desired than life! Thou art gone, thou hast forsaken me completely, and hast left me heart-branded, consumed, weary of the world. . . . None ever had a friend like thee! Now, why art thou become weary of me? Hast thou not oft sworn fidelity to me? Now, because of what sin art thou become merciless? Why hast thou broken thine oath to me? For so long we have been united in soul, affectionate, why hast

[1] *Amiran-Darejaniani. A Cycle of Medieval Georgian Tales Traditionally Ascribed to Mose Khoneli*, trans. R. H. Stevenson, Oxford, 1958.

thou made me to lament? But as I know thy heart, certainly thou didst not deceive me. It is evidently Fate that has betrayed me, and from it, this is no marvel. To whom has it fulfilled good from then till now? The earth is emptied of joy by thy departure, thou hast taken everything good with thee. How can I endure the plague of old age and feebleness, as well as the sadness of being bereft of thee? Or how can I live and endure the thought of this? Grief is added to grief! I lying on a throne, and thou in the earth—I cannot think of it![1]

This efflorescence of secular love-poetry, romance, and epic was not confined to court circles. Already by the twelfth century, the Georgians of all social classes had acquired a rich store of folk-tales, popular epics, and drinking-songs, many of them having their roots in remote antiquity. Contact with medieval Byzantium and Iran, and increased opportunities for travel and trade throughout the East enriched this store of material still further. In many instances, motifs of foreign provenance were greatly modified in their new Caucasian setting, and transformed into fresh and spontaneous imaginative creations of the folk-mind. This was the case, for instance, with the *Shahnameh* or *Book of Kings* of Firdawsi (940–1020), which early became popular in Georgia under the title *Rostomiani*, after Rustam, one of the legendary heroes commemorated in the great Persian epic. Many versions, in verse and prose, circulated in Georgia from an early date. The *Amiran-Darejaniani* of Moses of Khoni, a work put into literary shape on Georgian soil, also gave rise to a whole cycle of legends, elaborated and handed down by the village story-teller. So involved has the interrelation of the literary and folk variants become that some leading experts, such as Professor Mikheil Chikovani of Tbilisi University, would even argue that the folk variants preceded the literary *Amiran-Darejaniani*, rather than deriving from it.

A beautiful and indisputably original Georgian popular

[1] *Visramiani. The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin*, London, 1914, p. 394 (Oriental Translation Fund, N.S., vol. xxiii).

romance is that of Abesalom and Eteri, known as *Eteriani*, which has been made into a magnificent opera by the Georgian composer Zakaria Paliashvili (1913). Eteri is a Georgian Cinderella, hounded and starved by a wicked stepmother. One day, a kindly witch clothes her in silk and sends her to church, where she attracts the attention of the prince, Abesalom. Returning home, Eteri drops one of her shoes in a stream. Abesalom finds the shoe and ultimately succeeds in tracing her. The lovers' happiness is destroyed by Abesalom's trusted retainer, an Iago-like character called Murman. The devil shows Murman how to win Eteri for himself, namely by sprinkling her with millet, which turns into loathsome fleas and lice, which only Murman's touch can momentarily cleanse. Filled with bitterness, Abesalom abandons Eteri to Murman's embraces.

Abesalom pines away, and soon lies at death's door. As a last resort, he sends Murman away in search of the waters of immortality. Murman spends one last night with Eteri, greeting the morn of his departure with these lines:

> O night now upon us,
> Turn not too soon to dawn;
> Else my love will fly away
> And tomorrow I shall see her no more.

While Murman is away, Abesalom breathes his last. Eteri stabs herself. The unhappy lovers are buried together. At the head of their tomb, a vine springs up, at their feet a spring of fresh water. From Abesalom's body there grows a rose, from Eteri's a violet. Murman returns from his quest, digs himself a grave between the two lovers, and kills himself upon the spot. Thenceforward the spring of water is poisoned, the vine languishes, and a hideous thorn-bush grows up from Murman's corpse. When the violet and the rose seek to entwine and cling together, the thorn-bush puts out a branch and forces them apart once more.

Profane love-poetry could, if necessary, be justified as a

harmless diversion for kings and princes. Innovations in religious dogma were, from the viewpoint of strict orthodoxy, far more dangerous. In this respect, the philosophical work of the great Georgian Neoplatonist Ioane Tchimtchimeli, known as Petritsi (d. 1125), posed a serious challenge. Petritsi's life-work was directed towards founding a national Georgian school of metaphysical philosophy, reconciling reason with revelation, and harmonizing Christian dogma with the teaching of the Greek philosophers, notably Plato. Ioane Tchimtchimeli was educated at the Mangana Academy in Constantinople, his teachers being Johannes Italos and Michael Psellos (1018–79), who revived the cult of Plato and the Ancients, and laid the foundations of medieval humanism. A Greek source speaks of a certain 'Abasgian', i.e. Georgian, as one of Johannes Italos' most faithful disciples, and no doubt this refers to Ioane Tchimtchimeli. Around 1076, he returned to his Georgian homeland, but found his ideas uncongenial and himself unwelcome among the conservative Church hierarchy. In 1083 he accepted an invitation from the Byzantine soldier and statesman Grigol Bakurianisdze—himself of Caucasian origin—to study and lecture at the newly founded seminary of Petritsoni at Bachkovo in Bulgaria, whence Ioane's surname of Petritsi. Eventually Petritsi was reconciled with the Georgian Church authorities and returned to his native land under the patronage of King David the Builder (1089–1125) to play a prominent part in organizing the Georgian academy at Gelati.

Petritsi was the first Georgian theologian to go back direct to the Greek classics Plato and Aristotle; he translated into Georgian two treatises of Aristotle (these renderings are lost), as well as two Neoplatonist works, *On Human Nature* by Nemesius of Emesa (*fl.* 390), which is an attempt to compile a system of anthropology from the standpoint of Christian philosophy allied to Platonic doctrines of pre-existence and metempsychosis, and the *Elements of Theology*

by Proclus Diadochus (410–85), to which Petritsi added his own extensive commentary. Petritsi's translation, based on ancient manuscripts, has been used with profit by Proclus' English editor, Professor E. R. Dodds,[1] while his commentary convinces one of the onset of philosophical maturity in Georgia, and the possibility of independent achievement in the realm of metaphysics. Petritsi was a valiant and original spirit, perhaps the most talented philosopher Georgia has produced. He attempted, so he avowed, to summon Athena, Hermes, and Prometheus to his aid in interpreting the divine message of the Supreme Logos, Jesus Christ, and to ally the Christian faith to the highest forms of antique philosophy. But herein he was trying to reconcile the irreconcilable, and it was inevitable that his writings should arouse opposition among the conventional schoolmen of his time. Only in the eighteenth century could the learned Catholicos Patriarch Antoni I declare Petritsi to be his favourite theologian, 'a godly philosopher, the sun of our nation'—a verdict fully supported by modern scholarship.[2]

The summit of this efflorescence of Georgian literature and philosophy in the Middle Ages is reached in the epic by Shota Rustaveli, *Vepkhistqaosani*, 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin', in which the currents of Platonist philosophy and Eastern romance find their harmonious and inspired fusion. Of the poet's life we know little for certain—scarcely more than the details given in the prologue and epilogue of his poem, which are in fact thought to have been added by a later hand. 'By shedding tears of blood', the bard exclaims, 'we extol the sovereign Tamar, whose praises I, not ill-chosen, have told forth. . . . They bade me indite sweet verses in her praise, laud her eyebrows and lashes, her hair, her lips and teeth, cut crystal and ruby arrayed in ranks. An anvil of soft lead breaks even hard stone.' In the

[1] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1963.

[2] M. Tarchnišvili, *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur*, Vatican City, 1955, pp. 211–25.

epilogue, the poet (or his imitator) explains that he is a certain Meskhian, a native of the little town of Rustavi, hence the surname Rustaveli. Legend adds further that the bard was educated at Athens, had travelled much in Asia, and then held the post of treasurer to Queen Tamar, with whom he fell madly in love. 'For her whom a multitude of hosts obey, I lose my wits, I die! I am sick of love, and for me there is no cure from anywhere, unless she give me healing or the earth a grave.'[1] It was the queen's disdain that led Rustaveli to withdraw from secular life and finish his days at the Monastery of the Cross at Jerusalem, where his picture appears on a fresco. Most of this, admittedly, is legend, and as is the case with the 'Baconian' school of Shakespeare criticism, there are some who dismiss as untrue the entire tradition relating to Rustaveli's date and personality. The late Dr. Jaromír Jedlička, for instance, an outstanding scholar who translated Rustaveli into Czech, declared in a private letter dated 31 May 1959 his belief that 'the *Vepkhistqaosani* was not written in the time of Tamar, its author is not Rustaveli, and the Prologue and Epilogue were written much later than the poem itself'.

However this may be, there is no denying the universal inspiration and appeal of Rustaveli's poem, which has been translated several times into Russian (once by Constantine Bal'mont), three times into French, and also into English, German, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Czech, Armenian, and Japanese. Seldom has a poet's vision been so vast, comprehensive, and turbulent, so that it seems that the universe is about to clash in primeval chaos, until the creative breath of a great poet subdues this chaos to a severe harmony. The sublime tone of the work is set from the opening lines, where the bard invokes the single, supreme Deity. 'He who created the firmament, by that mighty power made beings inspired from on high with souls celestial; to us men He has given the

[1] Marjory Scott Wardrop, trans., *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, London, 1912, pp. 1–3 (Oriental Translation Fund, N.S., vol. xx).

world, infinite in variety we possess it; from Him is every monarch in His likeness.' It is noticeable that Rustaveli's God is a universal force, and that there is never any mention of individual members of the Holy Trinity, or any of the conventional Christian religious symbolism. After discussing the merits of various forms of minstrelsy, and defining the differences separating ideal from profane love, Rustaveli exclaims: 'I speak of the highest love—divine in its kind. It is difficult to discourse thereon, ill to tell forth with tongues. It is heavenly, upraising the soul on pinions.' It is, in short, no common mortal love of which Rustaveli sings, but the single-minded, idealized cult of which the Platonists discoursed, in whose name knights of old did battle for their beloved, and of which troubadours and other exponents of courtly love sing in sweet despair.

While his poem is an allegory of Georgia's heroic age, Rustaveli chose an exotic setting for its narrative framework, which he claims to have found in some old Persian tale. The venerable king Rostevan of Arabia gives up his throne to his daughter Tinatin—as in fact King Giorgi III did in favour of Queen Tamar, his own daughter. A great feast is arranged at court, then a hunt during which the king and his suite encounter a knight clad in a panther's skin sitting by a river, sobbing bitterly. Rostevan gets no reply to his greeting, and orders the stranger to be seized and brought to him by force; but the knight jumps on to his steed, kills his assailants, and vanishes amid general consternation. Queen Tinatin is deeply intrigued by this mysterious episode. She summons her beloved, Avtandil, commander of the royal army, and begs him to set out in quest of the stranger, promising him her hand when he returns.

After long and toilsome travels, Avtandil runs to earth the man of mystery in a desert cave. The meeting of the two heroes is very touching and they soon become intimate. The man in the panther's skin is named Tariel, and tells Avtandil his tragic life-story. He is a prince and general of India, the

affianced of Nestan-Darejan, daughter of the Indian emperor. At Nestan's instigation, Tariel murdered her first betrothed, a Persian prince, to save her from a hateful match and guarantee the succession to the Indian throne from foreign usurpers. Hereupon riots broke out in the kingdom, and Nestan was secretly abducted from the palace. Since then Tariel has abandoned the world of men and roamed through the deserts of the world, looking for his beloved and bewailing his sad fate.

Avtandil comforts Tariel, and swears to remain for ever his faithful friend—indeed, the ideal of loyalty and friendship is one of the leitmotifs of Rustaveli's poem. Avtandil returns to Arabia to report to Tinatin on his discovery, and the two friends set off again to scour the world for Nestan-Darejan. After many vicissitudes, and thanks to an adventure as amorous as it is comic, Avtandil comes at last upon the princess's trail, shut up in a remote fortress in the land of the *Kajis* or demons, to whose ruler she is to be forcibly wed. With the help of a third hero, Pridon, the two knights raise an army, besiege the castle, and rescue the princess. Then follows feasting and merry-making, first at Pridon's palace, then in Arabia at King Rostevan's court, afterwards in India. Tariel and Nestan-Darejan ascend the throne of their ancestors in India, and Avtandil and Tinatin rule in felicity over the Arabian kingdom.

The poet's range of interest is amazingly wide; it embraces a mastery of political and judicial questions, familiarity with court life and ceremonial, and a grasp of the subtleties of the art of war. He can portray the structure and life of a great sea-power, its crowded cities and ports teeming with life and activity, and the feverish speculations and shifting fortunes of its inhabitants. Rustaveli was familiar with ancient Greek philosophy, with astronomy and astrology, and with the poetry of his Persian contemporaries, such as Nizami of Ganja (1140–1202).

Whether Rustaveli is writing of the laws of the feudal

system; the code of knightly love, fealty, and honour; the dealings of merchants, their avarice and thirst for gain; or the subtle inner conflicts of the human soul, he brings the same zest to his pen, with the same colourful imagery and broad human sympathy. Even today there exist many Georgian peasants who know by heart whole cantos of the epic, and recite them just as the Persian countryman will recite the verse of Hafiz or Saʿdi. A copy of *Vepkhistqaosani* traditionally forms part of the dowry of every self-respecting Georgian bride. Whether approved by the Orthodox Church or no, Rustaveli's ethical code, with its emphasis on courage, loyalty, and patriotism is well attuned to the Georgian national character.

A trait which Rustaveli shares with Shakespeare and other world geniuses is his capacity for heightening the effect of tragic or heroic deeds by unexpected flashes of grotesque, earthy humour. Thus, Avtandil being entertained in the city of Gulansharo by Dame Fatman, wife of the chief merchant, finds himself in duty bound to satisfy that mature lady's amorous cravings. While the knight 'unwillingly embraces her neck with his own crystal neck', he is pricked with remorse at the memory of his graceful affianced Tinatin. 'Avtandil secretly rains tears, they flow to mingle with the sea; in an inky eddy floats a jetty ship (i.e. the black pupil in his dark eye). He says: "Behold me, O lovers, me who have a rose for mine own! Away from her, I, the nightingale, like a carrion crow sit on the dungheap!"' Ever the perfect gentleman, Avtandil hides his repugnance from his hostess. 'Fatman rejoiced in him as if she herself were a nightingale; if a crow finds a rose, it thinks even itself a nightingale!'[1]

Rustaveli is a master of the technical art of versification. He wrote in stanzas composed of four lines or *shairi* of sixteen syllables, the rhyme scheme being *a:a:a:a*. Such a metre makes great demands on the poet, especially as each rhyme is usually made up of two or even three matching final

[1] Rustaveli, trans. Marjory Wardrop, pp. 199–200.

syllables, and does not consist in the last syllable alone, as often occurs in English verse.

As a result of the Mongol, Persian, and Turkish invasions, and the disapproval of the Church, the oldest manuscripts of the poem were destroyed. The most ancient complete copies, several finely illustrated in the Persian manner, date from the seventeenth century. Recent researches by the staff of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi have brought to light fragments of the poem from the sixteenth century, bound into covers of volumes in a provincial library in Akhaltsikhe. In the cave monastery of Vani, in Samtskhe province, destroyed by the Persians in 1552, there have been discovered a number of fifteenth-century graffiti on the walls, including stanzas 1300–1 of Rustaveli's poem. Further finds will certainly enable us one day to reconstruct with greater certainty the authentic text of *Vepkhistqaosani*, and tell us more of the identity of its author and his life and times.

> Their tale is ended like a dream of the night. They are passed away, gone beyond the world. Behold the treachery of time: to him who thinks it long, even for him it is of a moment. . . . This is such a world as is not to be trusted by any; it is a moment to the eyes of men, and only long enough for the blinking of the eyelashes. What is the use of searching and striving? Fate will put us to shame. Happy at least is he whom destiny escorts beyond this life into the hereafter![1]

Rustaveli's great poem is the swan-song of Georgia's Golden Age. Between 1225 and 1240, Georgia was overwhelmed and devastated by Khwarazmian and Mongol hordes from Central Asia, and again late in the fourteenth century by Leng Timur, or Tamburlane the Great. The feudal nobles exploited the situation by throwing off their allegiance to the monarchy, and setting up as petty sovereigns on their own. In 1453, Constantinople, centre of Eastern Christendom, fell to the Ottoman Turks. Georgia was partitioned between the Turkish Sultan and the Persian

[1] Ibid., pp. 256–7, slightly modified by the author.

Shah. In spite of heroic efforts by King Erekle II in the eighteenth century, annexation by Russia proved the only solution to Georgia's problems.

Meanwhile, a considerable literary revival had taken place during the so-called 'Silver Age' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which produced several poets of considerable talent—in particular, King Teimuraz I, David Guramishvili, and Besarion Gabashvili, known as Besiki.

A favourite writer of this period was Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658–1725)—lexicographer, priest, and diplomat, and above all author of the witty *Book of Wisdom and Lies*—an inimitable collection of moral precepts, Eastern humour, and typically Georgian 'shaggy dog' stories.

This humorous tradition was continued by Prince John Bagration (1768–1830), a member of the royal dynasty of Georgia, who amused himself in exile by writing an encyclopedic work called the *Kalmasoba*, in which he recounts the adventures of a couple of Georgian monks touring the country in search of alms for their monastery. There are many Rabelaisian touches, and also grotesque encounters in the manner of Don Quixote. I may cite one instance where the two brethren, Khelashvili and Ghambarashvili, visit the Dadian or ruling prince of Mingrelia, who is spending his time fishing by the banks of the river Rioni. His lodge roof is leaking and lets in streams of rain. The Dadian observes that sixty days' more rain falls in Mingrelia than in any other country. At this, the humorist Ghambarashvili exclaims: 'Sir Dadian! In that case you, the ruler of this land, are excused from building any bath-houses.'

The Russian annexation of Georgia in 1801 brought the country into contact with the main stream of Western European and Russian romantic literature. In this connexion, the outstanding figure is the young and tragic bard Nikoloz Baratashvili, who met his death in 1845 at the age of 28. No one who has had the privilege of seeing the young Georgian actor Gegechkori in the title-role of the drama

Baratashvili on the Tbilisi stage is likely to forget the appeal of this tortured, truly Byronic genius.

> By fate repulsed, oh bury me in a dark and lonely grave.
> My bloody foe, I fear thee not—thy flashing sword I brave.
> Speed thee on and onward fly with a gallop that knows no
>   bound,
> Fling to the winds my stormy thoughts in raging darkness
>   found.[1]

The other great poet of the nineteenth century was Akaki Tsereteli (1840–1915), 'Georgia's sweet nightingale', a bard of the greatest versatility, master of every genre from the revolutionary ballad to the tenderest love lyric.

SULIKO

> In vain I sought my loved one's grave;
> Despair plunged me in deepest woe.
> Scarce holding back the sobs I cried:
> 'O where art thou, my Suliko?'
>
> Midst rustling leaves a nightingale
> Was singing to the rose below:
> I hailed the bird and gently asked:
> 'Perchance 'tis thou, O Suliko?'
>
> The songster fluttered nearer to
> The rose, and on it pressed a kiss,
> Disburdening its soul in song
> That breathed of ecstasy and bliss. . . .
>
> None can express the joy I feel
> To hear the nightingale from far,
> To breathe the fragrance of the rose
> And gaze upon the shining star. . . .
>
> O happy am I once again;
> No more am I oppressed by woe
> I seek no tomb, for now I see
> Thy dwellings three, my Suliko![2]

Perhaps the most universal genius in Georgian literature was Prince Ilia Chavchavadze, of whom it has been said

[1] 'Merani', trans. by Venera Urushadze, in her *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*, 2nd ed., Tbilisi, 1958, p. 50.
[2] Venera Urushadze, *Anthology*, pp. 82–83.

that Rustaveli could be born again, but the world could never produce another Ilia.

Prince Ilia Chavchavadze was born on 27 October 1837 at Qvareli in the Eastern Georgian province of Kakheti, of an illustrious but somewhat impoverished family. His mother and the village priest gave him an early insight into the literary and historical traditions of his country, and provided him with material for his adult literary work. Here in Qvareli he could observe some of the quaint customs and superstitions which he caricatures in his novel *Do you call this a Man?* In 1856, Chavchavadze entered St. Petersburg University. The impressions that he derived from his student days in Russia were to play a vital part in forming his mature outlook. The University of St. Petersburg in the late 1850's provided a stimulating environment. The lectures of Kavelin, Kostomarov, Pypin, and Stasyulevich made a deep impression on him, and initiated him into many central problems of Russian and European literature, history, and ethics. In the world of affairs and journalism, the *Sovremennik*, or *Contemporary*, a periodical of great influence and radical trends, run by the poet Nekrasov and the political theorists Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, was at the height of its success, and provided him with a model for the papers which he was himself to edit in his native Georgia. The burning question of the day, of course, was the forthcoming abolition of serfdom, finally effected in 1861 in Russia, in 1864 and following years in Georgia. The iron rule of Nicholas I, discredited by the Crimean War disasters, had been replaced by the reign of Alexander II, under whom it really seemed that Russia would move forward into an epoch of reform and relative liberalism.

On his return to Georgia, Chavchavadze founded a short-lived literary and polemical journal, *Sakartvelos Moambe*, or *Georgian Herald*, and in 1877 launched *Iveria*, an organ which played an outstanding part in the revival of Georgian national consciousness and in furthering social and intellectual

progress. It was in this patriotic journal, oddly enough, that Stalin's first literary effort, a set of verses under the signature 'Soselo', or 'Little Joe', appeared in 1895.

In 1874, Ilia was elected President of the Land Bank of the Nobility at Tbilisi, an institution designed to put the landed gentry on their feet by the provision of credit as well as fulfilling ordinary banking functions. From then on, his life was increasingly devoted to practical activities of every kind. He founded the 'Society for the Spreading of Literacy among the Georgians' and financed a number of new schools, as well as supporting the Georgian national theatre. He promoted the development of railways in Transcaucasia and the industrial evolution of the country. This activity aroused the hostility of the Russian authorities. The archives of the Tbilisi gendarmerie contain a report, dated 1894, in which it is stated that 'the principal leader of the movement which aims at stimulating nationalist trends is Prince Ilia Chavchavadze, president of the Tbilisi Bank of the Nobility. . . . Prince Chavchavadze is a man of exceptional intellect and standing, and enjoys great ascendancy over the Georgians in general, and over free-thinking dissident elements in particular.' At the same time, the liberal-nationalist views of Chavchavadze's party, the so-called 'Pirveli Dasi', or First Group, failed to provide a satisfactory programme for the growing forces of Marxist social-democracy, represented by 'Mesame Dasi', the Third Group, which Stalin joined in 1898; cleavage was inevitable. Chavchavadze's humanitarian, patriotic convictions, audaciously radical in the 1860's, seemed an anachronism to the proletarian revolutionaries of 1900. Stalin was later to pay tribute to Chavchavadze's role in the evolution of Georgian society, but for the time being the Revolutionary Social Democrats treated him with hostility. A member of the Russian Duma in 1906, Chavchavadze met his death at the hand of a gang of ruffians while travelling in the country near Tbilisi the following year. The instigators of his murder were never detected. According to

the Left, responsibility lay with the Tsarist secret police, while others blamed the Georgian revolutionaries. The Soviet Government has erected an obelisk on the spot.

Ilia Chavchavadze's satirical novel of Georgian country life, *Do you call this a Man?* (*Katsia adamiani?*), published in 1863, established itself at once as a literary creation of merit and significance. It touched directly on the topical question of the abolition of serfdom, eventually carried through in Georgia in 1864, three years later than in Russia. The novel's motto, 'Criticize your friend to his face, your enemy behind his back', makes plain its author's intention of depicting the seamy side of Georgian life, in the hope of contributing to the regeneration of his native land. But it would be a mistake to regard the book as a tract. Chavchavadze rises far above the level of mere preaching, and fuses together elements of satire, critical realism, and artistic imagination into a synthesis of outstanding power and brilliance. Certain of Ilia's effects indeed recall *Dead Souls* and *Old-World Land-owners*, with Gogol's metaphysical disgust at the 'poshlost', or overpowering boredom and triviality of life, though with Chavchavadze this element is tempered by a fundamental optimism.

This is how Chavchavadze described an old-world Georgian squire's proud domain:

Pleasant was the estate of Prince Tatkaridze. Imagine to yourself a little hamlet in the depth of Kakheti, a vale open on all sides, and in the middle, a two-storied stone house.

Now this is what these two storeys looked like. Down below was installed the wine press, all grown over with dried-up vine shoots, and above the wine press, along the back wall, you see, was built out a little annexe room with a balcony. On to the balcony, like a swallow's nest, was fixed a lean-to shed made of planks, in which bedding was kept. A little way off from the house stood the oven in which the family bread was baked, under a roof of boards, and in front of this, a potting shed. Nearby was the maize store, a dingy and forlorn structure. Then there was a kitchen garden, surrounded by a fence. By this fence, close to a mulberry tree, stood an ancient thatched hut—the summer-

house. It had got so bent and awry with the passage of time that it looked as if it had once just been going to take a rest in the shade, but then suddenly stiffened up all askew and crooked—like an old woman with an attack of gout.

Round this palatial residence stretched an extensive, broad yard, bounded by a wattle fence. The wattle had given way in places, but it never occurs to the present proprietor to repair it. Obviously he is a Georgian!

The wattle was crowned by an enormous pair of gates, one of which for the last two years has been hanging loose on its post with a gaping grimace, as if the post had grabbed at it to hit it, and the gate had slipped aside to get out of the way. Beyond the gates you could see a widish stream, on one side of which was heaped a great pile of refuse, propped up against the side of a barn. The barn had an uncommonly comic, meditative look; one side of it was tilted upwards—exactly like a goose with a broken wing.

Many amusing things I witnessed here in my young days: in that rubbish heap, grunting with excess emotion, the cheerful and carefree pigs used to enjoy themselves. As they poked about in that fragrant refuse with their stiff snouts, so heartily, so lovingly, you could see they were real champion pigs! And how they used to gambol about and caress each other! How am I to describe it? In their exuberance, they would from time to time give one another an affectionate prod with their snout. And what a chorus of squeals they raised! Just like when one of our peasants tenderly treats his young wife to a clout. Somebody once remarked: 'In Georgia, love takes the form of curses.' Mark you, even a clout is a sort of playful caress.

The yard was as dirty as the soul of a superannuated civil servant. To reach the proprietor without getting filthy or collecting some kind of choice odour was a great achievement. Such was the external view of the establishment. Now be good enough to enter with me the house of Prince Tatkaridze.

There is just one thing I must warn you about, if we contemplate visiting him: as you come in, you must be most careful. The floor is tiled. That would not matter if the tiles had not unfortunately crumbled away in places, so that here and there holes yawn in their stead. Watch out for your feet. If you trip up, so much the worse for you: either you will break your neck or your leg. Of course, our hosts will offer a thousand apologies, but apologies are not much help when you have broken your neck, and even when it is only a leg, they are not much of a cure.

If it were light in the room, the visitor could obviously avoid this danger. But, alas, there is no light! It is true that there are two windows, a little bigger than arrow-slits, but it is dark in the room all the same because some ingenious fellow has hit on the idea of putting oiled paper into the pine-wood frames instead of glass. This is the sort of wheeze one thinks of in connection with the old proverb, 'Nimbleness and bright ideas are better than brute force'.

I have come across these delightfully adorned windows from time to time in other places; more than once I have seen oiled window-paper pricked through with a needle: here a heart has been sketched out, there a cross, and elsewhere some such inscription as,

> If you're fat like a bear
> Climb trees if you dare—
> Hi, Ho,
> Hey Nonny No!

Most likely, this is the work of a woman's hand. And anyway, if this is the case, what is so reprehensible about it? Reading the Psalter has palled on her, dejection has set in, and so to occupy her mind and while away the monotonous, boring day she has gone to the window, taken out the brooch from her corsage and settled down to this truly useful, edifying occupation. She had nothing to do, and now she has found something; as the proverb says, 'Bad work is better than good idleness.'

In our Tatkaridze's room there stand on opposite sides two long divans. The felt carpet spread over them is in such exemplary condition that with every excellent movement of Their Excellencies' excellent legs clouds of dust fly up, preventing the spectator from becoming sated with the picturesqueness of the spectacle.

The manners and appearance of Prince and Princess Tatkaridze, proud proprietors of this domain, match the décor in every respect. Luarsab and Darejan Tatkaridze have passed away, but their image lives on through the rich satirical humour with which they are portrayed in this bitter and yet endearing masterpiece of Georgian social fiction.

Ilia Chavchavadze was also a poet of stature. His grandiose and profoundly philosophical poem, *Gandegili*, or *The Hermit*, set amid the snows of Mount Kazbek, would not have disgraced the pen of Lermontov himself. In 1895, an English

translation by Marjory Wardrop was published in London by Bernard Quaritch. From a literary viewpoint it is perhaps the best of her translations from the Georgian; apart from a few lapses into conventional diction, her eloquent and flowing verse conveys with great power the story of the hermit on Mount Kazbek and his downfall. The opening lines evoke the setting of the legend:

> There, where Mount Kazbek rears his noble brow,
>   Where eagle cannot soar, nor vulture fly,
> Where, never melted by the sun's warm rays,
>   The frozen rain and snow eternal lie;
> Far from the world's wild uproar set apart,
>   There, in the awful solitude and calm,
> Where thunder's mighty roar rules o'er these realms,
>   Where frost doth dwell and winds sing forth their psalm;
> There stood, in former days, a house of God,
>   Built by devout and holy men, the fame
> Of that old temple still the folk hold dear,
>   And Bethlehem is still, today, its name.
> The ice-bound wall of that secluded shrine
>   Was hollowed out from craggy, massive block,
> And, like an eagle's eyrie on the cliff,
>   The door stood carved in the solid rock.
> Straight downward from this gate unto the path
>   There hung descending a rough iron chain,
> And save by that strange ladder's aid alone
>   Man could in no wise thereto entrance gain.

The poem goes on to tell of the hermit of Kazbek, and how temptation came to him in the shape of a shepherd girl, who seems to his fevered mind and body as if endowed with supernatural powers of seduction:

> He heard the melody of silver strings;
>   As on a lyre, love on his heart did play.
> What meant this sweetness hitherto unknown?
>   He could not tell this tender feeling's name;
> If it was sinful, why was it so like
>   Immortal life, his soul's incessant aim?

And so the hermit bends down to kiss the sleeping maiden,

when suddenly there is heard an outburst of fiendish mockery as the demon host celebrates the triumph of earthly temptation. The hermit rushes demented from his cell to wander on the crags: when at last he makes his peace with God, it is to die:

> And there where saints once sang their grateful hymns,
> And glorified God's wondrous works and ways,
> There where they offered daily sacrifice
> Of lamentation, love, and prayer, and praise,
> There, midst the landslips and the broken stones,
> Only the wind moves to and fro, and sighs.
> While, fearful of the mighty thunder-clap,
> Within its lonesome lair the wild beast cries.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Georgians drank deep of the heady wine of *avant-garde* literature. Various futuristic, Decadent, and symbolist movements flourished in Tbilisi literary circles, notably the coterie known as the Company of the Blue Horns, which took shape around 1916, being headed by such talented young poets as Titsian Tabidze and Paolo Iashvili (both victims of the Stalin Purges) and Giorgi Leonidze, now the doyen of Soviet Georgian poets.

The rise of the Georgian *kulak*, the life of the Georgian aristocratic intellectual and dilettante, and the impact on them of the revolutionary upheavals of 1917 and 1921 are depicted in the masterly novel by Mikheil Javakhishvili (1880–1937), *Jaqosk hiznebi* (or *Jaqo's house-guests*), first published in 1924–5.

The swashbuckling Jaqo, swindler, seducer, and false *bonhomme*, has sometimes been thought to have been modelled on the personality of Stalin, especially as both had Ossetian ancestry. Jaqo is contrasted with his victim and former lord, Prince Teimuraz Khevistavi, an amiable and ineffectual liberal philanthropist. While Jaqo swindles the tenants and his master alike, Teimuraz spends his time in Tbilisi, immersed in the affairs of his journal—published

needless to say in a very limited edition—in the modest Co-operative Society to which he belongs, in the shaky literary society he directs, in the folk theatre, in free evening classes for working men, and a dozen other good causes. A convinced radical, of a theoretical kind—a sort of *New Statesman* aristocrat—Teimuraz is ready to proffer his views and advice on all the burning questions of the day.

Whatever turn the conversation took—the irrigation of the Sudan, British policy in regard to Devil's Island, German colonies in Africa, the disputes concerning the port of Jibuti, the death of the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Chartist movement; the electoral rights of the women of New Zealand, the discovery of a new planet, some fresh scientific invention, the policies of Combes or Lloyd George, or the significance of any oration pronounced by any public figure in any country in the world—then Teimuraz was regularly consulted for his authoritative and final opinion.

Finally, Jaqo seduces Prince Teimuraz's wife (Jaqo's own godmother, as it happens), and reduces Teimuraz to a state of pitiful dementia. We are left with Jaqo presumably about to make his peace with the Communist régime, and perhaps embark on a successful career in democratic local government.

Javakhishvili also wrote a vivid historical novel about the nineteenth-century outlaw, Arsena Marabdeli, a kind of Georgian Robin Hood. Arsena is known to have been one of Stalin's favourite heroes, so that it is all the more incomprehensible how the order for the arrest and execution of this universally loved and respected figure came to be given. It has become customary of recent years to place the blame for this and other similar atrocities squarely on the shoulders of L. P. Beria. In 1954, Mr. V. P. Mzhavanadze, First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, declared:

Comrades, you all know what injury was done to our people by that gang of murderers and spies who now have been unmasked and done away with by our Party. That gang killed many leading and progressive scientists. . . . The Central Committee of

> the Georgian Communist Party has found out that the outstanding masters of the Georgian language—Mikheil Javakhishvili, Titsian Tabidze and Paolo Iashvili—became victims of the intrigues and terrorism of that abominable gang of murderers. I have pleasure in declaring in the name of the competent organs that these men have been rehabilitated.[1]

Unfortunately, as Chavchavadze remarked in the novel quoted above, 'apologies are not much help when you have broken your neck, and even when it is only a leg, they are not much of a cure'.

One of those who survived the Beria Purges and retained his artistic integrity intact was Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, born in 1891, now the doyen of Georgian prose writers.

Gamsakhurdia was educated in Germany, and made his début with an ambitious novel about émigré life called *The Smile of Dionysus*, which is not without very piquant passages.

His finest work is an historical novel about the building of the great cathedral of the Life-Giving Pillar in Mtskheta—entitled *The Right Hand of the Great Master*. This novel has been translated into English, and ably edited by my friend, Mrs. Hilda Perham, now Secretary of the Society for Cultural Relations with the U.S.S.R. here in London. The plot concerns the love of a base-born genius, the architect Konstantine Arsakidze, for the beautiful duke's daughter Shorena, who is also loved by Georgia's sovereign, King Giorgi I. This rivalry brings inevitable tragedy in its wake. Finally, Giorgi orders the architect's right hand to be cut off as punishment for his presumption, and the helpless genius, bitten by scorpions, dies a terrible death.

Gamsakhurdia is a fascinating companion, a wit of Voltairean brilliance, coruscating and fearless. When the Red Army occupied Tbilisi in 1921, Gamsakhurdia went into hiding. The Commissar Sergo Orjonikidze exclaimed: 'For goodness' sake send someone to tell Gamsakhurdia to come out! Otherwise he will only starve himself to death on pur-

[1] D. M. Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia*, London, 1962, p. 256.

pose, and then say that the Bolsheviks made him die of hunger!'

In his old age, Gamsakhurdia permits himself some amiable eccentricities, such as wearing constantly the old-style dress of the Caucasian mountaineers. To his barber, he will say: 'I shan't pay you this time! It is enough that today you have touched Georgia's greatest brain.' In 1963, he began to publish his outspoken memoirs in the journal *Mnatobi* (*The Beacon*). After the first two instalments, the editorial board had to suspend publication. It is understood that in the censored portion Gamsakhurdia claimed to have made love in his youth to the wives of most of the members of the top echelons of the Georgian Communist Party!

What of the future? There can be no doubt that within the terms of reference of Soviet literature generally, that of Georgia is in an especially flourishing condition. Lively debates are carried on regarding what is permissible and desirable in Georgian Soviet literature of the 1960's. Many young writers are growing up to fill the gaps left by the Purges and by World War II. Instruction in Georgian language and literature is, of course, universal in schools and university institutions throughout Georgia, so that writers are assured of a wide circle of readers, and novels and poems commonly circulate in editions of 50,000 or 100,000 copies. There is nothing to suggest any assimilation of Georgian by Russian culture, and the outlook both for new Georgian writing and for study of the older literature is bright indeed. So long as I have the honour to hold this post as Professor of Caucasian Studies here in London, it is my hope and intention to foster in every way the study of this original and truly remarkable literary culture.