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Shota Rustaveli (Encyclopedic Research)

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Resume: The review article represents all issues concerning Rustaveli's work. The main emphasis falls on the questions of ideal world view and the specificity of artistic style of the MPS. The article deals with the methodology issues of Rustaveli Studies as well.

Key Words: *Rustaveli, the Man in the Panther Skin, Ramayana, Shakespeare, Dante.*

Medieval Georgian culture belongs to the cardinal process of Christian thinking development. It gradually reveals the basic steps of European Christian civilizations. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, at the highest peak of its development, it represented the newest and the most modern tendencies of Christian thinking of those times. However the highest peak of the medieval Georgian culture is *Vepkhistkaosani – The Man in the Panther Skin* (MPS) by Rustaveli, being one of the best examples of a synthesis of Eastern and Western cultural streams, literary in particular. At the same time, similar to the whole essence of Georgian religious-philosophical and literary process of those times, it belongs to European Christian civilization. By its artistic actualizing world view and aesthetic ideals of its epoch, MPS is one of the most significant works of world literature.

On Rustaveli's Identity. Shota Rustaveli was a poet of the Georgian royal court at the turn of 12th -13th centuries. No direct biographical evidence about the poet has survived. His identity (Rustaveli) is confirmed in the poem's Prologue, however his name Shota in Georgian sources appears first only in early 17th century. The poem must have been written during the reign of Queen Tamar and her consort David Soslan in about 1189-1207. Among many folk sayings and scholar assumptions on Rustaveli's personality, the most popular today is the view that the author of MPS is Shota Rustaveli, the treasurer, depicted on the wall of the Georgians' Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and mentioned in a book of offerings to the dead as well.

On one of the central pillars under the dome of the Monastery, between the frescoes of St Maximus the Confessor and St John of Damascus, the portrait of an elderly, noble layman with his hands raised in prayer is depicted. The inscription in Georgian is 'Rustaveli' and above the image is the phrase, which is generally deciphered thus: 'God forgive Shota, the painter of

this. Amen.' A book of offerings to the dead reads as follows: 'On the same Monday, a funeral feast and prayers for Shota the Royal Treasurer.' Both the fresco and book entry are believed to have been made in the first half of the thirteenth century [14; 15].

MPS and Rustaveli Studies. As a great artistic work of art, MPS creates an independent reality, wide thinking space that in most cases goes beyond the limits of the thoughts of the author himself. Following the regularity of perceiving of works of art and even objective reality, an ideal-world view of MPS also includes subjective position, standpoint and association of each reader, scholar or perceiver's consciousness, merged with the reality of the poem and with the thought of the author in particular.

MPS is on the various crossroads of humankind civilization. On the one hand this is a blend of renaissance and medieval thinking, on the other hand - Christian - Religious and antique Greek philosophy, and a mythical and transcendental world view with analytical thinking as well. It offers vast space of imagination to a reader's subjective associations. Therefore it is natural for each reader and a scholar of the poem to have his own MPS. It is natural that endless wanderings in search of a beloved, painful path of the split couple after carrying out their risky decision, draping a panther's skin around, sharing a bed with a shameless woman having encountered during the travel, evokes various reminiscences from the vast space of mythical, heroic, and roman literature. This specificity, peculiar to every great art creation, leads every reader to having his own MPS.

Answering the following questions: Which of those variations, created by readers or scholars were considered by Rustaveli himself? What is the main point or idea the author put into his creation? - This is the main subject of Rustaveli studies? By all means, the associations and the impressions, evoked by the poem are in the sphere of interest of Rustaveli Studies, but only in case these individuals or the impressions are significant. In any case, studying all the above mentioned associations is only one but not essential sphere of Rustaveli studies.

Rustvelology, as well as all other scholarships, researching creative work of all great artists (Homerology, Danthology, Shakespeare studies), searches and studies the message of the author encrypted in his creations, along with its essence, authenticity, variations of the creations, their localization within time and space, as well as the author's relevance to his own creation, thus revealing every nuisance of his life. Understanding and comprehending of artistic expressive art and world view of the author, analyzing his phrase, is the most important among the aforementioned researching spheres. In order to be able to recognize the message of the author, it is significant to learn the sphere, with which his message shows relation. However among the variety of the associations of the abovementioned spheres, the most significant are the ones, indicated or pointed by the author himself (either directly by a word or context of the particular passages, as well as by the whole world view of the work). In other cases the author suggests something new, thus exempting from traditional attitude, realizing it in a new way.

The present encyclopedic study is based upon the principles of Rustaveli Studies. Rustaveli studies should be based upon the strict methodological principles in order to decipher the idea of the author, indicated directly or hinted at. Primarily the separate phrase or the separate terminology should be identified properly, which requires re-examining the meaning of the word or words within the poem, in every context of the MPS and in old and new

Georgian texts as well. The next step is analyzing the examined words in the study context. And finally, it requires a close examination of the relativity of the conclusion with the ideal-worldview of the author and with religious-philosophical and literary process of the transitional epoch from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, in general.

Plot of MPS. MPS is an epic of about 1600 quatrains containing lyrical passages with a plot enacted in Arabia and India - two stories that are compositionally united. The compositional unity is achieved through inter-linked short stories each of which is compositionally complete and the beginning of the second story is embedded in the end of previous story, and so on. No deviation from this system of the development of the plot can be observed in the composition of the poem. Conforming to the Renaissance literary style, all movements in the poem's plot are strictly motivated and subordinated to the author's concept. Each episode enters the composition only in the size that is necessary for the development of the main story. Not a single secondary episode is renewed and continued in other sections of the plot. These secondary episodic stories with their possible interesting continuations are closed in the poem without sequels. Rustaveli narrates only what is indispensable for the movement of the principal link of the subject.

The composition of MPS is clearly related to the classical model of the epic style as defined by Homer's poetry and analyzed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Rustaveli narrates a chronologically long story briefly, giving a detailed account only of individual episodes. The aggregate of a long story conveyed in brief and the principal episodes described extensively is regulated by the reminiscences and narratives of the characters inserted in the narration of the main story. Rustaveli discusses this specific style of epic narration theoretically in the prologue to his poem [12].

Oriental Fable. The plot of the poem unfolds through an oriental type framework adapted to Georgian reality, as pointed out by the author himself: 'This Persian tale, now done into Georgian, ... I have found it and mounted it in a setting of verse' (16).¹ The adventure of Rustaveli's principal enamored couple Nestan Darajan (a daughter of the king of India) and Tariel (serving as army commander of Arabia and a man of royal extraction): combining a search by Tariel and his companion Avtandil (army commander of Arabia) for Tariel's love Nestan, lost through an intrigue at the Indian royal court (upon the decision by Nestan and Tariel, Tariel kills the son of Khvarazm's King, invited by the court as Nestan's would be husband); pointing to the trace of the lost beloved by King Pridon (a casual acquaintance of Tariel); learning about Nestan, imprisoned in Kajeti fortress (the city-fortress of the demonic kingdom) in order to marry her to the son of the Kajeti King; the freeing of Nestan from Kajeti, by the three friends with the help of Pridon's warriors - represents a typical oriental narrative, one archetype of which is seen in the ancient Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* [3; 25; 5; 21].

Rama, the son of the Indian king and successor to the Indian throne, wanders in a dense forest as a result of intrigue at the royal court, and together with his companion Lakshmana he searches for his beloved spouse Sita, kidnapped from him. Along the way he meets and makes friends with a king Sugriva, wounded and defeated in battle. Rama heals him, makes friends

¹Quotations used here from MPS are taken from Marjory Wardrop's translation, with the numbers of stanzas given in it: *The Man in the Panther's Skin: A Romantic Epic by Shota Rustaveli, a Close Rendering from the Georgian*. London, 1912 .

with him and helps him in the fight to regain his kingdom. Sugriva tells Rama of his having seen Sita led by a demon. They learn that Sita is held captive in the kingdom of the demons and that the captors intend to marry her off. They send a wizard slave to Sita. The woman sends back a precious stone to Rama as a token. The three friends, with the army of this king, free Sita from her captivity in the kingdom of the demons. Before the battle they hold a war council and, by Rama's plan, they attack the citadel of the demons from different gates. The basic plot of MPS clearly resembles the above mentioned details: following the order of Nestan's aunt, she will be hidden overseas, due to the slaying of her would be husband. First Tariel, after Phridon and finally Aftandil go in search for Nestan. The occasional acquaintance King Fridon tells Tariel that Nestan was led by demons. Following Tariel's plan, the three friends together with King Fridon's warriors defeat the Kajeti fortress.

The narrative of MPS retains this oriental flavor in individual components as well. Clear relations are seen with the poems of Nizami Ganjavi, Gorgan's *Vis and Ramin*, and Firdausi's *Shah-Nameh*. A direct parallel of Tariel's losing consciousness at his first seeing Nestan after being reared together with her in their childhood is to be found in Gorgani's famous Persian romance *Vis and Ramin*, already popular in 12th-century Georgia: Ramin's losing consciousness at the view of Vis; the telling by Tariel, gone mad with love, of his story to Aftandil and the latter's decision to give his life to help his friend evince a relationship with the scene of establishing friendship between Majnun and the knight Navfal from the popular oriental story of the love of Leyla and Majnun by the 12th-century Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi....

Georgian Local Colour and Original Georgian Fable. Events occurring at the 12th-century Georgian royal court are allegorically hinted at by Rustaveli in the above story of oriental type. He introduces an original solution to the problem of succession to the throne, preaching the love of the two successors in place of their enmity; he reinterprets the Christian thesis of the love of one's neighbor into the Renaissance ideal of human love; he puts Classical philosophy into the fabulous flow of oriental narrative; the endless roaming in search of the beloved is turned into the solving of the medieval theological thesis of the existence/non-existence of evil, and turns all into an original plot of a Georgian poem. Georgian local color is visible in all aspects of the poem. Even the flora and fauna of The MPS are borrowed from Georgian, more precisely Caucasian reality [2].

The fact that the oriental plot is flavored with Georgian local color and Georgian world view is not the only determiner of the poem's original nature. The oriental plot of searching for the beloved, by Rustaveli, is imbued with, more precisely inserted in the original Georgian plot and both are considered as a whole. (Rostevan, the King of Arabia, together with Aftandil, his favorite army commander, who was reared by the king himself, during hunting will encounter a weeping stranger, sitting by the river, clad in a panther skin. The king will find it difficult to contact him. The stranger disappears in obscure circumstances. Tinatin, recently enthroned by the king, will send Aftandil, enamored of her, in search of the disappeared man. After having searched for a long time, Aftandil finds the disappeared strange - Tariel. He will hear about his tragic story - the intrigue of the Indian court, will make friends with him and will assume the duty of finding his lost beloved).

This original fable is based upon the historical reality of the Georgian court. The king of Arabia has his only daughter to be his successor. Having consulted with his viziers, he will enthrone his daughter and starts searching for the son in law to guarantee the protection of his kingdom. (The latest period of Georgian historical reality: upon the consent of his nobles, the Georgian king George the third will enthrone his only daughter Tamar; Tamar's two marriages with George Rusi and David Soslan). Both plot frameworks of the poem are based upon the Georgian historical reality, on the one hand Arabian — original-Georgian, and oriental - the story of India, on the other. (Similar to the king Farsadan in the MPS, George the third's daughter was also born in his late years; similar to the MPS, husbands for Tamar were invited from foreign countries). Two ways of solving this one problem are represented in the stories of Arabia and India.

The idea of the author is becoming clear: innovative and democratic solution of the problem (the marriage of the woman, successor to the throne with the noble fellow, well-known, at the court, based upon their love,) against the traditions established through the monarch etiquette (inviting a husband of royal extraction for the female successor of the throne). Thus Rustaveli's vision is clear - hostility of the throne claimants is replaced with love, as if hinting at the historical facts of the 12th century Georgian court, vaguely or controversially having survived today (the story of Demna the son of the predecessor king).

Cosmological Pattern. By cosmological model of the MPS, the transcendental belief, typical to the Middle ages, is matched with Astrological conception through Neo-platonic modelling, perceived as a science in the Renaissance epoch. This was the modelling opening gates for analytical thinking and calculations through mathematical and geometrical principles. Everything is submitted to the will, plan of the Supreme Being. This will is reflected on the sky through the disposition of the planets and zodiacs. People are able to unravel things from the celestial letter (disposition of the stars and planets). The will of the providence, reflected on the celestial arc will be fulfilled, activated on the earth, on the domain of the humans. [7, p. 139-195].

“Thanks to God, the Creator, Maker of all, by whom the heavenly powers decree what is to be done here; ‘tis they that do all deeds hidden and some revealed.” (Wardrop's translation, 1028)[16].

“Then the measureless wrath of God struck Kadjethi. Cronos, looking down in anger, removed the sweetness of the Sun; to them (the Kadjis) also in wrath turned round the wheel and circle of heaven.” (W. 1391).

It is on this cosmological pattern that Rustaveli builds his myriad-coloured poetic structure. Here are its basic components:

Man adorned with the best manifestations of humaneness, with all supreme moral and physical merits — beautiful to view, energetic and courageous, young in age, wise, rhetorical, bounteous, compliant, and a thinker and contemplator.

Man looking to heaven — one who sees divine reason and the will and desire of the Supreme Being.

A star-studded sky, constantly moving constellations and luminaries wandering endlessly in them. Occasionally, they look down with wrath and occasionally send down the sweet.

According to a popular medieval view, these were good visible ends of a chain of divine intellects, heralds of divine thought.

The unknowable and ineffable, highest, the Supreme, omnipotent lord of powers, which looks down sweetly over all.

Yet Man as a hero, a fighter for happiness, vanquisher of worldly evil, adorned with the purest and divine phenomenon of human feelings - love and friendship as the highest manifestation of human essence.

The Characters. Man, introduced by Rustaveli into the poem, is not always seen from one angle or presented according to the same principle. Characters from everyday life, such as Usen - chief of merchants, and Patman - his wife, lover of free life; viziers, merchants and some kings (including the King of India Pharsadan), who merely fill separate episodes connected with them in the poem, on the one hand, differ radically from the ideal heroes, i.e. non-existent, but created by the poet's fantasy on the base of the mundane, existing. These are: the pairs in love of the royal courts of India and Arabia: Tariel-Nestan and Avtandil-Tinatin, as well as Pridon, the knight-king of the land of Mulghazanzar, Asmat maid-servant of the Indian pair in love, Shermadin, loyal vassal of Avtandil, the king of Arabia - Rostevan, and Saridan, the king of one-seventh of India as well. Such ideal types are created on the basis of conventionality and exaggeration. Conventionality here implies that a character is brought into the poem only by the motif whose expression the author has in mind and the adventures of such characters are limited strictly to the episodes that are indispensable for the course of the plot. Thus, for example, Asmat is the ideal of a loyal servant - no other manifestation of her character or emotion is to be seen in the poem. Nor do we find any episode from the life of King Pridon or Shermadin to deviate from the rationally motivated line of the development of the plot. Hyperbolizing the image and the action of the ideal hero is aimed at revealing the idea which is a part of the world worldview of the author. This is the reason why the action of the character is sometimes conventional and exaggerated, by being far away from the real, ordinary, logical and expected. This is how the new, desired world, dream reality for the poet is created, indicating to the worldview inclination of the author himself. For example, the fact that the king of India - Saridan, owning one-seventh of India, voluntarily joins his kingdom to the rest of India, reveals the author's sympathy to the centralized monarchy system of the state. However, this idea of the poet coincides with the Georgian governmental structure of the XII century.

The perception of man from a positive angle only and the hyperbolization of this positive side is a worldview claim for a reassessment of traditional ideals. Placing an ideal man in the centre of his own poetic world is an expression of Rustaveli's striving towards new thinking brought by the new era. This is an emphasis, highlighting a person itself, his human emotions and ability to think analytically. This gives rise to a new reality, novel poetic world. The poet looks for hidden emotions in the hero's spiritual world. He sees the person wrestling with his own ego and instead of the plot-related aspect of the story, he seeks to transfer the literary interest to the psyche of the character.

Aesthetic Experience of the Elevated. The emotion of the character, the depth of aesthetic experience is not only a characteristic component of the hero of the work or an adornment of his artistic image. It is an essential pointer to the wholeness of the outlook of the

artistic world of MPS. Around this revolves the new thinking of the Renaissance, introduced uncompromisingly by the poet. Events such as Tariel's momentary loss of consciousness on first seeing Nestan-Darejan or the establishment of friendship between Tariel, Avtandil and Pridon at first sight is not a fairy-tale narrative or a simple telling of a story, it is rather an organic wholeness based on the nuances of human psyche. Exaggeration of the elevated, of viewing the beautiful is the foundation of that great love and friendship brought into play by Rustaveli as a new philosophy. Just as Tariel was charmed on seeing Nestan, so too did the knights of MPS find a liking for each other. 'He looked at me, I pleased him' (578)—this is how Tariel describes his first meeting with Pridon to Avtandil. This attraction has an artistic basis since it is not only liking the beauty seen by the eye but primarily the view of the elevated however aesthetic experience of the beautiful arising in the characters and developing into friendship and love that is Rustaveli's new credo.

Desperate with the perfidy of this fleeting world, Tariel, who had shunned other human beings, and was ready to destroy those who attempted to learn his identity, found himself awakened at seeing something elevated, i.e. aesthetically beautiful: doomed like Tariel by human perfidy, one who had lost his courageous and reliable warriors and spiritually wounded like him, the threats of the embittered knight (Pridon) reached the skies: "I heard a shout. I looked round, a knight cried out haughtily, he was galloping along the seashore, he was hurt by a wound, his sword was broken and soiled, blood flowed down; he threatened his foes, was wrathful, cursed, complained" (W. 576). Tariel was startled by the scene he witnessed. The 'enraged and wrathful' knight attracted him: 'I bade him say "Stand! declare unto me who angers thee, O lion!"' (W. 577).

Avtandil's high art of hunting and knightly air charmed Pridon's troops:

"When they beheld him the soldiers ceased shooting, and breaking
the circle,
Eagerly hastened to him surrounding and pressing upon him.
Wonder increased the nearer they came, rendered blind by his
brightness.
Awe tied their tongues and they could do nothing but look on in
silence.

(Urushadze's Translation. p. 143) [17].

Pridon's becoming charmed at seeing Avtandil for the first time and their becoming friends has an aesthetic basis: 'The knight seems peerless to Pridon, and Pridon pleases the knight' (967). Such a style of literary speech is already in line with that of Renaissance thinking 7, pp. 570-575].

Love of the MPS. Conforming to the moral concept of Christianity, Rustaveli considers love to be the highest form of human bliss and hence ethical category of the highest good. But he attempts a novel reinterpretation of this ethical system and love, which, at the centre of the poetic world of MPS, is an earthly human emotion with divine elevation and essence. The concept of love in MPS takes its inspiration from the humanistic principles of twelfth-century Christian courtly literature. The artistic model of the types of couples in love is based on the image of the beloved in the Persian epic of the period - a knight gone mad and roaming in the

fields because he has been separated from his love. Rustaveli's concept of love rises above the Sufic philosophy of the Persian epic as well as above the standardized conventionality of courtly poetry. Love in MPS is a natural human emotion, free from the obligatory conventionality of European courtly love. The Georgian poet sees the ideal of the mutual striving of the couples in love in their union in this world i.e. in marriage. Thereby he is closely linked to Georgian national customs and mores. Georgian tradition considers marriage the greatest ritual in this world. He thus adjusts his own concept of love to the highest ideal of Christian mysticism: wedding of an individual soul to Christ. Rustaveli's concept goes beyond the norms of Courtly Poetry. The relationship between the enamored couple of Rustaveli at its initial stage is similar to the love of the courtly poetry: love between the Queen and the knight, serving at the court. Reciprocation of love by the woman and the enamored knights deeds for gaining the fame. At the next stage the love of the MPS rises above the standardized model of courtly poetry, growing into the love towards a friend along with the love to the woman and at the stage his seek for the fame reveals itself in the service of a friend already based upon his own volition. Furthermore, this love reveals itself in the idea of love to a neighbor through compassion to a human being. The road from love for the beloved to the service for a friend and then to the idea of a compassion to the human being, a neighbor, is the road leading to the elevation. The road to a human perfection according to the Plato's philosophy is similar: from beautiful bodies to beautiful deeds and then to beautiful ideas (Symposium, 211c). [19, p. 84-85].

This elevation of Rustaveli's concept of love is expressed also in the fact that it turns into the object of his creative work not love *per se* as a personified idea, not so much the object of love, i.e. woman, but a character in love, subject, his/her psychological experiences and spiritual or intellectual elevation. Thus, love in MPS is this worldly human feeling and this worldly human love is already divine, meaning that human love is already divine love without its symbolic-allegorical reinterpretation. The love of MPS is not limited by the boundary of this or that world; it stands above the mystery of death and life. Tariel believes that Nestan is no longer alive, but their love still lives on. In his imagination he takes this love to the other world and is confident in the triumph of love in that world. And what is more important, Rustaveli believes that viewing Nestan in the other world will give a rise to the same worldly human love.

"How can a lover forsake and abandon the loved one? I shall go to my lady in gladness; she will come likewise to meet me. I to her, she to me; she will weep, and make the tears flow too from my eyes" (Stevenson's translation, p. 106) [18].

The process of such re-conceptualization of human love is seen in European literature of the Late Middle Ages as well. Dante Alighieri's concept of love goes higher than the troubadour love lyric almost in the same way. As suggested in scholarship, with Dante human love of a real woman is clearly the first stage and hence is part of divine love. This process of re-interpretation of love continued in European literature immediately before the Renaissance, and with Petrarch human love is already divine love without its allegorical conceptualization [7, pp. 614-653].

Rustaveli's concept of love is built through a harmony of medieval and Renaissance ideals. In this harmony the Renaissance enters on the basis of the medieval. Furthermore, Rustaveli clearly tries to place the thesis of human love in the concept of the Christian religion. He is given a basis for this by a statement in the Gospel (Matthew. 22, 37-40; Mark 12, 30-31;

Luke 10, 27): Love thy Lord—this is the first and greatest commandment; the second is similar to this: Love thy neighbour; on these two commandments the whole faith and Prophets depend. Rustaveli's concept of love is based on this theological premise, which is formulated theoretically in the Prologue to MPS: Among divine commandments love is the first and greatest. As it is divine it is incomprehensible and ineffable. That is why the poet says that he will speak about its manifestation in this world, which is its imitation (unless it passes into adultery) preserving divine spirituality (27 - 29). Such commentary to the concept of the love of the Christian religion in the New Testament has another essential proposition (1 John, 4, 12): 'No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us' [10].

Rustaveli's love is a very broad feeling. It embraces, from a definite angle, both love and friendship. Woven into MPS is the author's new and original concept of friendship. There are four basic factors that dominate its making, which are: Georgian national roots expressed in the folk tradition of sworn brothers; the idea of the love of one's neighbour based on the tradition of Christian ethics; the chivalrous ethic of the feudal and military aristocracy of Rustaveli's time; and Aristotle's teaching on friendship inherited by the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance from Classical philosophy [7, pp. 550-581].

Social life. The institution of the social life of the Georgian state of the eleventh - twelfth centuries - called *patronqmobā* ('master-and-serf relationship') - is reflected in the MPS. In the poet's view, a centralized monarchy is the highest form of the state system. At the same time, the poet advances the principle of deference to woman, supports the possible enthronement of the king's daughter, gives independence to a girl to choose her love, and preaches the intellectual and legal equality of the heir of the royal family, whether male or female.

The social environment in the MPS gives variations of lavishness of the Middle Ages and the softness of demos and gayety typical to the Renaissance. In his depiction of the nobles of the medieval royal court, its wealth, light and bright colours, festivity, banquets, hunting, infinite space and varied setting, Rustaveli is one of the best representatives of the grandmasters of the letters.

The great king of Arabia is raising his daughter to the throne. His command has reached all the corners of the country. There is no counting of the nobles at the ceremonial. The sound of the bugle and cymbals gladdens the place. The banquet goes on the whole day. The young queen gives away countless valuable gifts:

"She said: "Go, open whatever treasure there is! Master of the Horse, lead in the droves of asses, mules, and horses". He brought them. She gave them away without measure; she wearied not of generosity. The soldiers gathered together stuff like pirates". (W. 54).

In the poem, next to the medieval palaces full of gold and chain mail armour is a light and crowded city bearing the Renaissance spirit, surrounded with gardens and made beautiful with exotic flowers. The city rejoices, the sound of singing never ceases. Boats loaded with costly goods come from all directions. Merchants sell and buy. A poor man turns rich within a month. All are glad to see exotic and beautiful things. The appearance of the most handsome and brave knight Avtandil, disguised as a merchant, causes a stir in the town. All hurry here to see him, all women faint while gazing at him.

“There was a hubbub, the hosts of the town all assembled; they pressed on this side and on that, saying: “We will gaze on him till sleeptime”. Some were carried away by desire, some had their souls reft from them; their wives grew weary of them, their husbands were left contemned” (W. 1053).

With his worldview problems Rustaveli is linked to the Late Middle Ages, while in the depth and specificities of solving the problems faced, he stands at the level of Renaissance thought.

Religion. The poet’s religion is Christianity. He is a resident and apologist of the twelfth-century Christian Georgian State. He acknowledges the existence of God and the immortality of soul and bases himself on the Bible, the first source of Christianity. Christian ritual practice is known to him as well as the Apostle Paul’s wisdom and Christian interpretation of the God-fearing. The poet frequently borrows images from the Bible. He takes into consideration the basic principles of Christian mysticism: Resurrection, the coming of the Bridegroom, mystic wedding [7, p. 338 - 346], and is aware of the essential problems of Christian scholasticism: teaching on the four primary substances or ‘roots’; the theory of the Four Causes [8, p. 19 - 534]. The poet develops the rich and highly artistic traditions of Georgian hymnography and uses the theological terminology of Georgian church writings. Even phraseologically, he echoes Georgian hymnography and Patristic literature: Hymns of Ioane Minchkhi, a Georgian hymnographer, ‘The Wisdom of Balavar’, Georgian recension of the “History of Barlaam and Ioasaph”, the Teachings of Basil the Great and the *Dialoghon* of Pope Gregory the Great (both translated by Euthymius the Athonite) [7, p. 347-360]. In his attitude to Christian dogmatism, one feels his consideration of the achievements of the highly developed scholasticism, which in the eyes of the educated society of the period was believed to be the philosophy of Christian teaching both in Byzantium and Western Europe, for which the trail was blazed in Georgia by Ioane Petritsi, Georgian philosopher of the 12th century. There is no mention in the poem of those postulates of Christian dogmatic argumentation of which by reason and logical thinking twelfth - thirteenth century scholasticism evaded. [7, pp. 739-746].

This silence of the MPS regarding the specificity of Christian dogmas is natural since the action of the plot of the epic was developed in oriental countries and the heroes of the poem are Muslims. At the same time, specific dogmas of Islam are not observed in the epic either. The essential feature of the deeply religious background of the poem is being non-dogmatic. The MPS does not reveal any of the historically existent religious specifications exposing characters’ religious feelings.

Tolerance. Such “correction” of the poet’s religious stand was primarily conditioned by the social atmosphere and worldview of his times. This is tolerance - the significant characteristic feature of both European and Arabic thought of the twelfth century. The religious experience of the characters of three different countries of the poem is the same. They are not separated by a language barrier either. Succession to the throne is not restricted by the gender principle: “The lion’s whelps are equal (alike lions), be they male or female” (W.39). The basis of this tolerance is man; love of human for human; the world harmonized by love.

Tolerance is the driving force of Rustaveli’s whole work. It is seen primarily in the plot of the poem, which unfolds over an extremely broad geographical area, covering the really

existing countries of the East at that time: India, Arabia, China and Persia, as well as unreal countries thought up by the poet: Mulghazanzar, Kajeti, the kingdom of the Seas, Gulansharo – city of the merchants. Generally, all the countries and peoples resemble each other. They understand each other. Solving the similar problems differently in Arabia and India is not caused by religious or national differences of the two countries. It can be explained by different inclinations (traditional or innovative) of the monarchs of the two kingdoms. A conflict between states is not enmity between peoples – it is a temporary radical manifestation of policy, ending in repentance, reconciliation and restoration of harmony. An example of this is the stepping aside of Khataeti from India. The reception with great honour of the defeated and captured Khatavian king at the Indian royal court is unique. This hyperbolized forgiveness indicates the atmosphere regulated by love and harmony the poet dreams about. Kajety, the only kingdom, the destruction of which is described in the MPS, is unreal and inhuman, but an imaginary, fairy-demonic fortress.

Tolerance is also adaptation to a grave life situation, a quality and capacity to endure and accept what is difficult for you to do but is dictated by your own mind. That is why Avtandil urges Tariel: “Do not heed to your heart’s promptings; do what you ought, and not what you would” (Stevenson’s translation, p. 105-106) [18]. That is why, when Avtandil lies in Patman’s bed, though he finds it hard, he considers it humiliation of his dignity and expresses his inner feeling in a rhetorical outcry:

“ ‘See me now, O lovers!’ he cried within his heart - ‘like a nightingale with a rose of my own, perched like a crow upon a rubbish heap!’ ” (Vivian’s translation, p. 166) [19].

In this case Avtandil follows in the wake of the Christian commandment of loving one’s neighbour. He does not abandon the seduced neighbour, but is roused by it, and responds to the woman who loves him with a love that is understandable to her. Here, too, Rustaveli follows his own interpretation of the Gospel’s Commandment of the love of one’s neighbour (2 Cor. 11.29) [10].

Rustaveli’s tolerance is religious tolerance as well. The poet, who is profoundly religious, feels the atmosphere of the future – the atmosphere of the Renaissance world view – and strives towards it; he lays down such a religious vision to serve as the world view basis of the poem that is equally acceptable to the Arab Avtandil, the Indian Tariel, Mulghazanzarian Pridon and Gulansharoan Patman. It is in this way that Rustaveli moves from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. And this is religious toleration.

This tolerant ideal-worldview world of the MPS, so elevated and beautiful, stems from Georgian national roots. At the same time the MPS, with its elevated tolerant ideals creates a moral and spiritual individuality of further century’s Georgian man and Georgian nation, Georgian phenomenon. Those better features of the Georgian phenomenon, together with the Bible are based upon the MPS. Tolerance is of major importance among the characteristics of the Georgian phenomenon. This is an amazing poetic heroism of the best representative of Georgian classical poetry Vazha Pshavela, ranking humanity above a religious and national approach (“Aluda Ketelauri”, “Host and Guest”). These are priceless jewels of one of the best representatives of modern Georgian poetry Ana Kalandadze: A whistling, cheerful Gipsy woman

walking on the beach of a harbor ("Gipsy Woman"); A Tatar girl with jewels on her breast ("Hey, Tatar Girl"); A Rose seller Yazidi girl ("Are You Arab?").

Renaissance Trends. The Bible and ecclesiastical writings are not Rustaveli's only source of thought. His work brings to the fore such impulses of a new type of socio-philosophical thought that were called Humanist, Platonic and Aristotelian movements in the European reality of the Renaissance period [13]. Of the main principles of humanism of this period MPS evinces a striving for the Classical models of wisdom and thought and highlighting man's privilege and dignity. Rustaveli's emphasis on cognition, conceptualization of love and friendship as the highest forms of human cognition and religious-philosophical tolerance bring him close to the ideas of Platonism of the same period. The basic characteristic tendencies of Aristotelianism of the same period is noticeable in MPS: placing the ideal of moral perfection at the centre of human philosophy and the independent value of life in this world, or the independence of the behavior of the characters of the poem from hope or fear of life in the future world [7, pp. 99-114].

Ancient Philosophical Trend. The intellectual aspirations of his age lead Rustaveli directly to Classical Greek philosophy. His worldview has clearly an imprint of Classical philosophy (both of Plato and Aristotle) on the one hand, and a profound conceptualization and development of Neoplatonic theosophy (in particular of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), on the other.

By directly naming the great Greek philosopher, reference is made in the poem to Plato's philosophical proposition on the torment suffered by man's soul because of his ethical flaw in this world and in the next one too: "I venture to remind thee of the teaching of a certain discourse made by Plato: 'Falsehood and two-facedness injure the body and then the soul.'" (W. 770)

Rustaveli consistently conveys Plato's view of ethical flaw or injustice (*Politheia*, II and X): injustice, ethical flaw, stemming from falsehood, harms man first in this worldly life - in corporeal existence, and later it affects the person's soul in the heavenly abode. Rustaveli dreams of life in this world ordered by divine harmony. The worldview of MPS brings to the fore divine harmony and justice as implemented in this life; at the same time, he retains his belief in the existence of the same justice in the other worldly, eternal life. It is for this that he needs a categorically firm thesis: because of an ethical flaw man will be punished not only in the other world but in this world too. He finds this thesis declared with Plato [7, pp. 474-496].

Aristotelian influence is largely seen in MPS in the spheres of ethics and poetics. Development and novel interpretation of Aristotle's concept of friendship [7, pp. 384-439] and definition of the essence of soul [7, pp. 306-337] can be observed in the poem. Rustaveli's original concept of friendship - arising from the social and cultural as well as national specific postulates of the period - is in principle related to Aristotle's ethical system: friendship is most essential for life; the highest form of friendship is that of ethically perfect individuals, which is facilitated to a considerable extent by some rearing and social standing; a true friend forgoes all human benefits in order to be useful to his friend. With his artistic images Rustaveli incarnates Aristotle's principled stand that love is the foundation of friendship, which begins with liking. The three principles of genuine friendship that are essential to Aristotle's ethical conception are

formulated in MPS: "Three are the ways of showing friendship by a friend: First, the wish for nearness, impatience of distance; then giving and not grudging, unweariedness in liberality: and attention and aid, roaming in the fields to help him" (W. 758).

In the wake of Christian and Arabic scholasticism of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries (Averroes, Thomas Aquinas, and others), Rustaveli rests on Aristotle's metaphysical definition of the soul (soul is the face or form of the body, completion, and entelechy) and he (Rustaveli) introduces it into a theological thesis: every soul is created by God. On the basis of these theological and philosophical postulates, he commits his own soul to God in the second quatrain of his poem: O one God, thou created the face of everybody! Defend me, give me strength to trample upon Satan... (stanza, 2).

Aristotle's ethical ideal leads Rustaveli to the apotheosis of man's moral and physical perfection: "To a lover, beauty, glorious beauty, wisdom, wealth, generosity, youth and leisure are fitting; he must be eloquent, intelligent, patient, an overcomer of mighty adversaries" (W. 8).

The Golden Mean. This ideal of human perfection rests on the thesis of Aristotle's ethical philosophy called 'the golden mean'. According to MPS, each act as well as each property is best when it is the mean between two extremes, e.g. abundance is the mean of profligacy and close-fistedness, and so on.

The only advice given by Rostevan to his newly enthroned daughter was to be abundant (abundance according to Aristotle's ethical conception is the most popular virtue with the people). At the banquet Tinatin gave all her inherited wealth away. Towards the end of the feast Rostevan was seen to fall into low spirits. Avtandil and Sograt the vizier said to him in jest: "Thou art right, for, lo! your daughter with lavish hand has given away all your rich and costly treasure" (W.60). Rostevan was able to feel the humor that his sadness was perceived as his stinginess: "He who lays avarice to my charge is a lying chatterer" (W. 61).

All principal actions and features, like courage (being intrepid); selecting the ways of penetrating the Kajeti fortress; trying to find a solution out of the situation caused by the inviting a future husband for Nestan - typical to the ideal characters of the MPS - is determined by the above mentioned principle [7, pp. 392-428].

Areopagitic Trend. Dionysius the Areopagite is named by the poet. In discussing the Supreme Being, use is made of the Areopagitic theological method of defining God by joining oppositional positive and negative names (the so-called *cataphatics* - *apophatics*). The Areopagitic proposition is presented on the interpretation of the medieval question of the essence of good and evil, namely on the substantial non-existence of evil. It is important that this latter thesis is the philosophical motivation for the development of the subject of MPS. And which is essential, according to the interest of the new epoch in analytical and practical inquiry, the thesis of the non-existence of evil in the poem is the subject not only of theological-metaphysical discourse but of practical-experimental search as well. At the very beginning of the story of MPS the strange knight, encountered while hunting, and his miraculous disappearance were taken by King Rostevan to be the advent of an evil force. Using a theological argument, the king's daughter Tinatin tries to persuade her father of the opposite: 'why should the Creator of good make evil!' (W.112). But to convince herself in this view, she launches a

practical search by sending Avtandil on a long journey in quest of the strange knight, saying: 'if thou find him not, I shall believe he was a vision' (W.131).

Harmony of the Medieval and the Renaissance. Thus, a peculiar synthesis is seen in Rustaveli's outlook of Neoplatonism, stemming from Dionysius the Areopagite as well as the logical and metaphysical thought known as Aristotelian in the Late Middle Ages, and its conceptualization on the basis of highly-developed Christian theology. It is clear from this specific synthesis that Renaissance horizons take shape in the poet's world view and Dante Alighieri still appears next to it in the European Literature.

Confidence in the value of earthly reality, genuine perception of the beauty of the human world, and trust in human reason and intelligence in Rustaveli's work directly - without opposition - merge with the traditional Christian ideal of the immortality of the soul, the eternity of the good and merciful creator, and the faith in the merger with this infinite God following death. This too is a feature of the first explosion of Renaissance ideals. Thus, with Rustaveli the traditional medieval ideals, the basic postulates of Medieval faith merge harmoniously with the Renaissance ideal of this worldly reality. In other words, the worldview of MPS is a harmony of the Medieval and the Renaissance. Such confidence in the dual ideal of human and divine must have been filled with a deep experience of internal glory and calmness. This worldview specificity must be responsible for the great poeticalness preserved to this day by MPS. MPS is one of the great literary works of its contemporary and immediately following or preceding creations to highlight the new world outlook most consistently-romantically coloured realistic outlook established in Medieval transcendental Weltanschauung. Rustaveli is the youth of the present-day thought. Placing trust in beauty, strength and supreme spiritual and emotional ideals, the poet dreams of human happiness, seeing this happiness, along with eternal life, in the triumph of good in this life and in human love [5].

The Setting of Medieval Ideas or Images and Analytic Seeing. The poetic world of MPS continues and develops the traditions of Georgian folk poetry on the one hand, and of the rich Georgian ecclesiastical literature - hymnography, on the other. At the same time it is clear that both the poetic world of folk fantasy and, in general, the medieval system of ideas and images is only a backdrop or poetic setting for Rustaveli's new artistic thinking. The traditional characters of folk fantasy – *devis*, *kajis*, as well as the medieval objects or actions – cladding oneself in an animal's skin, dwelling in a cave, slaying of a lion, flying steed, sorcerer slave – form a natural background of medieval poetic fantasy against which the characters of the period of Renaissance act with their human intelligence and emotions. In the poem, the components of the medieval context are more or less deprived of their traditional symbolic, magic or allegoric content or suggestions, retaining the poetic accessories of medieval aroma.

Movement from the Medieval to the Renaissance, from the mystic to the intelligent and real is revealed in the actions of Rustaveli's characters. An evil power who came as a foe is defeated by the Holy Father with a word-divine miracle. The same enemy is overcome by a medieval knight with the aid of fairy-incredible force. Rustaveli's character possesses the same force – God is with him, and at the same time his victory is motivated by human mind, stratagem, and calculation: Tariel's plan of entering the Kajeti fortress is based upon an exact calculation of the control and customs laws of a medieval fortified city. Avtandil's fight against

the pirates is based on successful tactics and technique of battle. The three matchless knights, guided by divine light (“...those three are covered by the seven planets with a column of light” – W.1385) were given an advantage in arms to fight in the Kajeti fortress. They were clad in diamond coat of mail and helmet to smash the arms of the enemy; they held a sharp steel sword. To find Nestan’s location Avtandil does not follow the path shown by a divine miracle nor does he look in a magic mirror, but goes in the direction where, in Pridon’s words, the slaves carried the chest with Nestan and from where she failed to return; he stops in the city where all boats harboured. This is a new mind or intelligence moving in medieval setting; human calculation, work of logic; bringing in analytical thinking in Transcendental world sentiments.

Aesthetic Phenomenon and Poetic Hand. Along with Georgian national folk and literary traditions Rustaveli is nourished by the rich traditions of Oriental, Persian-Arabic epic and lyric. MPS’s aesthetic phenomenon is created largely by hyperbolic and symbolic poetic images (astral symbolism, symbolism of the animal world, symbolism of precious stones and the vegetable world). Especially important in poetic semantics is metaphoric speech, as well as repetition, parallelism and epithet. Rustaveli introduces his own style in traditional poetics. This is especially felt in the fields of poetic vocabulary (derivation of verbal and adjectival forms from nouns: *mze aghar mzeobs...dari ar darobs* (“The sun no longer shines on us; the weather is not bright” W. 801); *ena enda* (*the tongue tongued*); and *disagantsa upro desi* (“more sisterly than a sister” – W.248). His style is also felt in poetic syntax, in the abundance of verbal forms to indicate the expressiveness of action and in the reduced use of conjunctive words: *mterta ekadda*, *tsqreboda*, *igineboda*, *chioda* (“...he threatened his foes, was wrathful, cursed, complained” – W.576); *mightsvian*, *momigoneben*, *damlotsven movegonebi* (“...they will be grateful to me, remember me, bless me; I shall be thought of” – W. 784.)

MPS is considered a norm in the field of versification of Georgian poetics. In contrast to medieval epic style, monotonousness is averted through the alternation of two variants of *shairi*, the Rustaveli poetic metre. The beginnings of this verse form are attested not only in Georgian folk poetry but also in literary tradition proper from the ninth century, reaching the zenith of its perfection with Rustaveli. The higher *shairi* - a 16-syllable line of which each half-line is divided by caesura into 4-syllable sections (4/4//4/4) - is characterized by a more expressive rhythm, while the lower *shairi* (3/5//3/5; 5/3//5/3), with its comparatively unhurried rhythm system, is more appropriate for epic narration and philosophical maxims. It has been noted that at substitution of Rustaveli’s asymmetric strophes of the lower *shairi* for symmetric strophes of the higher *shairi*, the former moves into maximum harmony or correlation of the so-called “golden section”; that is to say, the number of syllables - 8 of the semi-strophe is in such a relation to the number of syllables - 5 in the large rhythmic section as the latter is in relation to the number of syllables in the smaller section - 3 [24]. Each strophe of Rustaveli’s *shairi* consists of four lines rhyming with one another (the outside rhyme). The rhyme is predominantly two or three-syllable, though four-and five-syllable rhymes also occur [4, pp. 33-39; 217-229].

Aphoristic Speech. The attractiveness of the poetic world of MPS is to a certain extent due to the harmony of high content value and perfection of expression, manifested in aphoristic speech as well. Aphoristic Speech is the most spread trend of medieval philosophical thinking, *Ecclesiastes* by Solomon being the most prominent example of it. Rustaveli’s wisdom, having

molded the Georgian people through centuries is expressed through this Aphoristic Speech. Christian virtue, Classical Greek philosophy, Georgian folk and Oriental wisdom in Rustaveli's poetic art is moulded into pithy, elegantly expressed, broad apophthegms, wise pronouncements, creating, with their, versatility a philosophical code of human optimism, wisdom and high morality. Some aphorisms by Rustaveli, representing one trend are given below:

"Better a glorious death than shameful life!" (W. 781)

"It is better to get glory than all goods!" (W. 780)

"What thou givest away is thine; what thou keepest is lost." (W.50)

"A foe cannot hurt a foe as a man harms himself." (W.743)

"An evil man loves an evil word more than his soul or heart" (W.779)

"Mindfulness of a friend never doeth us harm" (W. 779)

"Who seeks not a friend is his own foe!" (W.834)

"Fate is a challenge, but what God wills is your destiny and mine"

(C. 812)

"Learning doesn't avail you if you don't pay heed to wise men's views"

(C.811)

"A hundred can overcome a thousand if they choose the best way"

(C. 1399)

"The sweetly discoursing tongue can lure the serpent out of its lair."

(C. 910)

"The wise love learning, the dumb take it as a stabbing in the heart."

(C. 913)

"Through his own reason a man falls into trouble" (W. 855)

"Sometimes speech is better than silence, sometimes by speaking we
spoil (things). "(W. 733)

"If you have yourself, you're not alone" (C. 832)

"Men are not all equal; there is a great (difference) between man and
man" (W. 932)

"Let a man seek to solve the difficulty; this, I think, would be better
than grieving" (W.107)

"Of foes, the most dreadful is the friendly foe" (C. 1219)

"Do what you desire not. What your desire wills, do not seize" (C.889)

Manuscripts of MPS, Versions and Continuations. There are 164 survived manuscripts, rewritten in 17th century and after. The oldest record belongs to the edge of 16th - 17th centuries. The oldest manuscript dates back to 1646 (rewriter and the author of the miniatures –Mamuka Tavaqarashvili). All the old (17th century) manuscripts belong to one editorial, one version of the reproduction, with already included stanzas and continuations. The version preserved in these manuscripts is called an extended edition.

The first printed edition of the poem, dating back to 1712, includes a so called short version, which should have been created through the critical reproduction of the extended edition. There are two more editions of the poem preserved in late manuscripts, dating back to the XVIII and XIX centuries. They included the mixed versions of short and extended editions

of the poem. [1, p. 356-392; 23]. All old manuscripts contain the text of the so-called extended redaction. The first printed edition of 1712 gives the text of the so-called short redaction, which must have been obtained from a critical revision of the extended redaction. In comparison with the extended redaction, the short one lacks three long stories at the end, which are called continuations? They do not seem to have come out of Rustaveli's hand, at any event, in the shape they have come down to us. This is indicated by the sharp difference between the artistic structures of MPS and so called continuations: difference in the worldview system, breakdown in the composition style of MPS, collapse of the artistic structure of the conventional depiction of characters [7, pp. 72-87].

Conceptualization of the Poem in Georgian Society. MPS appears to have gained popularity in Georgian society rather early. From the end of the fourteenth century we come across jottings of separate lines of the poem on the margins of church writings, pointing also to verbal quoting of excerpts of the poem by the Georgian clergy. In a definite period of Georgian social life some movement is conjecturally to have taken place against the poem, which was probably an echo of the Christian radicalism in sixteenth-century Europe. At any rate, the extant old manuscripts of the poem date only from the seventeenth century, stemming from a single recension. It is believed to basically differ from Rustaveli's original only with the closing part, the so-called supplements. It must contain the continuations that were probably created – like in the Persian literary tradition – after the poem became popular. This recension involves an added introductory stanza that presents the poem as a secular work differing from the church ideology and writings, and advises the reader to give a wide berth to its worldview; by doing this, it enables one to read or propagate it as a secular work.

The commentary added by the Governor of Kartli Vakhtang VI to the first printed edition of MPS seeks to reconcile the world view stand of the poem with the church, laying the foundation of allegorical-mystic interpretation of the poem. In the 19th century allegorical interpretation of the plot of MPS as the historical reality of Georgia was popular. The 20th century Soviet ideology began to look for anti-religious passages and materialistic hints in the poem. From the last quarter of the same century, Georgian literary criticism inclined – as a reaction to the understanding just cited – to an allegorical - religious interpretation of the MPS.

MPS in the European Environment. We may presume that the notes on Rustaveli's poetic works must have crossed the borders of Georgia in XIII - XIV, mostly to the East. The main reason why we think so is the preserved unknown poem by Rustaveli, translate from Arabian into French [22].

Acquaintance with MPS beyond the boundaries of Georgia began in the nineteenth century, due in a way to the endeavour of the Georgian society to project into European space the greatest phenomenon of its own culture and national identity. The first translations of MPS published in Europe are: Polish (Kazimir Lapczynski—1863, Warsaw), German (Arthur Leist—1889, Dresden, Leipzig), English (Marjory Wardrop -1912, London). To date the poem has been translated into about fifty languages of the world—some of them several times.

It transpires that an attempt to acquaint Europe with the story of MPS was made even earlier. The story of the principal pair in love of Rustaveli's poem was used as a plot source by Shakespeare's contemporary English playwrights Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. At the

end of the first decade of XVII century, two plays of the above named writers appeared on the stage of England – “Filaster”, “King and a No King”, the plays which never lost their popularity throughout the century. Both plots of the plays are built upon the love story of Nestan and Tariel, indicated not only by the content similarity but also by the plot details and the author’s remarks. [6; 8].

Even Shakespeare’s “Cymbeline” indicates the fact that the love story of Nestan and Tariel was used by Shakespeare, having appeared on the English stage at the same period, the end of the first decade in the XVII century. The main theme, idea and composition, even separate details in the play of Shakespeare shows relevance to the indicated plot of Rustaveli’s play. Therefore, it is logical to think that the plot of the Rustaveli’s MPS must have penetrated the circle of England’s dramaturgy at the end of the XVI century through the incentives of the Georgian nobles and through the expedition of travelers, the diplomats sent to the Shahi court [9; 11].

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