

Katharine Vivian (1217-2010)

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Abstract: The English writer and translator Katharine Vivian was not only a well-known Kartvelologist – translator of and researcher into Old Georgian belles lettres and historical writings but a friend of many representatives of Georgian intelligentsia of the second half of the 20th century and active participant of Kartvelological activity.

Key words: *Katharine Vivian, "The Man in the Panther Skin", "The Book of Wisdom and Lies", the "Georgian Chronicle".*

The name of the well-known British Kartvelologist of the twentieth century Katharine Vivian, today belongs to history. Beginning with the 1970s her contacts with Georgians were very close, enjoying high respect. She took up with honour the work of her predecessor Marjory Wardrop, shouldering the translation and study of landmarks of Georgian literature into English. Her activity contributed much to the process of integrating Georgian culture into European space.

Katharine Vivian was born in October 1917. In 1939 she married Anthony Ashton, who later became a well-known statesman. Katharine graduated from Sorbonne University, majoring in French civilization. Initially, she took up journalism. During World War Two she served at the Belgian Embassy in London. After the War she continued her studies in French and English literature and philosophy. She translated from the French, wrote poems and plays. Later she joined the seminars on the Georgian language under David Marshall Lang at the Institute of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and from the mid-60s she dedicated her life to Georgian studies with great care and love.

In Georgia Vivian is known primarily as the translator of "The Man in the Panther Skin". She recalled that she became interested in this poem by Shota Rustaveli and Georgian literature in general after reading Sir. Maurice Bowra's work "Inspiration and Poetry". Then she read Marjory Wardrop's rendering of the poem. As a result, she decided to study Georgian and to make a translation of the MPS into modern English. Having studied the Georgian language, in the late seventies Katharine took up the translation of Rustaveli's poem. In 1972, during her work on the translation, she visited Georgia for the first time, bringing the rough draft of her translation with her. Her purpose was to see Rustaveli's homeland, to get acquainted with the Georgian people and juxtapose her translation with the original with the assistance of Georgian scholars. She worked at the Institute of Georgian Literature of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In Vivian's words, her first visit to Georgia proved very interesting, for it helped her form a definite impression of Georgia and the Georgians. Her subsequent visits gave her good knowledge of Georgia's past and present, bringing her into close and friendly relations with representatives of Georgian society. She mentions many of them in the prefaces to her translation of the "The Man in the Panther Skin" and one section of *Kartlis Tskhovreba* ("The Georgian Chronicle"): Aleksandre Baramidze, Mzekala Shanidze, Manana Gigineishvili, Tsiala Karbelashvili, Sergei Serebryakov, Levan Menabde and his daughter Darejan, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his wife Dali, Niko Kiasashvili and his wife Mary, Mariam Lordkipanidze, Arrian Tchanturia, Elguja Khintibidze, Revaz Gachechiladze, Mikheil Kaviladze. She also cites her English friends and colleagues: David Lang, Akaki Ramishvili, David Barrett, Tamara Dragadze, Peter Nourse, Tristram Beresford, Anthony Ashton. Her books have prefaces and introductory articles by Anthony Bryer, David Lang, Aleksandre Baramidze, Mariam Lordkipanidze, the covers of the English editions of her translations of *Kartlis Tskhovreba* and *The Book of Wisdom and Lies* are designed by Mamia Malazonia. The foregoing is an incomplete list of Vivian's friends. I have often witnessed Katharine Vivian's delight at interesting meetings with people – be it in the studio of Korneli Sanadze, the family of Isidore Gvarjaladze, or in the wings of Rustaveli Theatre... My mind has preserved a vivid picture of the

meeting of the celebrated translators of the twentieth century: Venera Urushadze and Katharine Vivian. I believe that this circle of acquaintances and friends helped her form a clear impression of Georgian character and Georgian traditions. It was through these meetings that she came to love Georgian history and culture, past and present. History seems to repeat in a definite form. Marjory Wardrop arrived in Georgia in 1894. Much has been written to the effect that the then noble society with whom Marjory established friendship contributed much to the development of the English lady's love for Georgia and her interest in Georgian literature. A century later, it was again the environment that played a significant role in the country winning the friendship of an English lady. It was these personal contacts that made for the further development of Georgian-British relations. It was not accidental that while visiting the house-museum of Ilia Chavchavadze at Saguramo Levan Menabde called Katharine Vivian a Marjory Wardrop of contemporaneity.

In the autumn of 1981 Katharine Vivian made a second visit to Tbilisi, at the invitation of Elguja Khintibidze, Dean of the Philology Faculty of Tbilisi University. During this visit to Georgia she broadened the circle of her friends, becoming closely involved in the Kartvelological work of Tbilisi State University. As a result her visits to this country became regular. This time she brought her translation of "The Man in the Panther Skin" published in London and a draft translation of part of *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. She was consulted by Georgian colleagues in the selection of the parts of the latter work for translation and clearing some points in the translation. Her sojourn lasted for a month, visiting various corners of Georgia: Zedazeni, Mtskheta and its environs, the Borjomi valley. (That time her wish to see Vardzia failed to materialize. She visited the site in the summer of 1990), Gelati, Bagrat Cathedral, Shemokmedi, Shuamta, Iqalto, Alaverdi, Tsinandali . . . She left for home with a wish to visit Georgia again. I had the pleasure of acting as her a guide for a whole month. That was a month filled with deep insight and joy. Vivian's personality opened to me an absolutely new and beautiful world. She was an embodiment of the great English culture. Herself a charming and refined person, she was endowed with great intellect and singular literary feel, inimitable humour,

classical English reserve and youthful spirit. We proved to be like-minded and became great friends.

Vivian published an article in a British magazine, entitled "Western Georgia. Shemokmedoba". It is written under great impression, filled with emotion and love. It was the result of one of her visits to Georgia, namely her journey in Western Georgia together with Elguja Khintibidze to attend the remarkable folk festival *Shemokmedoba*.

From the seventies Vivian did not leave out any significant Kartvelological forum without taking part in its work – be it in England, Georgia or European countries. She presented papers on "The Man in the Panther Skin" and medieval Georgian culture at the Kartvelology Day in London, at a symposium devoted to Georgian art held in Bari, at a symposium on Rustaveli studies at Turku, at a symposium devoted to the Millennium of the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos, at three Kartvelological symposia held at Tbilisi University, at the meeting of Byzantinists at Birmingham University, at Presteigne Institute. She translated not only Kartvelological works but Georgian historical and literary works as well: K. Salia's "History of the Georgian Nation", the period of Lasha Giorgi from the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (ed. by S. Qaukhchishvili), "The Man in the Panther Skin" (1977), and "The Book of Wisdom and Lies" (1988).

Vivian closely cooperated and kept up special friendship with the Centre for Kartvelological Studies. From the very first days of the establishment of the Centre (1992) she was a genuine appraiser and interesting contributor to "The Kartvelologist", scholarly journal of the Centre. She was editor of the English translations of old Georgian literary texts (Jumber Cholobargia's translation of "The Passion of Shushanik", Tbilisi, 2006).

In December 1994 for her highly significant work in Georgian Studies Katharine Vivian was awarded the Marjory Wardrop Prize by the Centre for Kartvelian Studies. Later, by submission of the same Centre she was elected Honorary Doctor of Tbilisi University.

Vivian's picture will not be complete unless we note that she was an excellent skier, an excellent swimmer, as well as an excellent housewife; she was fond of preparing Georgian dishes; she was awarded a medal for Scottish dances. After Katharine and her spouse Tony, the son of the well-known English economist T.S. Ashton,

retired on pension, they settled at Quarry Field – a beautiful place near Presteign, on the border of England and Wales. Their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren often got together at Quarry Field to have a pleasant time in the family setting. I happened to be present at such family gathering in the autumn of 1989, when Katharine invited me to spend two unforgettable months at their place. At that time Katharine and her spouse were celebrating their golden jubilee in a wide circle of her large family and friends. Along with many interesting personalities, the celebration was attended by Katharine's contemporary Kartvelologist David Barrett and his wife Marjory McPhee, the British physician Akaki Ramishvili, a Georgian immigrant. I was accorded brilliant hospitality. Along with many interesting trips and meetings, she introduced me to quite a few British scholars. Her husband and I made great friends. He used to tell his friends that I had introduced Dickens to him, whom he came to love. Tony showed so much paternal care and affection for me as to make his daughters jealous. We indeed developed a great affection for each other. I felt very sad to learn about Tony's passing away in 2005. Katharine and her daughter Vivien were last in Georgia in 1997. After that we kept up our friendship of thirty years only by correspondence and telephone calls. Katharine passed in Summer 2010.

I have several manuscripts and typescripts of Katharine's addresses, which she presented to me. I wish to conclude this brief reminiscence with her acceptance speech on the occasion of awarding her the title of Honorary Doctor of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, the recording of which is preserved in my archive.

Dear Rector of the University, Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I wish to greet you all with love and share my profound affection and respect for the Georgian nation.

It affords me great pleasure to be here, in your beautiful country and among the Georgian people for whom I have great love.

This day is really memorable for me.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Tbilisi University and the Georgian nation.

Translation of Georgian literature has always given me great pleasure. When I first read "The Man in the Panther's Skin" – the amazing product of Rustaveli's art, I understood that it was an outstanding work of literature, on the one hand, and that it belonged to the medieval tradition of chivalry and ceremonial love, on the other. I decided to make it as known in England as the legend of king Arthur's Knights is.

This required its translation in modern prose, in which I received great help from Academician Aleksandre Baramidze and the researchers of the Rustaveli Institute. I received several Illustrations from the Institute of Manuscripts and beautiful drawings from Levan Tsutskiridze. Then I translated other works: "The Book of Wisdom and Lies", with Mamia Malazonia's brilliant illustrations, which caused considerable interest in England. Also "Kartlis Tskhovreba" which is available at university libraries. Of Georgian scholars, who also are my friends, I wish to thank specially:

Akaki Ramishvili, Aleksandre Baramidze and members of his department: Manana Gigineishvili, Tsiala Karbelashvili, Sergei Serebryakov, Mzekala Shanidze, Mariam Lordkipanidze, Arrian Tchanturia, Elguja Khintibidze and Marika Odzeli.

My younger daughter Vivien arrived here with me. She, as well as my husband Anthony Ashton and all the members of my family have been interested for years in Georgia and her culture.

Your country has had a brilliant past and historical persons, which is a token of brilliant future. I am sure you will overcome year present difficulties.

"A wise man should keep a cool head in a difficult situation and with forethought".

Long live Georgia and England, and let cultural and economic contacts between them develop further.

Katharine Vivian
May 1997

Katharine Vivian's translations:

1. Shota Rustaveli, *The Knight in Panther Skin*, A Free Translation in Prose, London, 1977
2. Sulxan-Saba Orbeliani, A Book of Wisdom and Lies, London, 1982.
3. The Georgian Chronicle, the Period of Giorgi Lasha, Amsterdam, 1991
4. Kalistrate Salia, A History of the Georgian Nation, 1983.

Katharine Vivian's works:

1. Introduction to: Shota Rustaveli, *The Knight in Panther Skin*, A Free Translation in Prose by Katharine Vivian, London, 1977, pp. 11-33
2. Vepkhistsqaosani: Elements from Eastern and Western Cultures. In: Bedi Kartlisa / Revue de kartvelologie / Vol. XXXIX, 1981, pp. 216-219
3. Sufic Traces in Georgian Literature, Institute for Cultural Research, Kent, 1982
4. Western Georgia, Shemokmedoba. In: Britain – USSR, London, N62, 1982, pp. 5-6
5. The Art of Translation. In: Bedi Kartlisa / Revue de kartvelologie / Vol. XLI, 1983, pp. 102-104
6. Shota Rustaveli and Georgian Tradition. In: An International Shota Rustaveli Symposium: History, Insight, Poetry, April, 11-12, 1991. University of Turku, Finland Symposium Proceedings, Turku, 1991
7. Anthologie de la poesie georgienne, V-XX Siecles, Traduction et Commentaires de Serge Tsouladze (review in English). In: Revue des Etudes Georgiennes et Caucasiennes, 1985, N1, pp. 241-242
8. Sharadze Guram, A Treasury of Happiness and Virtue (review in English). In: Revue des Etudes Georgiennes et Caucasiennes, 1985, N1, pp. 239-241
9. Christian Georgia and Sufism. In: Cultural Encounters. Edited by R. Cecil and D. Wade, London 1990, pp. 14-33.