

## Georgian Verse: Path of Development, Nature, Researchers (A Brief Survey)

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**Abstract:** Genesis of Georgian verse goes back to pre-Christian times. In Old Georgian written monuments fixed rhyme and metre have been revealed much earlier than in Indo-European verse. The history of Georgian verse knows four reformers: Shota Rustaveli, David Guramishvili, Nikoloz Baratashvili and Galaktion Tabidze. Georgian verse adopted Oriental and European stable verse forms (iambus, mukhambazi, sonnet, etc.), though its main metre is still established: *shairi* (4444, 3535), *shavteluri* (55/55), *Besikuri* (5/4/5), etc.

The first Georgian treatise on versification written by Mamuka Baratashvili *Chashniki anu leksis stsavlis tsigni* (1731) preserves even now not only historical but theoretical value during determination of the nature of Georgian verse. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the beginning of a new stage in Georgian versification with Sergi Gorgadze's "Georgian Verse" (1930), the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Akaki Gatsrelia's "Georgian Classical Verse" (1953) and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - Akaki Khintibidze's monograph "The History and Theory of Georgian Verse" (2009).

On the path to scholarly research into Georgian verse the most important question still remains the establishment of the nature of national versification: due to the peculiarity of the phonological system of the Georgian language, it is neither syllabic nor syllabo-tonic, and that is why it is hard to place it in some known systems of versification.

**Key words:** *rhyme, metre, syllabic, syllabo-tonic.*

Georgian verse is centuries-old but the history of its research counts almost three centuries: in 1731 Mamuka Baratashvili, a loyal subject to King Vakhtang VI, who followed his patron into exile, wrote the first poetic treatise entitled: *Chashniki anu leksis stsavlis tsigni* (1731).

The first theoretician of the Georgian verse defined its essence as “verse is the main thing in this world”, and focused his attention on the identity of “word” and “verse”: in old times, in the Georgian language “verse” also denoted a “word”, two-stanza verse and “the whole story in verse”.

It is true, Georgian literary verse evolved from folk poetry but essentially, by nature they do not differ from each other. Therefore, Georgian scholars usually begin the research into the history of the national poetry with folklore. They have a rich treasure in the folklore of Pshav-Khevsureti, Megrelia, Svaneti, Racha and other parts of Georgia.

In Khevsureti, to denote composers of a verse three main terms were spread: *matkvami*, *melekse* and *meshaire*, and the verses were divided into three parts: for *simghere*, verse and *shairi*.

Thus, in the life of mountaineers “poetry utterly dominates the prose” [10, p. 396].

It is true, the records of Georgian folk poetry are of later period but structurally, in external form, the verse is less subject to modification and very likely it would not have substantially changed. In the same way as it is not difficult for modern Georgian to comprehend fifth-century Georgian literary language and artistic perception, it would not have been hard for the listener and reader to feel “rhythmic word” of the earliest specimens of national poetry.

“Verse implies manymetrical forms”, writes Mamuka Baratashvili at the beginning of the second part of the “Chashniki” and considers the metres, varieties of Georgian verse. Some of them are simply mentioned (*shairi*, *long shairi*, *chakhrukhauri*, *long chakhrukhauri*), others are characterized in detail. According to the author of the first poetic treatise the choice of the metre is determined by the content of the saying: “such parables match this voice better” (Baratshvili 1981:8).

Really, the art of transforming words into verse, in the first place took into account their rhythmic arrangement. The rhythm of the oldest Georgian verses was not very strictly balanced but under the influence of musical tune, gradually, obeyed a definite number of syllables. So there appeared *mtiblur-is* [grass cutting songs]. Rhyme is absent both in *mtiblur-is* and *natiral-is* [mourning songs] consisting of nine syllables.

The so-called “simghere” spread in Khevsurian poetry is performed with low shairi (5+3), and the “shair-is” with high shairi (4+4). In Svan verse too priority is given to the high shairi (4+4) and rhyme in Svan poetry exists as an exception. Therefore, a strophe in ordinary sense is absent. Georgian literary rhyme must have originated from the folk poetry [7, p.125].

After separating verse and musical tune, rhyme takes its proper place in folk poetry: it is for this reason that rhymed Pshavian kafia-s (humorous rhymes) became frequent:

The earliest samples of literary verse are related to the establishment of Georgian ecclesiastical literature and found in hagiographical monuments as inclusions, verse citations; although in the fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pavle Ingoroqva expressed a hypothesis according to which long before the development of ecclesiastical literature, there existed pagan secular literature with strong traditions in the Georgian language [7,8], in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century it was formed as a theory by Apolon Silagadze: the scholar managed to reconstruct the earliest stage of Georgian verse. In the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries half-line verse citations are already found which is a reliable sign of the existence of a verse in Georgia (e.g., in Georgian translation of *Sakme Motsikulta* [The Acts of the Apostles] Arate Kilikieli’s hemistich of the hexameter is already found: “...romelsa igi //natesavca vart”). These earliest verse citations are neither folk, nor ecclesiastic. For instance, in the “Martyrdom of St.Procopius” written in the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries one citation is performed with 2-syllable verse: [“ara ketil ars mraval uplebai, ert upal iqavn da erti meupe” [12, p.103-119].

The first fixed Georgian rhyme – “upali – sheuvali” belongs to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries (“romelman shekra jachvita bevraspi – gvelta upali da daaba mtasa rais zeda, romeli ars katst sheuvali”).

Being at the crossroads of the East and West Georgia gained the best verse forms from Persian and Byzantine poetry since ancient times but put down real roots into national soil, so-called mountain folklore. It is not accidental that Lado Asatiani wrote about the Georgian language and verse: “The Supreme gave birth to you in the mountains of Georgia, the language of love, verse, toast” [2, p.191].

Old Russian songs – *bylina* – arose during the period of the Kievan Rus between the tenth and eleventh centuries but were

recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and included in the anthology entitled *The Ancient Russian Poems* compiled by Kirsha Danilov.

Armenian poetry links its history with folk heroic epic "David of Sassoun" (8<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> centuries). The history of the Ossetian verse begins from the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The history of origination of the metrics of Homer's poems – dactylic hexameter – was linked by the prominent Georgian scholar Panteleimon Beradze with the rhythm of Georgian dance and song which indicates close link of Georgian verse with its Greek counterpart [4]. Early Germanic songs composed about gods and heroes were ruthlessly persecuted by Christian church and that is why in the old form, they almost never have survived. Only later in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries epic songs were recorded with supplement of important Christian elements ("Song of the Nibelungs"), circa 1200) The tradition of old Germanic epic poetry is comparatively widely represented in Anglo-Saxon literature ("The Epic of Beowulf", etc.) and in Scandinavia the songs of the old Island of "Eda" were created (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> cent.). "Anglo-Saxon" poetry was created in the early form of the English language which germinated among German tribes migrated to the British Isles. As early as the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxons did not have written literature. ("The Epic of Beowulf" came down to us by means of a tenth-century manuscript.

Far more archaic form of poetry has been preserved by Scandinavian countries, Icelandic literature (songs of Edda, poetry of scalds and prosaic sagas).

The scalds, Scandinavian singers, along with ordinary alliteration brought to the verse obligatory inner rhyme and syllable counting. Strophe form is matched with the refrain which is a distinctive mark of "drapa" ("a war song"). Scalds performed their compositions themselves without musical accompaniment. Whether it is eastern or western, the genesis of the verse of our neighboring countries, as is seen, is much later as compared with Georgian verse.

Today no one doubts that before starting to translate Greek ecclesiastic poetry, hymnography Georgia already had written verse.

In the verse inscriptions found on the walls of the Ateni Sioni church (second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century) rhymed verses can be read. Undoubtedly these verses are specimens of Georgian written poetry. Georgian secular and ecclesiastic poetry coexisted side by side in the

course of centuries and did not experience each other's influence [1]. On the one hand, iambic verses of 12-syllable (5+7) with literary, archaic vocabulary borrowed from Byzantine hymnography and, on the other, secular verse, mainly arranged with low and high shairi rhythm, rhyme and quatrain.

Chakhrukhadze's "Tamariani" was written in the epoch of Rustaveli, which represents a blend of hymnographic, literary and archaic vocabulary, long verses (twenty syllable), folk verse musicality and perfect literary rhyme of secular verse.

The *Vepkhistqaosani* has become an integral part of Georgians' historical life not only due to poetic perfection, philosophical depth and moral purity of the poem's protagonists but also because of liveliness and flexibility of sixteen-syllable shairi; though one or two samples written with this metre was known before *Vepkhistqaosani* (citations in hagiographic writing, St.Philip's hymn, Arsen Iqaltoeli's epitaph, etc.) but 16-syllable shairi, with alternation of low and high shairi, with boundary rhythm and quatrain was established thanks to the *Vepkhistqaosani* in Georgian poetry and that is why it is called "Rustveluri" [114, p.147]. *Vepkhistqaosani's* unprecedented popularity led to the supremacy of "Rustveluri" and predominance of epic poetry compared with lyric verse.

The first who managed to introduce other metres along with "Rustveluri" and the establishment of lyrical verse in Georgian poetry was David Guramishvili, an émigré poet who easily escaped feeble imitation. Along with the sadness of parting with homeland, the years of life spent in Ukraine gained great experience of enriching written literature with foreign metres, theme and folk poetry. David Guramishvili started writing with Rustveli's metre but later he mastered 57 metre the 40 of which are introduced by himself [14, p. 39-43].

The third reformer of Georgian verse was Nikoloz Baratashvili. He returned to Georgian poetry the feature of Rustveli's "wisdom of one branch" and "brought Georgian man to quench mankind's thirst at a spring" (Ilia). Typical of Baratashvili is an alternation of metres within one verse ("Merani", "Twilight on Mtatsminda"), new kind of rhyming (*abba*) which is called arched

rhyme. He is simultaneously an innovator and restorer of Georgian poetic traditions simultaneously.

The fourth reform of Georgian verse is associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Galaktion Tabidze's name. In the sphere of lyrics he truly appeared as a "new Rustaveli of our time". Galaktion's masterpieces created in 1915 are: *The Blue Horses*, *The Moon above Mtatsminda*, *Mary*, *Pear's Flowers*, *Akaki's Phantom*, *Reconciliation*, *Violet*, *Country-Seat*, *Candle*, etc. give scholars (A.Khintibidze) an opportunity to state that the latest reform of Georgian verse is associated precisely with the above-mentioned year. Galaktion's book "Artistic Flowers" includes the poems created in 1914-1919 which familiarize Georgian readers with a new harmony in contrast to the harmony of a classical verse, perfection of dissonances: canonization of nonidentical rhythm, total domination in rhythm, unlimited diversity of the rhythm manifested hitherto unseen possibility of national verse musicality. Numerous new themes and motifs ("the motif of Mary", "the motif of peach flowers", "ephemerae", traveller's letters", etc.) were established by Galaktion Tabidze in Georgian poetry.

Thus, the realization of Georgian versification as a system occurred stage by stage and four main stages are singled out: I - up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Rustaveli), II - 18<sup>th</sup> century (David Guramishvili), III - 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nikoloz Baratashvili), IV - 20<sup>th</sup> century (Galaktion Tabidze).

Twentieth century Georgian verse observes rhythmic and metre regularities with more precision, variants of Georgian verse stanza, the variants of Georgian verse strophe become diverse, astropheric verse appears; polymetric stanzas are established, blank verse prevails [14, p.143].

On the path of scientific research into Georgian verse the establishment of the nature of national versification has remained the most important issue till now. There were none of the more or less known researchers into poetics or poets thinking on the problems of Georgian verse who did not express their views on the issue as to what system of versification the national versification subordinates.

Earlier researchers did not put this question directly but their views became evident when speaking about rhythm, metre, prosody of the verse. From the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the system of Georgian versification started. From the very beginning two opinions opposed each other: syllabic and accentual-syllabic theories of Georgian verse.

The syllabic theory of the Georgian verse was supported from the 18<sup>th</sup> century till now by Mamuka Baratashvili, anonymous author, David Rektor, Teimuraz Bagrationi, Marie Brosset, Platon Ioseliani, David Chubinashvili, Iona Meunargia, Luka Isarlishvili, Grigol Qipshidze, Niko Marr, Mose Janashvili, Hans Vogt, Andrei Fedorov, Silovan Khundadze, Grigol Robakidze, Pavle Ingoroqva, Givi Gachechiladze, Giorgi Tsereteli, Akaki Khintibidze, Togo Gudava, David Tserediani, Mikheil Gasparov, Apolon Silagadze, Katharine Vivian.

The syllabo-tonic theory of Georgian verse takes origin from Evgeniy Bolkhovitinov's book "Historical Description of Georgia in Her Political, Church and Educational State" (1802). From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this view was supported by Lavrenti Ardaziani, Nikolai Gulak, Kote Dodashvili, Meliton Kelenjeridze, Shio Davitashvili, Ioseb Qipshidze, Sergi Gorgadze, Akaki Gatsrelia, Panteleimon Beradze, Roland Beridze.

The dispute became especially aggravated between the supporters of syllabic and syllabo-tonic theories of Georgian verse from the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Giorgi Tsereteli's book "Metre and Rhyme in Vepkhistaosani" came out. This work rejected the theory of foot in Georgian verse and denied the role of the stress in the creation of segments (*mukhli*) and rhyme of our verse. According to Giorgi Tsereteli the stress in the language is not only weak and fixed but its function is minimal during organization of

verse rhythm and rhyme: rhyme does not start with stressed vowel; the line of Georgian verse is divided into hemistichs which are divided again into segments (*mukhli*), that is why G. Tsereteli calls versification of the Vepkhistqaosani "syllabo regulated verse".

G. Tsereteli's view is criticized by Akaki Gatsserelia who holds the syllabo-tonic view of Georgian verse. He claims that Georgian spiritual poetry (iambic verse) was of syllabo-tonic nature but then Georgian verse (Arsen Iqaltoeli, Chakhrukhadze, Rustaveli and later poetry) became syllabic. Akaki Gatsserelia states categorically: "Georgian versification is syllabo-tonic. The base of its rhythm makes a natural succession of strong and weak syllables in lines and equal number of syllables.... In Georgian versification the words lose not stress but acquire more sharpness and strength" [6, p.282].

It is impossible to understand the nature of versification of this or that nation without taking into account the peculiarity of the language. Verse and language are inextricably interrelated with each other and alternation of versification systems is determined by changeability of the nature of a language: metric versification, as we know, was abolished just because the Greek language lost the property of length-short syllables. Transition from the syllabic to syllabo-tonic system occurred in those languages whose stress was free and flexible (German, English, Russian) and in languages with static, fixed stress (French, Polish) syllabic versification remained in place. However, in culturology there also exists a theory according to which alternation of versification systems must reflect cultural evolution of mankind: musical (metric) versification was replaced by syllabic and then syllabo-tonic prevailed.

The adherent of the syllabic theory of Georgian verse, Akaki Khintibidze shares the view of traditional Georgian linguists (Giorgi Akhvlediani, Arnold Chikobava) on weakly dynamic stress of the Georgian language and states: "This weakly dynamic stress which does not clearly divide a word into stressed and unstressed syllables, fails to create verse foot" [14, 407].

Contemporary Georgian linguists boldly declare that "Georgian verse differs from syllabo-tonic verse (e.g. Russian or English) as well as from syllabic verse (e.g. French) where rhyme section starts with stressed vowel. In this respect verse similar to Georgian versification is to be sought in those languages in which the

stress of the word is expressed weakly. English, French and Russian verse fall into one group just because of that sign that in these languages stress of the words (or stress of the rhythmic group) has an ability to create rhythmic section" [14, p.136].

Apolon Silagadze considers that it is not obligatory for Georgian verse to belong to some known system. In his view Georgian verse might be neither syllabic, nor syllabo-tonic (also, neither metric, nor tonic) – it may be of original nature and based on such super-segment element of the phonological system of the language which none of the four systems is based upon [13, p. 99-100].

The syllabic system of Georgian verse has been advocated by Akaki Khintibidze since the second half of the seventies of the 20th century. The scholar asserts that Georgian verse is not syllabo-tonic. According to him, "In Georgian manuscripts of the 9th-13th centuries the pattern of French alexandrine verse are represented not only as separate lines, but entirely a verse is clearly pronounced" [14, p. 415]. A. Khintibidze names Ephrem Mtsire's four iambic verses written according to the scheme 4+4+4 (17<sup>th</sup> century) French Romantic verse; while analyzing Petre Gelateli's iambic verses the scholar is mainly based upon the argument that iambic is a syllabic verse and French syllabic verse is 12-syllable, namely, established by the above-mentioned scheme from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In A.Khintibidze's view syllabic system is the foundation of the Georgian verse and traditional national versification together with modern verse observes this principle. The equal number of syllables or regular alternation regulated sections and clearly expressed caesura which fulfils the function of the stress in a syllabic verse. Free verse (or vers libre) is free just because it neglects the syllabic order obligatory to Georgian verse. However, A. Khintibidze, of course, does not ignore the fact that due to the reinforcement of the accentual languages, Georgian verse experiences the influence of syllabo-tonic versification too. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this influence is in the first place reflected in the rhythm and metres of David Guramishvili's verses and twentieth-century Georgian verse sometimes vividly manifests the tendency to the arrangement of stresses.

The issues treated in the works of Georgian researchers in versification in the course of three centuries are multifaceted: issues of the structure of the verse (stress, metre and rhythm, rhyme, stanzaic prosody, verse metre and type, caesura, enjambment, euphony, intonation, folk versification), nature of Georgian verse and general methodology of its research, research methods (comparative metrics, experimental analysis, statistical method, psychological research, prosody and textology), issues of poetic mastery; Georgian rhythm, free verse, sonnet, demonstration of the universality of Galaktion Tabidze's tropologic thinking.

Study of Georgian verse is conventionally divided into two stages: from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the thirties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and from the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. At the first stage of the research into Georgian verse predominant place was given to characterization of shairi metre, search for feet in it on the basis of school metrics and making appropriate schemes but in connection with Rustaveli's verse, two opposing views concerning the nature of the Georgian verse were singled out already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Kote Dodashvili's extensive newspaper essay for the first time rhyme was considered in a professional way. And later the discourse on rhyme was arranged, polemics on sonnet and free verse started.

From the forties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the discussion on versification of Georgian poets started (Marie Brosset's remark in the letter on David Guramishvili's verse technique). The discussion on versification of Georgian poets according to their newly published collections is found more frequently in Ilia Chavchavadze's "Iveria" and in the press of the eighties-nineties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The reviewers analyzed the creative works by D.Guramishvili, Besiki, A.Chavchavadze, G.Orbeliani, R.Eristavi, Ilia, Akaki, anthologies of Russian and foreign poets translated into Georgian.

From the tenth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during consideration of newly published anthologies verse euphony, rhythm and metre, rhyme, interrelation of poetic devices and essence of the verse are discussed.

Sergi Gorgadze's monograph "Georgian Verse" is a kind of summary of what had been done in Georgian poetics for two

centuries. S.Gorgadze created the first comprehensive systematic course of Georgian versification; the researcher made his own contribution to the description of metres and classification. The most significant thing that S.Gorgadze established in Georgian metric is a real perception of the verse rhyme, putting of the stresses in sections according to real data. Sergi Gorgadze, the adherent of syllabo-tonic theory of Georgian verse, when dealing with the rhyme neglects the existence of clause and considers the existence of four or five syllable rhymes to be natural.

Akaki Gatsserelia supports the syllabo-tonic theory of Georgian verse, shifting the factor of hearing to the background. According to the author of the monograph, Georgian ecclesiastic poetry (iambic verse) was of syllabic nature but then Georgian verse (Arsen Iqaltoeli, Chakhrukhadze, Rustaveli and poetry of later period) became syllabo-tonic [5, p. 94-102].

Akaki Gatsserelia agrees with Pavle Ingoroqva on the folkloric genesis of Georgian rhyme, but considers controversial whether the end-rhymed verses enter literary verse from folklore or vice versa. The author does not exclude the influence of Byzantine rhyme and considers less important Arabic-Persian influence on Georgian versification [6, p.196].

Panteleimon Beradze studied Georgian verse on the basis of comparative metrics; his most important works are devoted to the study of the genesis of Greek dactyl hexameter and Rustveli shairi [4]. Among the researchers into the classification of contemporary Georgian stanza and stable verse forms Roland Beridze has occupied a special place.

Akaki Khintibidze laid the foundation to the history of monographic study of Georgian poets's versification; in this respect his works "Ioseb Grishashvili's Poetry" (1955) and "Akaki's Verse" (1972) are of epochal significance.

In Georgian prosody scientific basis for the functional study of the verse euphony is created by Teimuraz Doiashvili: phonics underlines, exhibits more vividly metric boundaries of the verse, and the condition of the tempo retardation must be sought in alliteration. Euphonic motivation of the enjambment according to the scholar is characteristic of those poets who strive for balance between

versification and tropology. T.Doiashvili directs the Galaktion Study Centre.

And Apolon Silagadze tries to determine the integrity of the system of Georgian versification and regularity of its development, instead of recording separate facts and analysis.

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