

## Existing German translations of the epic by Rustaveli

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**Resume:** The present article discusses the poetic and prosaic German translations of *The Man in the Panther Skin* by Shota Rustaveli, namely, translations by Artur Leist, Hugo Huppert, Ruth Neukomm, Michael Tseretheli, Hermann Buddensieg and Marie Prittwitz.

**Keywords:** *Rustaveli, The Man in the Panther Skin, German translations.*

A detailed list of German translations and publications of *The Man in the Panther Skin* is given in the following books: *Die Literaturen der Völker Kaukasiens* [2] and *Georgian Literature in European Scholarship* [4]. This article will focus on the poetic and prosaic translations of the poem that represent complete or almost complete translations into the German language:

Translator	Printed in a journal	Printed as a book	Location
Artur Leist	-	1889	Germany
Hugo Huppert	-	1955	Germany
Ruth Neukomm	-	1974	Switzerland
Michael Tseretheli	1975	-	France
Hermann Buddensieg	1970-1972	1976	Georgia
Marie Prittwitz	-	2005 2011	Georgia Germany

Before Artur Leist started translating Rustaveli's work, Bertha and Artur Suttner, famous people of Western society, had made an attempt to approach this world classic of Georgian literature. In 1884, during their nine-year life and travel in Georgia, they started translating *The Man in the Panther Skin*. Since Arthur knew only little spoken Georgian and Bertha was studying Russian, they were not able to make an accurate translation of "Vepkhistkavi" (*The Man in the Panther Skin*) as Bertha von Suttner would call it.

"We had planned to return to our homeland by May, and there were still three months to go. We wanted to devote this time to the task that my husband's friend, a Journalist from Tbilisi, had asked us to undertake. It was about translating the Georgian heroic epic *The Tiger's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli into French and Russian. Since we had no Georgian, we had to accomplish this task in the following way: Mr. M (whose name I do not remember except for the first letter of his name)<sup>1</sup> would provide a word-for-word translation of the original into rough French, since he did not have a good command of French, and then we would translate that into polished French... In order to have quiet working conditions, we accepted his proposal to move to a remote village in Samegrelo where his father served as a priest and had a small house where he put us up for a small rent. After this, we could regularly work on *The Tiger's Skin* two hours before and after dinner. Our translation was not published in the end, but we do not regret having spent time on it because thanks to it, as well as to stories and comments of our enthusiastic Georgian friend, we captured the essence of it, of the history and the spirit of Georgian people and the fascinating country we spent so many years in..."[7, p. 190, 194].

Many Georgian Germanists, German Kartvelologists, and people interested in Georgia tried to find the translation in question, but their search was fruitless. Thus we have to content ourselves with the views about the translation found in the memoirs of Bertha Suttner, who won the Nobel Prize later, and the articles by Artur Suttner published in Georgian periodicals (*Kavkaz*, *Droeba*, and *Iveria*) in 1885.

Thus, credit for discovering Rustaveli's poem for German readers goes to Arthur Leist, who, being almost an unknown person in Europe, was a very much esteemed figure in the Caucasus, thanks to his many translations from Georgian and Armenian. During his university studies, he met Friedrich Bodenstedt, who was a popularizer of Russian, Persian and Turkish poetry and who aroused his interest in the East, especially in Armenia and Georgia. Leist first

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably, Iona Meunargia

visited Georgia in 1884. In 1887 the book *Georgische Dichter* was published, containing 150 pages and 57 poems of eleven Georgian poets (mainly of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and folk songs. This was followed by Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin* in 1889. Although this translation did not include the poem's prologue and epilogue, and some parts of the text contained mistakes, the most noticeable thing about it was that the translator rejected the traditional four line stanza of *The Man in the Panther skin* and changed its metrics, rhythm and rhyme (he used ABAB rhyming and free iamb). Despite the fact that it is difficult for German readers to fully consider Rustaveli's work with such simplified translation, the translation's importance is still paramount.

იყო არაბეთს როსტევან, მეფე ღმრთისაგან სვიანი,  
 მალალი, უხვი, მდაბალი, ლაშქარ-მრავალი, ყმიანი  
 მოსამართლე და მოწყალე, მორჭმული, განგებიანი  
 თვით მეომარი უებრო, კვლა მოუბარი წყლიანი.  
 სხვა ძე არ ესვა მეფესა, მართ ოდენ მარტო ასული,  
 სოფლისა მნათი მნათობი, მზისაგა დასთა დასული;  
 მან მისთა მჭვრეტთა წაუღის გული, გონება და სული,  
 ბრძენი ხამს მისად მაქებრად და ენა ბევრად ასული. (33-[see 5])

In Leist's translation, this passage sounds as follows:

Ein König lebte im Arabierlande,  
 Mit Namen Rostewan, dem Gott, der Herr  
 Noch reiches Glück verlieh 'n zum hohen Stande.  
 Leutselig, von erhabnem Sinn war er,  
 Mildthätig auch, gerecht und klug im Rate,  
 Herr einer ungeheuren Kriegerschar,  
 Ein Feldherr, der nicht seines Gleichen hatte  
 Und auch als Redner anzuhören war.

Ein Kind war seiner Ehe nur entsprossen,  
 Nur eine Tochter, die ein Licht der Welt,  
 Von solchem Schönheitsglanze war umflossen,  
 Dass sie dem Sonnenkreis schien beigezelt.  
 Wer sie nur sah, verlor bald alle Sinne,  
 Sie nahm die Seele ihm, Herz und Verstand.  
 Zu singen ihrer Schönheit Lob beginne  
 Ein Weiser nur, der zehnfach sprachgewandt!

The next translation of the work by Rustaveli into German belongs to Hugo Huppert (1902 – 1982). Since it will be discussed in detail later (“The Poetry Competition”), only a few facts will be mentioned here. The foundation of this new translation was laid in 1950. According to Huppert himself, the head of the Georgian Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Mikheil Kveselava, in the presence of the Head of the Writers’ Association of the Soviet Union, Alexander Fadeev, suggested that the Austrian poet should ‘internationalize’ *The Man in the Panther Skin* and translate the poem without changing its form. While translating the epic, Huppert, who did not have a command of Georgian relied on a Russian literal translation. Because of the volume of the work, it was impossible to construct a strongly rhymed translation of all (1671) stanzas by the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1951) of the Soviet Socialistic Republic of Georgia.

Only after 28 months of hard work was the rhymed text ready and it was translated alternatively in Georgia, Moscow and the Soviet Baltic Countries. The Berlin publishing house *Rütten & Loening* requested the Georgian Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries to provide them with a copy of the German translation of the poem and printed it in 1954.

Thus, this work became widely available to the general public and attracted international attention. The press praised the translation as a ‘remarkable literary achievement,’ as the first really precise rendering of the Georgian national epic into a European language (excluding numerous Russian translations) and which, according to Adolf Endler, is classed as the strongest and unique translation among the German translations of the work [3, p. 157]. Huppert’s translation of *the Man in the Panther Skin* was published four times.

The cited passage above looks as follows in Huppert’s translation:

Einst war König in Arabien Rostewan, ein hochgeweihter,  
huldvoll edler Fürst, beflügelt von der Heermacht seiner Streiter,  
mild, gerecht, voll Großmut war er, seinem Staat ein kluger Leiter,  
unerreicht als kühner Kriegermann und beredt wie kaum ein zweiter.

Keinen Sohn besaß der König, hatte nur ein einzig Kind,  
eine Tochter, sterngleich strahlend und wie Frühlingssonne lind.  
Ganz betört war, wer sie ansah, wurde ruhlos, wurde blind.  
Preisen könnten sie nur Worte, wie sie Weisen dienstbar sind.

In Switzerland, the epic by Rustaveli was published by *Manesse Bibliothek der Weltliteratur* publishing house in 1974 under the title *Der Mann im Pantherfell*. This is a prosaic translation by Ruth Neukomm. In the afterword, she explains the reason for giving preference to this method of translation: many excuses can be named, but the deciding factor was the fact that the structures of Georgian and German languages differ radically, which makes it very difficult to reproduce the epic's musicality and rhythm, and narrate the poem as close to the original as possible at the same time.

This same afterword includes the story of the creation of this translation. Neukomm started working on the translation as early as 1958 together with Kita Chkhenkeli, her Georgian language teacher. After the death of the teacher, Neukomm continued translating on her own. According to Goethe's advice, first of all, one should: open truly deep and fundamental, encompass truly essential and compelling, which remains from poetry, when a piece of poetry is translated into prose. With her prosaic translation, Ruth Neukomm undoubtedly reached her goal.

The German translation of *The Man in the Panther Skin* (*Der Ritter im Panterfell*), published in Paris in 1975, is in a prosaic form. Mikheil Tsereteli (1878-1965), a Georgian immigrant living in Europe, rendered the Georgian text into German scrupulously and word for word. There was not much known about this translator in Georgia. *The Georgian Encyclopedia* does not include his exact date of birth, let alone his life story. However, the Friedrich-Wilhelm (presently Humboldt) University archives and other archives of Berlin contain extensive materials about his life. Tsereteli studied natural and social sciences, languages and journalism in Kiev, Paris, London and Geneva. After his political career was over – he was on the Committee of the Liberation of Georgia and an ambassador in Stockholm – he gave a series of lectures at Berlin University in 1933, and was a professor of Georgian language and literature from 1936.

Tsereteli, like other Georgian immigrants, moved to Munich after the World War II, where he died in 1965. The translation that was published in Paris in 1975 was actually finished in 1949. Unfortunately, Tsereteli did not live to see the publishing of his translation. Only Nino Salia, a prominent Georgian immigrant, published it for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the scholar and translator. In the foreword, she thanks Julius Assfalg and Hubert Kaufhold, who made substantial corrections to the text. Georgian literary critics D. Baramidze, D. Lashkaradze and J. Gagnidze pointed to certain problems of interpretation in this translation. The passage cited above is presented below in M. Tseretheli's word-for-word rendition:

Es war in Arabien König Rostewan, glückbenedet von Gott,  
Erhaben, freigebig, bescheiden, Gebieter vieler Ritter und Vasallen,  
Gerecht und barmherzig, glorreich und weise,  
Ein unvergleichlicher Kämpfe (und) selbst ein glänzender Redner.

Kein anderes Kind hatte der König, wohl nur eine einzige Tochter,-  
Ein Gestirn, das die Welt erleuchtete, ein Glied in den Sonnenscharen.  
Denen, die sie schauten, nahm sie das Herz, die Gedanken und die Seele.-  
Ein Weiser sollte sie preisen und eine viel\* mal ver Hundertfache Zunge!

The last complete translation of Rustaveli's poem into German is a poetic one. It was made by Hermann Buddensieg, who did not speak Georgian and used Tsereteli's word-for-word translation. Instead of using adequate quatrain of 16 syllable lines, Buddensieg resorted to the hexameter (six-foot dactyl). In the preface to the translation, which was published as a separate book in Tbilisi in 1976, he justifies his decision stating that "Hexameter is known by the German translations of ancient poems... The German hexameter of the classic poetry is characterised by raising and lowering, following the German language characteristics, instead of the lengthening and shortening of the antique hexameter. Due to this transformation, the hexameter is created for the German language. The hexameter allows getting closer to the original poem as much as possible. It is not bound, is free from artificial word

formation and language exaltation, and does not use force with the language. [6, p. 11-12].

As the rhyme and rhythm of the original were not retained according to versification, the content of the translation is precise, but the form and musicality of the original are lost. However, some Georgian scientists consider the translation by Buddensieg to be “the best of the existing translations.” This conclusion is based on the fact that it conveys the meaning of the Georgian original more precisely than the translation by Huppert:

It conveys each word and image of the text; only rarely do we encounter an insignificant error. By choosing the hexameter and using refined vocabulary an elevated mindset is created which no other European translator has ever achieved (2, p.130).

The above mentioned passage in the Buddensieg’s translation sounds as follows:

Rostewan war in Arabien König, von Gott wohlbegnadet,  
Freigebig, demütig, huldvoll, Herr vieler tapferer Mannen,  
Gnädig, gerecht, sieghaft und scharfsinnig weise,  
Selber ein unvergleichlicher Krieger, gewandt auch im Reden.

Keinen Erben hatte er, nur eine einzige Tochter,  
Ein die Welt erleuchtend Gestirn aus den Scharen der Sonne,  
Wer sie ansah, dem nahm sie das Herz, den Verstand und die Seele,  
Einen Weisen braucht man zum Lobe und zehntausend Zungen.

The German translation of Rustaveli’s poem by Marrie Prittwitz (1876-1961) was published in 2005 and 2011.

Even though this translation had already been finished in 1940-1947 in Ufa, and was highly prized afterwards, either because of rivalry or simply neglect, it lay discarded in a desk drawer for 60 years [2]. It was found by the German scholar Steffi Chotiwari-Jünger with the help of Elguja Khintibidze. These scholars printed Prittwitz’s translation of the epic in Georgia first together with the introduction in three languages (German, Georgian, Russian), which was intended as an appeal for further assistance for researchers (in the handwritten manuscript of translation made by Prittwitz there were low-quality photocopies instead of some stanzas).

Marie Prittwitz was a translator, librarian, teacher and researcher who had a good command of Russian, German, English, French, Italian, Romanian and Moldavian. Although she had German ancestors, Marie spoke Russian as her native language but considered herself Moldavian.

Her father's name was Viktor Huber. Since her childhood, Marie spoke German which she mastered further while studying at Dresden's 1<sup>st</sup> Women's Gymnasium in 1893-1894. She got acquainted with Rustaveli's creation with the help of her Georgian friends and worked on its translation which she considered to be a source of great happiness during her exile from Leningrad to Ufa, the Second World War and the postwar hard years: "Думала ли я, что фортуна даст мне возможность приобщиться к великому труду Руставели, оживившему меня во время утраты многого дорогого мне? И даст мне ещё раз возможность конкретно послужить возвеличению родины и её культуры?" [8, p. LXXXVI].

These words of Marie Prittwitz to her child emphasise her deep respect for Rustaveli, who she classed not only as a historical figure, but also her counselor and consoler. Her granddaughter, Natalja Prittwitz, says that these words moved her deeply, «так как их писала женщина, потерявшая в вихре революции мужа, двоих детей (она так и не узнала ничего про них до конца своей жизни) всё имущество, право проживать на прежнем месте». (8, p. LXXXVI)

The passage cited above is worded as follows in Marie Prittwitz's translation:

Rostevan, Arabiens König, der durch Schicksalsgnad' geweihte,  
Kraftbeschwingt durch seine Heere, ward gepriesen seiner Zeiten;  
Schlicht, gerecht und hochbeflissen in des Landes weiser Leitung,  
Ein beredter, edler Ritter, weltbekannt in seiner Weisheit.

Sprossen hatt' der Thronherr keine, außer einem Mädchenkinde,  
Das, gestirngleich, hell und leuchtend, sanft war wie die Sonne linde.  
An ihr, Sonne aller Sonnen - Herz verlor man und erblindet',  
Nur dem Weisesten ein Loblied ihr zu singen es gellinget.

Finally, it should be mentioned that none of the four German poetic translations of Rustaveli discussed above were made directly from Georgian. They were based on either a word-for-word translation or followed a Russian translation.

Among all the translators, only Hugo Huppert and Marie Pritwitz were able to gain an insight into Rustaveli's verse form ('shairi') and shaped them into beautiful German stanzas, which give esthetic pleasure to German readers, and help them to delve into the original.

On the basis of these short citations, readers can choose their own 'favourites,' give their preference to either prose or verse, to hexameter or quatrain of 16 syllable lines, to musicality or accuracy.

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