

Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin*: Cultural Bridge from East to West and the Georgians of Safavid Iran

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Abstract: In the Middle Ages the road from East to West was not only a trade and economic route but it served as a cultural bridge as well, Georgia being an important user of this bridge. In the present study attention is focused on Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin* along these lines. My research of recent years has enabled

me to state and argue an absolutely new fact both for Kartvelology (Georgian Studies) and for English literary criticism, namely that Rustaveli's MPS was used early in the 17th century as a plot source by the English dramatists Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. On the basis of the story of the love of the main characters of MPS, Tariel and Nestan, the cited dramatists wrote two plays: *Philaster* and *A King and No King*, that were successfully produced through the 17th century on the English stage.

The means by which the story of Rustaveli's poem reached the intellectual circles of the England of Shakespeare's time remains a mystery. Only conjectures may be made on this issue. One of these conjectures seem to me relatively more convincing: the circle of Islamised Georgians at the Safavid court in Persia, in particular Allahverdi Khan and his family. The point is that towards the end of the 16th century the Iranian royal court was visited by a large embassy of Englishmen led by the well-known diplomat Antony Sherley. The Englishmen sojourned long at the Shah's court and, with the support of Shah Abbas and his foremost confidant and commander Allahverdi Khan, they reorganized and rearmed Iran's army. After this Antony Sherley left for Europe in the rank of the Shah's envoy, where for

years he facilitated the establishment of political and trade relations between Iran and Europe. This period coincides exactly with the entry of the story of MPS into England.

Key words: "The Man in the Panther Skin", Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Allahverdi Khan

As is known, the historical road from East to West in the Middle Ages was not only a trade and economic route but it served as a cultural bridge as well. Clear examples of this are: the Persian *Vis o Ramin*, whose trace is seen in the European *Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, the Indian *Panchatantra* and the Persian *Kilila wa Dimna*, which influenced the development of the fable genre in Europe.

Medieval Georgia was one of the major links along this cultural route, as attested by a legend of Indian provenance, subsequently repeatedly adapted in Georgia from the Arabic *Kitab Bilawhar wa Būdasf* as the Georgian *Wisdom of Balavar*. A Georgian author of the end of 10th century rendered the story from Georgian sources into a Greek hagiographic work which turned into a highly popular novel of almost all countries of 12th-15th centuries Europe [33, pp.192-291].

On this occasion I want to discuss in more detail a fact brought to light as a result of my research of recent years, which is a significant novelty both for Georgian and European philology.

It has transpired that Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin*, the acme of Georgian poetry and philosophy of his day, served as another cultural bridge from East to West.

The Man in the Panther Skin by Shota Rustaveli, a Georgian poet of the turn of the 12th -13th centuries, is an epic poem containing lyrical passages. 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'. The adventure of Rustaveli's principal enamored couple: search by Tariel and his companion Avtandil for Tariel's love Nestan lost through an intrigue

at the Indian royal court; pointing to the trace of the lost beloved by King Pridon, a casual acquaintance of Tariel; the freeing of Nestan from Kajeti, demons, fortress, by the three friends with the help of Pridon's warriors. This is a typical oriental narrative, like a fairy-tale plot migratory in the medieval East, one archetype of which is seen in the ancient Indic epic *Ramayana* [23]. The narrative of *The Man in the Panther Skin* retains this oriental flavour in individual components as well. 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 *Vis and Ramin's* story [14]; the telling by Tariel, gone mad with love, of his story to Avtandil and the latter's decision to lay his life to help his friend evince 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* [26].

A story of oriental type is given allegorical significance of the history of the twelfth-century Georgian royal court by Rustaveli. He introduces an original solution of 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 neighbour 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 a theological thesis of the existence-nonexistence of evil, and turns all into an original plot of a Georgian poem.

On the basis of my research of recent years I have had the honour to report and argue an absolute novelty to the history of Georgian culture and European literary criticism, namely that the highest and most popular literary circles of early seventeenth-century England were acquainted with Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin*, successfully putting it to literary use [35, pp.50-84]. In William Shakespeare's lifetime two plays by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher – his direct successors – were performed on the English stage for a century: *Philaster* [9] and *A King and No King* [10], created by adaptation of the plot of Rustaveli's *The Man in the*

Panther Skin. The direct plot source of the cited plays is hitherto considered to be unknown to English literary criticism [29, p.168; 41, p. 15].

The plot of both plays unfolds round the problem of succession to the throne, involving the king's successor woman and the youth also considered heir to the throne. This problem is an immediate and basic theme of Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin*. In these plays of the English authors the king has a single female offspring, and the problem is solved through the love of the successor woman and the young man, and their marriage. This is the solution of the issue of succession to the throne according to Rustaveli's poem.

Now let us discuss the topic in more detail, beginning with *A King and No King*. My discovery was based on the following considerations:

1. The action in the play by Beaumont and Fletcher takes place at the Iberian royal court. Beaumont and Fletcher's Iberia refers to Georgia and not the Iberian peninsula of historical sources. Suffice it to say that the principal character of *A King and No King* - the young king of Iberia - defeats the king of the neighboring country Armenia, brings him captive to the Iberian royal court, where the subsequent action of the play takes place.

2. The basic facts of the romantic intrigue of the enamoured couple in the English play *A King and No King* coincides with the story of Nestan and Tariel - the enamoured pair of India in *The Man in the Panther Skin*: in both works the childless king and queen adopt the newborn son of a nobleman; later the queen gives birth to a daughter; upon reaching adulthood the boy and girl fall madly in love; following dramatic adventures they marry and the issue of succession to the royal throne is resolved.

3. In addition to the common elements of the plots of both stories, there are some strong similarities in both plots, for example: the pregnancy of the queen just five years after the adoption of a child; the isolation of the boy and girl from each other in their childhood; the prince's loss of his consciousness when he first sees

the girl; the removal of a prince brought from a neighboring country as groom for the daughter.

4. Such details are found in both *A King and No King* and *Philaster* that point directly to *The Man in the Panther Skin* as a direct plot source, ruling out the obtaining of this plot by the English authors from any other older source, i.e. migratory plot that may have been known to Rustaveli himself. The hint of the authors of *A King and No King* at *The Man in the Panther Skin* does not end with locating the action of the play in Georgia. The princess of the couple in love in the English play, whose prototype is Nestan from Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin*, is called Panthea. "Panther" is the translation of the Georgian *vepkhi*, and the *vepkhi* or "panther", is in Rustaveli's poem, whose title in Georgian is *Vepkhistqaosani* ('one who wears a panther's skin'), a symbol of Nestan. Assuming that Panthea's name is based on the panther as the symbol for Nestan provides the most acceptable explanation for Panthea's name, and that, of course, presupposes that Beaumont and Fletcher knew the plot of the *The Man in the Panther Skin* in detail, along with the symbols used.

Now a few words about *Philaster*.

Similarly to *The Man in the Panther Skin*, in *Philaster* two kingdoms are united. The king of the united kingdom has a female successor, but the son of the other kingdom has a claim to his throne. The king invites the prince of a neighbouring country as a groom for his daughter. The same occurs in *The Man in the Panther Skin*. The issue is solved through the love of the two successors, with the girl offering her love to the young prince. This plot coincides precisely with that of Rustaveli's poem. Similarity with *The Man in the Panther Skin*, as well as in *A King and No King*, is seen in *Philaster* in a number of essential details of the plot.

To announce her love, the woman invites the young man to visit her, sending him a letter through her handmaid. It transpires that the young man too is secretly in love with her. They together work out a plan of action in order to remove the invited bridegroom

and dreaming of coregnancy. Thus, the coincidence of this plot with that of *The Man in the Panther Skin* is obvious.

Besides the parallels brought to light by me in the development of the principal line of the plot, essential relations are apparent in both plays of the English dramatists along the line of posing idea and thematic issues, the shaping of the characters and the nuance twists of the plot. It is natural to query how Rustaveli's poem came to be known to English writers early in the seventeenth century. To date there seems to be no answer to this question in Georgian or English sources. I can make several suppositions.

1. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Georgian kings established direct contacts with Europe, sending their ambassadors, letters and gifts, predominantly to Spain. Spanish envoys too arrive in Georgia. In particular, in 1495, Constantine II, king of Georgia, sent an emissary bearing valuable gifts and a letter addressed to Queen Isabella, the great champion of Spanish Christianity, requesting her aid against Ottoman Turkey. The original of the letter sent in response to this letter by Ferdinand and Isabella is preserved in the Royal Archives of Aragon in Barcelona. The hope of Georgian kings for aid from the powerful Spanish monarchs continued for centuries. At the close of the sixteenth century Simon I, the valiant king of Kartli and a relentless enemy of the Ottomans, sent letters to Philip II, king of Spain. The latter too sent a response to his Georgian counterpart, fulfilling the Georgian king's request by confirming that he had sent a message of support for Georgia to the Pope and the German emperor. Simon's letters were discussed at the Spanish royal court towards the end of July 1598 [32]. Such material makes it evident that during the sixteenth century, information concerning Georgia was available in Spain. This exchange of two letters at the close of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century is no casual occurrence. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Constantine's ambassador visited several major countries in the search for aid: Egypt, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Spain, and Italy. Returning from his embassy to Egypt, he made a detour via Jerusalem. There he met the Spanish envoys, sent from Spain to

Jerusalem, whom he brought to Georgia where they appear to have stayed for some time. Subsequently, the envoys returned to Spain in company with Georgian ambassadors. It may be assumed that the Spanish envoys were getting ready not only to present the Georgian envoys to Ferdinand and Isabella but to introduce the country of the Georgians to the royal court. Hence I do not think it impossible that evidence on Georgian culture, in particular literature, to have entered Spain at that time. In this way, the story of *The Man in the Panther Skin* may have become known in Spain. As is known, Beaumont and Fletcher made use of Spanish sources.

2. Another more concrete possibility of MPS finding its way to English shores lies in the links between English and Georgian merchants. These contacts resulted from the activities of England's Muscovy Company, whose agents actively entered Persian provinces in the 1560s-1570s by the Volga-Astrakhan route. They traded in raw silk at Shemakha and Julfa, trading centres close to the Georgian border, and from there in Georgia proper, i.e. the kingdom of Kakheti [31]. The letters and records of English merchants and travellers (Anthony Jenkinson, Laurence Chapman, Cartwright) contain much on subjects such as the interest shown by the Kakhetian king Levan II (r. 1518/1520-1574) in trade with the English, a Georgian merchant buying goods for Levan from an English merchant, the conference between the king's envoys and agents of the English Company on the establishment of ties of friendship between Kakheti and Muscovy, the attempt of English trade companies to secure permission for trade in Kakheti, the participation of Georgians in the society of traders of Julfa, and so on. The English merchants who sought to promote friendship between the kingdom of Muscovy and Kakheti. Some evidence must have been taken from Khakheti about the culture of the Georgians. Reports on the activities of the Muscovy Company would therefore have reached educated circles in England by the end of the sixteenth century and this does seem to have been known to John Fletcher. This is evidenced by the fact that his uncle, Giles Fletcher (1546-1611), whose contribution to the education of the young John after

the death of the latter's father was considerable, was a writer who was also a member of parliament and diplomat. In 1588 Giles was sent as a special agent by Elizabeth I to Moscow where he stayed for some time, returning with a treaty concluded between England and Russia, the terms being highly favourable for England. He published *Of the Rus Commonwealth*, his impressions of Muscovy in London in 1591 and it is believed that John Fletcher used the stories told by his uncle in his works.

3. When we consider the introduction of Rustaveli's poem into England in the early seventeenth century, casual paths should not be excluded, in particular a Georgian who, on some mission or by pure chance, found himself in England. As it transpires from European sources, early reference by European writers to Georgian literature or culture was made through contact with Georgian consultants. Direct pointers to this can be found in works by German scholars of the eighteenth century such as G. J. Adler's *Museum Cuficum Borgianum Velitris* (Rome, 1782) and F. K. Alter's *Über georgianische Literatur* (Vienna, 1798). European diplomats, travellers, merchants and intellectual circles interested in the East in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had frequent and close contacts with the royal courts of Persia and Turkey, where the permanent presence of Georgian women in the harems of the shahs and sultans claimed their attention, not only for the beauty and cleverness of these women but also for their constant thoughts of their homeland. This is reflected in European literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Attention should also be given to the fact that the earliest description of the Georgian language, alphabet, script and ecclesiastical writings was first published in Europe on the basis of material obtained by a German traveller during his journey through Turkey in 1579 [34, pp.25-27,85]. Information reaching Europe in this way is significant, and it would be no surprise to find *The Man in the Panther Skin* a part of this wave of information. Further, the memory of the Georgian people positively records that Rustaveli's book was considered a valuable gift of a Georgian girl's trousseau. The expansion of

Georgians beyond the country's borders, which was more intensive in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, caused by the incorporation of a large chunk of South Georgia into the Ottoman empire, would have entailed the taking of *The Man in the Panther Skin* abroad.

To form a clearer idea of individuals of Georgian ethnicity and their offspring being related to European families of aristocratic origin from the Late Middle Ages, finding continuation in royal dynasties of European countries, I should like to point to the following fact: the Emperor Alexios II of Trebizond and his Georgian spouse Djiadjak Jaqueli, daughter of Beka II Jaqeli, a great feudal lord and *Atabag* of Samtzkhe, were fourteenth-century ancestors of Queen Elizabeth II, as established by European specialists of Greek and Roman biographies. The same list of genealogy considers Djiadjak Jaqueli not only the 22nd ancestor of the Queen of England, but also the 22nd great grandmother of Juan Carlos, the 17th of Louis XVII and the 23rd of Philippe of Belgium (<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/2004-03/1080611845>).

The big Georgian feudal lord Beka Jaqeli was *eristavi* or ruler of Samtzkhe, an important region of old Georgia. Samtzkhe was by the time a culturally advanced region of South Georgia. Incidentally, the historical memory of the Georgian people predominantly links Rustaveli to this region, and the material heritage connected with MPS (fragments of old manuscripts, archeological artefacts, place names) are found here. Beka's daughter Djadjak Jaqeli (of Samtzkhe) married the prince of Trebizond, subsequently the Emperor Alexios II in circa 1300. They had six children, of whom two are believed to have been the continuers of the genealogical line leading to the English Royal House. (See the other versions of this genealogical table as well: <http://209.85.129.132/search?q-cache: http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/2004-04/1080922915>).

I want to make this special note: I point out this fact not with the purpose of assuming the penetration of the Georgian book, namely *The Man in the Panther Skin*, into the European environment by this way. This fact is an example of the Georgian element – Georgian cultural-historical memory having already entered Europe of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.

4. Another possible conjecture of *The Man in the Panther Skin* finding its way to England early in the 17th century lies through the Georgian diaspora in Safavid Iran at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries.

As is clearly indicated by European (Adam Olearius, Antony Sherley, Pietro della Valle, Antonio Gouvea, Don Pietro Avitabile... [1; 6; 21; 22; 5, 12a]), Georgian (Parsadan Gorgijanidze, Archil II, Ioane Bagrationi, Sekhnia Chkheidze, Aleksandre Orbeliani... [15; 8; 17; 25; 2; 3], Armenian (Arakel Davrizhetsi [7]) and partly Persian (Faḏli Khūzāni al-Esfahāni, Mir Mohammad Sa'īd Mashhīzi, Valīqoli Shāmlū, a certain Bajan, Jolāl al-Dīn Monajjem, Eskander Monshī... [16; 20; 27; 11; 18; 13] historical sources the Georgian element was highly important at the Persian Royal Court in the last quarter of the 16th and first decades of the 17th century, involving the country's political life, military aristocracy and administrative system. Research of the last decades has shown that this Georgian element was not only the multitude of slaves, concubines and warriors formed of thousands of boys and girls abducted or sold into slavery, subsequently Islamized and Persianized and absolutely alienated from their native environment and traditions. These isolated and scattered persons formed a large group of highly influential rulers of ethnically Georgian aristocrats, interrelated through kinship and national interests, promoted at the court of Safavid Iran, namely Shah Tahmasp I and Shah Abbas I. It should be stressed that this Islamized and Persianized Georgian circle should not be identified – either by origin or social status – with Persia's so-called corporation of slave-soldiers. Furthermore, they were not only outstanding commanders: this circle belonged to the intellectual elite of Persia [11].

Representatives of four major houses have been identified in this ethnically Georgian elite of Persia: Baratashvilis, Saakadzes, Undiladzes and Mirimanidzes. They hailed from the Lower Kartli region, predominantly from the areas called Sabaratiano (Baratili) or Somkhiti in Georgian sources. The aspiration of the nobles of this region to become subjects of Persia was mainly due to the incessant

wars between Persia and Turkey in the 16th-17th centuries, causing merciless devastation of this region. In some historical sources several Islamized ethnical Georgians are proclaimed to have been Armenians but, as is argued in scholarly literature, this must have been due to the erroneous understanding of their provenance from the Somkhiti province of Kartli. Of the Islamized Georgians of the houses just listed only the ancestors of the Mirimanidze house are considered to have been representatives of the Armenian ethnos, for they bore the title of *melik* which meant a local Armenian. However, some Persian (Fazlî Khûzânî al-Esfahâni) as well as Armenian (Arakel Davrizhetsi, the same Tabrizi) sources consider the Mirimanidzes, promoted at the Persian royal court, to have been Georgians.

Of the circle of ethnically Georgian major commanders and administrators, promoted to very high offices at the Persian royal court of Safavid Iran, of I want to focus my attention on Allahverdi Khan-Undiladze, as he has a direct bearing on the present research topic. He is the principal and one of the first representatives of administrators of Georgian descent. He and his sons Imam-Quli Khan and Daud Khan and grandson Sefi-Quli Khan gained great authority, the highest administrative posts beglarbeg (beylerbey), and great wealth, retaining all this for almost over forty years. It will suffice to point to a couple of facts.

The Portuguese ambassador at the court of Shah Abbas, Antonio Gouvea writes that the Shah had told him that the entire Persia obeyed him, while he obeyed Allahverdi Khan [5, p.43]. Allahverdi Khan and his family had amassed great wealth: palaces and bridges were built with his money. One of the most beautiful bridges at Esfahan is known under Allahverdi Khan's name. Roads across the pass of the mountains of central Iran were built with the money of Allahverdi Khan's Georgian spouse. Imam-Quli Khan too was very rich. Grand irrigation systems were under construction with his funding near Esfahan. Both English and Georgian historians cite evidence from a Persian manuscript to the effect that Shah Abbas had once told Imam-Quli Khan to spend by one dirhem less than

himself, so that the people might see the difference between the Shah and the Khan [30, pp.65-66].

This unprecedented influence of the Undiladze house at the Persian royal court lasted from the last decade of the 16th century to the 1630s: the epoch of Shah Abbas I. This is the period in the history of Iran of very intensive relations of Iran with Europe. These relations were manifested most clearly in Iran's contacts with England in the diplomatic, military and commercial spheres.

In these relations the central figure next to the Shah and beside him was Allahverdi Khan. Here is the description of the relations of the Shah with Allahverdi Khan, given by the Iranian historian, Professor Nasrolla Falsafi: "Shah Abbas appreciated and respected Allahverdi Khan more than all other great commanders of Iran. As he was an aged man, the Shah called him "father". None of the commanders could match him in rank or office. With his well-armed thirty-thousand-strong war-hardened cavalry, he ruled over all vilayets in southern Iran, the coast and islands of the Persian Gulf. In the major wars waged by Shah Abbas he mainly rested on his (Allahverdi Khan's) military force" [28, pp. 19-20].

The ethnical extraction of Allahverdi Khan is problematic in the scholarly literature. Some historians consider him to have been Armenian by nationality, emigrated from Georgia. They see the ground for this in the writings of the well-known Italian traveller Pietro della Valle [22]. At the same time, both foreign and Georgian researchers consider this report of Pietro della Valle an error, explaining it by a probable confusion of one region of Kartli - Somkhiti - by the Italian traveller in his old records or narration by Georgians, with the Armenian ethnos (Z. Avalishvili, W. Allen, V. Gabashvili, H. Maeda). The Georgian extraction of Allahverdi Khan is attested by European sources earlier than the recordings of Pietro della Valle [30, pp. 68-69]: Don Juan the Persian who accompanied Antony Sherley from Persia to Europe, in his 1604 publication points out clearly that the Shah appointed Allahverdi Khan as the head of 12, 000 Georgian troops, for he was a Georgian renegade [24]. According to the evidence of the Englishman William Parry, a

member of Sherley's entourage, Allahverdi Khan was a Georgian Christian [38]. That Allahverdi Khan was Georgian is attested by the close and kinship links of his and his large family with Christian Georgia, in particular with the royal house. According to the Georgian scholar V. Gabashvili, the name of Undiladze is mentioned in Georgian written documents from the 13th century. As clarified by the Japanese researcher H. Maeda, this family name is mentioned uninterruptedly to the 16th century inclusive. Today Allahverdi Khan's ascription to the Georgian house of Undiladze is an acknowledged fact in European Iranistics [27a, p. 28, 37, 119, 156].

From the standpoint of the topic of my study the fact is very significant that in 1598-99 an English delegation headed by the well-known diplomat Antony Sherley resided at the Persian royal court. This embassy of the English was instrumental in the rearming of the Iranian army, in particular firearms were obtained and implemented. This was done chiefly by Allahverdi Khan, under the general supervision of Shah Abbas. Antony and his brother Robert Sherley were helped also by Tamaz-Quli of the Mirimanidze house of Georgia; he was an official promoted at the royal court. Antony and Robert Sherley played a very important part in intensifying and developing Iran's diplomatic and trade relations with countries of Western Europe. Shah Abbas sent, first Antony and later his brother Robert Sherley as his personal envoys to Europe [37a]. At this point, I am interested in the fact that in the anti-Ottoman coalition plan a significant function was assigned to his favourable attitude to Christians, which he tried to parade by his own attitude to Georgian Christians. One act proving this was that the Shah married the daughter of the Georgian King Simon; later he sent the golden cross presented to him by the Pope to the king of Georgia, and a wooden cross carved with his own hand to the Patriarch of Georgia. Shah Abbas sought in every way to show Europeans his loyalty and favourable attitude to Christian Georgians. The Iranian Professor Nasrolla Falsafi thinks that Shah Abbas knew the Georgian language. On the basis of notes made by the Spanish envoy Don Garcia Silva Figueroa, Prof. Falsafi recalls the fact that at one of the audiences the

Shah addressed the Spanish envoy in Georgian in order to prevent the Turkish envoy getting the gist of their conversation and his words were translated by an interpreter who knew Spanish and Georgian [28, p. 18]. Antony Sherley left for Europe in 1599 as an ambassador of Shah Abbas. The Shah sent many letters and gifts for European monarchs through him. There was much ado about the 32 boxes of gifts sent to Europe by the Shah. According to Sherley's later statement, the boxes were lost on the way, while in the opinion of researchers they were sold by Sherley. The English envoy of the Shah visited the entire Europe, seeking aid for the Shah; he left many recordings, which are today preserved in the British Museum.

This period of close diplomatic relations between Europe and Iran, the activity of English diplomats with the administration of Shah Abbas, Sherley's travels between Iran and Europe falls to the end of the 16th century and the first years of the 17th century. In 1608-1611, in the circle of the English Royal theatrical company, two plays: *Philaster* and *A King and No King* were written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher on the basis of the plot of *The Man in the Panther Skin*. Hence, I surmise that MPS or the story of the poem may have found its way to Europe, reaching English intellectual circles.

Attention should be given to two circumstances: the community of English scholars, namely dramatists, looked eagerly for stories and news, books or literary plots arriving from the East. This style of literary activity is clearly visible in the works of Beaumont and Fletcher. On the other hand, from the end of the 15th century Georgian diplomacy looks keenly for political support of countries of Western Europe; to this end, it tries to demonstrate all the values of the land of the Georgians, including cultural. In my observation an attempt takes shape from the end of the 16th century to save *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, the greatest expression of the cultural past of the Georgians. The manuscripts of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* must have been gathered, supplemented and edited into a whole, prefaced with a stanza delimiting it from church ideology and pronouncing it to be secular literature, allowing the copyists to

spread it. The idea of using Rustaveli's poem towards demonstrating the high intellectual image of the Georgians must have been conceived for the first time in this period, repeated many times in the country's centuries-old, hard history, up to recent decades. The question will naturally be asked whether this aggrandized ruling circle of ethnical Georgians in Persia, namely Allahverdi Khan and his family, was inspired with such national and cultural interests to shoulder this mission of Georgia's public interest. I believe this question should be answered in the affirmative. In the first place, the fact of Allahverdi Khan's descent from the family of Undiladze is firmly established in Georgian historical memory. This is attested not only by a direct indication made by Teimuraz I and Archil II, but by reports as well preserved in foreign sources on historical developments of the Kartli of the first half of the 17th century. According to the evidence of Fazli Khûzânî, 17th-century Persian chronicler, the rebellious Georgians captured the daughter of Imam-Quli Khan and his son-in-law Anduqapar Amilakhvari in 1626. Shah Abbas sent a large army to Georgia to rescue them. The scared rebels fled, sending beforehand the captured Anduqapar and his wife, the daughter of Imam-Quli Khan, to Allahverdi Khan's family in Sabaratiano [36, p.37].

More importantly, Allahverdi Khan strictly upheld his Georgian roots in his family. His wife was a Georgian. His two sons, the grand beglarbeks Imam-Quli Khan and Daud Khan, served the Georgian cause, because of which Shah Abbas' successor Shah Sefi had both of them murdered. Initially Daud Khan secretly sided with the rebellion of Giorgi Saakadze, and later, jointly with Teimuraz I, revolted against Shah Sefi.

Allahverdi Khan had his son Daud Khan marry Teimuraz I's sister Elene. It is confirmed by historical sources that the four daughters of Imam-Quli Khan were married to Georgians: one to Daud-Beg-Gurji, the other to Ali-Quli-Beg (brother of Rostom Saakadze), the third to Nouruz Tulashvili, and the fourth to Anduqapar Amilakhvari [30, p.68; 36, p. 69]. According to a report found in volume 3 of the work *Afdal al-Tawarikh* (17th-century)

daughters of Imam-Quli Khan (he had twenty-two daughters) at the will and mediation of Shah Abbas, were married to Islamized princes and gentry of Georgian extraction [36a, p. 46]. European sources intimate also that the Georgian society of the seventeenth century pinned great hopes on the house of the Undiladzes. The Italian missionary Don Pietro Avitabile, who resided in Georgia at the time, records the following fact: a message was sent from Georgia to Shah Sefi of Iran to the effect that if he wanted to take possession of Georgia, he must do away with Imam Quli Khan, for the Georgians' eyes are reveted on him [12a, p. 47].

Naturally enough, in the available historical sources on Persia there is no evidence on the literary tastes of Allahverdi Khan's large family, in particular interest in Georgian literature, yet several facts should be mentioned: according to a tradition, recorded in Georgian scholarly literature, in the Chehel-Sotoun palace, painted with Allahverdi Khan's money, Georgian inscriptions were also made [30, p.65]. The fact may be mentioned here that while Yuri Marr travelled in Iran in 1925-26, in the Palace of Ali-Kapu in Isfahan, which was, according to tradition, the residence of the wives of Shah Abbas I, he saw frescoes that had appeared upon the removal of a later plastering. One of them depicted a man's figure with an open book in his hands; formless letters were visible in the open pages, among which two Georgian letters ა (a) and დ (d) recurred [37, p. 570].

A letter of 1623, written by the prefect of the missionaries of the order of Carmelites, sent by the Pope to the Persian city of Shiraz, says that Imam-Quli Khan had requested to order from Rome the texts of the works of Plato and Aristotle in Greek and Latin, an Arabic-Latin dictionary and the Bible translated into Arabic [12, p. 279]. On the basis of Persian historical sources, recent scholarly literature notes that Allahverdi Khan supported not only the implementation of architectural projects but the compilation of historical chronicles and religious texts. Furthermore, he himself wrote poetry [27a, p.121]. Persian sources refer to Allahverdi Khan and Imam-Quli Khan as patrons of illuminated manuscripts as well

[27a, p. 137].

Finally, on the attitude of Allahverdi Khan and his family to Shah Abbas' bloody campaigns in Georgia. According to Georgian historians, Allahverdi Khan and representatives of his family, although they were major commanders of Persia, never took part personally in the campaigns of the Shah in Georgia [30, p. 69]. In October 1612 a peace treaty was concluded between Iran and Turkey and the Shah began preparations for a campaign against Georgia and for the final subjugation of the Georgian region. He must have taken Allahverdi Khan into confidence regarding his plans, for Allahverdi Khan was the Shah's foremost adviser, commander-in-chief of Iran's army and with family ties with the Bagrationi royal house [39, p.102]. Allahverdi Khan was well aware of the outcome of the talks on this matter with the terrible Shah, who had been reared in his hands and with knowledge of all political intrigues. According to one story that spread in Persia in connection with the death of Allahverdi Khan, a few days prior to his death, Allahverdi Khan asked the person charged with the building of his tomb as to what was the state of construction of his eternal resting-place. The noble Khan was told that the work had been completed and that the tomb awaited his arrival. The Khan's entourage rebuked the builder for such an ill-considered answer, while Allahverdi Khan upheld the reply, saying that the time of this departure had already come. Apparently, the Shah too was well aware of how the discussion with Allahverdi Khan would end. The chronicler of Shah Abbas Eskander Monshi related the following legend: the Shah returned to Ispahan from a long journey. Allahverdi Khan returned from his province of Fars to meet the Shah (he must have been summoned). On spotting him, the Shah remarked to his fellow-travellers that Allahverdi Khan had a look of the other world. The chronicler adds: as the Shah had prophesied, a few days later the emir of emirs of Fars suddenly fell ill and died. The Shah knew also how the accidental death of the noble khan should be announced. He held a gorgeous funeral for his faithful beglarbeg; in the presence of Iran's high officials he buried Allahverdi Khan at the expense of the royal court. On the following day he visited

Allahverdi's son Imam-Quli Khan, conferring on the latter all the offices and wealth of the deceased father, and in several months, in October 1613, he left for a campaign in Georgia. Persian sources intimate that secret rumours were afloat among the population that the Shah had a hand in Allahverdi Khan's death. The secret stories of Persian sources were disclosed in European books. In 1635 Claude Malingre's book came out in Paris (S. Lazare Publisher) [19]. In connection with this affair the book says: "The Shah was highly insensed. The Khan of Shiraz, Allahverdi (Aloavardi) by name and the guardian of the Shah's harem and endowed with high authority, Qorchi (Kurchi) Bashi attempted to persuade the Shah to change his decision of personally marching against the Georgians. Because of this they failed to escape the Shah's anger: the Shah ordered to have Allahverdi Khan poisoned (he was actually poisoned). Before his death, in despair he bit his wife's hands. And Qorchi Bashi was caned on the Shah's order" [40, p. 64].

Thus, of the probable ways of the story of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* becoming known to the early-17th-century English intellectual circles, the relations of ethnical Georgians promoted to high offices at the Safavid royal court in Iran with European diplomats and with ambassadors sent to Europe from Iran seem to me most convincing. Immediately prior to the appearance of the story of MPS, the relations of Allahverdi Khan Undiladze, the well-known beylerbey and the closest confidant of the Shah with the English embassy, whose leader Antony Sherley travelled to Europe at the end of the 16th century as an envoy of Shah Abbas; Allahverdi Khan's interest in the political life of Kartli, his relations with the Georgian court, his and his family's literary interests promise new lines of research into this topic.

The fact is that Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin* as a literary source entered early-seventeenth-century English literature, giving rise to dramatic works highly popular at the time. This is one more newly-discovered example of the cultural bridge existing between East and West in the Middle Ages.

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