

**A Textbook on the History of Georgian
Literature in Armenian**

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Abstract: The Armenian scholar, Professor Hrachik Bairamyan has for the first time compiled a textbook of Georgian literature of the 5th-19th centuries in Armenian. The book was published by Yerevan State University in 2007.

The creation of a textbook, as noted by the author, was due to the demand of the times. The Armenian youth evinces considerable interest in the literature and culture of neighbouring Georgia. Hitherto there had not existed either an original or translated textbook. Hrachik Bairamyan's book aims at filling this great gap. The author compactly acquaints us with the basic stages of development of Georgian literature, the life and works of all significant writers of the 5th-19th centuries. He has deemed it necessary to devote separate chapters to the major classics: Rustaveli, Ilia, Akaki, Vazha, dealing with the history of their translation into the Armenian language, their perception and evaluation by the Armenians, which should be considered a laudable novelty of the book. This book, written with good knowledge of the subject and love, will help Armenian youth to form an idea of the rich literature of the Georgian people, will predispose them with trust for the latter, will raise the Armenian interest in Georgian culture and serve as an impetus for an in-depth study of Georgian-Armenian literary and cultural relations.

Key words: Bairamyan, Georgian literature, Georgian-Armenian relations

The Yerevan State University Press printed in 2007 Professor Hrachik Bairamyan's Georgian Literature, 5th-19th centuries – a textbook for students at the Humanitarian faculties.

Prof. H. Bairamyan completed his postgraduate course at Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University, specializing in the history of new Georgian literature. In 1975 he successfully defended his thesis on "Georgian Literature in Armenian Criticism (1846-1916)". Returning to Yerevan, Bairamyan linked his scholarly activity to the study and popularization of Georgian literature in Armenia – an in-depth study of Georgian-Armenian literary contacts. His interesting work was soon followed by desirable results. He is now an author of several books on questions of Georgian literature, compiler of an anthology of Georgian poetry; at the same time he is engaged in extensive translation work, familiarizing the Armenian reader with the best works of Georgian prose writers.

Since 1981 Mr. H. Bairamyan has headed the team of Georgian-Armenian philology at the basic research laboratory of Armenian Studies of Yerevan University. In 2007, on the basis of extensive and fruitful work, a Centre of Kartvelology was set up at Yerevan State University on Bairamyan's initiative. In the same year, Professor Bairamyan compiled a textbook of Georgian literature – the first of its kind in Armenia – for students of Humanitarian faculties of higher educational institutions.

True, the author modestly calls the textbook "Georgian Literature", in fact the book of 320 pages is a history of 5th-19th century Georgian literature.

As the author states in the Preface, the creation and publication of a textbook on Georgian literature in Armenian is a demand of the times. To the present day neither a translated nor original textbook was available in Armenian. The purpose of Bairamyan's book is to fill this lacuna. The literary processes and authors are presented in the book according to the chronological principle, with indication of the main stages of development.

Praiseworthy is the author's decision to devote separate chapters to the greatest representatives of Georgian literature: Shota

Rustaveli, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha-Pshavela, and others, with the history of the translation of their works into Armenian, the appreciation of their work by Armenian authors. Introduction of material of this kind enhances the interest in the book - naturally, not only of the Armenian reader. In the Preface to the book the author finds it necessary – before setting to a discussion of the questions of the history of literature – to provide the student with information on the Georgian people and the Georgian language. This is done briefly, with expertise and laudable care, with special indication of the wealth of the Georgian language. Neither does the author overlook the fact that the link of Old Georgian, the dialects and literary language is so organic that one with knowledge of Georgian “reads and understands works of the 5th-18th centuries without any special training”.

The author touches upon the Georgian writing, pointing out that the Georgian alphabet is one of the 14 alphabets of the world, used at present in public and literary activity. He deals with the question of the origin of the Georgian alphabet with great caution. It should be said to his credit that he never loses the sense of objectivity, consistently presenting the evidence of Leonti Mroveli and the views of Acad. I. Javakhishvili and Acad. K. Kekelidze. He naturally refers to the evidence of Armenian sources regarding the Armenian provenance of the Georgian alphabet, pointing out that “Georgian researchers consider the reports of Armenian sources about the alphabet a legend or a later addition”.

The major role of the Christian religion in the life of Georgia is appropriately indicated in the textbook. “The Christian world view determined the nature and content of Georgian culture”, the author notes. “Following the creation of its own alphabet and script, the literary expressiveness of the Georgian language grew, the Georgian language took on the holy mission of a native language, becoming the language of the Church, state and culture, a shield and sword in the defence of the existence of the Georgian people. It played a major part in the cultural, political and historical development of the

country. The developmental stages of the Georgian language and the oldest specimens of the Georgian script are indicated.

Next the author dwells on questions of education in old Georgia: Gelati and Iqalto Academies are named and the major scholarly and cultural work carried on at these centres of enlightenment is highlighted. According to the author's noteworthy conclusion, "The philosophical, historical and literary works written and translated at those research centres evidence that their authors had received admirable education, knew many languages, and had close contacts with major thinkers of various countries".

After reviewing Georgian folklore, the author passes directly on to Georgian literature. First he deals with 5th-10th c. ecclesiastical literature. The author's caution and refined approach are praiseworthy. He defines the "Passion of Shushanik" not as the first monument of old Georgian literature but the oldest work of the period of Persian domination. The author evinces caution in defining the originality of the monument. He bears in mind the existence of this work in Armenian literature as well, and that by local tradition it is not considered to have been translated from the Georgian. He writes "the monument exists in Armenian literature as well and that to date the Armenian and Georgian specialists have not been able to arrive at a common conclusion on this matter".

Here we want to point to a deplorable inaccuracy: according to the book, the Georgian text of the "Passion of Shushanik" has come down to us in an 18th century MS. Actually, as is universally known, the text of the "Passion" is extant in an 11th century MS. This inaccuracy should be corrected in the next edition. It is indicated in the book that Shushanik has been canonized by the Georgian and Armenian Churches, with her feast day set.

Of the works of the period of Persian domination, "The Passion of St. Eustace of Mtskheta", "The Martyrdom of Abiḡos Nekresi" and "The Martyrdom of Razhden the Protomartyr" are discussed in brief.

In 643-45 the Persian rule was replaced with the Arab conquests, and *marzpan* by *emir*. Of the period of Arab dominance

the situation is specially discussed in the "Martyrdom of Abo Tbileli". The composition of the work is discussed and its content presented. Then come the martyrdoms of David and Konstantine, King Archil, and Mikel Gobron. According to the author's justified conclusion, the evidence found in the work on the political, church and cultural life of Kartli acquires not only purely political but historical cognitive value as well.

The overview of the martyrdoms is followed by a brief statement to the effect that from the 10th century works of the "Life" genre emerge, namely "The Life of St. Nino", the Lives of Serapion Zarzmeli, Grigol Khandzteli, Ioane and Ekvtime (Euthymius), Giorgi the Hagiorite. Here too it should be said by way of a remark that the "Life of St. Nino" was written much earlier than the 10th century. This inaccuracy too should be reflected in the next edition of the textbook.

More space is devoted in the book to the description of the literature of the 11th-13th centuries. It is noted that this period of Georgian literature is considered to be of the "golden age". The author states that five works of this period have come down to us: "Amiranderejaniani", "Visramiani", "Tamariani", "Abdulmesiani", and "The Man in the Panther Skin". "Tamariani" and "Abdulmesiani" are considered to be remarkable specimens of laudatory poetry.

A large part (pp. 35-60) of the book is devoted to the discussion of Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin". In the author's words "Shota Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin" was and remains the highest expression of the spiritual development of the Georgian people. It also constitutes a value of world literature".

The author of the textbook first touches on the biographical evidence on the great poet, and its paucity; an attempt is made to account for the causes of why this evidence has not come down to us. In this respect pushing the role of the Church and reactionary churchmen to the fore and the statement to the effect that "Medieval dim-witted ecclesiastics pronounced the poet an heretic, struck his name from sources in order to obliterate it, and burnt the MSS of the poem or threw them into the Mtkvari", are clearly exaggerated.

It is noted in the book that the name Shota appeared in Georgian reality from the 18th century, which does not correspond to the facts. To say nothing of the name Shota attested on a fresco of the Monastery of the Cross (13th century), in literature Teimuraz I mentions the author of the poem for the first time as Shota Rustaveli (Teimuraz lived in the first half of the 17th century).

In Bairamyan's words, "Although the poet's biography is obscure, his greatness as a poet is obvious". The author of the textbook develops a fully justified view in connection with the provenance of the plot of the poem. He too defines the strophe of the Prologue of the poem "This Persian story ..." in its literary sense. In his view, "The Man in the Panther Skin" is indeed "a literary echo of 12th-century Georgian reality. It is clear that the events of the poem revolve round the kingdom of Giorgi III. Hence, although the characters of the poem are not Georgians, in the unanimous opinion of Georgian scholars, "Georgian hearts throb in their chests".

The author of the textbook considers the plot of the poem in detail, giving a description of the characters. In his conclusion, "By its artistic perfection and content common to all mankind the poem is of great value". By preaching high moral principles the poem challenges the works created on a similar theme both in the East and West.

In Georgian reality "The Man in the Panther Skin" remains an insurmountable height. Many have attempted its continuation but they stayed in the role of imitators. For centuries "The Man in the Panther Skin" served as a measure of morality; as a holy relic, it formed part of a bride's trousseau."

It should be noted with satisfaction that this part of the textbook on "The Man in the Panther Skin" is written with high enthusiasm and inspiration. It will doubtless help the Armenian youth form an idea of the great Georgian poet.

That part of the book is interesting in which Mr. Bairamyan deals with the question of the entry of "The Man in the Panther Skin" into Armenian reality. In his view, a definite contribution to the protection and spread of "The Man in the Panther Skin" was

made by Armenian copyists. In particular, he mentions MS 757 of the Georgian Republican Centre of Manuscripts, copied in 1671 by Aghmuran Baghdasar's son Gaspar. However, we cannot share the author's view of the cited MS being the oldest one.

The author gives a brief account of the history of the translation of Rustaveli's poem into Armenian, and presents a list of the Armenian translations.

The text contains an appreciation of the contribution of Armenian artists and sculptors to the creation of pictures and portraits on the motifs of "The Man in the Panther Skin".

Armenian literary critics have made some contribution to Rustaveli Studies.

The words of the great Armenian poet Avetik Isaakyan are very impressive: "Shota Rustaveli is one of those marvellous geniuses of the world in whose work mankind's best wishes, dreams and ideals are brought together and crystallized and in which mankind attains its perfection".

In the words of Mr. Bairamyan, "The genius of Rustaveli has become the source of inspiration for many Armenian poets."

The author concludes this chapter by stating that "In Armenian reality Rustavelology has traditions and gains, on the basis of which new translations are made, and new articles and essays are being written."

The gravest period in the life of the Georgian people and in general, South Caucasia, began from the mid-13th century. From this period practically to the close of the 16th century the development of literature, culture and scholarship came to a standstill. At any rate, no important literary monument has survived.

The last segment of old Georgian literature covers the 17th-18th centuries. This is the so-called "period of revival". Some political, economic and cultural upsurge is noticeable. Translation activity begins to renew in Georgia. The "Shah-nameh", "Iosebzikhaniani", "Leilmaj'nuniani", "Kilila and Damana", a collection of fables famed in the East, and so on, are translated.

In this section of the book the author discusses separately the life and activity of Teimuraz I, Archil, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, Vakhtang VI, David Guramishvili, Besiki, and others, and their literary legacy. Sulkhan-Saba's immeasurable role in the development of Georgian prose is highlighted. The author specially draws the attention of students to the considerable service done from the standpoint of development of Georgian poetry by David Guramishvili, Archil, Vakhtang VI, yet the greatest poet after Rustaveli in old Georgia is David Guramishvili, the latter giving rise to a qualitatively new stage on the road of development of Georgian poetry.

For fully understandable reasons, the author deals separately with Sayatnova's poetry – the “Sazandar of the King of Georgia”. Sayatnova's role in the development of urban *ashugh* poetry is stressed.

More than two-thirds of the textbook (pp.100-320) is devoted to a discussion of 19th-century Georgian literature.

First the author gives an overview of the political situation and culture in the 1820s-30s. The literary trends in Georgian reality are discussed relatively broader; a number of peculiarities of Georgian romanticism are brought to light, the patriotic spirit of Georgian romanticism, and generally its national content, are highlighted.

Of the representatives of Georgian romanticism attention is focused on three principal poets: Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani and Nikoloz Baratashvili. Their life and poetry are passed under review, and their place in the development of Georgian poetry is indicated. The author discusses the philosophical character of Baratashvili's poetry, and its content common to all mankind. The high appreciation given to Baratashvili's poetry by the great Armenian poet Avetik Isaakyan is common knowledge. He added that his Abul-al-Maari follows the track of Baratashvili's “Merani”. Bairamyan's essay on Baratashvili is written in the same spirit.

Next to the romanticists, the author discusses Georgian literature of the 1840s-50s. He sheds light on the political-cultural

atmosphere that determined the gradual transition from romanticism to realism. Further discussion concerns the works of G. Eristavi, B. Antonov (an ethnically Armenian Georgian playwright), D. Chonkadze and L. Ardaziani.

Considerable space is devoted to the discussion of the life, work and activity of Ilia Chavchavadze, the most powerful figure not only of the 1860s-70s but of the entire 19th century, and spiritual leader of the Georgians (pp. 187-217).

In the words of the author of the textbook, "Most important is the historical mission of Ilia Chavchavadze, leader of the Georgian people and standard-bearer of the national-liberation movement."

In discussing Ilia's biography, the author of the book lays stress on the ethnic origin of Ilia's mother; he notes that Ilia's mother was an Armenian, daughter of an *aznauri* (gentry). We should note that Ilia's mother Magdana (Mariam) was the daughter of Kristopore Beburishvili. The Beburishvili's family name derived from the Vachnadzes. Georgian history is not aware of Beburishvili (Vachnadzes) turning Armenian. Owing to the vicissitudes of our history, in the 19th century the policy of tsarist Russia restricted Georgians in all ways, as representatives of a refractory nation. Georgians were deprived of the right of coming to Tbilisi, establishing themselves here and gaining work. Some Georgians were impelled to embrace the Armenian confession of the Gregorian church, and thus settle in Tbilisi, as the authorities supported strengthening the Armenian element in Tbilisi. It is apparently in this way that the ancestors of Ilia's mother found themselves in Tbilisi. Grigol and Magdana held their wedding in a Georgian church; Magdana adopted Orthodoxy under the name of Mariam.

Despite his enormous contribution to almost all spheres of spiritual life, "Ilia Chavchavadze is primarily a writer", the author notes; he created stories, poems, dramas, verses "imprinted with great originality". From the beginning Ilia set himself the task of fighting against national oppression and injustice, never deviating from the path chosen, the author concludes.

The essay about Ilia is wound up by a noteworthy part dealing with the history of the printing of Ilia's works in Armenian, how his literary activity and service were received and appreciated by Armenian writers, critics and specialists in literature.

The author highlights Ilia's contribution to the protection of Armenian rights and their dignity. The author is not oblivious of and attaches special significance to Ilia's words: "We are well aware that in the past Georgia began to weaken from the fatal day when Armenia, our southern rampart, fell... The independent existence of Armenia is a pledge of a similar existence of Georgia".

The author of the textbook could naturally not bypass Ilia's brilliant work, "Armenian Savants and Outcrying Stones", which appears to be still perceived painfully even by such an open-minded author as Mr. Bairamyan, and even he fails to view that work in an objective light.

Since Ilia Chavchavadze's death to the present day the writer's works, collected works, articles on his work, in which "the civic and human image of the ideological leader and great national writer have found reflection in the best light", have been published systematically in Armenia.

The next chapter of the book is devoted to the description of the life, activity and works of Akaki Tsereteli. After Rustaveli, Tsereteli is the greatest representative of Georgian poetry, the author says. The power of Akaki's poetry lies in its connection with folk poetry, he adds. The poet grew in the midst of the people and returned to the people with his powerful poetry, the author of the book notes correctly. Thanks to his talent and spiritual wealth, Akaki broadened the spheres of national lyrics more than his preceding poets or representatives of the subsequent generation.

The author presents compactly the most important facts of Tsereteli's life and activities, demonstrating his role in establishing the Georgian literary language and in the development of Georgian journalism, publicism, the Georgian theatre and art in general.

Akaki's poetry is closest to the spirit of his people, hence, writes the author, his entire poetry clearly expresses the dreams and

aspirations of the Georgian people. Akaki's works are distinguished for great depth, astonishing artlessness, simplicity and emotionality. He always inculcated in the people a clear, optimistic spirit.

A separate chapter in the book is assigned to the friendship of Akaki Tsereteli and Gabriel Sundukyants, their mutual cooperation and respect. The author borrows the words of Ioseb Grishashvili to the effect that the friendship of Akaki and Gabriel should be assessed as "a bridge connecting the two peoples".

An appropriate space is devoted in the book to the life and activities of Giorgi Tsereteli, a third representative of the generation of the "sixties". His works are discussed according to content.

This is followed by a characterization of the literature of the 80s. First Aleksandre Qazbegi's life is presented with a brief review of his works.

The life and legacy of Vazha-Pshavela are discussed by the author of the textbook. In his words, Vazha Pshavela was a new and interesting phenomenon in Georgian literature. It seems hard to imagine that Georgian society would be astonished by the emergence of one more new poet who came into the literary arena when the heart and mind of the whole nation were captured by such geniuses as Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, when Shota Rustaveli was the cult of all Georgia, and when nearly all Georgians knew by heart the impressive poems of David Guramishvili, A. Chavchavadze and N. Baratashvili.

Vazha Pshavela enriched Georgian poetry with new motifs. He did much to expand the frames of his native poetry, to raise its artistic level; he showed how inexhaustible the potentialities of the Georgian language are.

After conveying the personal life of Vazha, and describing his great poetic legacy, the author devotes a special chapter to a brief history of the publication of Vazha's works in the Armenian press; he emphasises the high appreciation given to Vazha's works by the Armenian society; Hrachik Bairamyan asserts that "After the Georgian reader, the Armenian society showed most interest in the

life and legacy of the great poet; this society appropriately appreciated Vazha's works and assisted in their popularization."

The textbook ends with a discussion and review of the life and activities and works of Egnate Ninoshvili, Vasil Barnovi and David Kldiashvili.

Mr. Bairamyan does justice to all writers, unstintingly adorning them with epithets. This book disposes the Armenian youth with trust in and liking for the neighbouring people and its rich literature. It acquaints the youth with Georgian literature; it will kindle interest in many for an in-depth study of Georgian culture and Georgian-Armenian literary contacts, so that in the future they might stand by the trail-blazing scholar.

The author of the book expresses his hope that in the future a better textbook will be written. This will naturally be the case – the author himself will take care for its expansion in further editions.

The main thing now is that such a book has been created in fraternal Armenia, being a response to the demand of the times; the first book should in no doubt be followed by a second one in which the great Georgian literature of the twentieth century will unfold in full splendour to the Armenian reader. In the future Mr. Bairamyan and his pupils will see to it that the textbooks by Georgian researchers or a separate work of an individual notable writer be translated into Armenian, so that the Armenian reader become acquainted with the level of research in Georgia. Probably it will be worth thinking of such work.

Mr. Hrachik Bairamyan, who is full of creative energy, will, it is hoped, plan many future tasks.

Thus, very interesting prospects may lie ahead at the Kartvelological Centre of Yerevan State University.