

Shota Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin"
in German Schools¹

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Abstract: German and Georgian Kartvelologists have hitherto not been aware of the fact that the Georgian author Rustaveli and his poem "The Man in the Panther Skin" entered a German school textbook. There is no reference to this book in the last German Bibliography (Georgia -the German-language world, 2008), though the said textbook was issued in 1985 and was used in schools of the German Democratic Republic.

At the time, Rustaveli was almost unknown in the German Federal Republic. Following the unification of Germany Rustaveli was not entered in any textbook.

Key words: Rustaveli, Germany, school textbook, song of the heroes.

The present article deals not with the German language or German-language schools in Georgia, as some may think, but schools in Germany. This is a sensation as such. To the present day no one would have thought Georgian writers would find their way into German school textbooks or would have ever entered the curriculum of German schools. This school book has not been mentioned in a recently issued bibliography either.

German children became acquainted with a Georgian writer for the first time in 1985 [1, pp.45-53]. This is Shota Rustaveli. But he was known in a school in East Germany. Rustaveli's work (*The Man*

¹ Paper revised by the author from the journal *Georgica* #32, 2009: Literarische Werke georgischer Schriftsteller an deutschen Schulen (von Rustaveli zu Margvelaschvili).

in the Panther Skin) was taught in the 7th form (wholly or partially). The old Spanish epic poem "The Song of Sid" was studied in parallel to *The Man in the Panther Skin*. Both poems sang of heroism. The German epic *Das Niebelungenlied* was also studied in schools. It was read, discussed and parallels were drawn with *The Man in the Panther Skin*.

Several major stories can be singled out in Rustaveli's work:

1. A mysterious stranger knight
2. The story of Tariel and the beautiful Nestan
3. Nestan's disappearance
4. Return

Extracts from *The Man in the Panther Skin* were entered in a school textbook; the following topics were studied: the story of Tariel's love and the disappearance of Nestan, confidence that good would triumph over evil, theme of friendship, unanimity of the characters, expansion of the theme of friendship as exemplified by the friendship of the characters of Georgia, India and Arabia.

Several translations of *The Man in the Panther Skin* were known at the time: by Arthur Leist (1889), Hugo Huppert (1955), Ruth Neukomm (1974), Mikheil Tsereteli (1975), Herman Buddensieg (1976). Schoolchildren were taught only Huppert's translation. This is not surprising, as schoolchildren were taught specially selected literature. Because of this only two books of Rustaveli were available for children to read:

1. Rusthaweli, Sch. Der Mann mit dem Tigerfell. Aus dem Georgischen übersetzt und für die deutsche Jugend nacherzählt v. F. Pecina, Reutlingen 1931. (In: Bunte Jugendbücher Heft 146)

2. Rusthaweli, Sch. Der Recke in Tigerfell. Erzählt von V. Ruika-Franz. Berlin 1976 (L. Ausgabe).

Only Ruika-Franz's translation was entered in the school textbook, with no mention of other (earlier) translators and their translations. Ruika-Franz's translation was appraised highly.

Besides the epic poem *The Man in the Panther Skin* the pupils were obliged to know its author, evidence on his identity, his floruit, what we know about his life, etc. The pupils found this

evidence in the Afterword of Ruika-Franz's book. The author sheds light on such ideas as justice, friendship and, in the first place, love, the latter being the main motive of the action and thought of the characters of the poem. Synthesis of oriental wisdom and European thought. We know nothing about the number of teachers that taught the poem, or how many pupils read Ruika-Franz's translation (more precisely, narration, 150 pages in all) fully or partially, or how many read Huppert's translation, what impression the poem made on the children and to what extent they used it in their life. Unfortunately, we have no evidence or assumptions on this. Conjecturally, Rustaveli was read and taught in German schools till 1995. After this date neither Rustaveli's name nor his poem are to be found in the list of world literature for, owing to the changes in the political situation in Germany, old books were replaced with new ones, in which Rustaveli and his poem were not entered.¹ From 2002, in place of Shota Rustaveli, in the 7th form textbook we find Givi Margvelaschvili's work *Der ungeworfene Handschul*. This work survives to the present day both in textbook and in the people's memory.

Thus, in German school textbooks only two Georgian authors were entered: Shota Rustaveli and Givi Margvelaschvili.

References:

1. Lesebuch der Klasse 7, (Auswahl: Wilfried Bütow, Waldemar Freitag, Renate Gerecke), Berlin, 1985.
2. "Deutsch plus 7/Gymnasien", Hsg. Von C. Gansel/ F. Jürgens/ K. Rise, 2002.

¹ It is hard to assert this categorically, for there are countless books in Germany, and evidence on Rustaveli and his poem may be preserved in some. It is very difficult to locate and study all books.