“SOCIÉTÉ ASIATIQUE” IN PARIS AND “THE KNIGHT IN THE PANTHER’S SKIN” OF SHOTA RUSTAVELI

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In 1821, in Paris, a “Société Asiatique” was established dedicated to the study of Asia. Marie Brosset as an active member of the society was interested in Kartvelology. His relations with Teimuraz Bagrationi in Petersburg are confirmed since 1830. Teimuraz Bagrationi was a son of the last King of Georgia Giorgi XIII who in 1810 moved to Petersburg. In this period of time Teimuraz began his literary and scientific activity. Since 1830 Teimuraz Bagrationi became an employee of “Société Asiatique”, and since 1831 he became a real member of this society. M. Brosset considers T. Bagrationi to be his mentor. Teimuraz consulted the French scholar who worked on issues of Kartvelology. In “Société Asiatique”, Teimuraz himself was engaged in scientific work. Upon recommendation of M. Brosset, T. Bagrationi was named an “honorable member” of Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1837. He was among first members of “Danish Royal Antiquarian Society”.

On October 23 1846 Teimuraz Bagrationi died of dropsy in Saint Petersburg and was buried there at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra.

In the period of his activities in “Société Asiatique”, in particular from 1830 till 1846, T. Bagrationi wrote more than 40 scientific letters to M. Brosset on Georgian language and literature and history.

It is worth noting that M. Brosset was the first to translate “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”. The translation of the prologue of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” by M. Brosset was published in “Journal Asiatique”, the organ of “Société Asiatique”. It was a prosaic translation of the fragments from the poem. Despite the fact that the translation did not attract the Europeans’ attention, Brosset translated the whole poem into French and worked on it until the end of his life. After M. Brosset, I. Meunargia translated “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”. With his help Austrian scholar Zunter got acquainted with the poem. His letters about the poem
were the reason why “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” became a subject of interest and research abroad.

In 1863 “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” was published in Warsaw translated into Polish by Kazimier Lapchinsky, and in 1889 the poem was published in Leipzig translated as a blank verse by Arthur Leist.

First poetic translation of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” into English language was fulfilled by Marjory Wardrop and with Oliver Wardrop’s persistent effort it was published after her death in 1912. “Oliver attached a preface to the translation, translation of explained strophes by Marie Brosset, bibliographic information about “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, index of names, persons and geographic places. O. Wardrop thinks that it is useful for the whole mankind to know Rustaveli’s poem for it fills people with ideas of heroism, friendship, devotion and pure love. In his preface O. Wardrop mentions the issue of originality of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”. “There has not been found any similar tracks of this story and if it were found the name of the author and his fame wouldn’t lose its ... as Shakespeare didn’t lose it because of Luigi Da Porto’s story”\(^1\).

With this O. Wardrop opposes himself N. Mari’s some provisions and at the same time emphasizes the universal significance of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” and reviews it among the world masterpieces.

T. Bagrationi’s tenth letter to Marie Brosset is dated 1833 in which “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” is mentioned published by King Vakhtang in 1712, in particular, the end of the epilogue, the bibliographic strophe. Here is the strophe as given in the letter:

1. “Amiran son of Darejan, was praised by Mose Khoneli,
2. Shavteli, whose songs are renowned, sang of Abdul-Mesia,
3. And with his untiring tongue, Tmogveli exalted Dilarget
4. But I, Rustaveli, praise Tariel for whom I shed undrying tears”.

1. “\(\text{ძარჯანი} \text{მოსე} \text{ხონელი},\)
2. \(\text{აბდულ-მესია} \text{შავთელი},\)
3. \(\text{დილარეტ} \text{ომგოველი},\)
4. \(\text{ტარიელ} \text{რუსტაველი},\)

“There is no mistake in this poem”, Teimuraz writes to M. Brosset. It seems the mentioned strophe is significant for Georgian as well as for French scientists.

\(^1\) L. Taktakishvili-Urashadze, ქართული ლიტერატურა, (Marjory Wardrop), Tbilisi, 1965, pp. 94-95.
In his letter T. Bagrationi explains each verse when mentioning the authors’ names and where they came from. We suggest you an abstract taking into consideration the main accents.

“1. In the first strophe – he mentions Amiran, the son of Darejan and Moses of Khoni wrote a tale about him. It is written in old Georgian language in prose, yes, it is written beautifully. In this book called “Darejaniani” are fourteen tales and each is called song.

Amiran was from Baghdad, a sardar from there.

Moses of Khoni was a contemporary of Shota Rustaveli. He was a secretary and a noble man of the Queen Tamar, the glorious and the unforgettable, the daughter of George III, the Autocrat of the whole Iberia, he was a secretary and a noble man.

Khoni is in the lower part of Georgia, in Imereti.

2. In the second verse – Shavteli is mentioned, his name in worldly life was Abdul-Mesia, he was also a secretary and a nobleman of the Queen Tamar. Abdul-Mesia Shavteli left his worldly life, became a monk and he was called Ioane (John). In the lower part of Georgia, in Imereti, he entered Gelati Monastery, there he settled down with praying and fasting and worked and there he deceased.

Shavteli wrote in verse an amazing story about Abdum-Mesia and the story-tellers would say that such praised lyrics have never been written in Georgian language... They say: Shavteli’s verses are better that Rustavelis’ and in Queen Tamar’s times Shavteli’s verses were more appreciated. For what Rustaveli agrees to this fact in his verses (Shavteli, whose songs are renowned, sang of Abdul-Mesia - in this verse you have sent there is written “he said” and it is a mistake, it should be written “praised” because they liked it).

Our poor Georgians have lost the marvelous verses of Shavteli about Abdul-Mesia. My grandfather, King Erekle, made others look for it a lot, he longed for these verses, but nobody could find them. Other verses of Shavteli with praise of Queen Tamar and others are there, yes, the selected ones.

And this place was Meskheti, Shavsheti.

Meskhia or Meskheti took from Georgia by force, since then two hundred years passed. Many outstanding and precious churches, monasteries and holy places were there.

3. In the third verse he mentions (And with his untiring tongue, Tmogveli exalted Dilarget) Sargis, was also a secretary of Queen Tamar, a very noble man and a contemporary of Rustaveli and Shavteli. He wrote a tale
with the title “Dilariani”. They say it is written in prose, with wonderful words, with Asiatic name: it is named “Dilariani” for it tells Dilar’s story, as if Dilar were a strong and giant and conqueror king of many kingdoms, he had many adventures and took part in many battle, and did a lot of good. This book is lost as well; it is nowhere to be found.

Sargis of Tmogvi left one book named “Visramiani”, it is written in prose as well, with wonderful words, with Asiatic name. Yes, it is a good poem. Rustaveli is right when he says: “his untiring tongue”. He spoke of love so much that he is true for he did not get tired. From where he was, his place Tmogvi, in Samtskhe-Saatabago that is in the land of Meskheti, it was an old city Tmogvi and now it is a big settlement. There is no place named Dilarget in Georgia.

Dilar is the name of the king in the tale that Sargos of Tmogvi wrote. He mentions in his verse: “Dilar Get, Sargis Tmogveli”, this name in dative case “Get” is the surname of Sargis of Tmogvi. His surname was son of Get and hereditary Sargi of Tmogvi, that family is in Saatabago and Imereti as well and they are named sons of Get. (This name was mentioned by Rustaveli so that the verse is not shortened).

4. In the fourth verse he says: But I, praise Tariel for whom I shed undrying tears, the general verb of these four verses is “was praised”.

Rustveli that is Rustaveli. There was a city Rustavi in Kakheti, in Outer-Kakheti, on the bank of the river Mtkvari. This city was called Garden-city in the ancient times, then it was named Rustavi and the third name is Nagebebi.

Rustveli was born at a hot place. His name was Shota (Shota is a Georgian name and they used this name in the old days during their idolatrous rituals and now as they are Christians. They did not forget this name. Shotta is a name of Armaz idol that was the foremost of Georgian Gods who was a creature of holiness; I found this name Shota in the French mythological dictionary of Parnoeli too. It is written that Shotta is a name of Armazi, Armaz that is Ormuzad Shotta).

Shota Rustaveli was Queen Tamar’s treasurer (that is he was a ministry of finances) and a very noble man and respected. They tell about Shota Rustaveli who was the foremost in writing verses, in any science and divine morality, military and civil activities. In his times he was the best and foremost and his face, eyes and body was very splendid and wonderful generally for the nation and with Georgian character, as he composed The Knight in the Panther’s Skin, no one of them is his friend.

Shota Rustaveli as he was perfect with his education and morals, his decease was also like this, he left this vain world and went away from
his country, to holy Jerusalem and there in Monastery of Holy Cross and that monastery belongs to Georgians, a huge and gorgeous monastery. Its foundation was made by King Mirian, the surname Khosrovian, in Constantine’s the Great of the Greeks and Rome Emperor’s time. As King Mirian was the first King who was christened, according to the decision of the first World Meeting Constantine the Great gave Georgia a lot for strengthening Christianity and also land in Jerusalem. And since the Georgian Kings made the Monastery of Holy Cross more beautiful and in Jerusalem and its vicinity built other monasteries and they belonged to Georgia. They donated lot of serves and land in Georgia, and our holy fathers were translators of Holy Writ, they were in Jerusalem, translated books and in this Monasteries all Georgian monks and priests were living. The Monastery of Holy Cross became a book repository and a large library in Georgian language was collected and today there are a lot of Georgian books in that monastery, the old and the selected and unspoiled ones.

Shota Rustaveli settled in this Monastery of Holy Cross, donated a lot and he passed away there and was buried there. His face there, in Jerusalem, in that Monastery of Holy Cross is painted on the wall and his face is still there. (Though I spoke a lot because of this simple question, but excuse me, your diligence forces me. I would like you to have scrupulous thoroughness in this investigation).

With respect and with bow M. son Teimuraz
[Till November 9, 1833]2.

It is worth noting that M. Brosset translated this letter into French and published it in France.

M. Brosset publishes two letters based on T. Bagrationi’s scientific ideas. In both letters the scientist reviews the mentioned bibliographical verses of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” that is also called pseudo-Rustaveli in scientific literature.

He publishes the first letter in 1834 with the title “literary notes about some Georgian authors” in the magazine “Nouveau Jurnal Asiaticque” №XIV. Brosset writes about Georgian classic works as well as works of Renaissance in the letter.

2 Teimuraz Bagrationi, წინალები ისნ. ო. მისამართშიპშეგზე შეიმჩნეან ექსტრო ჰპირობებით მონსავან წინაპროგრამა, მონაწილეობით და დარჩენილობით ხანგრძლი- ა. (Teimuraz Bagrationi’s letters to Acad. M. Brosset, S. Kubaneishvili prepared the text for publishing, attached the preface, notes and contents), Tbilisi, 1964, pp. 32-38.
“Rustveli or Rustaveli, the author of the poem “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, says in the last verse of his book: these verses, that by the way are weak from the viewpoint of poetry, give us an interesting information about Georgian literature for all the three authors are mentioned here with their works and places of birth: all three authors are unknown in Europe”. Thus the scientist emphasizes superiority of Rustaveli. One fact is more interesting, that in the same letter he characterizes Teimuraz Bagrationi as well. “The author of this letter applied himself to a good expert of Caucasian literature and countries, a very educated person, whose useful advice were always a guide to him. Prince Teimuraz, a member of “Société Asiatique” and its pride, provided materials that I will introduce to you. First we shall discuss the mentioned text that is carefully copied from the edition of the King Vakhtang, in which he made good notes and comments.

It’s worth mentioning that this verse has a number 1589 in this edition while in one of the manuscripts of the royal library it is presented with the number 19604.

In 1877 M. Brosset published another letter in the magazines: „Bulletin de l’ Academie imperiale de sciences“ № XXIV and „Melanges Asiatiques“ №8. In the letter he notices mentions: “I have kept the punctuation of the royal edition unchanged, according to the educated Prince Teimuraz’s interpretation and my ideas thoughts I will write and read this verse like this:

“Amiran, son of Darejan, was praised by Mose Khoneli. Shavteli, whose songs are renowned, sang of Abdul-Mesia. And with his untiring tongue, Tmogveli exalted Dilarget. But I, Rustaveli, praise Tariel for whom I shed undrying tears.”

„Amiran darejanis–Ze moses uqia xonelsa. Abdul-mesia, SavTelsa, leqsi mas uqes romelsa. Dilarget sargis Tmogvelsa, mas ena dauSromelsa. Da tariel misa rusTvelsa, misTvis creml SeuSrobelsa“.

Thus, Moses of Khoni (from Imereti) wrote a poem in prose – “Amirandarejaniani”; Shavteli (from Shavsheti) – nowadays the lost

3 M. Brosset, literaturuli Senisvna zogierTi qartveli avtoris Sesaxeb, rusTveli msofilo literaturaSi, (Literary note about some Georgian authors, Rustveli in the world literature), I, Tbilisi, 1976, p. 58.
4 M. Brosset, literaturuli Senisvna zogierTi qartveli avtoris Sesaxeb, rusTveli msofilo literaturaSi, (Literary note about some Georgian authors, Rustveli in the world literature), I, Tbilisi, 1976, p. 58.
poem – “Abdulmesia”; Get Sargis or just Sargis Tmogveli – a book (also lost) about Dilar or Dilarget; Rustveli – from Rustavi (near Akhaltsikhe) – a poem about Tariel, “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”.

I’m not quite sure that B.D. Chubinov is right when he says some comments on Rustaveli’s work: Mose of Khoni is the author of “Amirandarejaniani”, Abdul Mesia of Shavsheti – of “Tamariani”, Sagis of Tmogvi – of “Visramiani”.

These notes, excluding the second one, are right from the viewpoint of the authors’ names and the works but it has no direct connection to the verse that I have just discussed.

“The Knight in the Panther’s skin” is the story of a man whose name is skin of a tiger or a leopard. I have not cleared up yet if he word “tiger” is of Georgian, Persian, Arabian or other language origin.

Anyway, the main hero Tariel is dressed in skin of a tiger or a leopard. I will not repeat what I said about the contents of the poem in “Nouveau Jurnal Asiaticque”. As for the author, Shota Rustaveli, he was a contemporary of the Queen Tamar and her treasurer (e.i. ministry of finance). As they say, he died in Jerusalem in 1215 where he was a monk.

Among Georgian works this poem is the most well-known for its composition and style and it is a true work of art, this explains why this poem was published so many times”5. In his letter M. Brosset reviews the publications of “The Knight in the Panther’s skin” of his time.

Generally, a tiger’s skin, Tariel is dressed in, is a symbol of lost Nestan as well as Tariel’s thoughts and tribulation. Tariel does not wish to be in the skin of a tiger and the whole poem is dedicated to this problem.

It is worth noting that some issues Bagrationi and M. Brosset touched are thoroughly examined and cleared up in the modern literary criticism.

“Teimuraz Bagrationi and the academician Marie Brosset started scientific study of Georgian literature. M. Brosset started learning Georgian and publishing Georgian works in France, in 1828. M. Brosset described Teimuraz Bagrationi with rare precision and sincerity: “I cannot help saying the Prince Teimuraz’s name without astonishment, who is a man of morals with educated mind and science... Whose goal is to immortalize the name of his nation with his work, and I recognize myself to be his humble disciple”6.

5 M. Brosset, ქართული რომანტიკული ლიტერატურა, რუსტველი მსოფლიო ლიტერატურაში, (Georgian Romantic Literature, Rustveli in world literature), I, Tbilisi, 1976, p. 65.
When discussing about works and their authors mentioned in the bibliographical verse, Georgian as well as foreign scientists often rely and mention this verse from “The Knight in the Panther’s skin” and explanations of Teimuraz Bagrationi and M. Brosset. Academician M. Brosset’s merits are immense in study of “The Knight in the Panther’s skin” and popularization of Georgian culture. He is the first foreign Rustvelologist who through “Société Asiatique” introduced wisdom and world view of the poem to Europe.

“The Knight in the Panther’s skin” played a great role in consciousness of Georgians in the process of development of Renaissance ideals that certainly promoted integration of Georgian culture into Europe.