

*The Old Georgian version of the miracle of St George, the princess and the dragon, II.
Representations of George and his female counterpart in vernacular religion and folklore*
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The original narrative of St George, the princess and the dragon drew upon the conventions of eastern Christian hagiography, and early forms of chivalrous romance. But key elements of the miracle story can be traced to vernacular antecedents. The framing narrative of George killing a dragon, which dwells in a lake and eats a daily ration of the city-dweller's children, harks back to the ancient Iranian myth of a hero slaying a dragon which impeded access to vital resources, and its numerous reflections in Caucasus folklore. Of particular interest is the role of the princess. Initially, she is yet another sacrificial offering passively awaiting her fate. But after George subdues the dragon, he asks her to lead it into the city, using a leash made from her belt. The princess's role thus shifts from potential victim to co-participant in the victory over the dragon, albeit in a subordinate function to George, to whom belongs the honor of killing the beast. The motif of the maiden as "junior partner" of the saint likewise has precedents in the oral literatures of the Caucasus, as I will attempt to demonstrate here.

I. Vernacular sources: The princess as junior partner. The princess-and-dragon miracle is more than the ancient dragon-slaying motif with a new character added. The narrative of a hero rescuing a woman or women from a dragon has a long history of its own, going back at least as far as ancient Iranian tales of combat against a dragon guarding vital resources, such as water, livestock or women (Ivanov & Toporov 1974: 136-164; Fonterose 1980: 515-520; Watkins 1995: 297-300; Kuehn 2011: 87-91; Aarne-Thompson 1961: #300; Thompson *Motif-index* B11.7.1; Basilov 1991; Skjærvø et al 2011).¹ The theme lives on in Georgian and Azerbaijani folklore, as in the following excerpt from a Georgian folktale:²

(The protagonist, the youngest of three brothers, descends to a land beneath the surface of the earth, and arrives at the home of an old woman. She tells him:) "Our water is held by a dragon (*čveni c'q'ali ert gvelašap' uč'iram*). If we do not bring it a sacrifice (*msxverp'l*) each day, it does not let us get water." (The boy asks for two large wine-jars, and goes to the water source). He saw a beautiful (*mzetunaxam*) woman seated there, weeping. "Why are you weeping?", the boy asked. "I am the daughter of the king, brought as a sacrifice. When the dragon comes it will eat me." The boy said: "Let me rest my head on your knees, and when the dragon comes, wake me up." The boy lay down and went to sleep. The maiden saw that the dragon was coming, but she felt sorry for the boy and did not awaken him. She began to weep. One of her tears fell on the boy's cheek and he suddenly woke up. He jumped to his feet and asked her, "What is it?". "Look over there, the dragon is coming." The boy grabbed his bow and arrow, and shot the dragon through the middle. He chopped up the dragon and scattered the pieces (Gogiashvili 2011: 170).

¹ In most Georgian and Greek versions of the miracle, the king and people of Lasia construct a church after their mass conversion to Christianity. George enters the church, and miraculously makes a spring of healing water arise from the floor of the sanctuary. The production of a source of life-giving water by St George could be a distant transformation of the motif of the hero restoring access to water upon slaying the dragon.

² The Azerbaijani tale of Melik-Mamed follows a very similar plot (see the Russian translation at http://www.kot-bayun.ru/azerbaidzhanskie_skazki/melik-mamed.html), as do the adventures of the Georgian folk hero Aspurtsela (Wardrop 1894 #12; see also Kurdovanidze 2001).

Unlike the maidens and princesses freed by Fereidun in the *Shah-Nameh*, or the knights of the *Amiran-Darejaniani*, or the boy in the Georgian tale just cited, the daughter of King Selinos is not a mere resource to be regained, nor a prize to be handed out to the victorious hero. She plays an active, if subordinate, role in the subjugation of the dragon: Her belt is used to bind it, and she, not George, leads the dragon into the city. The scene of the princess leading the dragon on a leash, followed by St George on his horse, appears in the earliest known visual representations of the princess-and-dragon miracle, all of which are situated in Georgia: three frescoes from the late 11th to early 12th cc (Adiši in Svaneti (Volsk'aia 1969); Ik'vi in Kartli; Boč'orma in K'axeti); a mid- to late 12th c. fresco in Pavnisi, in central Georgia; and a 13th-c. depiction of episodes from the life of St George in Ač'i, in Guria (Privalova 1977: 71-91, 139-140). The same scene is represented on several Georgian icons, including a celebrated 15th-c. cloisonné enamel image, and also a recently-discovered wall-painting in the Alaverdi monastery (Xusk'ivadze 1981: XLIX; Lomidze 2011). The wide geographic distribution within Georgia attests to the exceptional popularity of the legend at the time, but more importantly, the prominence of this particular episode, rather than the preceding scene, where the dragon falls at George's feet, or the following one, in which he slays it. Clearly the representation of the princess in the foreground, as co-participant in the dragon miracle, was of special significance to medieval Georgian iconographers, and presumably to their sponsors and audiences as well. The dragon-on-leash motif subsequently appears in most medieval Greek and Latin accounts of the miracle, including that in the *Legenda aurea*, from whence it made its way into West-European hagiography and iconography.³ Ogden (2013: 397-403) draws an association between the princess's belt motif in the St George miracle and earlier narratives of saints (Marcellus of Paris, Samson of Brittany, Clement of Metz), who subdue dragons or serpents, then tie a belt or leash onto them. What is lacking in these narratives, however, is any notion of partnership between a female and a male protagonist in the task of subduing the dragon. The holy figure who invokes God's aid to defeat the dragon also performs the remaining acts in the sequence: removal of a belt or stole, tying it on the dragon, leading the dragon away.

In this paper, I will present evidence in support of the hypothesis that the figure of the princess in the miracle narrative was drawn in part from vernacular representations of female divine patrons, as described in ethnographic accounts collected over the past century and a half in Georgia and neighboring regions. But before we can examine the figure of the female patron, it is necessary to review the characteristics of her male counterpart, who bears the name of St George.

³ The earliest visual attestations outside Georgia of the scene of the princess with the dragon on a leash are from Slavic lands: a Russian fresco from Staraja Ladoga dated c. 1180, and possibly a Serbian church built c. 1168 (Lazarev 1953; Okunev 1927).

2. St George, patron of men. Figures bearing the name of St George have been described in almost all regions of the Caucasus where Orthodox Christianity is, or once was, the religion of the elite.⁴ The local names of divine beings based on Saint George seem to come from two distinct sources. In the Georgian language, he is called *Giorgi*, (*Givargi* in some northeastern dialects), with a high vowel in the first syllable, as in Syriac *Giwargis*. In much of the West and Central Caucasus, however, the numerous local variants go back to a proto-form with /e/ in the first syllable, **Gerge* or perhaps **Gergi*, indicating a separate introduction of the saint's name from Greek-language Byzantium:

- (a) The Kartvelian languages Mingrelian (*ǰ(g)ege*, *ǰerge*, *ǰgere* < **gerge*; also *gergeba-tuta* = Geo. *giorgobis-tve* "November") and Svan (*ǰǰarǰǰ* < Mingr. **ǰǰerge*; *li-gǰǰergi* "St George's Day" < **gerge*)⁵
- (b) Ossetic: Digor *Was-gergi*; Iron *Was-tyrǰi*
- (c) Abkhazian: *Aergj*, *Airgj* < *A-(j)ergj* < **A-gerge/i*
- (d) Adyghe: *Aus-Gergi*; *Dauš-ǰerǰi*, *ǰarǰ*, *Auša-ǰár*, *Auša-Gér*
- (e) Karachai-Balkarian *Bij Ašgergi*, *Uasgeri*, *Žeorgi*
- (f) Ingushetia: *Gerg*, *Gierg*

The two probable sources for the "George" names in the Caucasus parallel quite closely the two principal trajectories by which Christianity itself came to the Caucasus (Assfalg 1984): (1) an inland, eastern and southern Georgian center for *Giorgi*, and (2) a Black Sea coastal, western route for the Greek-derived *Gergi/Gerge* variant. With respect to the latter, Abaev believed that early Mingrelian **gerge* was the immediate source of Ossetic *Gergi* (1958-1989 IV: 26-28, 55-56; 1949: 301). Mingrelian was at the time one of the principal languages spoken along the western Black Sea coast. The vectors of the eastward diffusion of the *Gergi/Gerge* name (and the St George cult) were most probably the states of Abkhazia and Alania in the late 1st millennium. From 780 up to its dynastic union with the East Georgian kingdom in 1008, Abkhazia expanded its borders dramatically to encompass most of what is now western Georgia. It was also through Abkhazia that Orthodoxy was implanted in Alania, a dynamic, multi-ethnic kingdom on its eastern border, that flourished from the 10th century to the Mongol invasions of the 13th century (Arzhantseva 2002). Among the various languages that would have been spoken in Alania, the ancestor of Ossetic had special importance, as attested by a handful of inscriptions (e.g. the Zelenchuk stele, c. 1000), as well as the borrowing of Old Ossetic vocabulary into Kabardian and other Circassian dialects, the Turkic Karachai-Balkar language, and also the Kartvelian language Svan, spoken to the south

⁴ In the case of Armenia, the cult of St George — ecclesiastical as well as vernacular — rose and fell with the fortunes of the Armenian kingdom and the feudal houses. Numerous churches dedicated to the saint appear in the 7th century, and some of the best-known images and inscriptions referring to George and the other military saints date from the reign of Gagik Arçruni, builder of Aghtamar (908-943), to that of Gagik, king of Bagratid Armenia (989-1020), who dedicated a church to George at Horomos. Images of the saint become rarer after the devastating series of Mongol and Turkic invasions beginning in the 1220s, which left the Armenian nobility depleted and scattered.

⁵ Abaev (1949: 596) derives *ǰǰarǰǰ* from Mingrelian *ǰǰari Gege* "good George"; see also Abakelia (1988). J. Gippert (pers. comm.) brings up the possibility of an Iranian source akin to **wac-ge(o)rgi*.

(Abaev 1949). Among these loanwords was Ossetic/Alanic *Was-Gergi*,⁶ from which are derived the local names for the divine patrons of hunters and warriors in the adjacent Karachai-Balkar and Circassian-speaking territories (Miller 1887, 1888; Mizhaev 1991; Kaloev 2004: 354-55).⁷

On the eastern fringe of the *Gergi/Gerge* diffusion zone is Ingusheti, where the cult of St George was described by mid-19th-century writers. Berzhe (1859: 84) described a shrine at Mat-xox [= Ingush Mæt-loam] named for George, paired with shrines named “Mother of God” and “Mary”. This in all likelihood is *Gierg-Eargie*, which once stood near the village Falxan (Sulejmanov 1978: 23). Several other toponyms from the southern Ingush highlands contain the root *Gerg-/Görg-*, possibly denoting sites once associated with local cults of St George (Sulejmanov 1978: 53, 69, 97).⁸

In the vernacular religions of highland Georgia, Abkhazia, Ossetia and — in vestigial form — the Northwest Caucasus, supernatural figures named after St George (Georgian *Giorgi*, Svan *ǰgarǰg*, Abkhaz *Airg´* and Ossetic *Wastyrǰi*) are invoked as the divine protector of men who leave the domesticated space of their communities for the sake of profit.⁹ As the patron whose primary function is to “mettre les espaces naturels à la disposition des hommes” (Charachidzé 1986: 183), the vernacular St George is the object of prayers and offerings presented by hunters, travellers, warriors, woodsmen, and even thieves and livestock rustlers (Charachidzé 1968: 471-490; Inal-Ipa 1965: 519; Chenciner 2008).¹⁰

3. Gender attributes and trajectories: complementarity and male dominance. George, as the divine patron of men, is juxtaposed to female-gendered counterparts, known under various names in the central and south Caucasus. In earlier work on traditional Caucasian belief systems, I have represented the attributes of female and male divine patrons, and also the typical life courses of women and men, as distinctive trajectories in real and symbolic social space (Tuite 2006: 171). These trajectories, like the social roles of the two sexes, are complementary and equally necessary, but underlain by a fundamental asymmetry. Women were traditionally represented in ambiguous terms, due to their outsider origins, and periodic “impurity” (Charachidzé 1968: 279). Within the community, the men dominate public spaces, whether in ritual performance or communal

⁶ *was/wac* “parole sacrée” > “saint” (Dumézil 1978: 237-40); cf. Abaev 1949: 185-6; 1958-89 IV: 26-8, 55-6.

⁷ Largely overlapping with the range of Alanic cultural influence is the distribution of a distinctive type of North Caucasian architectural monument, the stepped-roof mausoleum or shrine. These are small stone buildings with a single entrance and a sloped or pyramid-shaped roof with rows of slate shingles. Some such buildings served as mausoleums (with shelves in the interior for placing the deceased), others were built as Christian churches or “pagan” shrines (as in the northeast Georgian district of Pshavi).

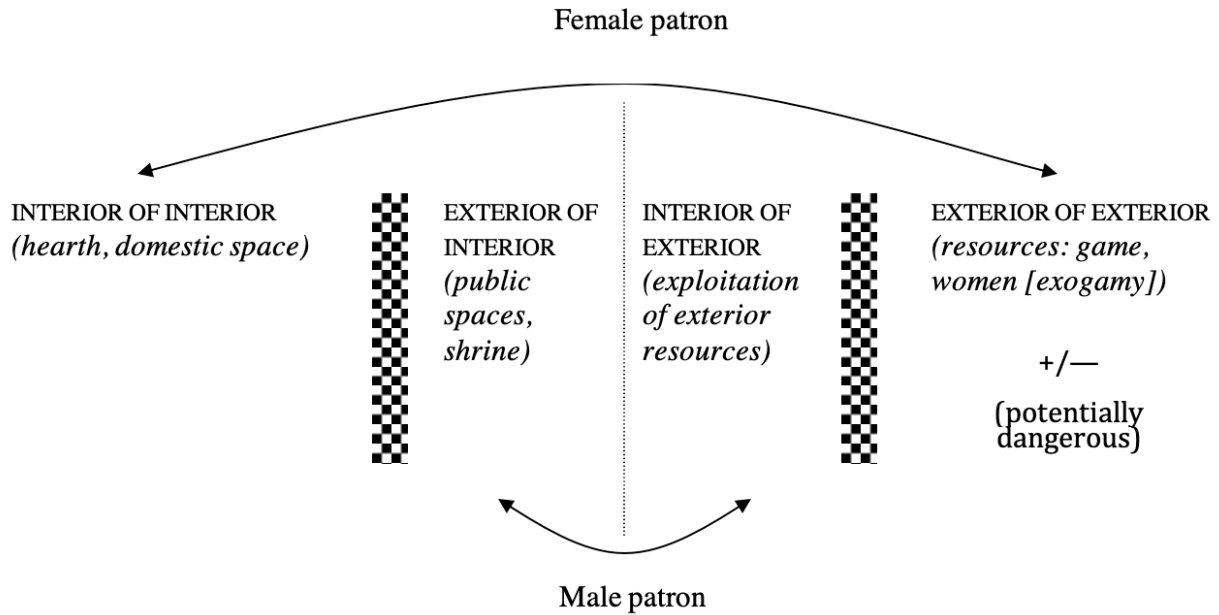
⁸ In his account of an expedition to Ingusheti in 1848, Zisserman (1879: 170) observed that the Kistis (Ingushs) “honored St George”, despite being nominally Muslim.

⁹ Not uncommonly, Abkhaz and Ossetic texts make reference to St. George in the plural number (Ossetic *Wastyrǰy-tæ* “St Georges”). This practice probably stems from the multiple shrines dedicated to him, as well as the belief that divine beings, like humans, belong to clans (Dumézil 1978: 75-77). Georgian folk texts refer to the “three hundred three score and three” shrines said to be under the patronage of St. George, one for each day of the year (Surguladze 1991; Tuite 1994: 142).

¹⁰ Cp. the medieval Georgian distinction between *kveq’ana* (‘land’), where people and domestic animals dwell; and *t’q’e-veli* (wilderness, lit. ‘forest and meadow’), inhabited by wild beasts (Surguladze 2003: 37).

governance (Tserediani et al 2018). As shown in the diagram below, the circuit associated with females, divine and human, is wider, anchored in the extremes of the domestic interior and the remote exterior. This latter space, whether associated with exogamy or the high-mountain hunting grounds under the patronage of the divine patron of game animals, is of ambiguous nature: necessary for the begetting of children and the welfare of the community, yet potentially harmful, being linked to impurity and danger.

Trajectories of divine patrons of women and men.



(i) *Female trajectory.* The societies of the western and southern Caucasus — essentially, all of the Caucasus with the exception of Dagestan — are rigorously exogamous. Marriage is forbidden between a man and a woman known to have a common ancestor, or even suspected to have one (because they share the same last name, for example). These societies also prefer for the bride to take up residence in the husband's family home, rather than the reverse. A woman's trajectory, as seen from the vantage point of her clan of birth, therefore, takes her from the female space in the home around the hearth (the interior of the interior), to entry, via marriage, into an unrelated family in another village (the exterior of the exterior). From the point of view of the latter group, the trajectory is in the reverse direction: a woman from the exterior enters the central space of their home through marriage to one of their men.

In the northeast Georgian highlands, women of childbearing age once performed a complete circuit of their trajectory, from domestic to savage space and back again, on a monthly basis. At the onset of menstruation, they left the home to spend a period lasting from five to nine days, in the

menstruation hut (*samrelo*) or stable.¹¹ As a space associated with impurity, potentially danger-bringing and off-limits to men, the *samrelo*, although situated in or near the village, is symbolically situated in the savage exterior. After their period of isolation, women wash and change clothes, return home, but remain outside the house until nightfall, whereupon they complete their reintegration into the household.

(ii) *Male trajectory*. If the hearth and the innermost part of the house is women's space (Chartolani 1961), men dominate the public spaces in the village, especially on the occasions of religious festivals, political assemblies, and gatherings of elders and mediators to settle disputes. These public arenas constitute the "exterior of the interior", as shown in the diagram. It is also a recognized function of men, under the patronage of St. George, to go in search of profit, whether it be through hunting, warfare, commerce, or negotiation with another kingroup to obtain a bride. The exploitable spaces outside the community are what I call the "interior of the exterior".

(iii). *Divine patrons*. In the oral literature of the Georgian highlanders of Pshavi and Xevsureti, the divine female patrons of women are represented with trajectories mirroring those of human women, even as St. George's trajectory parallels that of the menfolk. The Xevsurian divinity Samdzimari is depicted as a female spirit of remote or even subterranean origins, who is called upon for aid in women's domestic affairs, such as the health of children and livestock, and the production of milk and cheese (Charachidzé 1968: 559-616) One of the central shrines of Pshavi is dedicated to Tamar, a divinity based on a medieval Georgian queen of that name. This figure is invoked for the health of women and children, and for the well-being of the community, but is also imagined as dwelling far from human society, on a mountaintop or in the sky (Charachidzé 1968: 690-698). At the local level, within each commune of Pshavi, are sacred sites named after Mary, the Mother of God (*yvtismšobeli*), or a divinity of outside spaces named "the Mother of the Place" (*Adgilis-deda*). These figures as well are invoked for health, fertility, and aid in childbirth. In some areas of the Central Caucasus, where traditional religious practices take place at shrine complexes (rather than Orthodox churches or their ruins), peripheral sites named after Mary or the Place Mother are paired with central shrines dedicated to St George or his local equivalent. For example, in the northeast Georgian province of Pshavi, in the communes of Udzilaurta and Kist'aurta, boys

¹¹ In the cultures of the Caucasus, as in those of many regions of the world, female blood flow during menstruation and childbirth is believed to contaminate or counteract the power or "purity" (Geo. *sic'minde*) attributed to men and the gods. In Abkhazia, Ossetia and most parts of Georgia, women of childbearing age were excluded from participation in certain religious ceremonies, or barred from approaching sacred sites. As recently as the 1930's and 40's, women in the northeast Georgian districts of Pshavi and Xevsureti spent their monthly periods in the stable or in specially-built menstrual huts. They gave birth in rude, unheated cabins even further from the village, which men refused to approach under any circumstances (Tedoradze 1930: 140-150, 167-180). Eristavi (1986: 171-2) and Gabliani (1925: 140) refer to a similar exclusion of women at times of blood flow among the Svans.

are initiated at the principal shrine, whereas the initiations of girls and in-marrying women take place at a smaller shrine some distance away (Tuite & Buxrashvili 2000).¹²

4. St. George and the seductive goddess of exterior spaces. The trajectory associated with women, encompassing the extremes of interior and exterior space, reflects the fundamental paradox of women in virilocal Caucasian societies, as periodically impure (and thus potentially dangerous) outsiders who are nonetheless essential for the continuity of the patrilineage. With respect to domestic space — the interior of the interior — female supernaturals are invoked for family health, prosperity and dairy production (for which women are responsible). The association of female divinities with necessary, but potentially harmful, outer spaces — the exterior of the exterior — manifests itself in diverse ways. Tamar and Samdzimari, as previously mentioned, are ascribed remote origins, celestial or chthonian. Doubtless the most captivating variations on this theme, however, are the patronesses of game animals.

The relation between St. George and the game patrons, whether represented as individuals or kingroups, finds particularly elaborate expression in the folklore of the Abkhazians and Svans, and — considerably transformed — in the oral literature of the Georgian mountaineers of Pshavi and Xevsureti. In Abkhazian traditional religion, the counterpart of Airg' (St. George) was *Až^Weipšaa*, depicted as an old man, deaf and blind, with numerous beautiful, golden-haired daughters (Gulia 1928; Salakaia 1991). The hunter's success depends not only on Airg', but also on *Až^Weipšaa*, since the latter and his daughters must grant him an animal from their herds to kill. In the words of an Abkhazian folksong, the fortunate hunter is he "to whom Airg' first gave the stick, to whom *Až^Weipšaa* first granted the liver" (Anshba 1982: 33); in other words, the hunter, who is under the protection of Airg', is allowed to kill an animal by *Až^Weipšaa*.¹³ The female game spirits, such as the daughters of *Až^Weipšaa*, are depicted as seductively beautiful. They are reputed to have taken legendary hunters as lovers, in return for assuring extraordinary success at the hunt.¹⁴

The ambiguous nature — beneficial but dangerous — is particularly evident in portrayals of the deity *Däl* in Svan folklore. Golden-haired and bewitchingly beautiful, *Däl* bestows her affections — as well as hunting success — on the men she favors, but should they have sexual contact with a human woman, or slaughter too many animals, she can also bring about their ruin or even death

¹² Examples of complexes with paired shrines dedicated to George, or his local variant, and a female patron include Rekom (Ossetia), Iaqsari (Pshavi), Xaxmati (Xevsureti), Mæt-tseli (Ingusheti, according to Berzhe).

¹³ Not only do the two deities cooperate in assuring a successful hunt, they are thought to be related through marriage according to some accounts: "the girls of the Airg' clan are the daughters-in-law of the *Až^Weipšaa* clan" (*Airg'aa r-təpha, Až^Weipšaa r-taca*; Inal-Ipa 1965: 517; Anshba 1982: 27).

¹⁴ Cf. the Chechen and Ingush forest spirits known as *almaz* (Dalgat 1893), and the Mingrelian *t'q'ašmapa* (Canava 1990: 60-71). Mingrelian folklore also mentions an aquatic counterpart, *c'q'arišmapa*, "queen of the waters", similar to *Däl* in many respects, although she prefers to seduce fishermen (Virsaladze 1976: 120-1).

(Tuite 2006). Svan folklore commonly represents the relation between Jgəräg (St George) and Däl as one of rivalry rather than collaboration (Virsaladze 1976: 138-140). The latter imposes strict limits on the number of beasts a hunter can kill, and only favors those hunters who respect norms of purity and ritual preparation.¹⁵ Jgəräg on the other hand is the patron of exploiters of nature, even those who pillage its riches without restraint. A popular ballad recounts how the legendary Svan hunter Chorla, having slaughtered more than his quota of ibexes, incited the wrath of Däl and her sisters — like the daughters of Až^Weipšaa, Däl is sometimes represented as one of a group of game patronesses with similar properties. They caused him to slip, and left him hanging for dear life from a cliff by one hand and one foot. Jgəräg interceded for Chorla, compelling Däl and her sisters to release Chorla (Chikovani 1972: 228; Charachidzé 1986: 185).¹⁶

4.1. Xevsureti : the partnership of Giorgi and Samdzimari. The northeast Georgian highland province of Xevsureti, like some of its neighboring districts, remained largely out of direct control by the Orthodox Church and the feudal lords of the lowlands. Nonetheless, certain concepts and attributes of Christianity and feudalism were integrated into an ancestral belief system similar to those that are believed to have existed in the central and western Caucasus. The result of this thoroughgoing restructuration, or reformation — which was probably carried out several centuries ago, with ritual specialists playing a leading role — is a complex, sophisticated and elegantly structured cosmology quite unlike anything else in the Caucasus ethnographic record. Among the key innovations of this restructuration are (1) the reconceptualization of the relations between the human and divine worlds in accordance with feudal principles of hierarchy, dependance and land tenure (Bardavelidze 1960, 1974; Charachidzé 1968; Tuite 2002); and (2) professionalization and masculinization of the functions of establishing contact with the supernatural realm, through the presentation of offerings and spiritual possession (Tuite 2004). In other regions, contact with the supernatural was assured by heads of household and possessed persons of both sexes. In Xevsureti, the role of sacrificer came to be the exclusive privilege of male shrine priests (*xucesi*), selected from specific lineages in each community. The function of divine spokesperson was appropriated by authorized oracles known as *kadagi* (Ochiauri 1954;

¹⁵ Svan men would only go up to the mountains to hunt after abstaining from sexual contact, and assuring that no women in their households were having their menstrual periods.

¹⁶ Accounts from the western Caucasus also mention a male-gendered divine figure named *Æfsati* (Ossetic), *Afsaty* (Karachay-Balkar), or *Apsât* (Svan). In the former two regions, the guardians of wild game animals are said to be his daughters. The name *Æfsati* and its variants stems from that of the Christian saint Eustace (Eustathius), (Arzhantseva & Albegova 1999). Eustace is portrayed as a mounted hunter taking aim at a deer, within whose horns the figure of Christ appears. The Eustace cult, introduced from Georgia, was very popular in Alania, as attested by church frescoes and the remarkable petroglyphs on a “hunter’s stone” near Kiafar, seat of the rulers of western Alania in the 10th-11th c. (Arzhantseva 2012; see also Thierry 1985, 1991). The distribution of functions between the Eustace figure and the female game patrons (father-daughter, or patronage of different types of game), appears to be the consequence of the appropriation of a male-gendered figure from elite iconography into a belief system in which female divine patrons already existed (Tuite 2018).

Charachidzé 1968: 113-133), whereas occurrences of possession in women were ascribed to demons (Charachidzé 1968: 167).

One of the most powerful shrine complexes in Xevsureti is Xaxmat'is-Jvari, situated near the pass leading from southern Xevsureti toward the main road to the North Caucasus. Associated with the site is a shrine-foundation narrative (*andrezi*), different and more elaborate than those linked to most other sacred sites in Xevsureti.¹⁷ The *andrezi* of Xaxmat'is-Jvari features *Giorgi* (St George), who led his divine army on a raid in Kajaveti, the subterranean land of the Kajes, a race of demonic blacksmiths with magical powers.¹⁸ Giorgi was also accompanied on the raid by his *mk'adre* Gaxua Megrelauri.¹⁹ The *mk'adre* ("one who dares", i.e. dares come in close proximity to a deity) is a legendary oracle with exceptional powers, and the prototype of the male shrine oracles (*kadagi*) who continued to serve as authorized spokesmen of their divine patrons until very recently (the last Xevsur *kadagi* died in the 1980s; T. Ochiauri, pers. comm.).

After defeating the Kajes, Giorgi brought back as war booty a herd of cattle, a collection of cups and metal-working tools, and three women of Kajaveti: the lovely Samdzimari and her companions Mzekala ("Sun-woman") and Ashekala. Giorgi "baptized" them, and granted them residence at Xaxmat'i. Worshipped alongside George at the "believer-unbeliever" shrine of Xaxmat'is-Jvari,²⁰ Samdzimari is invoked as the helper of women, especially during childbirth, and for the health and productivity of dairy cattle (Charachidzé 1968: 559-616). In addition to her tasks as the Xevsurian equivalent of the female-gendered divinities known throughout Georgia and adjoining regions under the names of Mary, Mother of God, or the Mother of the Place (*Adgilis-deda*), Samdzimari also appears in Xevsurian ballads as the supernatural lover (in a sense) of a series of oracles. The first of these was Gaxua Megrelauri himself. Samdzimari, having taken the form of a human woman, cohabited with him. For this reason, Gaxua was not allowed to take a human wife (K'ik'nadze 2011 ## 43-44). St. George and the other divine patrons appeared to him in the form of doves, and took him along on voyages to holy sites (such as Gerget'i, in the district of Xevi to the west of Xevsureti, and Targame in Ingushetia; K'ik'nadze 2011: 63-66). Other *mk'adre* companions of Samdzimari include Pshavela Peraulidze of Xaxmat'is-Jvari, and three men of the Abuletauri clan of K'ist'ani who were said to have lived in quasi-couplehood with Samdzimari (Charachidzé 1968:

¹⁷ In the typical Xevsurian *andrezi*, the divine being which is to become the community's patron deity appears in the form of a luminous bird-like flying object, and selects the spot where the shrine is to be built (K'ik'nadze 2011)

¹⁸ Several variants of this legend are reprinted in K'ik'nadze's collection of *Andrezebi* (2011: 41-47).

¹⁹ More precisely, George brought Gaxua's souls along, but not his body, which was left behind and began decaying. After their return from Kajaveti, St George restored to the souls to Gaxua's body, which came back to life. The Xevsur texts refer to "souls" in the plural (*suln uridebian*). On the concept of multiple souls in northeast Georgian traditional religion, see Bardavelidze 1949.

²⁰ So called because not only Xevsurs and other Georgian highlanders, but also the nominally Muslim Ingushes and Chechens visited Xaxmat'is-Jvari and presented offerings.

141-144, 565-570; K'ik'nadze 2011: 50; K'ik'nadze & Makhauri 2010: 27-28; Chikovani 1972: 105-7, 246; Fähnrich 1999: 68, 131, 241, 264; Tuite 2017).

As was discussed earlier in this paper, divine and human women are associated with the extremes of exterior and interior space. They not only circulate between these spaces but also bind them together: through her transfer from one kingroup to another via marriage, a woman forges a social link between the two groups, opening up new possibilities for mobility, hospitality and mutual support. Samdzimari, moving from the underworld of the Kajes to partnership with St George, is also attributed a special capacity for opening contact between the divine and human worlds (Charachidzé 1968: 570-574). Through their relationship with Samdzimari, Gaxua and the other *mk'adres* were granted close access to their shrine patrons, whom they alone could see and converse with. As soon as they violated the vow of celibacy that Samdzimari imposed on them, however, both Samdzimari and the shrine patron deserted them and disappeared from view. Bach'uat Axala, for example, was abandoned by the patron of Sanebis Jvari after he felt attraction for a beautiful Chechen woman (Ochiauri 1954: 105-8).

K'ik'nadze (1996: 120) surmised that the motif of Giorgi bringing Samdzimari back from Kajaveti was ultimately derived from the narrative of St George rescuing the princess. In my view, he is partially correct, although the relation between the two narratives is considerably less direct than he imagined. The *andrezi* of the campaign in Kajaveti would appear to be a transformed variant of the old Iranian myth of combat against a resource-hoarding dragon, in which the demonic Kajes as a group take the place of the dragon.²¹ The Kajes possess wealth, in the form of metal artifacts, livestock and women, which Giorgi and the deities capture and bring back for the benefit of the community. Samdzimari herself is of underworld, demonic origin, but — like the princess — she is baptized into the true religion. It remains unclear to what extent the representation of Samdzimari was influenced by that of the princess in the Christian miracle narrative, or whether it developed independently, from a synthesis of the Iranian dragon myth and the Caucasian figure of the female divine patron. Some Samdzimari narratives published by K'ik'nadze 2011 (## 44, 47) do in fact contain motifs obviously borrowed from some version of the princess and dragon miracle (including the dragon). What is clear is that Samdzimari came to be represented as a junior partner of St George, albeit a less lethal one than her Svan colleague Däl. The once-demonic Samdzimari was installed by Giorgi on the territory of one of Xevsureti's most sacred sites; and she is invoked alongside Giorgi by shrine priests throughout Xevsureti (K'ik'nadze et al 1998: 16, 40, 44; Tuite 2011: 202), even as human women are excluded from most religious functions. Her pacification and subordination to George is consistent with the professionalization and masculinization of

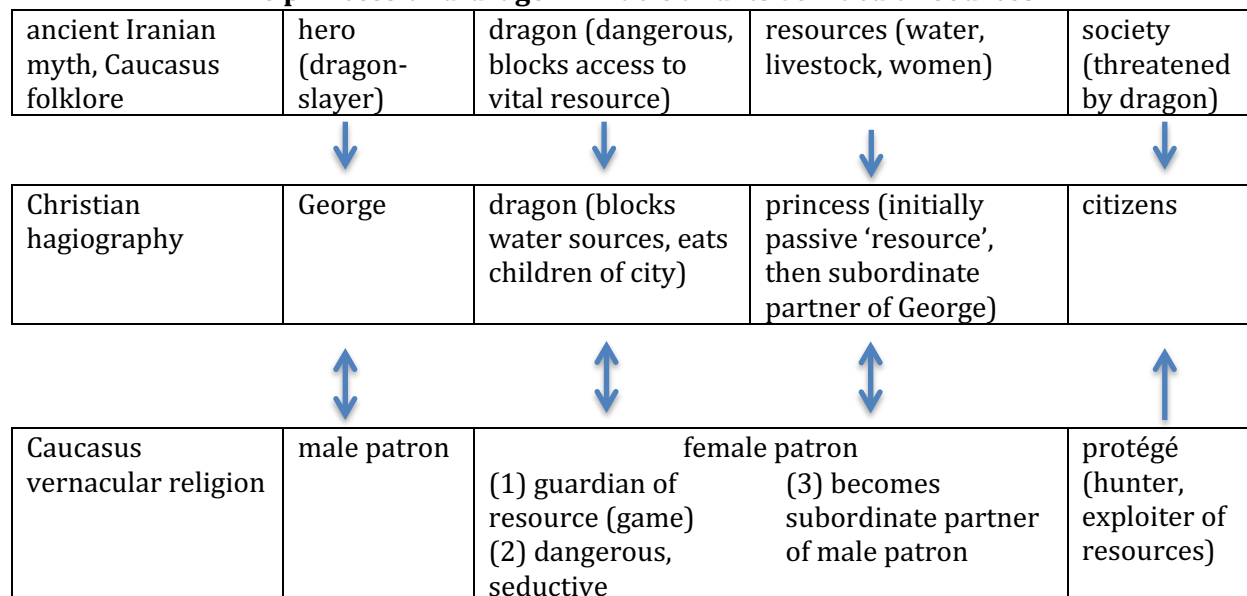
²¹ On the figure of the Kajes in Armenian, Georgian and Ossetic folklore, see Charachidzé 1968: 533-543; Russell 1987: 451-3; Testen 1989.

divine functions in Xevsurian vernacular religion, as well as the more general principle, mentioned earlier, that the female role is complementary with that of the male figure, but also subordinate.

5. Conclusion. Well over a century ago, the Russian scholars Veselovskij (1880) and Rystenکو (1909) pointed to the Caucasus as the likely site of the emergence of the princess-and-dragon story. What I hope to have demonstrated here is that particular attributes and motifs associated with the princess figure were drawn neither from the Iranian resource-hoarding dragon myth, nor chivalrous romance, nor folktales of the type cited at the beginning of this paper, but rather from a source that had hitherto escaped notice: the divine patrons of women, external spaces and game animals in the vernacular religions of the Caucasus highlands.

In the miracle narrative, the princess is at the outset yet another sacrificial offering passively awaiting her fate. But after George subdues the dragon, he asks her to lead it into the city, using a leash made from her belt. The princess’s role thus shifts from potential victim to co-participant in the victory over the dragon, albeit in a subordinate function to George. Her participation mirrors that of Däl vis-à-vis Jgäräg, Až^Weipšaa’s daughters vis-à-vis Airg’, and Samdzimari vis-à-vis Giorgi: the collaboration of the female patron is necessary, but she must submit to the male patron, who insures the success of his protégé, the hunter or the oracle. The contribution of the two vernacular sources to the hagiographical account is shown in the following diagram.

The princess-and-dragon miracle and its vernacular sources



The two-headed arrows indicate two-way influence at the interface between elite and vernacular representations of St George and his female counterpart. Besides the name of George bestowed upon the male protagonist, elite influence underlies some of the traits attributed to the female

patron. More precisely, her profile already contained some “dragon-like” features, stemming from the ambiguous, potentially harmful nature of female supernaturals in Caucasus vernacular religion (Tuite 2004). The aquatic attributes of St George’s female counterparts in some central Caucasus traditions, could well have resulted from the incorporation of characteristics of either the hagiographic or old-Iranian dragon.²²

But at the end, the female patrons yield to St George and his human protégé, to whom they grant animals to kill. If Caucasus vernacular religion contributed an active female figure to the story of the St George the dragon-slayer, it received in return a myth licensing the subordination of the female patron of game animals to the male patron of men exploiting the wealth of the outside world.²³

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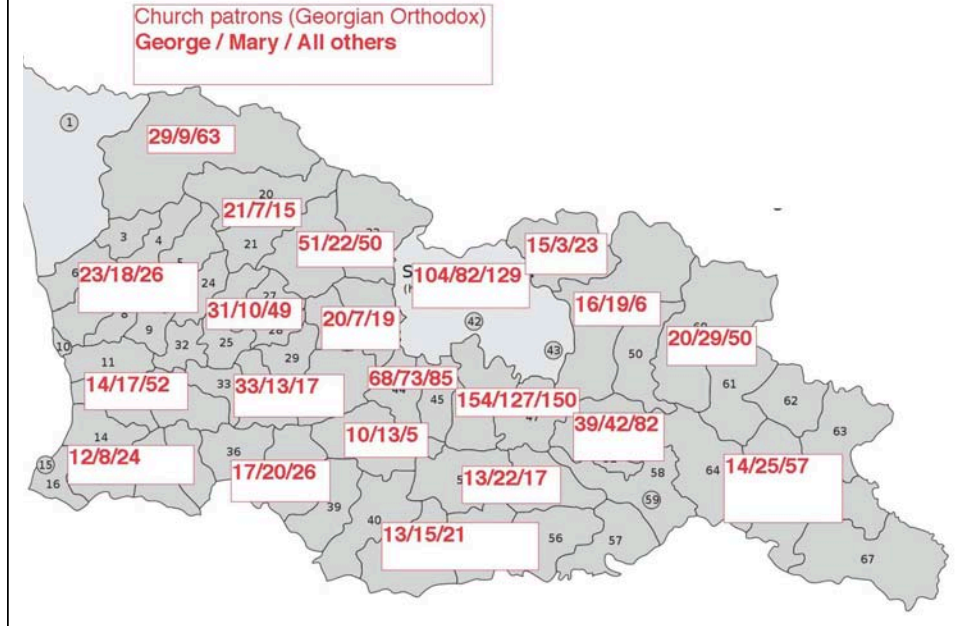
²² Caucasus folklore includes several accounts of the St George figure coupling with a supernatural female from the subaquatic realm, from whom children are born. In Kabardian oral literature, Aušjerj (Аушджердж < Ossetic Wasgergi), invoked in ballads as “our father”, is said to be the husband of the water goddess Psythē Gwaše (Псытхэ гуашэ), “our mother”, with whom he fathered seven sons and three daughters living at the bottom of the sea (Kokov & Kokova 2011). Doubtless the strangest variant, especially from the standpoint of contemporary Western sensibilities, is the Ossetic tale of the post-mortem birth of Satana, the matriarch of the legendary Narts, from the nocturnal union of Wastyrji (St George) and the corpse of Dzerassæ, daughter of the water god Don Bettyr (Dumézil 1965: 34-35; Abaev 1949: 242, 304-5). A similar account was recorded in late 19th-c. Ingusheti (Dalgat 1893: 122-123).

²³ There may be another story to tell about the evolution of images of the princess and the dragon as the narrative spread across space and time from its point of origin in the Caucasus over 900 years ago. The oldest depictions of the scene, such as the frescoes at Adiši, Ik'vi and Boč'orma in Georgia, show the princess in the central foreground, leading the dragon on a leash, with George on his horse following behind her. Later images, such as a 14th-c. icon from Novgorod and a 15th c. fresco from Dragalevski Monastery (Atanasov 2001: Figs 238, 222), and the 15th-c. cloisonné icon from Georgia (Xusk'ivadze 1981: XLIX), place the princess in lower right periphery, and reduce the size of her image relative to that of George. Finally, in many depictions from Western Europe — despite the description of the dragon's leash in the popular *Legenda aurea* — the princess is set off to the side, looking on passively as the saintly hero fights the dragon (e.g. in the 15th-c. books of hours MS Egerton 1147 and MS Harley 2900 in the British Library).

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Georgian Orthodox churches dedicated to St George / Mary / others



Early images of St George
in the Caucasus:
Lmbatavank, Xozhori
(6th-7th c.)





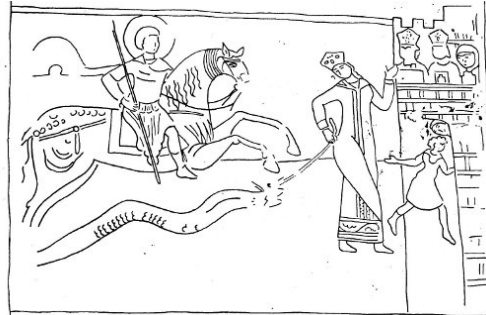
Valence 1:
George
Tropaiophoros

- Saints Theodore (spearing dragon) and George (spearing man), Altamar Church of the Holy Cross; 915-921

Iconographic minimal pair: Theodore & George (Nikortsinda, 11 c.)



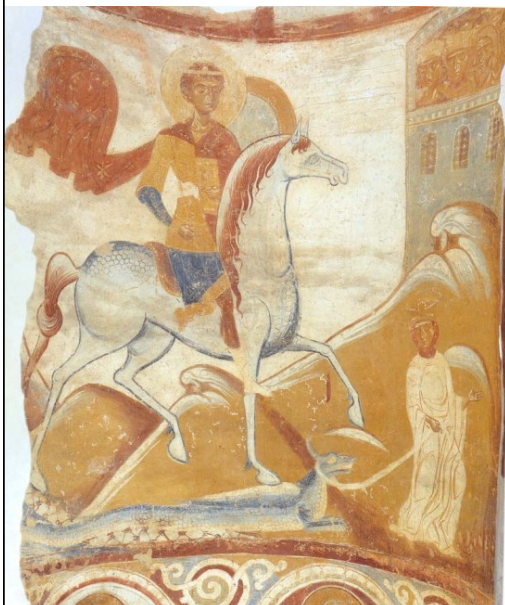
The princess leading the dragon on a leash toward the city
(Hadīshi Jgērāg, Svaneti, early 12th c.)

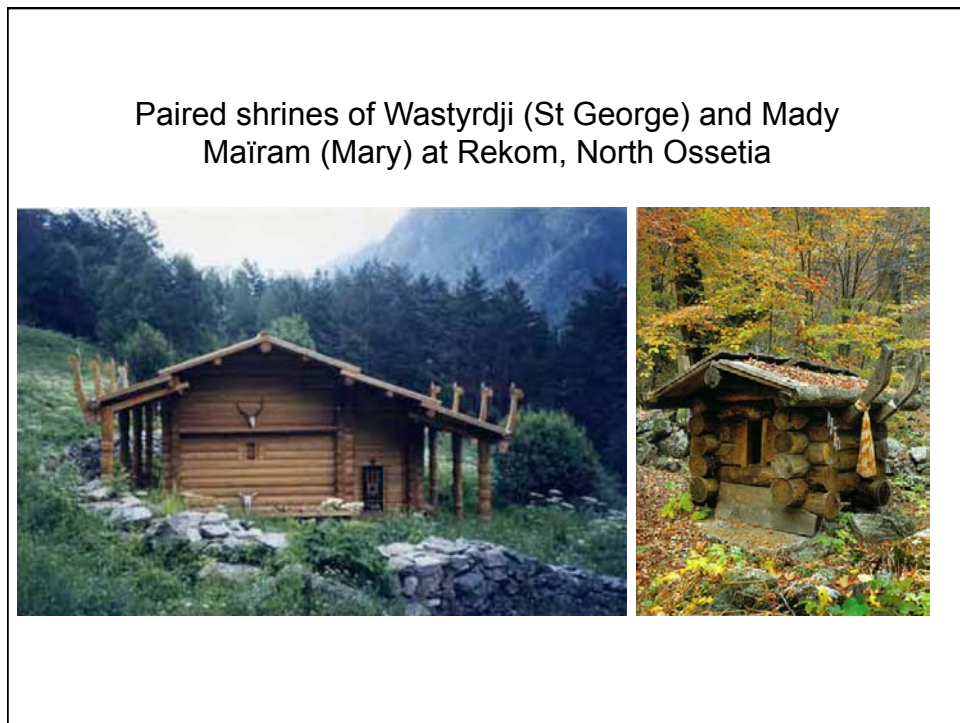


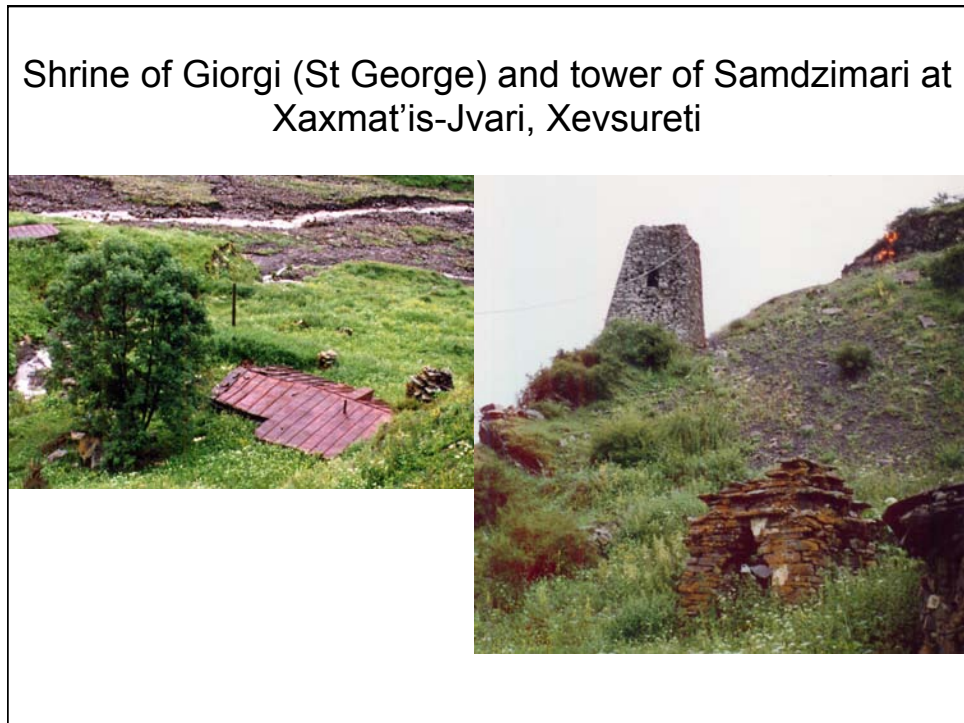
- Fresco of St George and the princess in Ik'vi (Shida Kartli), late 11th-early 12th c.



The princess-rescue motif goes global







later images: the princess off to the side, smaller than George
 (L) Cloisonné enamel icon, 15th c., Georgia
 (R) icon from Novgorod, 14th c. (Atanasov)



Обр.238

The princess as passive spectator, without a leash
 (L) France, c. 1430-1440 (British Library, MS Harley 2900, f. 55r)
 (R) Bruges, c. 1500 (British Library, MS Egerton 1147, f. 259r).

