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# THE TRANSLATIONS OF *THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS* IN GEORGIA AND THEIR ADAPTATIONS IN GEORGIAN FOLKLORE

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**Abstract:** Translation is one of the ways in a process of adaptations of fairytales of foreign origin. From this perspective, it is very important to consider literary sources in the study of oral narrative materials. The large numbers of the folktales has a rich literary tradition and some plots of the folktales come from the literature, spread and interpreted by folk narrators. This article focuses on Georgian folktales related to the stories from “*The Thousand and One Nights*”, and compares the types of international folktales, such as ATU938 “*The Tale of the King Who Lost His Kingdom*”, ATU976 “*Which was the Noblest Act?*”, ATU930A “*The Predestined Wife*”, ATU561 “*Aladdin*”, ATU35 “*Ali Baba*.” The review of these tales reveals to us information about not only Georgian folktales related to “*The Thousand and One Nights*” but also the unique relationship between oral tradition and literate production.

**Key words:** folktale, literature, narrative tradition, orient

## 1. Introduction

The cultural adaptation of international tale types appears to be the rule for folkloric communication. Translation is one of the ways in a process of adaptations of tales of foreign origin. However, the question of the literary influence in folkloric texts had received little attention. From this perspective, it is very important to consider literary sources in the study of oral narrative materials. The large numbers of the folktales has a rich literary tradition and some plots of the folktales come from the literature, spread and interpreted by folk narrators. The study of Georgian folktales shows an intensive interaction between literary and oral traditions. In medieval Georgia in particular, literary sources of influence on folklore included not only original Georgian literature, but also translated literature from both East and West. This article focuses on Georgian folktales related to the stories from “*The Thousand and One Nights*.”

The fairy-tale world of “*The Thousand and One Nights*”, containing the stories of Indian, Persian and Greek origin, influenced the European literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after Antoine Galland’s edition “*Mille et Une Nuit*” (Galland 1706). As Ulrich Marzolph noted, no other single work of Oriental literature (besides the Bible) has had such a long-lasting and deep impact on world culture (Marzolph 2005:3). Similar statements would be made about folk narratives. In terms of methodology, the observation of translation theory about recodification is helpful: “Translation denotes more than linguistic transformation, as language is only one kind of code. In principle, the transfer from one genre into another genre, or from one

medium into another medium (oral to pictorial, written to oral, etc.) could also be called ‘translation.’” (Roth 1998:243).

Before taking a closer look at the Georgian folktales, some distinctions have to be made. Despite Georgia’s close cultural contacts with Arab world, “The Thousand and One Nights” as a whole was not translated into Georgian until the twentieth century. However, various Georgian literary sources suggest that the frame of “The Thousand and One Nights”, as well as some of the stories, were well-known in Georgia. The knowledge of Arabic literature has been usual for Georgian writers and scholars since the Middle Ages. In introducing the subject, it is worthy of note to sketch briefly Georgian-Arabic relationship in their historical context.

## 2. Georgian-Arabic Historical Relationship

Arabs appeared in Georgia since 40ies of the seventh century. In the eighth century, their military actions took a more intensive form and ended with the total domination of Georgia. Since 30s of the eighth century, the capital city of Tbilisi already had an Arab ruler, appointed by the Caliphate. He carried the title of Emir (Georgian ‘Amira’) and had a large staff of officials: *Shurta*, head of the police, keeping order in the town; *Muhtasib*, supervisor of bazaars and trade, responsible for the organization of street orderliness, cleanliness, services amenities; *Amid*, head of the chancellery; *Resa*, representative of the Muslim population of the city at the Emir’s court; *Muhrib*, tax collector for the city; *Qadi*, judge. During the Arab rule, the number of Muslim population and their cult buildings, Mosques, have been increased in Tbilisi. The Georgian ruler with the title of *Erismtavari*, represented the local authority at the Emir’s court.

In the eighth century, the Georgian state was subdivided into smaller political units, little kingdoms or principalities. At the verge of the eighth and ninth centuries, the Georgian kingdom-principalities became more powerful, and there followed the process of gradual restriction of the territories of Tbilisi Emirate (In Georgian ‘Tbilisis Saamiro’).

Since the beginning of the ninth century, the process of particularism emerged; Emirs attempted to isolate themselves from the central powers and to turn the Emir’s status into the hereditary title. In the late ninth century, Tbilisi became the property of one family clan, Jaffarians. Tbilisi Emirate had no more any legal links with the central authority, and the Emir of Tbilisi recognized only the religious superiority of the Caliph of Baghdad.

Since the middle of the tenth century, Tbilisi Emirs started minting their own coins, too. On a dirham, made in 954-954 in Tbilisi, there are depicted both the Emir of Tbilisi, Mansur ibn Jaffar and the Caliph of Baghdad. Since the early ninth century, Tbilisi Emirate acts as a rival versus Georgian kingdoms and principalities in their fight for the central regions of Georgia. Yet, actually Tbilisi Emirate struggles more in order to defend itself, its territories are too small and it soon finds itself under the influence of the Georgian kings. By the late tenth century, the power of Emirs covered just the city of Tbilisi and its immediate surroundings. Since 1046, after the demise of the Emir

Jaffar, the Arab rule ended in Tbilisi and local citizens came to power in the city (Lortkipanidze 1973:489-506).

The Arab culture has made a certain impact in Georgia. Institutions present in the Emirate have been remaining within the central powers even after the unification of Georgia. Relationship of the Georgian rulers towards the Muslim population remaining in Tbilisi was tolerant. Despite the fact that Tbilisi was the capital city of the Georgian Christian state, the Georgian kings used to respect and protect the Muslims residing in Tbilisi.

Description of Georgia appears in several chronicles by Arabic historians as Yahya of Antioch (eleventh century), Ibn-El-Athiri (1160-1233), Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi (1186-1257), Shihab al-Din Muhammad al-Nasawi (thirteenth century), Abu al-Fida (1273-1331), Ahmad Abd Allah al-Qalqashandi (1355-1418), Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi (1364-1442), Muhammad ibn Arabshah (1388-1450) etc. (Silagadze 1979:38-51).

### **3. Georgian Editions of “The Thousand and One Nights”**

“The Thousand and One Nights” as a whole, was translated into Georgian only in the twentieth century. The first printed editions of the Georgian translations of some stories from “The Thousand and One Nights” appeared in the late nineteenth century. These tales are as follows: “The Lamp of Aladdin”, “The Tale of a Brother and a Sister” (1888), “Scheherazade’s Tales” (1894). “Reading for Children” (1895), “The Tale Narrated by Scheherazade of the Thousand and One Nights” (1904), “The Thousand and One Nights” (1937).

*All of these incomplete collections are translated from Russian. The fairytales are translated selectively and the translation does not follow the chronology of the nights. The translations are prefaced by an introduction that briefly narrates the origin of the collected stories and its translations into the European languages, particularly, Galland’s translation.*

The complete corpus of “The Thousand and One Nights”, an eight-volume edition, in Georgian was published in 1967-1996, translated from Arabic by professional orientalist Nana Purtseladze and Tina Margvelashvili. *Translators, while translating, mainly followed the Egyptian edition, but, they were careful and tried to avoid possible mistakes so they compared and checked the Egyptian edition with other editions.*

### **4. Traces of “The Thousand and one Nights” in Georgian Literature**

*We have no factual material that shows the existence of fragments of “The Thousand and One Nights” translated into Georgian before these the above-mentioned printed editions, but some Georgian literary works suggest that the frame of “The Thousand and One Nights”, was well-known in Georgia. The earliest Georgian text structured as a frame story is “Amiran-Darejaniani”, a prose work in twelve chapters attributed to Mose Khoneli, a Georgian writer of the twelfth century. This narrative revolves around the hero Amiran Darejanisdze whose adventures are related in five sections. The*

remaining sections are dedicated to other characters and have no strong connection with each other. This cycle of tales is influenced to some extent by the styles of medieval Near and Middle Eastern literatures, and its roots can also be traced in Georgian folk tradition and literature. Another, much later, chivalric romance with a frame story structure, by an unknown author, is “Rusudaniani” from the seventeenth century (Kekelidze 1958).

The literary sources for the Georgian folk tradition include works translated from other languages. “Chardavrishiani” (The four dervishes), “Bakhtiarname” (The book of Bakhtiar), and “Timsariani” (The seven viziers) are versions of medieval Persian romances, translated into Georgian in the eighteenth century (Timsariani 1903).

The impact of “The Thousand and One Nights” on Georgian literary tradition is also noticeable in the didactic works of the Georgian writer and lexicographer Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725). His book “Sibrdzne Sitsruisa” (The wisdom of the lie) is composed on the model of the frame tale with embedded stories (Orbeliani 1957). Among Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani’s fables, some tales originate from the oral tradition as well as from “The Thousand and One Nights”: for example, ATU 62, “The Fox and the Cock”, and ATU 670, “Knowledge of Animal Languages.”

## 5. The Tales from “The Thousand and One Nights” in Georgian Folklore

Most coincidences of the stories from “The Thousand and One Nights” with some Georgian folktales are in the area of realistic tales (novelle). In the following, I suppose to focus on certain tale types, namely, ATU938, ATU976, ATU930A, ATU561, ATU353.

ATU938 “*The Tale of the King Who Lost His Kingdom*”: In Georgian folklore the tale of a man who lost his two sons and his wife is widespread: A man crossed a river with his two sons, one of them was carried off by a wolf, the other one fell into the river. Farmers and shepherds found the boys and raised them. The man worked as farmhand many years, and by chance he recovered his sons and his wife. The family reunited (Khakhanov 1901). This story corresponds partly the international folk-tale type ATU938 *Placidus*, and partly the tale from “The Thousand and One Nights”, enframed by the story of ‘King Shâh Bakht and His Vizier al-Rahwân.’<sup>1</sup>

ATU976 *Which was the Noblest Act?*: The visible example of a literary plot in oral traditions is a story about the noblest act, included in “The Thousand and One Nights.” This story forms part of the narrative cycle enframed by “The Forty Viziers.” It is told by the ruler’s wife to urge him to take action.

The sultan of Egypt, feels that his end is drawing near. The sultan tells his sons that he has deposited a box with jewels that they should divide among themselves. When he

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<sup>1</sup> The tale is told by the vizier in an effort to ward off the king’s wrath. King Shâh Bakht has a loyal vizier named al-Rahwân. One night the king has a dream about his vizier handing him a fruit that poisons him. The king consults a sage who conspires with al-Rahwân’s enemies and advises the king to have the vizier executed. The vizier wisely agrees with the verdict, but asks permission to stay with the king one more night. He is granted permission, and on the twenty-eight following nights he tells the king the stories, including “The Tale of the King Who Lost His Kingdom” (Marzolph 2004: 234).

has died, the youngest son steals the box. His brothers soon find it, but it is empty. They consult the qadi, and he tells them a story. A young woman who is deeply in love with her cousin is married to someone else. On the wedding night, the young woman confesses her love to her husband and is generously allowed to visit her beloved. On the way she is spared by a thief who follows the example of her husband's generosity; the lover is also impressed and sends her back to her husband. After finishing the story, the qadi asks them which of the three men was the most generous. While the two eldest sons choose the lover, the youngest son chooses the thief and thereby discloses his guilt (Marzolph 2004:411-412).

This tale is included in Georgian novel "Rusudaniani" by unknown author of the seventeenth century and widespread in folk narratives too (Marr 1895:221-259).

This tale with both its characteristic frame story and the enframed narrative corresponds to the international tale-type ATU 976 "*Which was the Noblest Act?*"

On their wedding night, a man allows his bride to visit her former lover, in order to keep a promise she had made previously or, according to some oral variants, to cancel the engagement. On her way she meets a robber. When she tells him her story, he leaves her unmolested. When her lover hears about her bridegroom's and robber's magnanimity, he takes her back to her bridegroom without touching her. In some variants the tale occurs in conjunction with a frame tale that deals with the discovery of a thief. Three (four) sons inherit jewelry from their father. The money is stolen by one of the brothers. The robbed owners call a wise man (judge, king, Solomon), who is to discover the thief. The wise man (or his daughter) then starts to tell the story. The thief betrays himself unconsciously when he answers the question, "Who acted in the noblest way?" He argues that the robber in the story was the noblest one or he answers other questions in a revealing manner.<sup>2</sup>

ATU930A "*The Predestined Wife*": This folk-tale type, well known in Georgia, tells about a young man, who learns by a prediction that a very young girl will be his future wife. Not willing to marry the poor child, he tries to kill her by stabbing her. The girl survives, grows up, becomes very beautiful, and marries to the man. After the wedding he discovers the scar and learns from his wife's life-history that the prediction has been fulfilled despite his actions (Wardrop 1894:23-25).

The motifs of the folk-tale type ATU930A have oriental origin. It seems its source does not belong not only to the Islamic, but older cultural region and are related to the Buddhist literature. Early literary treatments start from the ninth century by Chinese writers. This story is common in India, Near East and Europe too. In "The Thousand Nights and One Night" is included a tale of the hireling and the girl, which forms part of the narrative cycle enframed by the story of King Shâh Bakht and His Vizier al-Rahâwan. It is told by the vizier to save his life. When a woman of an Arab tribe gives birth, a wise woman predicts that the newborn girl will have sex with a hundred men, a hireling will marry her, and a spider will slay her. Aiming to prevent this from

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Arabian Nights Encyclopaedia, this tale-type originates from India. Its oldest version, dating from the third century C.E., is included in the Buddhist "Tripitaka." In European tradition, the tale was popularized by Boccaccio's "Decamerone." Its version in Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale" probably derives from French models (Marzolph 2004:412).

happening, the woman's hireling slits the girl's throat and runs away. The girl survives and becomes a prostitute. Later the very same hireling, who in the meantime has made a fortune, marries her without knowing her true identity. When they find out that two of the prophecies have already come true, they try to protect her from spiders by going to live in a secluded place that is kept neat and clean. When one day her husband sees a spider, she wants to kill it herself. As she is striking with a piece of wood, a splinter enters her hand and gives her blood poisoning (Marzolph 2004:222).

ATU561 *Aladdin*. Some tales in "The Thousand and One Nights", including the tales of *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba*, were delivered to Antoine Galland in written version by the Maronite Hanna Diyab from Aleppo and later reworked by Galland. The texts Galland used as the basis for his translation have never been located. According to Galland's diary for the period 1709-12, Hanna Diyab told him a number of tales, some or all of which Hanna also wrote out in Arabic (Bauden and Waller 2011:7-8). No Arabic text of Hanna's tales has been found at all (Cooperson 1994:69). However, the tales of *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* became an inseparable part of Galland's translated collection, is universally known, and remains 'emblematic' of the collection as a whole.

The tale of Aladdin was the first translated tale from "The Thousand and One Nights", which appeared in Georgia in the late nineteenth century.

The closest Georgian folkloric version to the literary text of the tale of Aladdin is the folktale called 'The Lamp,' recorded in 1937 and published by Georgian folklorist and linguist Alexandre Glonti. The tale of Aladdin appears in multiple Georgian oral versions with a different magic object (other than the lamp). For example, in one folktale recorded in 1962, instead of the lamp there are magic balls (Glonti 1948:193-203).

ATU353 "*Ali Baba*": There is only one text titled as "Ali Baba" tale in Georgian Folklore Database, though there are plenty of related stories and tale types on the robber themes. The Georgian folktale "Ali Baba" is recorded in 1962 in the village Mokhisi, near Tbilisi (Folklore archive of Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature, № faq137gv442). In this tale appear twenty robbers, not forty, but other details are similar Galland's literary version.

The tales of Aladdin and Ali Baba arrived in Georgia in the late nineteenth century through literary translations and soon spread in Georgian oral tradition too. Georgian folkloric material confirms that all variants of the tales of *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* in oral tradition ultimately come from Galland's versions. In contrary, the other tale types, namely ATU938 "*The Tale of the King Who Lost His Kingdom*", ATU976 "*Which was the Noblest Act?*", ATU930A "*The Predestined Wife*", were widespread in Georgia. The multiplicity of variants of these tale types with occasional contaminations display the popularity of these stories in Georgia. Oral narratives and literary narratives belong to parallel categories of traditions. Thus, the Georgian versions of the types ATU938, ATU976 and ATU930A seem to be arrived not through literary way but through oral narratives.



## 6. Conclusion

While this essay can by no means answer all the questions that the translated tales generates in Georgian folklore, some tales were presented for discussion. The review of these tales reveals to us information not only about Georgian folktales related to “The Thousand and One Nights” but also the unique relationship between oral tradition and literate production.

The translated tales could be adapted to a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts. Through various means of translation and transmission, translated tale crossed cultural boundaries with relative ease. The coincidences of literary and folkloric motifs are common for the medieval literature as well as traditional oral narratives. Writers and compilers took the vitality of the oral tradition, the very elements that gave it power over readers. On the other hand, the literary texts could transfer to the folkloric text. The folkloric adaptations of translated tales are a part of a culture as a code transporting cultural values and worldviews. As a consequence, the meanings could change when they cross cultural and religious boundaries.

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Fig.1. Illustration of a Georgian Edition of "The Thousand and One Nights" (Janashvili 1895)

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