Jāmī in Regional Contexts

The Reception of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī’s Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century

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CHAPTER 22

Sweetening the Heavy Georgian Tongue
Jāmī in the Georgian-Persianate World

Rebecca Ruth Gould

There is a manuscript of Jāmī’s Haft awrang (Seven Thrones), the seven narrative and didactic texts that constitute the poet’s major literary output, in the Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts in the Republic of Georgia.* The paper is thick and gilded. The body of the text is in black ink and the titles are inscribed in bright red ink. This manuscript is stored in a case covered with leather, of Georgian manufacture. Joining thousands of Persian manuscripts that circulated within Georgian borders from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, and the hundreds of manuscripts of Jāmī’s works that have traversed the Caucasus, this Haft awrang is dated 1021/1613.1 Like the other manuscripts with which it is stored, this Haft awrang circulated at a time when Persian was the major literary language for Georgia’s elite, a status it held until the end of the eighteenth century.2

While it is not the case that every Georgian spoke Persian, the migrations from Georgia to Iran that proliferated under Safavid dominion (907–1135/1501–1722) contributed immeasurably to the Persianization of Georgian literature. Under the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās I (993–1038/1587–1629), the practice of using Georgians as military and domestic slaves replaced the earlier Safavid institutional reliance on the Qizilbash, a tribe of Turkmen origin. With the trend towards increasing institutional reliance on Georgian slaves, “the slave chapter

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1 Katalog persidskikh rukopisei Instituta rukopisei im. K. S. Kekelidze: kolleksiia AC (Tbilisi: Mec’niereba, 1977), PAC 296 (poetry); p. 21. A partial listing of the manuscripts of Jāmī’s works held by the Kekelidze Institute is given on p. 181.

of Safavid history” begins.3 With this shift in the Safavid social order also began a new era in Georgian literary history, marked by new tensions between the poetic visions of Georgian kings and the violence of Safavid sovereignty. At the same time, the violence of the Safavid-Georgian encounter was also marked by an unprecedented flourishing of Georgian poetry in a Persianate idiom. This chapter examines one text within the oeuvre of the Georgian poet-king Teimuraz I (1589–1663), arguably the most significant poet who came of age during Safavid rule, with particular attention to the effect of the disjuncture between poetic inspiration and political constraint on literary form.

Teimuraz I may well have consulted the Haft awrang currently held in the Kekelidze institute when he set about to do in Georgian what his predecessors had done in Persian during the early decades of the seventeenth century. If not this specific one, the manuscripts he accessed would have been as elegant and finely wrought. From 1605–1648, Teimuraz I resided in Kaxetia, in eastern Georgia.4 Under the close surveillance of Safavid rulers, it was from here that he served as the nominal, and powerless, king of Georgia, ruling over a kingdom that had become a vassal state of the Safavid Empire following the incursions of Shāh ‘Abbās I.5 While much of his literary output dates to the reigns of ‘Abbās I and Şāfi (r. 1038–1052/1629–1642), the last two decades of Teimuraz’s life coincide with the reign of ‘Abbās II (r. 1052–1077/1642–1666). Notably, the last two of these rulers had a mother who was a slave (ghulām) from the Caucasus.6 Each of the three Safavid rulers whose reigns spanned


4 For Teimuraz’s biography, see, in Persian Ḥasan Anūshah, Dānishnāma-yi adab-i Fārsi (Tehran: Mu’assasa-yi Farhangi va Intishārātī-yi Dānishnāma, 1375/1996–), 5172–77 (I thank Paul Losensky for this reference), and in Georgian, Meri Gugushvili, T’eimuraz pirvelis c’xovrebis gza (Tbilisi: Mec’niereba, 1979).


6 Kathryn Babayan, Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), 401–2, n. 91. Said Amir Arjomand’s observation that “From Shāh Safi I (r. 1629–42) onward, the mothers of all the Safavid shahs were Georgians” is relevant in general terms but is contradicted by Babayan, n. 91 (“The Salience of Political Ethnic in the Spread of Persianate Islam,” Journal of Persianate Studies 1 [2008]: 5).
Teimuraz’s life actively recruited Georgians to Isfahan so as to limit their involvement “in movements of resistance in their homeland.”7 In contrast to the hundreds of thousands of his fellow Georgians who were forced to emigrate to Iran and pressured to convert to Islam, Teimuraz was permitted to remain in Georgia for most of his literary career. His position between exile and home, Christianity and Islam, and Georgia and Iran conditioned the form and the content of his verse.

Although his relations with all three Safavid rulers were tense, they were also intimate, as evidenced by his gift of his daughter Tinatin as a bride to Ṣafī in 1634 (she was ultimately strangled to death by order of her husband, the Shah).8 These tragic decades were also some of the brightest of Teimuraz’s literary career, for they enabled and indeed compelled the poet to write for an absent audience. Consisting of royal predecessors and literary successors, this audience constituted a unique literary public peculiarly suited for the condition of the poet-king, a figure that features widely in the circuits of literary production across the early modern Persianate world.9 Due in large part to the narrative poems (mathnavīs) gathered in his Haft awrang, Jāmī, more than any other Persian poet, was central to the Georgian-Persian confluence that reached its acme in Teimuraz’s oeuvre.

Less prolific than Jāmī, the only works Teimuraz left behind are poetry. He collected his major poems into a single, five-part work, which he referred to, in Persian style, as his khamسا (quintet), thereby directly affiliating himself with the Persian poet Niẓāmī (535–606/1141–1209) from nearby Ganja whose khamṣa had been imitated by countless poets in Persian and Persianate languages and which had acquired an authoritative status as an arbiter of authorship, as well as of taste, genre, and narrative. Consisting of two poems in imitation of Niẓāmī’s Khusraw and Shīrīn and Laylī and Majnūn, one poem in imitation of Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, and two poems without any known predecessor, the composition of Teimuraz’s khamṣa spanned the years 1624–1635, and traversed the reigns of Shah ʿAbbās I and Ṣafī.10 In addition to his khamṣa,

9 For Dakani (early modern Urdu), the literary and political ambitions of the poet-kings of South India, Ibrāhīm ‘Adil Shāh of Bijapur (1579–1627) and of Muḥammad Qulī and ‘Abdallāh of the Quṭbshāhī dynasty (1518–1687) bear comparison with that of Teimuraz.
10 The most complete edition of Teimuraz’s works, and the only one to include his khamṣa in full, is Teimuraz I, eds. A. Baramidze and G. Jakobia (Tbilisi: Pʻederatsʻia, 1934). All references in this chapter are to this edition.
Teimuraz eulogized his predecessor, Queen Tamar (1184–1213), in verse, and composed lyric poems on melancholy themes. He was not the only Georgian poet to engage closely with the Persian literary tradition, and yet, at least for the early modern period, from among his Georgian contemporaries, Teimuraz used the Persian tradition to enrich Georgian literary form.

Teimuraz had many important twelfth-century Persianizing predecessors. These included Sargis Tmogveli, who rendered Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's eleventh-century romance *Vis and Rāmin* into Georgian prose. His famed predecessor, Rustaveli, authored the most famous Georgian romance on a Persian model. Chakrukadze composed Georgian courtly panegyrics that resembled the *qaṣīdas* that Persian poets had composed for their rulers during the same time in nearby Shirvan and Ganja. The age of Niẓāmī coincided with prosperity in Georgia, presided over by Queen Tamar, who acquired a near-legendary status in subsequent literary history as a patron of Georgian culture. The Shirvānshāh dynasty to the east, where such poets as Niẓāmī, Khāqānī, Mujīr al-Dīn Baylaqānī, Falakī, and Abū'īl ‘Alā‘ Ganjavī rose to fame, were weaker than the Georgian Bagratids, and there was no other viable competitor for power in the region, Persianate or otherwise, until the Mongol invasions. Hence, when medieval Georgian poets imitated the Persian masters, they could express without envy or resentment their admiration for a high literary culture that, since the beginnings of secular Georgian literature, had served as a model of excellence for Georgian writers. The intimacy and admiration that these medieval Georgian poets, prosaicists, and translators felt towards Persian culture was articulated in a world wherein Georgia's political sovereignty was unchallenged.

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15 For Georgia's political conditions during this period, see Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 93–186.  
By the seventeenth century, following the Mongol invasions of the 1230s and the ascendency of the Safavids, Georgia had become a shadow of her former self. Particularly during the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās I, Safavid rule from a Georgian perspective was a succession of forced deportations, territorial annexations, the removal of some regional kings from power, and the reduction of others to vassalage status. Georgian political sovereignty had become a myth, a subject of literary reminiscence of times long past. Georgian poets now had to deal with the new ambiguities of Safavid hegemony. They had to confront the politics of Persian in an era of Safavid sovereignty, forced conversion, and state persecution. For Teimuraz, in the words of D.M. Lang, “the atrocities committed by the Persians against his native country roused him to fanatical patriotism.” Karst similarly alludes to the ambiguities of Safavid dominion for the Georgian king when he notes that this “vassal of the powerful emperor Shāh ‘Abbās was able to maintain the dignity and culture of his small nation” even under the watchful eye of a “suzerain conquérant.”

By the time Teimuraz ascended the throne, royal Georgian lineage was practically a guarantee of personal catastrophe. The trauma of being Georgian under Safavid rule was most fully epitomized for Teimuraz by the martyrdom of his mother, Ketevan (1565–1624), who was killed with a branding iron by Shāh ‘Abbās’ executioners for refusing to convert to Islam. Even as this event epitomized the violence of the encounter between Georgian Christianity and Safavid Islam in the early modern period, it also contrasted with other aspects of Georgian-Safavid relations. Even as he executed select individuals who refused to convert, ‘Abbās I also “showed a great interest in people of different faiths and liked to converse with Christians, both those living in his own

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17 For Georgia under Mongol rule, see Jürgen Tubach, G. Sophia Vashalomidze, and Manfred Zimmer, eds., Caucasus during the Mongol Period–Der Kaukasus in der Mongolenzeit (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2012).
realm and those visiting from abroad.\textsuperscript{22} As one European visitor to ‘Abbās’s court in Isfahan stated at the time, “Persians will allow Franks to do everything except forcing the harams of the elite, because the Shah so wills it.”\textsuperscript{23} Hence the violence of forced conversion was attended by an unprecedented degree of inter-religious contact within Safavid Iran, much of which was peaceful. While acknowledging the negative impact of Safavid persecution on Georgian culture, and the way in which this violence has framed Georgian history, this chapter argues on the basis of Iosebzilixiani (Teimuraz’s version of Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā) for an understanding of Safavid-Georgian contact that is less monolithic than that which dominates most accounts of this encounter.

The Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story is an ideal text with which to advance such an argument, for it is itself a conversion narrative and a palimpsest of cultural and religious difference. The narrative chronicles the journey of Zulaykhā, who is overtaken with lust for her beloved Yūsuf, towards a pinnacle of spiritual love that enables her to transform her erotic desire into a pious encounter with the cosmos.\textsuperscript{24} Given its investment in cultural and religious difference, Yūsuf and Zulaykhā is an ideal text through which to explore the encounter between early modern Georgian and Safavid Iran as refracted through literature. The resonance commanded by this story across the many different languages and literary traditions that were captivated by it was due in no small part to its inscription of religious difference as a stimulus to narrative, in the figure of a Persian poet narrating a Quranic encounter in pre-Islamic Egypt. Having traversed multiple temporalities and cultures, the protagonists of the Persian text are pious without being bound to any particular sectarian affiliation. Each time they are reinvented in varying historical, cultural, and religious contexts (spanning Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism), the lovers Zulaykhā and Yūsuf epitomize the quest of the soul towards God, and the perpetual making and unmaking of the self that is intrinsic to the experience of sexual desire.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{23} A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 1:104.


\textsuperscript{25} With respect to the porosity of religious categories in the Georgian Iosebzilixiani, mention should be made of its predecessor, Rustaveli’s Vepxist’q’osani. Set in India and making no mention of Christianity, this text tells of a princess closely resembling Tamar who is “destined to inherit her father’s throne” (Eastmond, “Gender and orientalism,” 109). Such indifference to religious categories widely characterizes the \textit{mathnavī} form.
Although Georgia’s proximity to Iran deprived him of his mother and daughter, Teimuraz was arguably the most important Persianate author within Georgian literature. Some might say that Teimuraz did not choose this role, given that Persianized Georgian was the only viable literary idiom at the time of his writing, but the turn away from Persian that ensued in subsequent centuries and which is discussed below attests to the viability of non-Persianate registers for literary Georgian alongside Persianate ones. Regarding himself as the greatest Georgian poet of his age, Teimuraz was persuaded that the only way in which his poetic gifts could become manifest was by cultivating a sweet Persianate register in what he was to call “the heavy Georgian tongue.”

Aspiring to be the greatest Persianizing poet in Georgian literature, Teimuraz composed three Georgian *mathnavīs* modeled on Persian examples, in the *shairoba* meter (the name for which derives from the Arabic *shīr*,”poetry”) that had been pioneered by Rustaveli. The first of these, *Xusroshiriani*, is modeled after Niẓāmī’s *mathnavī*. A second, *Lailimajnuniani*, combines influences from Niẓāmī and Jāmī, both of whom composed a *mathnavī* dealing with the love affair of Layli and Majnūn. The third, *Iosebzilixiani*, is modeled after Jāmī’s *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā*, a text that is in turn based on the Quranic story (12:21–34), as well as on earlier Persian versions. Both Georgian texts are not so much translations as intertextual appropriations, in senses I explore below, of the original Persian text. Both texts also participate in the widespread tradition of *naẓīr* (imitation, Georgian *naziroba*) that conditioned the circulation of Persian literary culture during the early modern period.27

The circulation and imitation of *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā* outstandingly illustrates the multilingual and global scope of the Persian *naẓīr* (as well as of the *khamsa* genre into which many of these imitations were classed), for Jāmī’s narrative was imitated in Sanskrit, Dakani, Bengali, Pashto, Turkish, as early as within a century of its completion in 1483.28 Most geographically proximate to Teimuraz’s milieu is the seventeenth century Kurdish version of Selim ibn

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26 Another narrative in Teimuraz’s *khamsa*, on the martyrdom of his mother Queen Ketevan, utilizes the structure of the Persian *mathnavī* form, but the plot is taken from an historical event.


28 In addition to the essays in this volume, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi’s discussion of the Dakani version by Shaykh Ahmad Gujrati in *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 94–7, and Thibaut D’Hubert, “La réception d’un
Sleman, which is in dialogue with folkloric Kurdish versions as well as with Jāmī’s poem. At the culmination of these Persianate convergences, a nineteenth-century Albanian version produced by Muhamet Kyçuku establishes an identification between the poet and the male protagonist. This chapter tracks some of the ways in which Jāmī’s text circulated in the Georgian-Persianate sphere, with a view to better understanding the place of Persian, and of Jāmī specifically, in early modern Georgian literary culture.

1 Ambiguities of Safavid Sovereignty

In Lailimajnuniani, playing on the double meaning of ena/zaban as tongue/language in both Georgian and Persian, and masterfully deploying a series of verbs (musikobani, txrobani, mbobani, shexma-mkobani) in the causative mood, Teimuraz insists on the superiority of Persian to Georgian for the purpose of poetic composition (LM, v. 4):

sparsta enisa sitkboman masurva musikobani mdzimea ena kartvelta da ver dzalmits misebr txrobani mat metsmasnilta sitqvta minda martivad mbobani ac gamochndebris leksita mijnurta shesxma-mkobani

With a sweet Persian tongue I wished to make music from the heavy Georgian tongue, but feared I could not use it for poetry. With [Georgian’s] twisted words I wanted to make a simple story so that a lover [mijnurta] could henceforth appear in verse and elicit praise.


30 This text has been published as Muhamet Çami, Jusufi e Zulejhaja: dashuri përvëluese (Tirana: Tirane Ştëpia Botuese Vetjake Hasan Tahsini, 1992). For a brief discussion, see Robert Elsie, Albanian Literature: A Short History (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 41–42.

31 All citations from Teimuraz’s oeuvre are taken from Teimuraz I, eds. Baramidze and G. Jakobia. References to Lailimajnuniani are abbreviated LM and references to Iosebzi-lixiani are abbreviated IZ.
This early declaration of Teimuraz’s debts to Persian set the stage for his even more creative use of Persian narrative forms in Iosebzilixiani, his version of the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story. Rustaveli had already composed the major Georgian epic romance, *Knight in the Panther’s Skin* (*Vepxistqaosani*), around the theme of love madness (*mijunuroba*), which is also the keynote of Jāmī’s tale. But the rapid appropriation of Persian narrative romances for Georgian literary ends had to wait until Teimuraz’s *khamsa*. For most of Georgian literary history, the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story was known to literate Georgians from the Biblical narrative of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (*Genesis 39:7–23*). As a result of Jāmī, the Persian narrative became as local to the Georgian literature as the Biblical story.

Aside from a pun on *jām* in the sense of a goblet towards the end of Iosebzilixiani (*IZ, v. 302*), Teimuraz does not name his Persian predecessor. Other details, aside from the pun, fill in the missing pieces. Jāmī’s works circulated more widely throughout early modern Georgia than that of any other poet. Even though Teimuraz did not name him, his Georgian contemporaries, such as Nodar Tsitsishvili (discussed below), underscored Jāmī’s importance to Georgian literary culture. The first Georgian editors of Teimuraz’s Iosebzilixiani stated in the early decades of the twentieth century that Teimuraz’s sources had not been established (*dadgenili*). This uncertainty was, however, displaced a few decades later, when Alexsandre Gvaxaria published a full-length monograph in Georgian on the Persian sources of the Georgian Iosebzilixiani. In this work, Gvaxaria makes Teimuraz’s debt to Jāmī clear. Notwithstanding Gvaxaria’s important contribution, Teimuraz’s Persian debts merit much closer scrutiny than they have received to date, and the topic remains undiscussed outside the narrow circle of Georgian-language scholarship. This chapter uses Jāmī’s place in the Georgian-Persianate world to advance our understanding of this particular juncture in Georgian literary history, and in particular to better understand the interface between the cosmopolitan and vernacular literary idioms that, as has recently been argued, influenced the circulation of literary

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33 Jakobia, “Tsinasitqvaoba,” in Teimuraz I.

34 Alexsandre Gvaxaria, “Iosebzilixianianis” kartuli versiebis sparsuli tsqaroebi (Tbilisi: Sak’art’velos ssr mec’nierebat’a akademiiis gamomts’emloba, 1958). Gvaxaria unfortunately says little about Teimuraz’s text per se, and devotes most of his attention to tracing the dissemination of the Persian versions of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā.
culture across much of the early modern world. While my primary focus is on Georgian engagements with Jāmi’s *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā*, Jāmi’s place in Georgian literature is best understood in light of the other Georgian *mathnavī* that were influenced by Teimuraz’s work, and which I engage towards the end of this analysis.

Teimuraz’s *Iosebzilixiani* follows on another Georgian version of *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā*, also entitled *Iosebzilixiani*, which is attributed to the preceding century. This anonymous work, also held by the Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts, is extant in a unique unpublished manuscript, for which the ending is lost. In contrast to Teimuraz’s eastern Georgian register, the anonymous *Iosebzilixiani* uses a western Georgian lexicon, is over twice as long (736 stanzas), and incorporates elements of the Biblical story alongside Jāmi’s Persian retelling of the Quran. Given its complete lack of influence on subsequent Georgian literary history and my present interest in tracing a genealogy of influence, the anonymous *Iosebzilixiani* is not considered here, although it surely merits further scrutiny.

Notwithstanding the ambiguous status of Teimuraz’s Persian sources, the frequent references in both of his *mathnavī* to the marvels of the Persian tongue (*sparsuli ena*) attest to Teimuraz’s acute consciousness of his literary debts. The pages that follow consider how Teimuraz reconciled his Persian debts with his goal to become the greatest poet in the Georgian tongue, and to surpass his formidable Persianizing predecessor Rustaveli. I argue that Teimuraz’s anxieties productively founded a second Persian Renaissance within Georgian literature.

35 The basic reference for this argument is Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Rather than engaging with Pollock’s argument directly in this chapter, I aim to better understand its implications for conceiving the interface of Persian and Persianate literatures.


39 The periodization of Georgian-Persian relation in terms of multiple Renaissances dates back to Nikolai Marr (see the discussion in Diliara Alieva, *Nizami i gruzinskaia literatura* [Baku: Elm, 1989], 141). While such periodization is open to critique, it usefully captures how Georgian literary history proceeded through ruptures more than steady continuities.
Persianate Anxieties of Influence

The opening section to Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā is taken up with a tripartite praise of God, love (ʿishq), and poetic discourse (sukhan). Echoing the tripartite structure, Teimuraz’s Iosebzilixiani opens with a prologue of twenty-eight stanzas, in which he praises the Trinity (sameba), the word (sitqva), and Georgian poetry.⁴⁰ Constitutive as it is of secular Georgian literary culture, love (mijnuroba) commands the poet’s admiration, but Teimuraz does not elevate it to the same degree as his Persian predecessor. Teimuraz does not speak of ʿishq as Jāmī does throughout his mathnavī. He speaks instead of mijnuroba, a Georgian variant on the Arabo-Persian conception of love as a form of madness (junūn). For Teimuraz, love is praiseworthy, and even a basis for poetry, but it is not a metaphysical condition. By contrast, for Jāmī, Zulaykhā’s sexual attraction for Yūsuf is a pivotal stage in her journey towards God.

Across many versions of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā that were inspired by Jāmī, including those in Bengali, Sanskrit, and Georgian, the prologue consistently serves as an occasion for poet-translators to advance poetic agendas within their respective traditions.⁴¹ As with similar appropriations of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā within South Asian literatures, Teimuraz used the beginning of his work to elaborate his poetics and to locate his poem within the Georgian literary tradition. Teimuraz’s prologue does more than simply anticipate the ensuing narrative; much of it is narrated in the past tense, and draws on examples from medieval Georgian literary history. Just as the crucial poetic arguments at the beginning of his Laylimajnuniani are advanced in the grammatical past, so are the key events in Iosebzilixiani’s prologue drawn from the era of Queen Tamar, a period that was marked as Georgia’s Golden Age. Teimuraz begins by offering a justification for poetry, and then elaborates an argument, addressed to the reader, about the relationship between Georgian and Persian literary culture.

All Islamic texts, poetic and otherwise, begin with a basmala, a Quranic phrase meaning “In the name of God.” Teimuraz’s opening Christianizes the Islamic basmala. His idiom is simultaneously liturgical in the Christian sense and Persianate in terms of its rhythm. Teimuraz appropriates the rhetoric of

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⁴⁰ Baramidze and Jakobia have inserted the term “shesavali [prologue]” in brackets at the beginning of this poem, but it does not appear to have been used by Teimuraz, who left this section without a heading.

⁴¹ See respectively, the contributions of Thibaut D’Hubert, Ayesha Irani, and Luther Obrock in this volume.
praise that animates both rhetorical traditions, while also merging praise of God with praise of an as-yet unspecified but supremely human patron:

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\begin{align*}
\text{unda mciredi mciredta sitqva carmovtkva txrobili} \\
\text{vit vitrpiale sibridznesa amad arvisgan xmobili} \\
\text{dzoc-margaliti, gisheri ac naxet chemgan mkobili} \\
\text{da bolod scnat qovelta-ara var moshaireta dzmobili}
\end{align*}
\]

v. 3
The humble should use humble words in their stories.
I am a lover of wisdom, for that which no one names.
Whose coral pearl and ebony are always praised by me.
Recognized by everyone, I have no brothers in poetry.

Teimuraz then turns to the thematic of love (mijnuroba) so as to clear the ground for his discourse on Georgian poetry. As is typical of the Georgian tradition, uses the masculine-inflected mepe (king) to denote the Queen Tamar:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{me tvit vcer vitqvi romelsa meped mixmoben monebi} \\
\text{sitqva shevmzado shairta mart vita vardis konebi} \\
\text{brzentagan shesatsqnarebi cnobilta mosaconebi} \\
\text{da magra ekmnebis mijnurta laxvari gasaconebi}
\end{align*}
\]

v. 4
I write, I say, so that the queen [mepe] who commands her slaves will spread the true words of poetry like rose bouquets with the calm wise men, among the blessed ones.
Among the sages of love, insanity should be praised.

Whereas Jāmī gives pride of place to ʿishq, Teimuraz eulogizes mijnuroba. Both concepts are broadly Persianate, but, given the work that Rustaveli had already done with mijnuroba, as well as the term’s close association with Laylī and Majnūn, and thus with Niẓāmī, mijnuroba presumably appeared more locally relevant to the Georgian poet, while ʿishq would have had a more exotic genealogy.

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42 Queen Tamar is commonly referred to as king (mepe) in Georgian history. For a standard biography of this queen, which underplays the role of gender, see Roin Metreveli, Cminda Mep’e T’amar (Tbilisi: Saojaxo Bibliot’eka, 2011).
Teimuraz refers to the lovers Ioseb and Zilixia by the phrase *ekmnebis mijnurta* (“sages of love”). *Ekmnebis* is the plural genitive form of *ekimi*, and derives from the Arabo-Persian *ḥakīm* (sage). In this passage, Teimuraz uses a Persian term that was already part of the Georgian lexicon to idiosyncratically render a category that Jāmī describes in many different ways (for example *asīr-i ‘ishq* and *ahl-i ‘ishq*), but never precisely as “wise men of love.” In this respect and others, Teimuraz’s Persianized Georgian results in an idiosyncratic idiom that, while participating in the Persian tradition, also diverges from the Persianate norm.

Given Teimuraz’s efforts to pioneer a Georgian-Persianate register, it is striking that the prologue to his narrative of Ioseb and Zilixia’s love is entirely consumed with the tale of Tariel and Nestan-Darejan, two lovers of putatively Indian extraction whom Rustaveli introduced to Georgian literature. Tariel and Nestan-Darejan were in turn based on Majnūn and Laylī of Niẓāmī’s eponymous narrative. No aspect of the story that unfolds—not the characters’ names nor the fate that awaits them—is hinted at in the opening section. Instead we read of a Georgian romance, and of the place of *mijnuroba* within that story, alongside the virtues of the Persian tongue. While Teimuraz announces his intention to tell a “love story [*mijnurta ambavi*, v. 9],” readers encountering the text for the first time have no way of knowing what will ensue, and are indeed led to believe that this tale will simply recapitulate the plot of Rustaveli’s epic.

The dominant figure in Teimuraz’s prologue is Rustaveli’s hero Tariel, the fictional Indian prince who, at the behest of his beloved Nestan-Darejan, saves India (*indoeti*) from invaders, who are named in the text as Khwarazmians. In terms that recall Jāmī’s own intertextual deployments in his prologue (which are discussed below) Tariel is figured in the prologue as a Georgian version of Yūsuf, before the author even mentions Yūsuf’s name:

```
tarieli icnobt qovelni sardanis dzes mxnesa-da 
mas uebrosa moqmesa tanad alvisa xesa-da 
vit etrpiala indoets nestan-darejans mzesa-da 
da dakarga gulsa saxmili kvlav upro daekvesa-da
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v. 10

Everyone knows Tariel, the son of Saredon, the brave warrior with a body as slender as a cypress. He fell in love with the beautiful Indian Nestan-Darejan. Her heart lost its spark, and again revived.
The parallel between Tariel and Yūsuf is here as unambiguous as is Teimuraz’s appropriation of Jāmī’s lexicon, for in the Persian text, Yūsuf’s body is repeatedly said to resemble a cypress tree (sarv), particularly when Zulaykhā encounters him in her dreams. Although its gender is grammatically ambiguous (typical for a Persian trope), the cypress (alvis xe) is unambiguously associated in Georgian with the female form. From Teimuraz’s perspective, both Tariel and Yūsuf defy gender norms through their exceeding beauty and through their status as ma’shūq, the object of the lover’s gaze, a status Teimuraz deliberately overstates in the case of Tariel.

Although Tariel’s relationship to his beloved Nestan-Darejan resembles that of Majnūn with respect to Laylī, Rustaveli’s Tariel is a stereotypically male hero. Teimuraz acknowledges as much by calling Tariel moqme (a brave young man). But with Yūsuf on his mind, Teimuraz revises Rustaveli’s rendering of this male archetype, feminizing him, and shifting the reader’s attention from Nestan-Darejan, whose beauty is profusely praised in Rustaveli’s epic, to Tariel, who drives the epic’s plot, but is less an object of readerly attention in Rustaveli.

After delineating the epic feats of Rustaveli’s characters as a prelude to his own romance, Teimuraz considers the conditions under which Rustaveli composed his poem. By way of crafting a genealogy for himself, Teimuraz cites Rustaveli’s statement that he “found [his] story first recorded among the Persians” (vpoveo ambavi pirveli sparstagan mbobita, v. 17). Teimuraz then makes explicit what was only implicit in Rustaveli’s text: Queen Tamar, the paradigmatic patron of Georgian literature and of Rustaveli in particular, inspired his poem. Following on a recurring theme in Georgian literary history, Teimuraz presents Queen Tamar as the object of Rustaveli’s desire, and argues that it was at her request that he composed his romance. “Was it really possible,” Teimuraz asks, “that [Rustaveli] raved [xelobda] because of her?” (v. 18).

The next stanza radically shifts Teimuraz’s authorial placement within his text. Suddenly, we are transported from a golden age of Georgian literary culture that vanished half a millennium prior, to the Safavid present, as Teimuraz’s kingdom crumbles before his eyes, his mother is martyred, and his own position as the nominal sovereign of Kartli and Kaxetia (eastern Georgia) becomes increasingly tenuous. Reflecting on the destruction of Georgia’s past, Teimuraz laments (v. 19):

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43 Jāmī, Mathnāvi-yi Haft awrang, eds. Ālā Khān Afsahzād, Jābilqā Dād ‘Alishāh, Aqghar Jānīfīdā, Tāhir Ahrārī, and Husayn Ahmad Tarbiyat (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 1378/1999), 2:20. Future citations from Yūsuf and Zulaykhā are from this edition, and are abbreviated as YZ.
Teimuraz’s tortured associations with Persian resonate in the graphic, although fictitious, description of Tamar’s body incinerated in a furnace (scvevda saxmili ushreti). Recalling historical accounts of the martyrdom of his mother Queen Ketevan, who had been killed five years prior to the composition of Iosebzilixiani, Teimuraz imagines Tamar, who died of natural causes, as having been burnt to death with a steel iron (poladi maghnitsa). The reduction of Tamar’s body to physical remnants (ushreti) further conveys Georgia’s ruined material state in an era of Safavid hegemony. That the poet is projecting his mother’s martyred body onto the image of this fallen Queen is further suggested by the reference to her “discerning eyes” (tvalni sachvretlad), which suggest a son’s tender affection for his departed mother. Finally, Teimuraz turns his personal trauma into a problem for the composition of poetry. Whereas Rustaveli composed his epic at his patron’s behest, and could count on a built-in audience of avid courtiers, Teimuraz had no such audience during his lifetime.

In addition to giving voice to the poet’s personal grief, Teimuraz’s prologue functions as a palimpsest of Persian and Georgian culture. Overwhelmed by Safavid hegemony, Teimuraz asserts that Georgian culture has entered a state of decay. This theme was already anticipated when, in v. 4, Teimuraz underscores his loneliness, stating, “Among the poets I am without a brother” (ara var moshaireta dzmobili). Notably, this verse echoes Jāmī’s declaration of singularity in the prologue to his Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, where he states: “In this assembly I see no one experienced or inexperienced/who is capable of drinking this wine.” (na bīnam pukhta-ī zīn bazm u khām-ī/ki bāshad dar kaf-ash zān bāda jām-ī. YZ, 19), which is to say no one who is capable of fully understanding his verse. These professions of singularity resonate across the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā

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44 Poladi literally translates as “steel,” not the iron with which Ketevan was killed; the coincidence of terminology and imagery with Ketevan’s martyrdom is nonetheless evident.
textual tradition, particularly in the Sanskrit version by Śrīvara of Kashmir that preceded Teimuraz's version by two centuries. Just as he lacks a beloved who could inspire him to compose a new poem, so too has the Persianate register, on this account, ceased to stimulate Georgian verse. At the same time, there is much in Teimuraz's text and oeuvre to suggest a more positive relation to Persian. In light of Teimuraz's denigration of the traditional symbols of Persian culture, such as the nightingale (bulbuli) and the rose (vardi), it is noteworthy that the fifth poem in his khamsa, Vardbulbuliani (The Rose Nightingale), is constituted through these very tropes.

In the prologue, Teimuraz transitions from his catalog of Tariel's exploits to the conditions under which Rustaveli composed his epic romance. In what may be Iosebzilixiani’s pivotal verse, Teimuraz explores the paradox of his text’s existence. These verses echo the opening of Leylimajnuniani.

Mepes eneba sparsuli tkmat kartulisa enita
leksad tkma mcads-o ubrdzana laghmad brdznad shukta penita
niche aghutkva uzemo moaje var mokenita
da mijnuri mijnurt sakebrad dajda glax cremlita denita

v. 20
By the Queen’s will, I have put Persian utterances into the Georgian tongue.

“Time to recite poetry,” elegantly ordered the luminous light, whose brilliance emanates from above. I am her supplicant and admirer. I am the poor lover of lovers who sat adoring her. My tears flow.

Such verses would have sounded sincere during Rustaveli’s era, when the poet was in fact blessed with a patron, Queen Tamar, who looked after his well-being. But Teimuraz could only utter such statements ironically. He had no patron, no lover, no daughter, and his mother had been martyred. There was no audience to whom he could address his poem, and the country over which he was nominally king was facing annihilation. In the absence of an actual readership, and even of a muse, Teimuraz addressed posterity. He turned to Persian, less for the sake of the fictional patrons and beloveds he praises so elaborately, but for the sake of a literary future he brought into being by grafting his tale, composed in the inferior Georgian tongue, onto a more durable Persianate ethos.

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For this version, see Obrock's contribution to this volume.
Teimuraz’s efforts to situate himself in the Georgian literary tradition by engaging with Jāmī parallel Jāmī’s engagement with Niẓāmī. Both poets related to their predecessor as rivals in the quest for literary immortality. In contrast to Jāmī’s successes in the Persian romance, a genre he only assayed towards the close of his life and which formed a small portion of his overall oeuvre, Niẓāmī was unrivalled in his reputation as the master of the khamsa, and of the mathnāvi form of which the khamsa was comprised. Niẓāmī inspired many imitators, but neither Jāmī nor Amīr Khusraw nor any other subsequent poet is regarded as his peer with respect to the mathnāvi form. Each new khamsa contained new discourses of praise and derision towards the genre’s preceding examples, and in each case this divided rhetoric helped to facilitate the emergence of new literary traditions in Chaghatay, Bengali, Dakani, and Georgian. Working in the shadow of Persian literature, these vernacular poets drew on the khamsa’s conflicted rhetoric of authority alongside its systematic displacement of authorial personas into rhetorical tropes. And just as Teimuraz could not evade the influence of Jāmī, so too Jāmī could not evade the influence of Niẓāmī, the pioneer of the mathnāvi form, when he crafted his romances.

Teimuraz’s literary oeuvre parallels that of Jāmī in ways beyond their shared narrative repertoire. The anxiety of influence evidenced in the prologue of Iosebzilixiani is also visible in Jāmī’s opening sequences, particularly in the sections that enumerate the virtues (faḍīlat) of love alongside the virtues of poetic discourse (sukhan). In one section, Jāmī memorably declares his intention to exceed the achievements of Niẓāmī. Without naming his rival, Jāmī instead invokes two works from his khamsa, Laylī and Majnūn and Khusraw and Shīrīn, and implies that Niẓāmī’s verses have grown stale:

kuhan shud dawlat-i shīrīn u khusraw  
ba shīrīn i nishānam khusraw-i naw (YZ, 39)

The pleasure of Shīrīn and Khusraw is old.  
I’ll create a new Khosrow in a delicate way.

According to a nineteenth-century commentary by the Indian scholar Muḥammad Shāh, the dominant purpose of this verse is to draw an analogy between Shīrīn and Zulayḵā on the one hand, and Yūsuf and Khusraw on the other. We have already seen this tendency to generate equivalences between

46 I am very grateful to Thibaut D’Hubert for helping me to work through these points.  
47 Muḥammad Shāh paraphrases these verses as “with Zulayḵā I will show Yūsuf [bā Zulayḵā Yūsuf rā nishānam]” ([Sharḥ-i Zulayḵā Muḥammad Shāh, Cawnpore: Naval Kishore, 1884], 57).
characters across a poetic repertoire at work in Teimuraz’s parallels between Tariel and Yusuf on the one hand and Nestan-Darejan and Zulaykhā on the other. Jāmī clearly had in mind something similar, and that Teimuraz learned from his example.

However, the poet’s endeavor to embed his characters within an existing narrative repertoire does not negate his equally obvious intention of claiming a literary reputation for himself through his verse. Jāmī never composed a *mathnavī* for Shirin and Khusraw; this narrative is overwhelmingly associated with Nizāmī. So Jāmī could not have been referencing himself exclusively with this verse; he was necessarily invoking—and comparing himself to—his unnamed predecessor. Jāmī continues in the following *miṣraʿ* to contrast his own work in even bolder terms to Nizāmī’s achievement:

\[
sar āmad dawlat-i laylī u majnūn
kas-ī digar sar-āmad sāzam aknūn (YZ, 39)
\]

The pleasure of Laylī and Majnūn has been consumed.
Now I will make someone else famous.

Muhammad Shāh underscores how these verses further embed Yusuf and Zulaykhā within an existing narrative tradition. According to his paraphrase, this verse means that the story (*qiṣṣa*) of Laylī and Majnūn has reached its end and now the poet will cause a new character to dominate his imagination (*ḥālā kas-ī digar rā ghālib mīkunam*).\(^48\) In this verse, Laylī is to Zulaykhā as Majnūn is to Yusuf. But the parallel is far from complete, since one of the major accomplishments of Yusuf and Zulaykhā was to invert the heterosexual construction of the women as the object of desire and the male lover as its subject that fully permeates Laylī and Majnūn. While Jāmī’s verse is certainly striving for a kind of intertextuality, the allusion to prior *mathnavīs* as templates for these new characters only goes so far; the poet’s turn away from Laylī and Majnūn entails more than the replacement of names, or a ground clearing for new characters. Rather, it signifies an inversion of a heteronormative social order that also inverts a prior hierarchy of authorship. Even as Jāmī clears a space for the introduction of his characters into the Persian narrative repertoire, he also reframes the question of influence. Jāmī implies that, at this juncture in the history of Persian literature, the story of Laylī and Majnūn is over and the time for his Yusuf and Zulaykhā has arrived.\(^49\)

\(^48\) Here I also follow Muḥammad Shāh (*Sharḥ-i Zulaykhā Muḥammad Shāh*, 57–58).

\(^49\) Further adding to the parallelisms between Teimuraz’s and Jāmī’s texts, just as Teimuraz turns to the Persian poetic tradition to make a case for the importance of his Georgian
Jāmī understands love (‘ishq) as an affective condition that, because it so intimately related to the encounter with the sacred, permeates the desiring subject with what Zulaykhā calls ḥayrāt, astonishment or stupefaction. As a spiritual state, ḥayrāt also features widely in Jāmī’s theological writings, most notably in his mystical treatise Lavā’īth (Flashes), which expounds the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī. When Zulaykhā’s nurse asks why she seems to be suffering, Zulaykhā responds:

bi-guftā man zi khwud ḥayrān-am imrūz
ba kār-i khwīsh sar gardānam imrūz (YZ, 106)

She said: I am bewildered from myself today.
I’m bewildered about this situation of mine.

In Jāmī’s text, Zulaykhā’s desire for Yūsuf is more frequently associated with ‘ishq than with love-madness (junūn). Both at the level of narrative poetics, by giving a new life to a neglected story, and thematically, by elaborating a concept of ‘ishq that was unavailable to Niẓāmī, the mathnavī that Jāmī contrasted to Niẓāmī’s narrative corpus signaled a new literary-historical horizon.

Further paralleling the placement of Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā with that of Teimuraz’s Iosebzilixiani, Jāmī drew on a Quranic narrative that, notwithstanding earlier brief attempts by Firdawsī and ‘Amīq Bukhārī, had not productively been used in Persian literature prior to his creation. Jāmī rewrote the Quranic narrative so successfully that his example was imitated afterwards, so profusely and in so many languages that the status of his text as the source of subsequent vernacular appropriations has been highly mediated, although always present at some level. The Kurdish version is a case in point, as is the Georgian one. In both cases Jāmī is the great unnamed predecessor, whose authority casts a shadow over the entire text, but who is not explicitly invoked. Teimuraz positions his work within a Persianate tradition, but, even while drawing heavily on prior Persian and Georgian narratives, he does not invoke Jāmī. The task of more explicit invocation and affiliation was left for subsequent Georgian Persianizing poets.

work, so does Jāmī invoke the Quranic verse concerning God’s creation of the world (kun fayakūn, Quran 36:82) to elevate his own poetic act (this is my reading of YZ, 39, v. 395).
Translation as Intertextuality

Both the Georgian and Persian text considered here make the case for their newness by invoking contrasting examples from the same narrative traditions. Our understanding of the precise workings of literary influence in these milieus can be refined through the Arabo-Persian concept of *sariqa*, sometimes translated as literary theft. Because *sariqa* is a highly valued literary technique in Persian and Arabic rhetorical manuals, “literary appropriation” seems like a more appropriate rendering. Premodern rhetoricians meticulously distinguished among the many different varieties of *sariqa*. For present purposes, it is relevant only to note that the best *sariqa* was regarded as the one that most thoroughly transforms the original text at the level both of wording (*lafẓ*) and meaning (*maʿnī*) and thereby generates a fundamentally new creation.

While Teimuraz was at work constructing his *khamsa* through a series of direct and indirect *naẓīrs*, another Persianate poet indebted to Jāmī, Ālāol of Bengal (*fl.* 1651–71), pioneered an understanding of translation “as a hermeneutical practice inspired in its form by Sanskrit commentarial methods.”

Georgian scholarship similarly refers to Georgian reworkings of Persian *mathnavīs* as *badzvebi* (imitations), and the verb used to describe the act of transposition is *badzabs* (imitates) rather than “translates.” These lineages, which conceive of translation as a variation on commentary, imitation, and appropriation, suggest an alternative to the current understanding of translation as the wholesale reproduction of a syntactical unit. The forms of intertextuality cultivated by these premodern practices of translation reveal the limitations of contemporary understandings of translation for tracking *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā*’s circulation across the Persianate world.
The disjuncture between modern and premodern ways of conceiving translation holds whether these versions are genealogically related to Jāmī’s text, or whether they derive from a folkloric tradition. Rather than classing Teimuraz’s Iosebzilixiani as a translation of Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, I have engaged with this text as a means of better understanding the relation between Persian and Persianate literatures in early modern Georgia under Safavid rule. An intertextual approach is better equipped to track the movement between texts within the naẓīr tradition than is a literalist comparison between a series of genealogically related texts. Embedded as it was within a multilingual world literary culture, particularly during the early modern period, the naẓīr tradition was arguably concerned less with the recreation of specific texts than with their localization within new, only partially Persian, environments.

A literalist approach would only work if there were a single, normative model against which Teimuraz’s version could be measured. Jāmī was as normative in the Caucasus as he was across South Asia, but in both geographies the engagement with his Haft awrang was fluid. In much the same way as he related to Niẓāmī, the poet’s name functioned as much if not more as a stimulus to creative revision than as a locus of authority. Teimuraz conceived no single Urtext when he rendered the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story into Georgian. Instead, he used Jāmī’s Haft Awrang as he used the romances of Rustaveli and Niẓāmī, as stimuli, not as constraints against which the accuracy of his version was to be measured. Committed as he was to a conception of translation as intertextual recreation, Teimuraz’s literary legacy can move contemporary translation studies beyond the fetishization of literal fidelity to the source text.

In terms of Islamic literary theory, both Teimuraz and Jāmī attained to the highest levels of sariqa in their versions of the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story. Making previous alignments of lafẓ and maʿnī serve new ends, their works went beyond the scope of translations in the modern sense. Jāmī defines ʿishq against its preceding signification in Niẓāmī, and Teimuraz defines mijnuroba against its preceding signification in Rustaveli. Jāmī’s achievement was more comprehensive than that of his Georgian counterpart, but Teimuraz’s readerly as well as poetic gifts were considerable. Instead of celebrating Persian culture as more elevated than his own, Teimuraz could have denigrated the Safavid dynasty that he perceived as hostile to his very existence, for the very good reason that its rulers had executed much of his family. When Teimuraz created a new Georgian variation on a longer-standing Persianate narrative tradition, he

55 Outside Georgia, Jāmī was more influential in the Caucasus—Daghestan in particular—for his Arabic grammatical and philosophical writings.
advanced the shift from Persian to Persianate literary culture, by deepening the interface between local and global idioms, and by inculcating a creative understanding of translation that prioritized intervention within the target culture over fidelity to the source.

Another Georgian poet, Nodar Tsitsishvili, followed Teimuraz’s footsteps when he cast another Persian narrative, dedicated to the life and exploits of the Sasanian king Bahram Gur (r. 421–438), into Georgian verse.\(^5^6\) Niẓāmī produced the first major version of Bahram Gur’s story in Persian literature under the title *Haft paykar* (593/1197). Amīr Khusraw produced his version, *Hasht bihisht* (Eight Paradises) in 701/1302. By the sixteenth century, many versions of *Haft paykar* were in circulation, including a Chaghatay version by Jāmī’s close friend Mīr ‘Ali Shīr Navā’ī (845–906/1441–1501). In the prologue to his version of the Bahram Gur narrative, entitled *Seven Morning Stars* (*Shvidi mtiebi*, ca. 1655), Tsitsishvili situates Navā’ī’s version alongside three versions that preceded his own, using the verb “imitates [badzavs]” rather than “translates” to describe the process of the text’s recreation in a new language:

\[
\begin{align*}
esambavi & \text{sparsulebr goneba-miuqvdome}, \\
nizamis & \text{utkvams ganjelsa, brdzena brdzenia romeli; mas badzavs xosro dehlevi. mun ena-daushromeli, mas xosro sjobs tu nizami, vart misi miuxvdomei.} \\

\text{navais ese ambavi chaghaturis enita} & \text{utkvams, da misebr melekse sxva vinmetsa viazrebnita? Kvla jamis utkvams sparsulad munve chkuita brdzenita, Ilxens qovel mi kixveli mat ottxa leksta smenita.}^5^7
\end{align*}
\]

This Persian story [*ambavi*] is the height of profundity. Niẓāmī of Ganja told it once. He was the wisest of the wise. Then Khusraw of Delhi, of the insatiable tongue, imitated it [*mas badzavs*].

Whether it’s better [in the versions of] Khusraw or Niẓāmī, we cannot say.

\(^5^6\) Donald Rayfield considers Nodar’s version “the greatest [among the] Georgian adaptations” of Persian narratives (Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 99).

Then Navāʾī put this story into Chaghatay.  
Who could imagine a poem more beautiful than his?  
Then Jāmī again with his wise mind puts it into Persian again.  
Every reader rejoices at hearing all four poems.

Although Nodar attributes versions of the Bahrām Gūr narrative to Niẓāmī, Amīr Khusraw, and Jāmī, only versions by the first two poets are known. Nodar’s account of textual transmission may therefore be read as a statement concerning the plasticity of Persian forms of authorship and the malleability of Persianate narratives, rather than as a reconstruction of a preexisting genealogy. Nodar’s method of writing literary history substantiates the preceding discussion of translation in relation to the Persian-Georgian concept of naẓīr/naẓirōba. We can see from this list that the boundaries between texts were perceived as porous rather than constraining. Persianizing Georgian poets such as Teimuraz and Nodar saw themselves less as translators of texts than as translators of traditions, of cultural worlds to which they gave new life in new milieus. Nodar’s catalog is important less for what it tells us about the circulation of the Bahrām Gūr story than for what it reveals concerning the currency of Niẓāmī, Amīr Khusraw, Jāmī, and Navāʾī on this periphery of the Persianate world.

It is apt in this context to compare Nodar’s poetic catalog with one from a century earlier, by the Dakani poet Shaykh Aḥmad Gujrātī (b. 1539). His version of Jāmī’s Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, dated ca. 1580–5, was the first rendering of this work into any South Asian vernacular and a landmark within early Urdu literary culture. In this text, Shaykh Aḥmad generates a list of Persian poets identical to that invoked by Nodar, by way of preparing the groundwork for his vernacular rendering. “If I could find the poems/Made by Khusraw or Niẓāmī,” states Shaykh Aḥmad, “I should quickly put them/Into Hindvī.” The context of Shaykh Aḥmad’s statement is important: this is a vernacular text, one of the first of its kind, in a newly emergent literary language that was, like Georgian, lexically indebted to, while gramatically distinct from, Persian.

As with Dakani, so with Georgian. The differences between the South Asian and Caucasus literary situations, traceable to a Sanskritic register on the one hand, and a partially Byzantine register on the other, speak for themselves.  

58 For similar misattributions in the Bengali context, which equally attest to the symbolic status of the authorial persona behind the khamsa genre and his fluidity across this literary tradition, see d’Hubert, In the Shade of the Golden Palace.

59 Cited and translated in Faruqi, Early Urdu Literary Culture and History, 96.

60 The treatment of Georgian as a vernacular language in terms comparable to its better-studied Indian counterparts requires fuller elucidation elsewhere. For a more extended
The genesis of vernacular literary culture on these two borderlands of the Persianate world, so distant from each other, merits systematic comparison. Their divergences and convergences can crucially advance our understanding of Persian and Persianate early modernity, as well as the early modern interface between vernacular and cosmopolitan literary horizons.

Notwithstanding the radically different coordinates informing Indic and Caucasus literary cultures, the Persianate register brought about a confluence of literatures from across West and South Asia that had yet to engage with each other prior to the early modern translations of Persian texts into vernacular languages. I argued earlier for recognizing the contemporaneity of the Persianization of Georgian and South Asian literatures. Niẓāmī, for example, figured heavily into the literary imagination from South Asia to the Caucasus. The early modern moment, however, marked a new and even more linguistically heterogeneous confluence between these opposite coordinates of the Persian world. In contrast to the medieval example, which transpired primarily in Persian (with the important exception of Georgian), this confluence transpired across multiple languages, and entailed parallel, Persianate, yet mutually unintelligible revivals of local vernacular culture.

Nodar and Shaykh Aḥmad invoke identical genealogies, leading from Niẓāmī to Amīr Khusraw to Jāmī. They both arrive however at radically different, if parallel, locations in their pursuit of the vernacular. Nodar lays special emphasis on the beauty of Navāʾī’s Chaghatay and thereby displaces the authority of Persian as the supreme language of literary expression. Similarly, Shaykh Aḥmad boldly states that he is not content to play the role of “Jāmī’s slave.” Instead of engaging in blind imitation, Shaykh Aḥmad proposes to “follow [Jāmī]/In some places, and not follow him” in others, and to “extract whatever/Poetry Jāmī had, and add some of my own.” Shaykh Aḥmad’s revisionary literary agenda suggests a new confidence in the vernacular, and a new relationship to Persian, which is still a primary reference point, although its authority is now exercised in a different way. Nodar’s elevation of Navāʾī’s Chaghatay over Jāmī’s Persian can also be read in light of this changed relation between vernacular and cosmopolitan literary languages. In assigning the superior version of the Bahrām Gūr narrative to a language other than Persian,
Nodar helped to secure a place for early modern Georgian within Persianate literary culture.

Nodar was not the only early modern Persianate poet to conceive of Jāmī in relation to Amīr Khusraw. A century earlier, another South Asian poet, Jamālī Dihlavī (d. 942/1535) had bestowed on Jāmī the title “the second Khusraw.” In Nodar’s literary ecology, the status of Georgian with respect to Persian parallels that of Chaghatay. He even claims that the most beautiful version of the poem is the Turkic rather than the Persian one. Such equalization of linguistic registers is part of the poet’s endeavor to clear a space for Georgian within Persianate literary culture, and a reflection of the vernacular linguistic ecologies that were coming to characterize the Persianate world.

In contrast with the Persianate register cultivated by Teimuraz and Nodar, another Georgian king, Archil (1647–1713), pursued an idiom closer to Georgian speech. Archil incorporated into his Archili, a composite work consisting of narratives of Georgian history, a dialogue between Teimuraz and Rustaveli (gabaaseba teimurazisa da rustvelisa), in which he reproaches the Safavid vassal for “the artificial mannerisms of his style, as well as for having set himself above the sublime Rustaveli.” The sequence leading from Teimuraz to Nodar to Archil traces an arc of Persianization, followed by vernacularization, for a literature dating back to late antiquity. While this type of Persianization, which transpired within a literature that was susceptible to many other influences, calls for a rethinking of the Persianization/vernacularization sequence,

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64 See Marc Toutant’s contribution to this volume.
66 Lang, The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 122. For the text, see vol. 2 of Arch‘iliani: t‘xzulebat’a sruli krebuli or tomad (Tbilisi: Sak’art’velos muzeumi, 1936–1937) and Archili, Sruli krebuli (Tbilisi: Merani, 1999), 210–362.
67 For Georgian literary beginnings, which date (in terms of extant texts) to the fifth century, see R. Baramidze, Kartuli mtserlobis sataveebtan (Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1978). Bengali is another Persianate literature with a tradition that predates its Persianization.
this paradigm still retains heuristic usefulness, as a way of marking the influence of a transregional Persian idiom within resolutely local literary cultures. Nodar’s elevation of Navāʾī’s Chaghatay over Jāmī’s Persian was one stage in the process of Georgian literature’s vernacularization, which was a consequence of its earlier Persianization. This process reached its acme with Archil’s wholesale displacement of Jāmī’s Persian idiom. And yet even Archil, who tried to stem the tide of Persianization, composed an Alexander romance modeled on the versions of Niẓāmī and Jāmī.68

As Archil’s example attests, even when Georgian poets endeavored to turn Georgian away from Persian idioms, they inevitably pursued their agendas under the shadow of Persian. With regard to its complex relationship to cosmopolitan Persianate idioms, early modern Georgian can productively be thought of as a cosmopolitan vernacular, along lines that have thus far been discussed primarily for South Asian literary history.69 Extending the cosmopolitan vernacular to the scale of world literature, Wai Chee Dimock describes this paradigm as “a local tongue globalized in its emergence and globalized again in its circulation.”70 In using the cosmopolitan vernacular concept to trace the Persianization of Georgian literature, a few modifications need to be made. Although it was heavily inflected by a cosmopolitan language, Georgian was never “globalized in its circulation” as other cosmopolitan vernaculars were. The Persianization of Georgian created a sphere of literary influence within a Persianate geography that remained confined within narrow geographic coordinates and addressed to a small circle of connoisseurs, primarily comprised of poet-kings.71

This inward-looking Persianate sphere existed in a tense and contradictory relation to the broader political context of Safavid hegemony. Persian was the medium of Teimuraz’s subjection to Safavid rule and the register in which he articulated his profoundest grief. The tension between Safavid rule

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71 For further on “Persianate spheres” as a paradigm for understanding regional difference within the Persianate world, see James Pickett, The Persianate Sphere during the Age of Empires: Islamic Scholars and Networks of Exchange in Central Asia, 1747–1917 (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015).
and Timurid literary legacies is well-attested outside Georgia as well. The Safavid Shāh Ismā‘īl (r. 907–930/1501–1524) permitted the soldiers under his command to ignite a fire around Jāmī’s tomb. Later Safavid rulers followed suit. Persuaded that he was hostile to Shi‘ite beliefs, the Safavid Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 930–984/1524–1576) ordered the destruction of Jāmī’s shrine in Herat and issued an order to burn all extant copies of his dīwān.

Jāmī’s tomb was later rebuilt by the same Shah and revered by subsequent Safavid rulers, but the rifts these acts introduced into literary exchanges between Iran and the broader Persianate world remained as palpable, and as irrevocable, as the iron brandished by Shāh ‘Abbās’ executioner onto the resistant body of the Queen Ketevan, which would irrevocably shape the future course of Georgian literary history and which arguably remains the most potent image of Safavid in the contemporary Georgian imagination. One of the many potential benefits of more sustained exploration of the place of Persian and Persianate idioms within early modern Georgian literary culture is the impetus it can give those of us who seek with our work to displace the nationalisms of the present with more nuanced accounts of the circulation of world literature before modernity. Rejecting the monolithic construction of Safavid tyranny that dominates much Georgian historiography as well as contemporary Georgian cultural memory, I have sought to move beyond persecution as the dominant trope for understanding the Georgian encounter with Persian literature, while also illuminating a literary archive that, as Teimuraz’s encounter with Jāmī attests, richly supports a more cosmopolitan understanding of the genesis and circulation of global literary culture.

Bibliography


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72 Algar, Jami, 126.


