

**Problems of translating poetry and the English and Russian translations
of *The Man in the Panther Skin***

Abstract: Desire to translate poetic compositions in another language comes across numerous difficulties on one hand and on the other hand, every country has a desire its masterpiece to be recognized as the masterpiece all over the world. But if the reader hasn't an adequate translation close to equivalent, it's impossible. Shota Rustaveli's poem *The Man in the Panther Skin* (MPS) is the highest peak of Medieval Georgian literary and socio-philosophical thought. Current work explains the main difficulties of translating poetry in general; gives a brief history of English and Russian translations of MPS known to date; makes several important notes according the problems of translating the MPS; tries to find the ways of their solution and therefore the way from Rustaveli's world to non-Georgian world of our days.

Keywords: poetic translations, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, Shota Rustaveli, MPS

The extensive theories have been created in the line of translation within contemporary literature studies. However, it still remains disputed what criteria should be included exactly an ideal translation in spite of its old age. Deal comes much more difficult regarding of poetry. Many theorists (and practitioners as well) note about impossibility of creation artistic importance of adequate poetic translations. The tendencies change also. For instance, sometimes focus related to the content of text. But sometime it goes to the emotional attitude. Noteworthy that translation should be completed in modern language even if the author is from the middle ages, but according to other opinion, it is important to keep attempt not to change the color of the epoch of the text which is being translating. Due to evaluation of readymade translations and giving them some rank of quality it is easy for the qualified theory to define a relevant original and universal method. But when the theory defines tentative rules somehow it equals to prepare preliminary program script for artistic process. As for translation if it is carried out the original and only his interior pattern based on the poetic creation, is full-fledged artistic work. So, it is hard to imagine that the best translations may be based on theories. Actually it is final product derived from different talent and skills of translator and not a result of considered rules and regulations. (Khutsishvili 1989: 4)

W. Humboldt has the following opinion on the difficulty of poetic translation: people apperceive entitative world extremely subjectively. Characteristics of language cause perception of the peculiarities of thinking and psyche. Therefore, communication based on barely content identity is almost an impracticable plan. "For this reason, the German philosopher considers the possibility of literary translation, or "a fruitless work" as he calls it, to be a totally impossible task."(Humboldt 1970: 479)

Lineal translation is considered to be the fate of Georgian poetry. This type of translation provides a benchmark for translators who do not have good command of the source language. With the exception of talented translators, the attempts of translating Georgian poetry into other languages by the help of linear translation result in producing translations the only purpose of which is to prove the existence of translated pieces of literature. However, it should be mentioned that apprehending or transmitting the essence or artistic characteristics of literary works can be problematic also in the cases where translators do have command of the source language. Unfortunately, Georgian literature has never had many translators who could speak Georgians. Therefore, the process of translating Georgian literature has often been mediated by Georgian consultants or linear translation. Knowledge or ignorance of the language sometimes is not even decisive.

Shota Rustaveli's poem is the highest peak of Medieval Georgian literary and socio-philosophical thought. The artistic system and theoretical passages of the poem echoes the progress of

European Christian thought from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Rustaveli Studies as well as Homerology or Dante studies searches the message of the author encrypted in his creation. The most important thing in such spheres is to understand the artistic and expressive art and worldview of the author, analyzing his phrases, particular passages or context of the words. Nowadays, the interest taken in poem by foreign scholars, mostly medieval and Renaissance researchers, calls for the presentation of the text and its theoretical conceptions for the non-Georgian readers. The Question is: can any of the translations known to date shoulder this mission... if not, how to find solution.

The first mention of the Rustaveli's poem belongs to the Metropolitan Evgeny Bolkhovitinov in the book "Historical depiction of Georgia in their political, ecclesiastical and scientific state of Georgia" (St. Petersburg, 1802). Later, Marie-Félicité Brosset introduced the poem's content to the European reader; in 1863 the Polish translation of Kazimir Lapchinski is published, and in 1889 the first edition of the masterpiece of *The Man Panther's Skin* in the Western Europe comes out with complete German translation of Arthur Leist. (Georgian Literature... 2003: 33-35)

The foreign readers of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* are familiar mostly with Russian and English translations. There are five full (poetic and prosaic) translations in both languages. But there are partial translations as well and the first one is a partial poetic translation, which belongs to Ippolit Bardtinsky. It was published in the journal *Illustration* (No. 67, 1845), entitled as "Tariel. Leopard/Tiger's Leather" (*Тариедь. Барсова кожа*). A substitute for the translation of Bardinsky was made by prof. David Chubinashvili (St. Petersburg University).

The first Russian (incomplete) translation of the poem, made in the twentieth century and published in 1917, belongs to Konstantin Balmont, his first version of the title of the poem was "The Wearer of the Tiger's Skin" (*Носящий Барсову Шкуру*). (Podosokorsky 2016: <https://philologist.livejournal.com/8360711.html>) A year later, under the title "The Leopard's Skin" (*Барсова Кожа*), S. Mikirtumov, printed under the pseudonym Sharti, publishes his own translation of the Introduction of the poem (Kolchuga Publishing House, 1918).

The first complete Russian translation made my K. Balmont with the article in Russian, French and English was published in Paris in 1933. He met the poem of Rustaveli when he traveled with English vessels near Canary Islands and Oliver Wardrop gave the English translation of his sister to the Russian poet. The work of Marjory was not published that time, it was the copy with last corrections. Balmont fell in love with the poem. "How Homer is Hellas, Dante - Italy, Shakespeare - England, Calderon and Cervantes - Spain, Rustaveli is Georgia... This is the best love poem ever created in Europe, the rainbow of love, the fire bridge, connecting heaven and earth," - Balmont wrote in the foreword of the poem. (Rustaveli 1937: 21-22) In the transmission of the original Balmont makes mistakes, allows himself to make changes, complicates and overloads the verses. But he excellently recreated the sound and emotional richness of the romance. He was the first who took up to create the full translation of Rustaveli's poem.

Beside Balmont's translation, there are four other poetic translations into Russian made by Giorgi Tsagareli (1937), Panteleimon Petrenko (with the participation of K. Chichinadze) (1938), Shalva Nutsubidze (1941) and Nikolai Zabolotsky (1937). The famous Georgian philologist Solomon Iordanishvili made the interlinear translation of the poem in 1933. Till today *The Man in the Panther's Skin* was published in Russian more than 60 times: the translation of K. A. Balmont - 7 times, G. K. Tsagareli - 2 times, P. A. Petrenko - 6 times, Sh. Nutsubidze -10 times, N.A. Zabolotsky - 16 times, a substring S. Iordanishvili - twice.

Abovementioned Marjory Wardrop's work was the first English translation of the poem - complete and prosaic. It was printed in London in 1912 under the patronage of the Asiatic Society. According to the Oliver Wardrop's preface, "the first English translation of MPS endeavours to present the author's ideas and expressions with such fidelity that it may be of use to those who wish to read the original. This version was begun in Kent in 1891, and the first draft was completed at Kertch on November 1, 1898; but in spite of frequent revision and correction, carried on till December, 1909, Oliver Wardrop, that it is imperfect, and the translator estimated that ten more years of study at least would be required to bring it to its final shape. Nevertheless, as it stands it is a contribution to Georgian studies in Europe, a steppingstone to help others in a difficult task." (Rustaveli: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/mps/mps01.htm>)

More than half a century passed since the second full English translation of Venera Urushadze was published in Tbilisi (the first edition in 1968 and the author's revised edition in 1986). In her

Preface translator says that she “wanted the English reader to have a slight idea of the poetic beauty of the original, wanted him to hear an echo of the melody and spirit of this great poem.” (Rustaveli 1986: 7) Her translation was the first complete poetic English translation of Rustaveli’s poem. Again in London, in 1977, The Folio Society published the poetic translation of Catherine Vivian, who “has translated other Georgian Classics as well (notably S. S. Orbeliani's *Book of Wisdom and Lies*, a section of *The Georgian Chronicle*). She has also contributed to symposia on the literature and culture of Georgia in London, Bari and Tbilisi.” (Vivian 1982: 3) In the same 1977 Robert Stevenson published his version of MPS in New York: *The Lord of the Panther-Skin: A Georgian Romance of Chivalry* (Albany: *State University of New York Press*, 1977); and the last English translation belongs to American poet, fiction writer, playwright, translator, non-fiction writer, editor Lyn Coffin (Tbilisi: *Poezia Press*, 2015). “Lyn Coffin’s translation shows superb technical mastery of the elaborate *shairi* form used by Shota Rustaveli in his 12th century epic, *Knight in A Panther Skin*. Coffin is faithful to both meter and rhyme, yet does not lose the beauty of Rustaveli’s poetry. Most previous English translators such as Katherine Vivian or R.H. Stevenson, favored free verse, but Coffin has preserved the structure as well as the splendor of Rustaveli’s great adventure story. Coffin is both a meticulous wordsmith and a passionate artist who has combined both these talents to produce one of the most accurate and readable translations into English of Rustaveli’s epic over the last forty years.” (Jones: <http://www.mtapublications.co.uk/rustaveli.html>)

Analyzing all these translations the first point to which attention might be given is the title of the poem. It’s the best illustration of the questions about translating Rustaveli. In Wardrop’s translation it is *The Man in the Panther’s Skin*, in Urushadze’s *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, in Vivian’s *The Knight in Panther Skin*, in Stevenson’s *The Lord in the Panther-skin*, and in Coffin’s *The Knight in the Panther Skin*. “Of the nuances that differentiate these titles, we draw attention to only one: *Man*, *Knight* and *Lord* which are accepted interpretations for a natural perception of the Georgian *-osan* suffix (*Vepkhistaqosani*) in English. All these titles are more or less contradictory. An exact, though literarily hardly acceptable, rendering would be “one who wears a panther’s skin” or more precisely “wearer of a panther’s skin”. Among the variations of the English translations of the title, in my opinion, the word *Man* is much closer to the Georgian original title - *Vepkhistaqosani*. Other translations of the title over-specify the identity of the stranger fellow (Knight, Lord) and go beyond the original title of the epic.” (Khintibidze 2012: 10) The same fact is observed in Russian translations of the Georgian medieval romance. All of them represent the words “Knight” (витязь) and the tiger and leopard (барс) in the title. So, it’s easy to imagine, how many questions will arise towards the translation of the whole text of the poem.

“The time when the Georgian public was satisfied with all sorts of translations, even paraphrases, has passed. The literary-artistic and intellectual-cognitive level of the modern reader calls us to pay more attention to the quality of translations, and for this it is necessary to study each translation, to identify its advantages and disadvantages by comparing it with the original.” (Menabde 1992: 115) As we know the most important thing in Rustaveli Studies is to understand the artistic and expressive art and worldview of the author, analyzing his phrases, particular passages or context of the words. It’s the whole world, the world of Rustaveli with rhymes, verses and secrets behind them. Therefore, translations are worth to be observed and checked scrupulously in the light of Rustaveli Studies and the crossroad of parallel observation of translations (in current languages), analyzes of poetic merits of each of them and, of course, commentaries based on modern Rustaveli Studies will bring non-Georgian readers, researchers and translators closer to Georgian Masterpiece.

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