

**REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL SPACE IN SOUTH CAUCASIAN AND
INDO-EUROPEAN IDEOLOGY.**

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It is difficult to imagine that one person, in one lifetime, could have achieved an oeuvre of the quality and quantity of that of Georges Dumézil. Most of you who are reading this, I imagine, first became acquainted with Dumézil the Indo-Europeanist, and only later came to know of his work in Caucasian linguistics and folklore. For me, it was the reverse. I still remember my surprise at learning, from a fellow grad student at the University of Chicago, that “my” Dumézil, a French Caucasologist who almost singlehandedly saved the Ubykh language from oblivion, had a side interest in Indo-European comparative mythology. For the most part — at least this is the impression I have, based on the 10% or so of Dumézil’s writings that I have read so far — the primary point of intersection between Dumézil’s two careers was the collection and analysis of the Nart cycles, which represented one of the key corpora used in the reconstruction of Indo-Iranian and IE mythology and social ideology. Dumézil seems to have been less interested in the historical ethnology of the Ossetians’ North and South Caucasian neighbors, nor to have made much use of his disciple Georges Charachidzé’s research in this area. What I intend to do here is to sketch out one line of approach toward the comparative study of Kartvelian (South Caucasian) and IE ideological systems, an approach which I see as complementing, rather than contradicting, Dumézil’s and Charachidzé’s work.

Mythology, legend, history and other vehicles of ideological representation can situate groups along what I will call the vertical and horizontal dimensions of social space: vertical = hierarchical divisions within the society; horizontal = relations with different types of “outsiders”. These are not, of course, the only parameters relevant to the typology of ideological systems in general, nor to those of the Kartvelian- and IE-speaking peoples in particular. My interest in this matter stems from my research of the past fifteen years on the linguistic geography of the Caucasus. The Caucasus

region, especially its highland areas, has long been noted for its high degree of linguistic diversity. By contrast, the region is crisscrossed by fictive kinship ties and trade routes, and numerous cultural features are widespread in the Caucasus: myths, legends and types of supernatural beings; traditional systems of justice and governance, sexual division of labor; details of clothing and material culture, etc. Archeological and paleolinguistic evidence confirms that the circulation of people, goods, technologies and ideas has a long history within the Caucasus region. This seeming paradox has led me to examine representations of “space” — inside and outside, domestic and savage, pure and impure, etc. — in Caucasian myth and religious practice. On the basis of published ethnographic materials, supplemented by my fieldwork of recent years, I have formulated, as a working hypothesis for future research, a model of highland Georgian ideological systems as being predominantly horizontally-oriented. In the traditional religious systems of the Northeast Georgian Xevsurs, Pshavs, and their neighbors of the east-central Caucasian highlands, special emphasis is given to delimiting, contrasting and overcoming barriers between “inside” and “outside” groups of different types.¹

1. The religion of the Northeast Georgian highlanders. Each Northeast Georgian village is surrounded by a complex of shrines and sacred sites, at which members of the community offer sacrifices on various occasions throughout the year. The shrines are administered by a chief priest (Xevs. *xutsesi*, Psh. *xervisberi*), assisted by minor officials. Either the priest himself, or a separate individual, might receive the vocation of oracle (*kadag*), empowering him to speak with the voice of the local deity. Almost all Northeast Georgian shrine buildings are simple stone structures; churches of recognizeably Christian origin are few and far between. Many shrines have a tower or altar built at the spot where the deity is believed to have touched down after choosing the site for its dwelling. These structures (called *k'vrivi*) can only be approached by the shrine officials, if anyone, and are normally separated by a low wall from the rest of the complex [Bardavelidze 1974, 1982; K'ik'nadze 1996]. Radiating outward from this point are spaces of decreasing sacredness, accessible to the men of the community. Women, being considered more impure than the menfolk,

remain at a distance from the shrine. The extreme of impurity is represented by the women's menstruation huts (*samrelo*), on the margins of the village, and the childbirth huts (*sachexi*), often a kilometer or more further away. The Northeast Georgian pantheon includes dozens of deities, "angels" and "children of God" (*xvtisshvilni*), most of which have specialized functions (making war on ogres and dragons; assuring good crops and milk-yields) or are assigned to watch over social units of different sizes. The supreme deity is named *Morige Ghmerti* ("God the Director"), or *Dambadebeli* ("the Creator"), a remote celestial sovereign to whom no earthly shrine is dedicated. Mediating between Ghmerti and the host of subordinate deities is *K'viria*, a sort of divine prime minister [Bleichsteiner 1936; Bardavelidze 1957: 10-22; Charachidzé 1968]. *K'viria* is invoked as protector of human society, instrument of divine justice, and by families wishing for the birth of sons [Bardavelidze 1957: 19-20; Charachidzé 1987: 40]. In the mass of remaining deities, two figures stand out, although their distinctive features may be linked to a variety of theonyms. This is the divine couple of St. George (*Giorgi*, *Givargi*, or one of his doubles) and his female counterparts, called *dobilni* "sworn sisters", whose "towers" (*dobilt k'oshk'i*) are found within the complexes of most Xevsur shrines [Bardavelidze 1957: 12; 1982: 15, 136]. Although most *dobilni* are represented as a homogenous horde of half-demonic, potentially malicious sprites which can take the form of women, children, and even snakes and pigs [Bardavelidze 1982: 94], the most celebrated of *Giorgi's* sisters have mythic cycles of their own: *Samdzimari* in Xevsureti, *Tamar* in Pshavi. Both provinces have paired shrines of great importance dedicated to the joint cult of *Giorgi* and his "sister". A popular Xevsur myth describes how *Giorgi*, an especially redoubtable warrior deity, led a raiding party of *xvtisshvilni* to *Kajaveti*, the hypochthonian kingdom of the *Kajis*, a race of magic-wielding, demonic metalworkers. After defeating the *Kajis*, *Giorgi* seized their wealth and their women: the *Kaji* princess *Samdzimari* and several of her companions. One Xevsurian *andrezi* (shrine-foundation myth) recounts how *Giorgi* swore brother-sisterhood with them: "Come and I will be [your] brother and you [my] sisters, and what power and ability I have, I will share it with you, and your establishment shall be with me" [Andrezebi: 62]. At *Xaxmat's* *Jvari*, *Giorgi* and *Samdzimari* are at times invoked as one deity, at times separately. Women pray at the shrine,

especially to Samdzimari and her sisters, for the birth of children, an easy childbirth, and for women’s health in general. The shrine is invoked for the productivity and well-being of dairy cattle, and the protection of travellers [Mak’alattia 1935: 242].

Table 1.
Pantheon of the Northeast Georgian highland communities (Xevsureti, Pshavi).

Morige Ghmert [no shrines; distant from human affairs (almost Deus otiosus)]	
K’viria [“Chief of the dry land”, “Commander of the <i>xvtisshvilni</i> ”] *mentioned second in invocations of deities, after Morige Ghmert *protector of human society *instrument of divine justice *invoked for birth of sons to perpetuate patriline	
Samdzimari (Tamar, <i>dobilni</i> as doublets) (1) DOMESTIC FUNCTIONS *dairy production *women’s health, well-being, protection in childbirth; health, healing (2) RELATION TO MEN *”bead-wearing” seductress of oracles *assures success (or failure) of hunters *shape-changer (disguised as wives of oracles) (3) ORIGIN & TRAJECTORY *hypochthonian origins (Kajeti); potentially dangerous, can be appeased *circulates between home & remote spaces (inaccessible forests, Kist’eti)	Giorgi (K’op’ala/Iaqsar as doublets) *culture hero — demon/ogre slayer *raid in Kajaveti, returns with women [Samdzimari and sisters], metallurgy, cultic utensils *foreign attributes (Kist’ dress, Somxoz Giorgi shrine at Ardot’i allegedly founded by Armenian) *patronage of men, esp. in exploitation of outside spaces [shepherds, travellers, raiders]

The functions of Giorgi and Samdzimari can be linked to their movements, or trajectories, which appear to be fundamental characteristics of their nature as deities, and which mirror attributes of male and female roles as conceived by the dominant ideology of Northeast Georgian society. Giorgi is the patron of men in their roles as exploiters, for the profit of their communities, of the undomesticated space outside of the village and its adjacent fields. He is the protector of shepherds,

hunters, travellers, and men raiding cattle from their neighbors on the other side of the mountains. Although very much a Georgian culture hero, Giorgi is frequently described as being of foreign origin (Armenian, Persian or even “Tatar” [i.e. Muslim]), or as appearing to his oracles in Chechen dress [Bardavelidze 1982: 132; Andrezebi: 50]. The trajectory of Giorgi can be schematically represented as one of circulation between interior and exterior for the sake of obtaining profit for his community. The movements of Samdzimari parallel those of Giorgi in interesting ways, yet also contrast with them. She as well is a foreigner, daughter of the king of the demonic Kajis, who is abducted by Giorgi, “baptized” by him and installed at Xaxmat’is Jvari. Yet her wanderings do not cease there. A series of legends, analyzed by Charachidzé 1968 (see the text of one of them in Tuite 1994 #30), describe her as the nocturnal bed-mate of various semi-legendary oracles. She would take the appearance of a mortal woman, seduce the oracle (though without ever consummating the affair), and go to work in the family kitchen, where she miraculously produced enormous quantities of butter. On being discovered performing her butter-making hocus-pocus by her “mother-in-law”, Samdzimari assumed her original form and flew off toward the river Ts’ova, a site located in the land of the Chechens. Among other functions, Samdzimari is invoked to restore communication between a (male) deity and his (male) oracle, after some imagined offense had angered the former [Charachidzé 1968: 163, 511-2, 575-9].

Samdzimari’s trajectory resembles the circulation between inside and exterior associated with her male counterpart, but with significant differences: (i) the exterior spaces where she sojourns is tinged with “impurity”; (ii) her movements serve to ensure or reinforce links with exterior societies, such as the gods. As in the case of Giorgi, the trajectory of Samdzimari symbolically represents the “movements” of one of the human sexes, in her case, that of women moving between pure and impure spaces. Xevsur women circulate in marriage (between the family hearth and that of a potentially dangerous outside group, thereby establishing a tie between the two families), and in rhythm with their blood flow (between the center of the domestic circle, and the extremely polluting menstruation and childbirth huts).

Table 2.
Trajectories of the divine couple Giorgi-Samdzimari.

	SAMDZIMARI	ST. GEORGE
<i>Foreign origins</i>	Kajaveti (kingdom of demonic Kajis)	Chechnia, Armenia, Persia ...
<i>Circulation between interior and exterior</i>	Circulates between hearth (of oracle's family) and remote exterior (Kajaveti, land of Wainakhs). Ensures communication between oracle and deities.	Goes to savage exterior to exterminate demons, seize wealth and women of Kajis, return with booty to community
<i>Parallel with "trajectories" of women and men</i>	Women circulating (i) in marriage [insiders marrying out, outsiders marrying in]; (ii) between domestic hearth and impure outside sites (menstruation and childbirth huts). Brides brought from other communities reinforce links with exterior.	Men temporarily leaving village to seek profit in exterior spaces (hunters, shepherds, travellers, cattle raiders, etc.)

Xaxmat's Jvari, the principal seat of the couple Giorgi-Samdzimari, is not only one of Xevsureti's holiest and most powerful shrines, but one of several specifically designated as a "believer-non-believer sanctuary" (*rjulian-urjulo salotsavi*). By this is meant that the influence of the shrine and its patron deities extends far beyond the frontiers of Xevsureti and even of Georgia. Among those coming with offerings of bread, beer and sacrificial animals to attend the great summer festival of Atengenoba were not only Georgians from adjacent provinces but also nominally-Muslim Chechens and Ingush. They considered Xaxmat'i a powerful shrine which, if presented with offerings, would grant them success in multiplying their own livestock and in stealing that of their neighbors [Mak'alatia 1935: 242]. Among other sanctuaries represented as having forged links

with the Chechen and Ingush communities to the north are Gudanis Jvari (Xevsureti's principal sanctuary), Somxoz ("Armenian") Giorgi, who "grants favors to believers and non-believers alike" [Bardavelidze 1982: 131], and Anat'oris Mtavarangelozi (formerly located at the Georgian-Chechen frontier, overlooking the Argun River).² On the other hand, when the men of Xevsureti or Pshavi would attack their neighbors to steal their livestock or avenge an earlier raid against them, St George — although only visible to his oracle — was believed to march at the head of the troops to insure their victory. Onto him were projected the two sides — positive and negative — of what one might call foreign relations as experienced by Caucasian highlanders. Although painfully aware of the potential dangers coming from neighboring communities, the mountaineers acknowledged the absolute necessity of links with the outside for their survival.

I believe that an important component — perhaps the most important — of Northeast Georgian mythology and ritual is concerned with the horizontal axis of social ideology. The divine couple Giorgi and Samdzimari, and their equivalents elsewhere in the Central Caucasus, provide material for imagining relations between the interior and exterior in all of their complexity, with both their positive and negative aspects represented, with the objective of overcoming barriers between the two spaces in order to assure the perpetuation and well-being of the community. The hierarchical dimension, by contrast, is essentially absent, or rather, one might say, spatially expressed: gods in their sphere of action, humans in theirs; men occupying the upper floor of the traditional Xevsur home (*ch'erxo*), women the lower floor (*kveda tvali*). The hierarchical relationship among the shrines and their patron deities is reflected in the range of their influence. Gudanis Jvari is the patron of all Xevsureti; other shrines are linked to a particular clan (*temi*) or phratry (*sadzmo*). The frontiers of each territorial unit are crosscut by links described in the language of kinship, thereby weaving the social infrastructure which holds Xevsureti, and indeed the entire region, together.

2. The early Indo-Europeans. The IE-speaking societies of the 4th millennium BCE or thereabouts in all probability practiced a mixed economy based on livestock breeding and agriculture, and used the horse for transport [Anthony 1987]. Maria Gimbutas depicted them as

warlike and expansionist, with a strongly patriarchal family structure and ideology. There is little concrete evidence for ascertaining the marital preferences of early IE peoples. Some discern a tendency to describe preferences in endogamic terms, at least at the level of the tribe, possibly involving the exchange of women between moieties [Benveniste 1969 I: 223-229; Gamkrelidze/Ivanov 1984: 768; Polomé 1992: 379]. Then there is trifunctionalism: the hypothesis, elaborated by Dumézil, Émile Benveniste and many others over the course of the past 60 years, that a dominant feature of the IE social and religious thought was a distinction among three “functions”: the sacred (F1), warfare (F2), and abundance and fertility (F3) [Littleton 1982; Allen 1987]. One fundamental feature of trifunctionalism is its hierarchical nature. The three functions are ranked relative to each other. This gives a vertical dimension to ancient IE social ideology for which there is no parallel in the Xevsurian model described earlier. We have the impression of a religious system which emphasized vertical distinctions within the in-group, rather than the horizontal dimension which was of such importance to Northeast Georgian social thought. But even as the Xevsurian system incorporated hierarchical distinctions into a primarily horizontally-oriented social ideology, I wonder if the reverse couldn't be said to describe what we observe in IE mythology, epic and religion: horizontal distinctions woven into a predominantly vertically-oriented system.

2.1. The fourth function. To my knowledge the most innovative treatment of the horizontal dimension of early IE symbolic systems is presented by N. J. Allen in the guise of a “fourth function” (F4) grafted onto the original three.³ F4 “pertains to what is other, beyond or outside” [Allen 1987: 28-29]. Relative to F1-F3, “F4 elements may be ranked first, last or ambiguously” [Allen 1991: 144]. Among the phenomena interpreted as representative of F4 in IE social and mythic systems are fourth-ranked social castes or classes in India (Shudras) and Iran (artisans); the Roman pontifex relative to the three flamines (F1-3); Indic Yama, god of the underworld, relative to the deities of the other functions. More recently, Allen [1996] has proposed a splitting of F4 into positively- and negatively-evaluated variants, enabling it in a sense to ‘bracket’ F1-3. Among the gods, IE sovereign deities of the Varuna-type may be better interpreted as F4+. The same analysis

has been offered for the legendary foreigners of special status who contributed to the foundation of Rome (i.e. Romulus, Vergil's Trojan hero Aeneas). Consideration of the last example leads me to wonder whether the Indian, Iranian and Greek descriptions of the ideal society, or the Irish and Roman foundation myths derive from an earlier myth of the successive incorporation of outsiders into the in-group: (i) F1+F2 conquer and assimilate F3, according the latter full membership (this being the basic structure of the “War of Foundation” or “War between the functions”); (ii) F1-F3 either conquer or make room for further outsiders (F4-: Shudras, artisans, slaves, menial laborers, etc.), who do not receive full ‘citizenship’ rights [Sterckx 1992]; (iii) at the top of the social ladder are high-ranking outsiders — or, if I understand Allen's proposal correctly, outsiders of a qualitatively different, and superior, order — who represent F4+.

2.2. The horizontal dimension of IE social thought. Although the horizontal dimension of social thought, that concerned with relations between in-group and out-group, was incorporated into the primarily vertically-oriented IE ideological system, the representation of outsiders was quite different than in the case of the Kartvelians. The myth of the War between the Functions, and the various representations of the constitution of ideal societies, present alien groups as either the objects of conquest and assimilation (F3), or exploitation (the various groups collected by Allen into F4-: artisans, slaves and menial laborers), and explicitly rank them relative to the other functional groups. The ambiguous nature of at least one type of outsider, the terrifying, magic-wielding supreme deity of the Varuna-type, does find a place in the IE pantheon, as F4+. But such a figure can never be treated as anything but an object of awe, reverence and fear. The above-mentioned representations of outsiders are consistent with “the strongly stressed dichotomy between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ in the Indo-Europeans’ vision of their community, according to which the inside world is friendly and safe, the outside unsafe and hostile” [Polomé 1992: 378]. There is nothing comparable, at least in the reconstructions of early IE ideology with which I am familiar, to the elaborate crosslinking mechanisms which are an integral part of Kartvelian social thought. By representing deities and shrines as linked by fictive kinship-based “intergroup”

relations which cross-cut territorially-based “intragroup” units, the ideology affords both a means of delimiting the interior from the ambiguous, potentially dangerous exterior, and, at the same time, a representation of how these barriers can be overcome for the benefit — and indeed, the survival — of the community.

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NOTES.

¹ It is likely have been the case that some Northwest- and Northeast-Caucasian-speaking peoples of the Central Caucasus (e.g. the Wainakhs [Chechens and Ingush] and Abkhazians) had similar beliefs in this respect; the question remains to be explored. The cultures of the numerous Daghestian peoples remain a puzzle: they are described as favoring “endogamy” and even “cousin marriage” by Soviet ethnographers — rather than the strict exogamy practiced elsewhere in the Caucasus — and the early implantation of Islam has rendered the reconstruction of the indigenous religion particularly difficult.

² At the last-named sanctuary, worshippers and officials alike came from both ethnic groups [Ochiauri 1967: 68-74]. One *andrezi* describes Anat’oris Mtavarangelozi, in the form of a dove, leading the oracle Shaghira on trips to Chechnia [Bardavelidze 1982: 116; Andrezebi: 36]. Another begins with Gudanis Jvari announcing to his oracle and assistants [*dast’urebi*] that they are to accompany him to the village T’argame in Ghilgho [= Ingushetia]. After a comic misadventure, in which the Ingush villagers mistakenly capture the deity and stick it in a grain bin, the local god Iarda (a common name for Wainakh divinities), announces through his oracle that Gudanis Jvari is his “guest”, and demands that the Ingush greet him with respect and sacrifices. “That day Gudanis Jvari and Ingush Iarda became friends. Every year Gudanis Jvari would visit there” [Andrzebi: 41; cp. Bardavelidze 1940 for this and other Northeast Georgian travelling-deity stories].

³ Since Dumézil’s initial investigations into the opposition between F1 deities of the “Mitraic” and “Varunaic” character profiles [Dumézil 1986; 1995], and that between Herakles-like and Achilles-like depictions of F2 heroes, scholars have sought to accommodate both oppositions — and possibly one within F3 as well — with a single distinction crosscutting the three functions. Dean Miller & J. P. Mallory [1997] split each function into “left-hand” (“uncontrolled”) and “right-hand” (“delimited”) aspects, with the potential for the insertion of an interstitial figure combining features of each. Bernard Sergent [1995: 341-2; 1997: 279-292, 343-348] represents the bifurcation of F1 & F2 in explicitly horizontal terms, as reflecting relative distance from human

society, although it does not appear from the cases presented in support of this hypothesis that the ‘distant’ member of each opposition is specifically outside of a group to which the ‘near’ member belongs. Mitra and his counterparts elsewhere in the IE world, guarantors of contracts, justice and oaths, are “close to humans”, whereas magic-wielding, violent and temperamental Varuna is seen as “un dieu lointain” [Sergent 1995: 342]. Of the two types of paradigmatic heroes or warrior deities, the Achilles-type, closer to human society, is honorable, attractive, and fights as a member of an army, whereas the relatively distant Herakles-type is typically “un géant sauvage, farouche, solitaire, pourfendeur de monstres” [*ibid.* 344; Vielle 1997].