

THE MEANING OF DÆL. SYMBOLIC AND  
SPATIAL ASSOCIATIONS OF THE SOUTH  
CAUCASIAN GODDESS OF GAME  
ANIMALS.

Kevin Tuite  
Département d'anthropologie  
Université de Montréal

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**I. Introduction.** The Georgian or Kartvelian nation comprises an impressively diverse set of local sub-ethnic communities, each with its characteristic traditions, cuisine, manners and dialect (or language). The Svans number about 40,000, most of whom inhabit the highland valleys of the Inguri and Cxenis-c'q'ali Rivers in northwestern Georgia (Upper and Lower Svaneti, respectively). Although Svaneti has been exploited as a source of high-grade copper and other raw materials since the Bronze Age, and was integrated at an early date into the political formations of Lazica, Abxazia and then the united Georgian kingdom of the high Middle Ages, the Svans have preserved to the present day their distinctive Kartvelian language, incomprehensible to other Georgians, and a rich oral literature. One of the most popular figures in Svan poetry and song is *Dæl* (in Georgian: Dali), divine patron of the ibex and other horned beasts of the high mountains.

As described in Svan folklore, Dæl resembles a woman of extraordinary beauty, with long, golden-colored hair and radiant white skin (literally radiant: she is said to glow in the dark). She dwells high up in the mountains, usually out of the reach of humans. Her home is a cavern, and by day she watches over the herds of wild animals under her protection, as a human shepherd would guard sheep or goats. Some accounts even picture her milking an ibex. At the same time, she is not adverse to sharing animals from her flock with hunters, as long as certain conditions and taboos are respected. Hunters must not kill more ibex than they can carry back to the village, nor may they take aim at specially-marked animals believed to be a transformation of the goddess (e.g. an ibex with golden horns). If a hunter is successful, certain body parts from the slain beast must be offered to Dæl in thanksgiving. Dæl is particularly sensitive to violations of the purity of the mountains, by which is meant pollution from women's menstrual blood. A man may not go on a hunting expedition, for example, if one of the women in his household is in childbirth or having her period. The penalty for violations of the conditions imposed by Dæl range from lack of hunting success to a fatal fall from a cliff.

The origins of the name of this goddess has provoked a considerable degree of speculation. While many of the beliefs and practices of Svan religion cannot be traced to Georgian Orthodox antecedents, the names of nearly all of the principal figures in the Svan pantheon can: *Taringzel* 'Archangel', *Lamaria* 'St. Mary', *Ĵgəræg* [ʒgəræg < (Mingrelian) ʒgiri givargi 'good (St.) George' [Shanidze 1973], *Barbol* 'St. Barbara', etc. [Bardavelidze 1939: 190-200]. A further handful of theonyms are based on Svan roots (*Xoša yērbet* 'great god', *Ber šišwliš* 'old man of the naked (= treeless mountain peaks)'). The name of Svan Dæl, Georgian Dali, despite attempts to link it to the Georgian lexeme *dila* "morning" [Abashidze 1971], or Ossetic *dælimon* (a type of demon) [Gusejnow 1990], is almost certainly related to the word meaning "god" in the contemporary Nakh languages (Chechen *dēla*, Ingush *dælə*, Bats *dalə*). Allowing for the effects of umlaut caused by a high front vowel in the second syllable, a proto-form \**dāli*, or possibly \**dāle*, can be reconstructed [Johanna Nichols, personal comm., March 1996; Goniashvili 1985; Nikolayev & Starostin 1994: 1097]. From a strictly phonological point of view, linking Dæl to the Nakh word for 'god' is unproblematic, and a number of Caucasian linguists and anthropologists have already proposed it as a source [Goniashvili 1940: 621-2; Bardavelidze 1953: 89; Virsaladze 1976: 130-2;

Mak'alatia 1983: 180].

What I will attempt here is to motivate this etymology on semantic and cultural as well as phonetic grounds. To this end I will present certain features of the representations of Dæl in Svan oral literature, followed by a comparison of these features to those of female divinities from the folk religious traditions of other Georgian provinces. I will conclude with an analysis of the symbolism and functions of Dæl and her sisters, and demonstrate how this renders probable the appropriation of her name from another speech community.

**II. Images of Dæl in Svan oral literature and ritual.** A composite image of Dæl can be gleaned from the texts of the numerous Svan round-dance songs and myth cycles in which she appears, of which the following are especially well-represented in the anthologies:

(i) Dæl and the doomed hunter. The basic plot, of which there are numerous variants, begins with an encounter between the goddess and a legendary hunter (named Betgil in the best-known version of the story [Tuite 1994 #56; textual variants in Chikovani 1972: 195-243]), who has been chosen by Dæl to be her lover. She gives him a token of their love — a bead, ring or charm [twæl] — and requires him to avoid all contact with human females, including his own wife. As long as he remains in the goddess's good graces Betgil enjoys remarkable success, never once returning home empty-handed. One day, however, he breaks his promise, sleeping with either his wife or his sister-in-law. The goddess changes herself into a white chamois, and comes down into the village square where Betgil and his kinsmen are dancing in a circle. The chamois runs between his legs into the middle of the circle, then doubles back toward the mountain with Betgil in hot pursuit. The hunter and his prey climb higher and higher, even as the path beneath them crumbles away. On reaching the summit the goddess resumes her original form and confronts the terrified Betgil, who is by now clinging for dear life with only his right hand and left foot. 'Where is the bead I gave you?' she demands, knowing full well that the hunter's wife had stolen it after they slept together. She vanishes, leaving the doomed Betgil to fall (in some versions, to jump) to his death on the rocks below.

(ii) Dæl and the morning star. In one version of the Betgil ballad, the hunter's death is set "in the morning, [as] the morning star comes out" (*dzinars mərhil anyərīne* [Shanidze, Topuria & Gujejiani 1939: 286]); in another, he meets his fate "when light and darkness separate" [Virsaladze 1976: 133].<sup>1</sup> The association between the Svan goddess and the transition between night and day has been signalled by Vera Bardavelidze [1953: 84-89] and Elene Virsaladze [1976: 132-33]. Even if one sets aside the tenuous etymological juxtaposition of the theonym Dæl and Georgian *dila* "morning", mentioned above, the ethnographic data is compelling. In accordance with Svan traditional hunting lore, a hunter must leave his household in the pre-dawn darkness, and be already at the hunting grounds while the morning star is still visible. Once there, he lights a small fire, burns some beeswax as incense, and prays "Glory to you, morning star; glory to Dæl, glory to Apsat' [= the Svan divine patron of birds and non-carnivorous game; sometimes the name of St. George appears in his place]. Help me today, that I may kill a game animal. Glory to you" [cited by

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<sup>1</sup> Although Dæl does not appear in any of them, a series of poems recorded in the highlands of eastern Georgia feature a Betgil-like hunter hanging from a cliff after chasing a beast into the mountains. In the variants collected by Virsaladze [1976: 275-7], the doomed hunter is depicted waiting through the long night until "it appears — oh, when will it appear? — the morning star ...".

Virsaladze 1976: 133].

Of particular interest are the prayers and offerings presented to “Dæl of New Year’s Eve” [dæl ešxwamiš] on the night of New Year’s Eve (ešxwæm or šušxwæm, 31 Dec., O.S.)<sup>2</sup> in some Upper Svan villages [Bardavelidze 1939: 85-95; Virsaladze 1976: 132]. In the commune of Ecer, for instance, Dæl ešxwamiš is addressed in prayers for a peaceful entry into the new year. According to one informant from Lat’al interviewed by Bardavelidze, this divinity lives in the forest and “aids people and livestock” [Bardavelidze 1939: 91].<sup>3</sup> In the New Year’s Eve observances of the neighboring commune of Cxumar, Dæl Ešxwamiš is invoked by both the male and female heads of the household, and presented with offerings of bread baked from consecrated grain [Davitariani, Topuria & Kaldani 1957: 71-80]. The types of bread baked and consumed by the household on this occasion have been described and analyzed in detail by Bardavelidze [1953: 84-89], based on fieldwork in Upper Svaneti in the 1930’s. One type, called k’irk’adu or šešxwæm leti lemzir, is flat and somewhat cog-shaped, with a hole in the middle and a toothed edge. It is baked late on the night of New Year’s Eve, and in Bardavelidze’s opinion its shape was intended to represent the morning star [*op. cit.* 85]. A lumpier, muffin-shape bread (judging by the illustrations provided by Bardavelidze) called k’wænc’il, also baked on New Year’s Eve, is offered by the head of the household to Dæl Ešxwamiš while facing toward the early-morning light on the horizon; after this prayer, the shutters are closed and the family eats the bread before sunrise [*op. cit.* 87; Bardavelidze 1939: 88].

(iii) Dæl in childbirth. As described in the text of a popular Svan round-dance song, a hunter in the mountains hears the goddess wailing from the pangs of childbirth. Before he can get to her, she gives birth to a child, who drops to the ground and is instantly seized by a wolf. The hunter kills the wolf, returns the infant to Dæl, and receives guaranteed luck at hunting as a reward [Virsaladze 1976: 75; Tuite 1994 #3]. The father — if indeed there is one! — of this child is never mentioned, nor what becomes of the child after it grows up. (An independent cycle of myths and ballads, not discussed here, is centered around just such a child, the supernatural hero Amiran, born to Dæl and a hunter named Darejan or Darjelian).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The etymology of the name of the New Year’s holiday is obscure; it may contain a reflex of the Kartvelian root -s’xw- “stout, thick”, with reference to the abundance prayed for on this occasion. In one invocation collected by Bardavelidze [1939: 90], this root appears within an imperative verb in the phrase dæl šešxwamiš, xoča gar e-n-šxwæm næy kors “Dæl of New Year’s Eve, make us stout/prosperous(?) in our household!”

<sup>3</sup> In view of the domestic functions associated with Dæl Ešxwamiš, and her commemoration in household rituals, another Svan interviewed by Bardavelidze believed that the goddess in question is *not* the same as the “Dæl of the ibexes” invoked by hunters [Bardavelidze 1939: 87]. I hope that it will become clear in the course of this paper why I believe they are one and the same.

<sup>4</sup> The hunter Darejan is invited by the golden-haired goddess to spend the night with her in her mountain cave. He remains with her for several days until, one night, his wife catches the pair in bed and cuts off Dæl’s golden braids. Dæl wakes up, announces that she is pregnant and that she can no longer remain with Darejan. She commands her lover to cut the fetus out of her belly and takes her leave. Once extracted from his mother’s womb, the embryo is transferred to the stomach of a calf, then left beside a spring. God (or St. George) finds the child, and names him Amiran. The child is adopted by a peasant family, grows inordinately quickly and becomes a redoubtable fighter. After a series of adventures, exterminating demons and dragons and the like, Amiran fears that there is no worthy opponent left on earth. He issues a challenge to his godfather, the supreme deity, to come down and measure his strength against him. God punishes him for his audacity by chaining him to a

(iv) The rivalry between Dæl and Ĵǵæræg. In her capacity as protector and patron of the horned game animals of the mountains, Dæl — or rather, in this context, the Dæls<sup>5</sup> — are in direct opposition to the deity Ĵǵæræg (‘St. George’), whose principle function is, as Charachidzé puts it, “mettre les espaces naturels à la disposition des hommes” [1986: 183; cp. Bardavelidze 1953: 88]. Among the duties flowing from this role is the protection of shepherds and their flocks in the alpine pastures far from the village; the protection of bees and beekeepers — who must go to the forest to capture a queen in order to colonize a hive — and in general, men exploiting the world outside their villages for the benefit of the community [Charachidzé 1968: 478-486]. Significantly, the Svans refer to wolves, the predators par excellence, as “St. George’s dogs” (*Ĵǵærægi žeyær*; Shanidze, Kaldani & Ch’umburidze 1978: 90-91).

The ballad of the legendary Svan hunter Chorla recounts how the title character incited the wrath of the Dæls by slaughtering more than his quota of ibexes. According to traditional hunting lore, one can kill as many animals as there are empty-handed hunters in the party, but no more. As long as hunters observe this regulation, as well as several others concerning ritual purity, treatment of the bones, etc., the Dæls will allow them to kill a few animals from their herd (Chikovani 1972: 228). Chorla, although he had no companion other than his dog, killed three ibex and then “while he was aiming a fourth time, / Then the Dæls bound him, / Left him hanging on the cliff / By his right hand and left foot, / Poor Chorla, piteous Chorla!” The desperate hunter sent his dog for help. The dog returns with St. George, who threatens to bring a source of pollution into the mountains unless the Dæls release Chorla. St. George promises the hunter that henceforth he can kill without limit, and that he will support him against “les maîtresses du gibier, qui veillent au contraire à préserver la nature d’un pillage inconsidéré et finalement dévastateur” (Charachidzé 1986: 185). The wolf, one of “St. George’s dogs”, which snatched Dæl’s newborn child in the ballad mentioned above may in fact be another reflection of the symbolic opposition between Dæl, as patron of game animals, and Ĵǵæræg, patron of those who hunt them.

**III. Dæl and Samdzimari.** The rivalry between St. George and the Dæls, described in the preceding section, has its roots in what is to all appearances an ancient feature of the Kartvelian pantheon. The Georgians of the northeast have a St. George of their own, *Giorgi* or *Givargi*, who

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pole driven deep into the earth, and enclosing him inside a mountain high up in the Caucasus. His faithful dog Q’ursha (Black-ear) tries to gnaw through the chains, but every time Amiran is close to freeing himself, he is thwarted by either a woman who talks too much, a wagtail perching on the pole, or the combined activity of the local blacksmiths, who reinforce the chains by banging on their anvils every Holy Thursday morning. For details concerning the Amiran cycle and those of Greek Prometheus and Achilles, see Chikovani 1966, Charachidzé 1986, *Tuite* 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Although most ballads recount the encounter between a hunter and a single goddess, some texts describe a plurality of Dæls (*dalær*) who watch over herds of ibex in the high mountains, and punish hunters who exceed their kill quota. This manner of representing divine beings can be compared to the Ossetic references to “St Georges” and “St Elijahs”, these being clan-like cohorts of spirits which share certain traits of the (singular) George and Elijah of neighboring highland pantheons. As Dumézil [1978] notes, such pluralizations are likely to have been motivated by a projection of human social organization — into clans and households which bear the names of their heads or founders — onto the supernatural world. The Indic dawn goddess Ushas is also both one and many; she is addressed sometimes in the singular, sometimes the plural 2nd-person, even within one and the same RgVedic hymn [Renou 1986].

watches over roughly the same set of activities as his Svan namesake: war, raiding, wood-cutting, honey-gathering; in brief, those occasions where men leave the village in search of the riches of the outside world [Charachidzé 1968: 445; 471]. Like Ĵgøræg as well, he has a female counterpart, his *dobili* ‘sworn sister’ Samdzimari or Samdzivari, the ‘necklace-wearer’ [< Georgian *mdziv*- ‘bead, necklace’; Charachidzé 1968: 562-563].<sup>6</sup>

In a myth transmitted through Xevsurian epic poetry, Giorgi and his human scout, a legendary oracle named Gaxua who underwent temporary death in order to make the trip, descended into the hypochthonian kingdom of the Kaĵes (*kaĵ*, of Iranian origin via Armenian [Testen 1989]), a race of supernatural blacksmiths with magical powers. Giorgi succeeds in annihilating the Kaĵ army, whereupon he takes possession of their metalworking equipment, their treasures, a one-horned cow, and three daughters of the king of the Kaĵes, one of whom is Samdzimari. Despite her demonic origin — a characteristic she shares with human women — Samdzimari is elevated to the status of sworn sister or ‘sister-spouse’ of Giorgi at the important Xevsur shrine of Qaqmat’is Jvari [Charachidzé 1968: 625].

Like Dæl in Svaneti, the character of Samdzimari has fired the imagination of local poets.<sup>7</sup> She is a seductive, gold-haired bejewelled princess from Kaĵeti or Kaĵaveti, the land of the Kaĵes, who ‘reigns over the wild spaces’ [Charachidzé 1968: 620]. She is the mediatrix par excellence, in the context of a religious system in which women, human or supernatural, frequently appear in this role: legendary male oracles (Geo. *kadag*) are said to receive their communicative powers through the experience of nightly visits from Samdzimari, who can take on the form of a mortal woman.<sup>8</sup> As described in Xevsur poetry [e.g. Tuite 1994 #30], the key attributes of Qhel-Samdzimari — “Samdzimari of the hand”, one of her more common epithets [Charachidzé 1968: 505] — include (i) golden hair and jewelry; (ii) circulation between inaccessible spaces<sup>9</sup> and human society; (iii) cohabitation with selected men, who are granted special favors for the duration of the

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<sup>6</sup> Geo. *dobili*, one of the terms for a woman who enters into an intimate pre-marital relationship, called *c’ac’loba* or *sc’orproba*, with a young man of her own clan (i.e. someone she is strictly forbidden from marrying). Among the Pshav mountaineers of the late 19th century *c’ac’loba* had strong religious connotations, and on the occasion of certain festivals the couples spent the night together in the precincts of the sanctuary [Tuite 2000].

<sup>7</sup>According to Chikovani, sanctuaries dedicated to Samdzimari are found only in the province of Xevsureti, whence come as well the poems describing her [Chikovani 1972: 245].

<sup>8</sup>Women, despite their impurity, play an essential role in the mediation between groups or worlds that are ordinarily separated. Marriage — exchange of women between clans — is but one of the cultural phenomena conceived in this manner. Numerous Georgian sanctuaries are said to have been founded by legendary women, most notably the mythological figure named after the historical Queen Tamar (the late-12th century sovereign who presided over Georgia’s Golden Age) These women also establish the rituals, and one is even believed to have been buried beneath the sanctuary [Charachidzé 1968: 420-428, 468, 655-657, 683-684]. Contact with the souls of the dead is entrusted to the female *mesultane* (‘she who is with the souls’), who operates without the aid of a mediating spirit, whereas the male *kadag* (oracle) requires the services of Samdzimari.

<sup>9</sup>In addition to her associations with the kingdom of the Kaĵes, Samdzimari reigns over that part of nature where humans never (or hardly ever) tread. One Xevsur legend describes the chance encounter between a shepherdess in search of a lost calf and the goddess Samdzimari in a distant clearing, covered by grass which has never been tread upon by humans or livestock [Charachidzé 1968: 472]. Giorgi, by contrast, is associated with mountains and streams and prairies, which, though part of the world of savage nature, are accessible to humans [Charachidzé 1968: 473-474].

relationship, all features shared with Dæl.

In addition to these traits, Samdzimari is invoked to (i) watch over women, especially during childbirth; (ii) assure that the cows give milk, and that dairy products do not turn sour [Mak'alatia 1935: 242; Charachidzé 1968: 163, 575-579]; (iii) restore communication between a (male) deity and his (male) oracle, after some imagined offense had angered the former [Charachidzé 1968: 511-512]. The relation between Samdzimari and Giorgi appears to be more collaborative, less competitive, than that between Dæl and Ĵgæræg.<sup>10</sup> She watches over women and the animals they tend (milch cows); he supervises masculine activities. Both deities are called upon by hunters (who promise to leave the horns of the animals they kill at Samdzimari's shrine in the village Ch'ormeshavi) and travellers [Chikovani 1972: 243], although for different reasons: Samdzimari is invoked in her capacity as guardian of the spaces outside of human society, and Giorgi as protector of men making use of those spaces. Between the two of them, they assure the safe voyage and return of those who circulate between the interior (the community) and the exterior. In Charachidzé's words, "les fonctions patronnées par le couple Samdzimari-Giorgi correspondent aux besoins essentiels de la vie sociale et économique ... Ils administrent les rapports que le clan entretient avec les étrangers et les déplacements de ses membres hors du territoire dévolu à la société" [Charachidzé 1968: 620]. Although only a few Xevsur shrines are consecrated to Samdzimari by name, female spirits with similar characteristics are known to every Pshav and Xevsur community. The patron deities (called *xvtisšvilni* "children of God") of communes and villages are male-gendered, but associated with each of them are subordinate beings of ambiguous nature, potentially harmful to human society but also capable of assuring the health and fertility of people and livestock. Some of these spiritual subordinates have zoomorphic or monstrous features (e.g. an ogre imprisoned by the god K'op'ala, periodically unleashed to punish those who provoke K'op'ala's anger). Most of them, however, are represented as female, and referred to as "Mother of God", "Place Mother", or simply the "sworn sisters" (*dobilni*) of the patron deity. Like Samdzimari, these auxiliary goddesses are specifically concerned with women's affairs, dairy production and health, and have semi-demonic natures, with the potential of bringing harm as well as benefit.

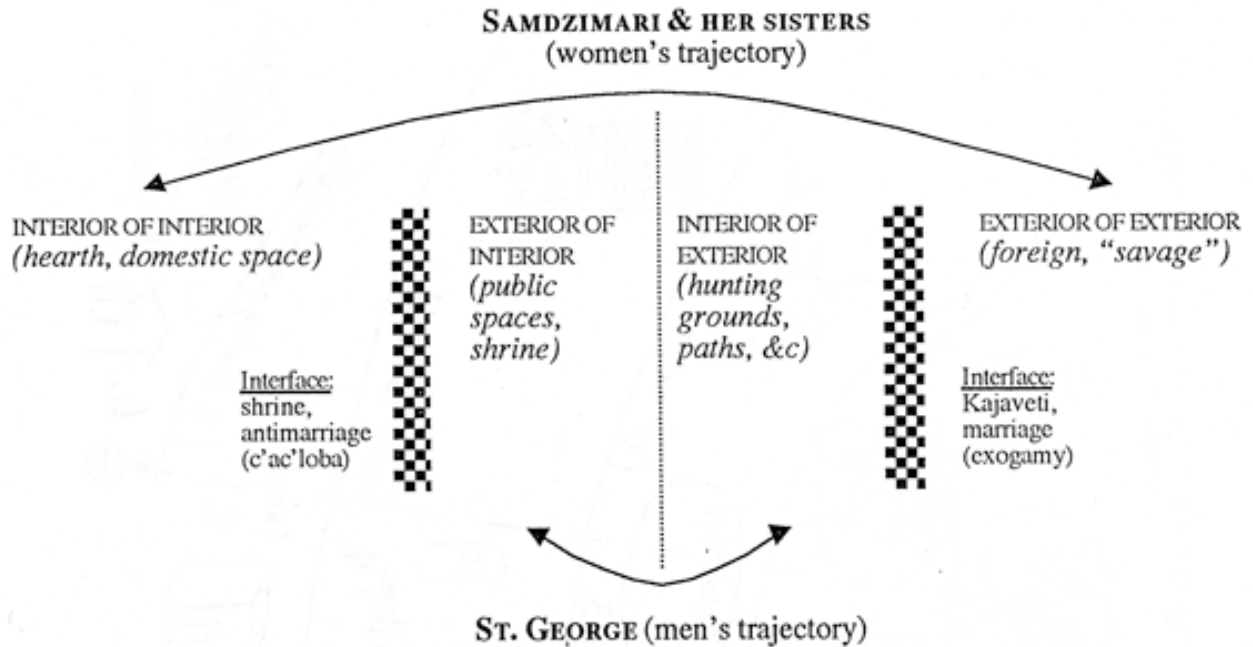
The trajectories associated with Samdzimari and Giorgi parallel those of human women and men in traditional highland Georgian culture [Tuite 1999; see Diagram #1]. Samdzimari circulates between the hearth (the interior of domestic space, the "interior of the interior") and the remote, uninhabited, unreachable outside ("exterior of the exterior"). St. George, by contrast, circulates between the public spaces of the community (the "exterior of the interior") and those outside spaces exploited for the profit of the community (the "interior of the exterior"). One and same exterior location can take on both aspects. Kaĵaveti, in particular, is represented as the remote and demonic homeland of Samdzimari, on the one hand, and as an exploitable source of wealth for Giorgi, on the other. Hence his role as patron of hunters, woodsmen, travellers, warriors, even livestock-thieves [see Table1]. There is evidence that these imagined trajectories include interfacial zones in both interior and exterior spaces, at which the two deities come into contact. The concept of the two interfaces contributes, I believe, to representations of two social institutions reconstructable,

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<sup>10</sup>One of Tinatin Ochiauri's informants of the 1950's went so far as to declare that "Giorgi and Samdzimari are one, one sole divinity" [cited in Charachidzé 1968: 506].

on linguistic and semantic grounds, to ancient Georgian society: marriage, and a relation Charachidzé (1968: 101) called “anti-marriage” (Geo. *c’ac’loba*, Svan *č’æč’ilæŕ*). The latter contrasts with the former on a number of parameters: it involves a temporary, premarital relationship between a woman and man from the same community, which must under no circumstances terminate in marriage or childbirth (Tuite 2000).

**Diagram 1. Trajectories of Samdzimari, St. George and human women and men.**



**Table 1. Features and trajectories of Samdzimari and St. George (Xevsureti)**

	SAMDZIMARI	ST. GEORGE
<i>Foreign origins</i>	Kaġaveti (remote, subterranean kingdom of demonic Kaġes)	Chechnia, Armenia, Persia ... (foreign human communities)
<i>Circulation between interior and exterior</i>	Circulates between domestic “interior of the interior” and “exterior of the exterior” (Kaġaveti as land of demons). Ensures communication between oracle and deities.	Goes to exploitable exterior (“interior of the exterior”) to exterminate demons, seize wealth and women of Kaġes, 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.)

The respective functions of the Xevsurian and Svan St. Georges are sufficiently similar to be captured by the generalization that the St. George of the Kartvelian mountaineers, east and west, was



responsible for the security and success of the men of the community in their relations with the outside world, both inhabited and uninhabited. As for Samdzimari and Dæl, the overlap is less satisfactory: the functions and attributes of the mountain deity Dæl are more limited than those of her Xevsurian cousin.

As it turns out, the range of competences attributed to Samdzimari overlap with those of Dæl and two other Svan goddesses, both of whom are named after Christian saints. *Lamaria* ‘St. Mary’ is the “goddess of the fertility of the land, of childbirth and the protection of women” [Bardavelidze 1939: 193]. She is also goddess of the hearth [Nizharadze 1962: 72-76; Chartolani 1961: 175-186; Charachidzé 1968: 286-288], a function for which there appears to be no equivalent among the Xevsurs, save perhaps for the guardian angel of the household, the *pudzis angelozi*.<sup>11</sup> The association of Samdzimari with milk cows and dairy production link her with the Svan goddess *Barbol* ‘St. Barbara’, the “protector of cattle, multiplier of bulls and cows, granter of abundant milk, giver of eyesight, protector of healers, defender against and curer of eye pain, contagious diseases and, in general, all manner of illness” [Bardavelidze 1939; 1941].<sup>12</sup> *Lamaria* and *Barbol* can be set in parallel with that side of Samdzimari’s portfolio which is concerned with women and an important part of their economic activity (in the traditional sexual division of labor throughout the Caucasus, and in Xevsureti in particular, dairy production is an exclusively feminine activity). *Lamaria*, as spirit of the hearth, is the deity of the central point of the interior, and her other responsibilities do not take her far from the home (the fields whose fertility she insures are located in the immediate vicinity of the Svan village). The same can be said for *Barbol*. *Lamaria* and *Barbol* are invoked in prayers at the hearth, pronounced downward toward the earth by women only, the men having been temporarily excluded from the house. At the same time, women pray to both deities — again, in the absence of men — at sites outside of the village, representing the other extreme of the goddesses’ trajectory: the remote, uninhabited “exterior of the exterior”. These are sometimes ruined, abandoned buildings, or small shrines called *witin*, in peripheral locations, where offerings of cloth, jewelry and beads are made to *Lamaria* [Bardavelidze 1941; Chartolani 1961: 176-201; Chartolani 1977; Mak’alattia 1977].

The principal deities of the two highland Georgian communities contrasted here — Pshav-Xevsureti and Svaneti — can be represented as a quartet of complementary clusters of functions and symbols: 1. an invisible and inaccessible chief deity; 2. a sort of divine vizier who mediates between the sovereign deity and human society; 3 & 4. paired female and male supernatural beings representing particular aspects of female and male social roles, attributes and trajectories. (See Tables 2 & 3 below).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Charachidze [1987: 100-105] argues that certain characteristics of the Svan hearth cult are attributable to Indo-European (specifically Alanic-Ossetic) influence, e.g. the use of portable hearths at outdoor rituals and the final position occupied by the name of the hearth deity *Lamaria* in invocations addressed to all the gods (cp. “Vesta Extrema”).

<sup>12</sup> The cult of St. Barbara is widespread in Europe. She is invoked for protection from diseases such as smallpox, from lightning strike, and from sudden death in general [Bleichsteiner 1954; Bächtold-Stäubli I: 905-910; Tuite 2004].

<sup>13</sup> It would interesting to compare this type of pantheon structure with others from the Circumpontic and West Asian cultural areas. According to Hajjar [1985], the Syrian divine triad at the Roman-style temple complex (c. 3rd c. AD) at Heliopolis-Baalbek, in modern Lebanon, comprised: 1. “Jupiter” [Hadad-Baal]: celestial sovereign, god of lightning, rain, storms; 2. “Venus” [Atargatis]: goddess of

**Table 2. Pantheon of the Northeast Georgian highlands (Xevsureti, Pshavi)**

<b>Morige Ghmerti</b> [no shrines; distant from human affairs (almost Deus otiosus)]	
<b>K'viria</b> ["Chief of the dry land", "Commander of the <i>xvtisshvilni</i> "] *mentioned second in invocations of deities, after Morige Ghmerti *protector of human society *instrument of divine justice *invoked for birth of sons to perpetuate patriline	
<b>Samdzimari</b> (Tamar, <i>dobilni</i> as doublets) (1) DOMESTIC FUNCTIONS *dairy production *women's health, well-being, protection in childbirth; health, healing ["Tamar the Healer"] (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, but can be appeased *circulates between home & remote spaces (inaccessible forests, Kist'eti)	<b>Giorgi</b> (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'i dress, Somxoz Giorgi shrine at Ardot'i allegedly founded by Armenian [som(e)x-]) *patronage of men, esp. in exploitation of outside spaces [shepherds, travellers, raiders]

**Table 3. Svan pantheon.**

<b>Xosha gherbet</b> [no shrines; distant from human affairs]	
<b>Targlezer, Taringzel</b> ["Archangel", invoked second in toasts] *protector of human society *instrument of divine justice *invoked for birth of sons to perpetuate patriline	
<b>Barbol, Lamaria, Dæl</b> (1) DOMESTIC FUNCTIONS <u>Barbol</u> , <u>Lamæria</u> (sometimes invoked as one deity): dairy production, women's health, well-being; heals eye pains <u>Dæl</u> : herds & milks ibex, deer, etc. (2) RELATION TO MEN <u>Dæl</u> : seductress of hunters, gives bead as token; assures success (or failure) of hunters; shape-changer (game animals) (3) ORIGIN & TRAJECTORY <u>Dæl</u> : foreign origin? (< Wainakh * <u>dāli</u> = "god"); circulates in inaccessible spaces (mountain peaks, caverns) <u>Lamæria</u> : hearth goddess <u>Barbol</u> : once circulated throughout Upper Svaneti [Bardavelidze 1940]	<b>Ĵgæræg</b> *patronage of men, esp. in exploitation of outside spaces *wolves as "George's dogs"; Ĵgæræg invoked to protect livestock from wolves. *exterior spaces (contrast with Xosha Gherbet)

This leaves Dæl as the Svan counterpart to the other side of Samdzimari, that which is of

crop and livestock fertility, love and temple prostitution (probably linked to the morning- and evening-star as well); 3. "Mercury" [Adonis]: young solar god of rejuvenation and fertility; patron of shepherds and merchants.

concern to the male half of the population: the dispenser of luck at hunting, the divine lover of selected men. This distinction between feminine and masculine spheres of activity is, not surprisingly in the context of the Caucasus, paralleled on the spatial plane: interior/domestic versus exterior. Samdzimari circulates freely between the exterior — the subterranean kingdom of the Kaĵes, the dense forests and the land of the Kist’ebi — and the interior, manifesting herself as the spouse of a oracle or priest, making butter and cakes in his family’s kitchen. Dæl, by contrast, is said to inhabit the highest and most inaccessible peaks of the Caucasus. Her encounters with humans are almost always in her domain, by her initiative (i.e. her invitations to hunters to share her bed); only on very rare and special occasions will she appear within the confines of the village. One such instance was described earlier: the irruption of the goddess, transformed into a white chamois, into the sacred space formed by a circle of men dancing the *murgvæl* (also known as *č’išxæš*), a round-dance performed on the occasion of religious solemnities [Virsaladze 1976: 113-114; Charachidzé 1968: 712]. This intrusion by an animal of the savage exterior caused a general commotion among the men, and Betgil was sent to hunt it down. The other instances where Dæl is claimed to have entered a village are her dramatic appearances at the funerals of hunters who had been her lovers [Virsaladze 1976: 72-73; 298].<sup>14</sup>

**Table 4. Lamaria, Barbol & Dæl partitioning functions of Samdzimari.**

	XEVSURETI (EASTERN GEORGIA)	SVANETI (WESTERN GEORGIA)
<i>protection of women, domestic space and dairy production</i>	<b>Samdzimari</b> *protection of women during childbirth *protector of cows *abundance of dairy products	<b>Lamaria</b> ‘St. Mary’ *goddess of the hearth *protection of women during childbirth <b>Barbol</b> ‘St. Barbara’ *protector of cows *abundance of dairy products
<i>relation to men; goddess of savage space</i>	<b>Samdzimari</b> *assures the success or failure of hunters *goddess of the wild *shape-changer *‘necklace-wearer’ [< <i>mdziv</i> - ‘bead’] *seducer (of oracles)	<b>Dæl</b> *assures the success or failure of hunters *goddess of the wild *shape-changer *gives bead as token to lover *seducer (of hunters)
<i>domain and movements</i>	<b>Samdzimari</b> *hypochthonic origins (Kaĵaveti) *circulation between interior-domestic and exterior space (sojourns among the K’istebi) *patronage of anti-marriage ( <i>sc’orproba</i> , <i>c’ac’loba</i> )	<b>Lamaria-Barbol</b> : women’s secret rituals at hearth, outside of village *invoked during <i>č’ æč’ ilær</i> (“anti-marriage”) <b>Dæl</b> : high mountains, caverns (spaces inaccessible to humans, except for sporadic intrusions into human society: white chamois passing between Betgil’s legs, funeral of lover)

**IV. Motivating the etymology of Dæl.** The communities of Upper and Lower Svaneti (the

<sup>14</sup> The only case in which Dæl is mentioned in a domestic cult, as far as I know, is the invocation of “Dæl of New Year’s Eve” [*dæl ešxwamiš*] discussed earlier. I suspect this New Year’s Dæl retains certain of the functions shown in Table 4, before they were apportioned to Lamaria and Barbol.

upper reaches of the Ingur and Tsxenis-ts'q'ali Rivers, respectively) have been part of the Georgian nation since the latter entity coalesced on the basis of political unity and shared religion in medieval times, and despite the difference in language — Svan and Georgian are no closer than Icelandic and English — the Svans have identified themselves as ethnically Georgian since at least the Middle Ages. Upper and Lower Svaneti have been inhabited continuously since the Bronze Age, with no archeological, ethnographic or toponymic evidence to indicate that the Bronze Age inhabitants of Svaneti were other than the ancestors of the current residents [Sh. Chartolani 1977; Japaridze 1991: 213-214]. More relevant for the purposes of the present discussion is the solid documentary evidence of Svan communities to the west of the upper Inguri valley, in what is now northern Rach'a province, up to the 15th century [Dzidziguri 1970: 190-1].

The Svan language gives evidence of contact with several speech communities. Loanwords of Northwest Caucasian origin indicate that the Svans were influenced by the more technologically advanced (and more stratified?) Adyghe-speaking communities to the north and west [Shagirov 1977].<sup>15</sup> An interesting study by Charachidzé demonstrates the degree of mutual influence of Svan and Ossetian religious and social ideology (e.g. adoption by the Svans of Indo-European tripartition of functions attributed to divinities); the two speech communities have also exchanged numerous lexical items [Charachidzé 1987; Abaev 1949, esp. pp 291-308]. The ancestors of today's Ossetians are known to have begun settling in the north-central Caucasian uplands in the latter half of the 1st millennium BCE, moving into territory previously inhabited by communities speaking Nakh languages, the branch of the Northeast Caucasian language family comprising Chechen, Ingush and Bats (or Tsova-Tush) [Thordarson 2000]. Before the arrival of the Ossetians, Nakh speakers would have been in proximity to at least the westernmost Svan settlements, and in a recent article, the German Caucasologist H. Fähnrich has identified what he believes are lexical traces of this contact. He proposes a Nakh origin for a dozen Svan lexemes, and while some of these attributions might be contested, several appear quite solid: Sv. dam 'Weizenmehl beim Reinigen', cp. Chechen dama 'Mehl'; Sv. t'q'irš 'Bodensatz, Schlamm' cp. Chechen t'q'aršin 'Schlamm, Schlammwetter'; and dæl 'Name der Jagdgöttin', cp. Chechen dela 'Gott' [Fähnrich 1988; Gusejnow 1990/91].

It remains to ascertain the factors which conditioned the appropriation of the Northeast Caucasian lexeme \*dali by the Svan speech community. In the modern Nakh languages, dela and its cognates mean "god", and can be used with reference to Allah, as well as to the divinities of pre-Islamic Nakh religion [Dalgat 1897]. The frontier between the Chechen and Ingush communities and their Georgian neighbors to the south has long been an active zone of contact and exchange [Xaradze 1940; Goniashvili 1971]. Some parts of northeast Georgia may in fact have once been Nakh speaking. The Tushetians speak a dialect of Georgian characterized by lexical items and other features claimed to stem from a Nakh substratum. This hypothesis is consistent with the presence of toponyms of Nakh origin — many of which terminate in /-lo/, /-go/ and /-čö/ — in some parts of Northeast Georgia, especially in Tusheti [Uturgaidze 1966].

Among the Nakh loanwords noted in the Tushetian dialect is the lexeme dala, which occurs in the funeral chant sung at the first anniversary of a man's death, especially a man who died young.

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<sup>15</sup>For example zantx 'oats', cp. Kabardian zantx 'oats'; gwiz 'special-quality wheat or millet flour used for baking ritual bread on feast-days', cp. Kabardian g<sup>o</sup>až 'wheat'.

Significantly, this root is employed in the designation of the person who performs the chant (mo-dala-ve), and in the name of the memorial ceremony itself (dala-oba) [Mak’alattia 1983: 180-186; Cocanidze 1987: 116-123]. The central event of the Tushetian dalaoba is a horse race involving riders representing the dead man’s family, his mother’s brother’s clan, and other families who were close to him. The participants follow a route from the deceased’s home village to that of his mother’s brother, and back again, which symbolizes the the path followed by the soul after death, and that taken by a newborn member of the community. Until as late as the 1950’s in some localities, women of the northeast Georgian highlands gave birth in crudely-built huts (sačexi or k’oxi), located at some distance outside the village. The new mother and her child were considered extremely “impure” during the first weeks after birth, and were only gradually (re)integrated into the community through a series of purifications, sacrifices and the child’s formal presentation at the clan sanctuary (xat’ši mibareba) [Mindadze & Didebulidze 1997].<sup>16</sup> This latter ceremony marked the child’s definitive transfer from the clan of birth (the lineage of the mother, or — in the patrilineal terms employed by the mountaineers — that of the mother’s brother) to the father’s clan. The father’s lineage will be the primary social affiliation for a boy for the rest of his life, and for a girl until marriage. The newly dead follow the same pathway. They are escorted to Suleti, the “Land of Souls”, by their mother’s brother to his andabi, the equivalent of a clan in the Land of Souls. Some time later their escorts (mgebari) take them to their father’s andabi. If the deceased is a male or an unmarried female, he or she remains there for eternity. The soul of a married woman follows a longer trajectory: she is first escorted to her MoBr’s andabi, then that of her paternal uncles (i.e. her father’s patrilineage), and then is taken to her husband’s andabi, where she remains (if she was married twice, she goes to the first husband’s clan for as long as she was married to him on earth, then spends the rest of eternity in her second husband’s andabi) [Baliauri & Mak’alattia 1940; Charachidzé 1968: 262]. In both birth and death, therefore, the individual undergoes an important transition from a primary attachment to a woman (his or her mother) to affiliation with a father’s or husband’s lineage; it is noteworthy that newborn children and the newly dead are considered impure, and highly polluting, until these transitions are completed.

**Table 5. Trajectories of newly born and newly dead [Xevsureti].**

	<i>women’s space (impure)</i> □	<i>men’s space (pure)</i>
NEWBORN CHILD	MoBr’s clan (birth clan), birth hut	Fa’s clan, shrine [ <u>xat’ši mibareba</u> ]
NEWLY DEAD	MoBr’s clan ( <u>mgebari</u> )	Fa’s clan [ <u>andabi</u> ]
	“exterior of the exterior”	“exterior of the interior”

Could the dala of the Tushetians, linked to the trajectory of dead souls, and the Dæl of the Svans, golden-haired divine shepherd of ibex, derive from the same source? In particular, was Nakh \*dāli appropriated by the ancient Georgians as a designation of the female-gendered supernatural ancestral to Svan Dæl and northeast Georgian Samdzimari and their sisters, perhaps as the taboo replacement of the original name of this goddess? The associations of the various patrons of the

<sup>16</sup>With regard to the customs of the Tushetians of the 18th-century, Vaxusht’i Bagrat’ioni wrote that “when a woman gives birth, no one comes close to her; rather they send her far away, alone, and forty days after birth they bring her back with her child”.

savage exterior with the world of the dead is not equally evident in each case. Dæl causes the death of those hunters who violate her conditions or provoke her jealousy, but seems not to have any more explicit connection with the Land of Souls. Kaĵaveti, the subterranean kingdom of the mysterious Kaĵes and homeland of Samdzimari, bears a strong similarity to the world of the dead; recall that the legendary oracle Gaxua was said to have undergone physical death — including partial decomposition of his body — in order to be able accompany St. George on the raid in Kaĵaveti from which he returned leading Samdzimari and her sisters. Among the Mingrelians of western Georgia, the patron of the exterior is known under the title galeniši orta (“Orta of the exterior”),<sup>17</sup> in contrast to St. George, sometimes invoked as žiniši orta (“Orta of the above”). This spirit is the object of a cult performed in remote exterior spaces, such as mountains or forests, and receives offerings of cheese and a sacrificed goat-kid, as do Samdzimari and the other Northeast Georgian dobilni. In addition to being called upon to watch over sick children and women in childbirth, and to assure dairy production and the health and protection of livestock, the galeniši orta have a special relation with the souls of the recently dead, a function consistent with their sphere of activity [Mak’alattia 1979, 2000; Abak’elia 1991]. The souls of the dead, like women and the female deities under discussion here, circulate between the interior of the community and a distant world beyond the territory of the village.<sup>18</sup>

The final matter to be discussed is why the ancient Georgians borrowed a foreign word to name the female counterpart of St. George. I will point to two facts as a starting point for future inquiry in this area. First of all, while the male half of the divine couple in question bears some variant of the name of St. George [Georgian Giorgi/Givargi, Svan žgəræg, Mingrelian žgege, Abxaz A-erg’, Ossetic Was-tyrdji], the names of the female half are variegated: she may bear a descriptive title (Samdzimari, the “necklace-wearer”; adgilis deda, the “place mother”; galeniši orta, “the portion/being of the exterior”), the name of Mary or St. Barbara, or the Nakh loanword Dæl. This plurality of epithets leads one to hypothesize fairly frequent lexical replacement, possibly due to taboos on addressing the goddess by her “real” name. Second, what appear to have been taboo-driven loanwords are by no means rare in the Caucasus, in particular those referring to elements of the “exterior world”:

(1) The word for daughter- and/or sister-in-law has been supplanted by reflexes of the Indo-European root *\*(s)nus-* in Caucasian languages from all three indigenous families [Tuite & Schulze 1998]. In the virilocal societies of the Caucasus, brides are brought in from other families, and as “strangers” suddenly installed at the very heart of the domestic circle, they were traditionally

<sup>17</sup> The word orta has no meaning as such in contemporary Mingrelian. Some commentators translate as “force” or “being”, or regard it as the proper name of the deity [Mak’alattia 1979, 2000; Abak’elia 1991]. Another possibility is that orta was derived from a participial form of the root *-rt-* “divide”, and had the meaning “portion” or “part”. The belief that divinities and selected humans have a special “portion” of God’s essence is widespread in the South Caucasus, especially in Abxaz traditional religion [Bardavelidze 1957: 106-110; Inal-Ipa 1965: 561-563].

<sup>18</sup> Charachidzé made a similar observation with regard to the northeast Georgian highlanders: “Les femmes et les morts sont conçus selon la même catégorie par les Xevsurs: des êtres qui sont à la fois intérieurs et extérieurs, participants du clan et étrangers à lui” [1968: 399]. The trajectory of the dead has in fact a cyclical character: each year, in the late winter or early spring, the souls of the deceased are believed to revisit their earthly families and participate as invisible guests at a banquet laid in their honor (Svan lipanæł, Xevsur sultak’repa) [Nizharadze 1961: 56-58; Bardavelidze 1957: 162-163]. In return they assure health and good harvests to their surviving relatives.

submitted to various restrictions and avoidance practices, especially in the period following marriage.

(2) Hunters in Abxazia, Ossetia, Svaneti and perhaps elsewhere in the Caucasus employed, up until about a century ago, a “hunting language” consisting in paraphrases and other types of lexical replacements for the names of game animals, hunting implements, and the like [Dirr 1925; Gulia 1926; Inal-Ipa 1965: 191-2; Kaloiev 1971: 250; Elisa Watson, pers. comm]. Some of these taboo-formations were based on borrowings; the word psit’ referring to the chamois or mountain goat in many Northeast Georgian dialects [Ghlont’i 1974 II: 1962] is almost certainly a borrowing, perhaps transmitted by various central Caucasian dialects, from Abxaz a-pst’’á “animal” [Charachidzé 1968: 457]. Another Northwest Caucasian lexeme which has been appropriated by neighboring languages is Abxaz a-psaát’ “bird”, which surfaces as the name of the Svan divine patron of birds and non-carnivorous game Apsat’ or Apsad; also Ossetic Æfsati, Balkar Apsatə [Abaev 1949: 300, 319]. Also from an Abxaz source is the name of “Lady Azau, a wife of the Water Guardians”, who appears in an Ossetic version of the Dæl and doomed hunter cycle (< Abxaz a-dzáŋ’a “swamp” < a-dzə’ “water”) [Chaudry 1996].

It is my conclusion, therefore, that the appropriation of the Nakh word for “god” to name the divine patron of exterior spaces and of high-mountain game animals is consistent with the ethnographic data concerning her functions, as well as with lexical-replacement practices observed in many regions of the central Caucasus. The naming taboo discussed here may well have been gender-specific. Among the Ossetes, for example, women cannot pronounce the name of Wastyrji, the local St. George, referring to him instead as lægty dzwar “patron-saint of men” [Kaloiev 1991]. Conversely, it may have been the menfolk who avoided pronouncing the original name, whatever it might have been, of Samdzimari, Dæl, and their sisters.<sup>19</sup>

**V. Dæl and the dawn goddesses.** Even without the hint provided by the title given to this paper, readers may well have already detected similarities between the attributes of Dæl and those of the Greek goddess Aphrodite: beauty and nudity, seduction (in particular, seduction of mortals in mountain settings), and a fondness for gold necklaces.<sup>20</sup> Although Aphrodite is reckoned among the chief Olympian gods and goddesses, and credible IE etymologies have been proposed for her name, it is the consensus view that many, if not most, of her traits and adventures have been adopted from Near Eastern sources. Writing for the majority, Burkert [1985: 152-6] asserted that behind Aphrodite “clearly stands the ancient Semitic goddess of love Ishtar-Astarte” [also Herter 1960; Penglase 1994: 159-179]. Paul Friedrich [1978: 53] sought to motivate a more complex prehistory of the Greek goddess, with roots in several interconnected religious traditions of the ancient Near East. Alongside the heavy Mesopotamian-Phoenician contribution to the cluster of traits, biographical motifs and cultic practices labelled “Aphrodite”, Friedrich uncovers features which he

<sup>19</sup> Not explored here, but definitely worthy of a close look, is the hypothesis that Nakh \*dāli was in its turn borrowed from another speech community, most likely one speaking an Indo-European (Iranian?) language. If so, the original lexeme might have been a derivative of the IE for “god, divine” (\*diew-). But all of this is ungrounded speculation at present.

<sup>20</sup> The Georgian scholar Bezhan Abashidze [1971] also perceived a link between Dæl and Venus-Aphrodite, although one that was principally forged by dubious etymologizing (dæl ≈ dila “morning”; this latter lexeme had been earlier connected by the historian I. Javaxishvili [1998: 148-9] to the first syllable of Dilbat, the Assyro-Babylonian name for the planet Venus as morning star).

traces back to the Minoan-Mycenean (and ultimately “Old European”, in Gimbutas’ sense) and Indo-European cultural complexes. Of the deities more or less securely attributed to the Proto-Indo-European religious system, the one bearing the closest resemblance to Aphrodite is “Dawn” (\**áusôs*), although she has a more direct descendant in the goddess Eos, about whom comparatively little has been written in the extant Greek sources. In Friedrich’s opinion, in pre-Homeric times “the Greek Aphrodite eventually fuses the features of the early Greek Eos with many of those of Astarte” [1978: 49]. Recently, Penglase [1994: 163-4] took issue with the hypothesis of a “composite Aphrodite” with a significant Indo-European component (i.e. the antecedent of Eos), for which, in his view, “the arguments are for the most part speculative and not supported by concrete, defined and reliable evidence”. While the evidence put forth by Friedrich in support of his assertion of a link to the dawn goddess is indeed less “concrete” than the rich and varied material that the Greek depiction of Aphrodite owes to Near Eastern sources, I find it compelling for other reasons. Rather than go into a detailed discussion of this matter, I will limit myself to two points, which are directly pertinent to the topic of this paper. First of all, I do believe that the Svan deity Dæl and Greek Aphrodite share numerous traits, which is, in my view, due to the similarities that each has to the dawn-goddess complex. In other words, Dæl’s resemblance to Aphrodite is mediated, in a sense, by Eos and Inanna-Ishtar. Secondly, Friedrich’s monograph on Aphrodite has the singular merit of pinpointing a crucial characteristic underlying the depiction of Aphrodite which is equally applicable to Dæl and the dawn goddess: liminality [1978: 132-148].

Setting aside Aphrodite for the moment, here are the common features of the IE Dawn goddess, the Mesopotamian Inanna-Ishtar, and Svan Dæl, which strike me as particularly significant:

(1). *Dawn and the morning star (also red, rosy, golden coloring and adornments)*. It goes without saying that rosy-fingered Eos and her Indic, Baltic and other Indo-European cousins share certain features associated with the beginning of day, in terms of color, brilliance and the like. Sumerian Inanna identifies herself as the morning star to the gatekeeper of the underworld, and is evoked as both Lady of the morning and Lady of the evening (e.g. in the context “Lady of the morning [or evening] is radiant on the horizon”), an evident association with the planet Venus as morning and evening star [Afanas’eva 1991; Wolkstein & Kramer 1983: 101-103]. Dæl is golden-haired and luminescent, and her association with the morning star in both narrative poetry and ritual was mentioned earlier. It is worth noting as well that Dæl is invoked specifically in the context of a New Year’s ceremony, that is, a time of transition between the old year and the new, just as dawn is the transition between night and a new day. Some poems of the Inanna and Dumuzi cycle were likewise performed annually, at New Year’s observances intended to assure the fertility of crops and livestock [Afanas’eva 1991].

Although Inanna and Dæl are characteristically depicted as nude, they are also described as wearing or using golden adornments on certain occasions. Mention was made above of the beads given as tokens by Dæl to her lovers, and the necklace from which her Xevsur sister Samdzimari derives her name. In the course of her celebrated descent to the underworld, Inanna-Ishtar is progressively stripped of her crown, earrings, necklaces and garments as she passes through the seven gates of the Land of No Return. That these adornments symbolize her powers is indicated by her weakness before Ereshkigal, the queen of the underworld, who deprives her of life straightaway. Conversely, her clothing and jewelry are returned to her as she rises to the surface of the earth, more



powerful than before [see, among other sources, Penglase 1994: 16-21 on the goddess' "journey of power"]. The Vedic deity Ushas is described exposing her unclothed body in several hymns ("Belle d'apparence, comme une jeune fille ornée par sa mère, tu mets ton corps à découvert pour qu'on le voie" [*RgVeda* I:123:11, tr. Renou]); elsewhere her shining adornments are mentioned ("Avec ses parures elle a brillé dans les portiques du ciel" [*RgVeda* I:113:14, tr. Renou]).

(2). *Sexual predation, especially of mortal men.* The mortal lovers preferred by preferred by Eos, Inanna-Ishtar and Dæl are portrayed as hunters or shepherds, that is, men whose activities take them far outside of the village, into the non-domesticated spaces under the control of the goddess (typically a mountain-top). These romances more often than not end unhappily, at least for the mortal lover, who dies or is otherwise punished as a consequence of his relationship with the goddess. In the case of Dæl, the inventory of slain hunters includes not only Betgil, but also a certain Mepsay, who meets his fate in a fashion one can only describe as bizarre. This hunter is one of the protagonists of the "Dæl in childbirth" ballad cycle mentioned earlier; it is he who rescues Dæl's newborn child after it had been snatched by a wolf. In one variant, he turns down Dæl's offer of her sexual favors, and opts for hunting success instead. He takes aim at a herd of ibex, one of which has golden horns, a sign that the beast is a transformation of the goddess herself. Mepsay's bullet ricochets off the golden horns and strikes his forehead, killing him [Tuite 1994: 44-47, 127].

Eos snatched several humans to be her lovers, among them Kephalos, and the giant, handsome hunter Orion [Nagy 1990: 242]. Unfortunately for the latter, "when pink-fingered Dawn chose Orion, you gods at ease in your heaven grudged the union bitterly, even until chaste Artemis of the golden throne killed him in Ortygia by an infliction of her gentle darts" [*Odyssey* V: 121-124; tr. T. E. Shaw]. The motif appears to have been a popular one at one time; Gantz [1993: 238] takes note of the "numerous appearances in Red-Figure [ceramics] of a hunter pursued by a winged Eos".

When Ishtar attempts to seduce Gilgamesh, he responds with an enumeration of lovers — men and animals alike — brought to misfortune by her: "Tammuz, the lover of your earliest youth, for him you have ordained lamentations year upon year! You loved the colorful 'Little Shepherd' bird and then hit him, breaking his wing ... You loved the supremely mighty lion, yet you dug for him seven and again seven pits ..." and so on [*Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet VI; tr. Kovacs].

(3). *Fertility; patronage or herding of beasts.* Among the varied functions under their patronage, Inanna, Ishtar and Astarte are invoked as goddesses of fertility, assuring the fruitfulness of fields, beasts and humans. Inanna is portrayed giving birth to vegetables and grains after coupling with Dumuzi under the apple tree. In the Akkadian version of Ishtar's descent to the underworld, during her absence "no bull mounted a cow, [no donkey impregnated a jenny], No young man impregnated a girl ..." [Dalley 1991: 158].

Of the Indo-European dawn goddesses, Indic Ushas, Roman Aurora and, more explicitly, Mater Matuta are linked to fertility, especially of women [Toporov 1991; Dumézil 1973: 93-199, 304-336]. Etymologically linked, at least, is the Baltic "father of horses" Ūsinš (whose name contains the same Indo-European root \*aus- as Eos, Ushas and Aurora), depicted as divine herdsman and patron of horses [Biezais 1975: 374; Ivanov & Toporov 1991]. Ushas is characterized as "rich in cows and horses" [*RgVeda* I:92], and even as "genitrix of cows" (*gāvām jānitṛī*; *RgVeda* I:124:4, also IV:52:2 [Renou 1986: 62, 76]). In view of the ubiquity of bovine imagery in the Vedas, one

should not read too much into these epithets; nonetheless, in Srinivasan's opinion [1979: 120], the dawn goddess can be interpreted as symbolizing "feminine abundance"(as does the cow), and as "possessing the generative power by which new food and new life is obtained".

Dæl is not only the divine patron of game animals; she is occasionally portrayed escorting herds of ibex in the high mountains, as would a shepherd leading her flocks, or milking a female ibex.<sup>21</sup> She watches over the beasts in her care, and ensures that there was always be enough for the hunters who comply with her conditions. Under the epithet of "Dæl of New Year's Eve" she is invoked in the course of the night separating the old and new year in prayers and offerings for the prosperity of the household, e.g. "Dæl of New Year's Eve, make us see many a day like today in peace, with a good heart, with peace and fertility of animals and people" [Bardavelidze 1939: 91].

(4). *Ambiguous nature, attractive yet dangerous.* All of the goddess compared here are characterized by, on the one hand, beauty, eroticism and the granting of prosperity, and, on the other, a dangerous, potentially lethal, nature. Inanna and Ishtar were not only goddesses of fertility and sexual love; they also presided over war and discord. Their treatment of their former sexual partners is a matter of public record. Despite her extraordinary beauty, and her capacity for granting success to hunters, Dæl's reputation for destroying her former lovers was such that she was regarded with fear and apprehension by Svans travelling in the uninhabited spaces outside of their villages. "Dæl appears to a man in the form of a woman, and tempts him. Afterwards she lures him into the forest and destroys the unfortunate human. Dæl will drive a man insane by tempting him to lie with her" [Wonya:n 1917: 13]. Nagy [1990: 252] saw in "the ambivalent function of Eos as the undifferentiated agent of abduction, death and preservation" (of her mortal lovers, that is) interesting parallels with Aphrodite, as well as the echoes of primordial representations of the daily movements of the sun and stars.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing upon Turner's formulation of the concept of liminality, Friedrich observes that "the liminal is ... dynamic or processual in that it involves crossing over (out of or in to) relatively stable or fixed structures or "grids". Or it may involve operating "betwixt and between" the margins of these recognized and accepted categories of these recognized and accepted categories, rules, groups and structures" [Friedrich 1978: 132]. In both of these senses — the transitional and the interstitial — Dæl, Inanna, Eos and their sisters are endowed with distinctly liminal attributes.

Dawn, which appears to have been an anchoring trope for at some of these divinities, is of course a transitional period between night and day. Inanna in addition was linked to the evening star, and therefore to the liminality of dusk. As we have seen, both Dæl and Inanna were invoked at

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<sup>21</sup> Her Abxazian counterparts, the patron of game animals Až<sup>0</sup>eipšaa and his daughters, exploit their herds in other ways. They are believed to slaughter the ibex in their herd and feast on their meat. The animals are subsequently brought back to life from their bones and skin [Salakaia 1991].

<sup>22</sup> Virsaladze [1976: 117-118] mentions the myth of Artemis and the doomed hunter Akteon (who while hunting in the mountains accidentally came upon the goddess at her bathing; for this offense Artemis turned him into deer, which was thereupon torn asunder by the hunter's own dogs) as bearing an interesting similarity to that of Dæl and Betgil. In addition to the features she may have inherited from the ancient Minoan-Mycenean *potnia thērôn*, some of Artemis' attributes also match those of Samdzimari and other auxiliary goddesses of northeastern Georgian traditional religion (assuring the fertility of people and beasts, bringing aid to women in childbirth, dwelling in untouched nature) [Nilsson 1971: 503-506].

ceremonies marking the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, this being the calendrical correlate of twilight, one might say. Going further along this line of thought, one can discern the potential of dawn and dusk as symbols of birth and death. I argued above that the usage of the root *dala-* in Tushetian (Northeast Georgian) funerary practices is to be interpreted in the context of traditional beliefs concerning the individual's life cycle. In particular, both birth and death are “impure”, and pertain to the woman's [i.e. the mother's] social sphere. The newly-born, or newly-deceased, individual thereupon follows a trajectory of progressive incorporation into a male-headed social group, either that of the father or the husband [Table 5]. It may be pertinent that the Proto-Kartvelian root \**tn-/ten-* is ancestral to the Georgian [*ten-eb-a*] and Laz-Mingrelian [*tan-ap-a*] words for “dawn”, whereas its Svan daughter form signifies “give birth, be born” [*li-tn-e*; Fähnrich and Sarjveladze 1990: 68; Klimov 1998: 147].

Encounters between the goddesses and their mortal lovers characteristically take place in liminal locations: mountains or pastures, at the frontier between the spatial domain of the human community (“culture”) and the inaccessible spaces appertaining to nature, the dwelling places of gods and spirits. The men are described as hunters (Betgil, Orion) or herdsmen (Dumuzi, Anchises); these professions are doubly liminal, one might say, both in a spatial sense — hunters and shepherds go far from their villages, into the transitional zones just mentioned — and in their function as exploiters of animals for the profit of their community. As has been noted more than once, the contradictions are particularly acute in the case of hunters, who cause the death of their prey in order to bring life-giving food to their families, and who, in so doing, invest themselves with some of the traits of animals [Vidal-Naquet 1992: 39].

It is no ordinary woman whom the hunter encounters, but a goddess: immortal, awesome and powerful. She is also pure, i.e., sexual contact with her is nonpolluting, unlike that with ordinary adult women in Greek, Semitic and highland Caucasian cultures.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the behavior expected of mortal women, the goddess takes the initiative, to the point of seizing or snatching the man of her choice. He is brought, at least temporarily, into intimate contact with another order of being. Yet, as Georgians and Greeks alike knew well, and as Anchises exclaimed after Aphrodite revealed herself to him in all her terrible majesty, “he who lies with a deathless goddess is no hale man afterwards” [*Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*: 189-190; tr. Evelyn-White], if he survives at all.

Nagy [1990] has made a special study of the motif of distraught lovers leaping from a white cliff into water in Greek epic and lyric poetry. Among those reputed to have taken the plunge are Aphrodite (in connection with “her known function as substitute for the Indo-European dawn-goddess of the Greeks, Eos” [1990: 257]) and the poet most closely identified with her, Sappho, both of whom were allegedly crazed with love for beautiful young men with solar associations (Adonis and Phaon, respectively). Nagy discerns, on the one hand, an astronomical pattern underlying these narratives: “If we imagine Aphrodite diving into the Okeanos after the sun, it follows that she will rise in the morning, bringing after her the sun of a new day” [1990: 258]. At yet a deeper level of analysis, both the cliff and the ocean are “symbolic boundaries delimiting light and darkness, life and death, wakefulness and sleep, consciousness and unconsciousness” [1990:

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<sup>23</sup> In all three cultural areas, menstruation, childbirth, death and sexual intercourse are considered sources of pollution for men. Compare, for example, notions of impurity in ancient Greece [Burkert 1985: 77-79] and highland Georgia [Charachidzé 1968: 378-9; Tuite and Buxrashvili 1999; Tuite 2000] with those stipulated in the Book of Leviticus.

236], that is, endowed with the sort of liminality proposed here for Dæl-Inanna-Eos complex. The Greek “lover’s leap” motif is strongly reminiscent of that of Betgil and other hunters falling (or even jumping, in some variants) from the mountain after an encounter with their jealous lover Dæl; furthermore, the fatal fall occurs at the transitional time of dawn.

Also potentially pertinent to a comparison of the Greek and Svan motifs is the association of the latter with seasonal rituals. In Upper Svanetia, and in the neighboring province of Mountain Rach’a (occupied by Svan speakers until the 15th century), at the foot of the mountain where the hunter is alleged to have died, annual round dances (samti č’ əšxæš) are performed in late winter or spring to the singing of the ballad of Betgil and Dæl. In Rach’a, the dance is believed to influence a change in the weather [Virsaladze 1976: 67; Charachidzé 1986: 131-172]. Although there is no mention in any of the Svan or other Georgian ballads of the resuscitation of the dead hunter, Virsaladze [1976: 115-117] believes the portrayal of Betgil can be juxtaposed to those of Dumuzi-Tammuz, Attis and Adonis, and thus linked to mythical projections of the annual cycle of dying and regenerating vegetation. Virsaladze [1976: 63] mentions in passing that the Upper Svan commemoration of Betgil coincides with the festival of *Aybæ-layræ:l*, the carnival preceding the Lenten fast. Recently, J. Ruxadze [1999: 131] has compiled, from various manuscript sources, a description of the colorful and fascinating ceremony within which the samti č’ əšxæš takes place:

“At the festivals of *Aybæ-layræ:l* and *Limurq’wamal* [the “tower feast”, its Lower Svan counterpart — KT], the chief element is the building of a snow tower. Into the center of it is stuck a fir, linden or other sacred tree ... at the top of which is attached a woman’s head scarf as a flag (in Upper Svaneti), or a human-shaped figurine “*Lamaria*”, which holds a dagger in its hand, and has a wooden phallus hung down in front; a torn piece of sieve-screen (called a “shield”) serves as its face ... In Upper Svaneti, the round dance known as samti č’ əšxæš is performed next to the *Lamaria* figurine, by six elderly men. While singing they climb up the snow tower and dance around “*Lamaria*”, after which they shake the tree until the “shield” falls down. According to their belief, on whichever side the shield-sieve falls, that side [of the commune — KT] will have a good harvest that year. Following the old people, children climb the snow tower and compete to be the first to grab “*Lamaria*” and make it fall to the ground”.

This extraordinary ritual appears to feature an effigy of the goddess *Lamaria*, ordinarily associated with the hearth and domestic prosperity, here placed atop a snowy mountain, like Dæl, and outfitted with such male attributes as a phallus and a sword. Furthermore, the participants seek to knock down, first, *Lamaria*’s mask or “shield”, and then the effigy itself. All of this takes place in a (literally) carnivalesque context of mask-wearing, cross-dressing and bawdy merry-making. Without more information (Ruxadze’s book only came into my hands a few months ago), I will not attempt to unravel the lush symbolism of *Aybæ-layræ:l*. Suffice it to say that liminality is written all over it, along with a dive from a white mountain that resembles that of Aphrodite rather more than that of Dæl’s lover Betgil. One wonders what Victor Turner would have made of it.

To sum up, the Kartvelian, Mesopotamian and Indo-European dawn-goddess complexes provide powerful conceptual tools for representing, and overcoming the contradictions inherent in, women’s nature and social roles, as perceived within the dominant ideological frameworks of these cultural areas. With regard to traditional highland Caucasian societies, at least, the principal contradictions are these three, although in effect they are but three facets of one complex representation:

1. Women — especially through the blood of menstruation and childbirth — are sources of pollution, and therefore potentially dangerous, yet absolutely essential for the survival of lineage.

2. In accordance with an exogamic ideology of marital alliance formation, in-marrying women are brought from outside the local group into the heart of the domestic interior (cf. the woman's trajectory shown in Diagram 1)

3. The transitional moments of birth and death are imbued with pollution, and linked to the women's sphere. Women give birth in isolation from men, and in the period between death and interment, it is primarily the womenfolk who mourn in proximity to the body [Baliauri & Mak'alatia 1940]. These liminal phases, of course, are integral components of each individual's life cycle, and each is accompanied by a transfer of social attachment to the father's or husband's patrilineage.

The potent, fascinating figure of Dæl, the golden-haired, glowing, sexual predatory, touchy, jealous and lethal patroness of the game animals of the high mountains, will of necessity be reduced to a pallid, skeletal outline in comparative analyses of the sort attempted here. Even if one were to read through the corpus of harsh and compelling ballads, round-dance songs and narratives that have come down to us in collections of Svan folklore — which doubtless represent but a tiny fraction of the texts that would have been in circulation in the Svaneti of a few centuries ago — it would be impossible to replicate the swirling cluster of thoughts and emotions that Dæl would have called up for a chilled, hungry and anxious Svan hunter feeling his way along the edge of a precipice in the pale light of dawn. It should be noted, finally, that Dæl, like her semi-divine and doomed son Amiran, to whom I devoted an earlier study [Tuite 1998], are featured in songs, dances and tales performed by men, and presumably composed by them as well. In this case as well, one would like very much to know how the womenfolk thought of her.

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