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Rethinking the Story of the *Surami Fortress*: Multicultural and Anti-imperial Dimensions of Georgian Novella and Films

The Surami Fortress (1859-1860), a 19th-century novella by the Georgian writer Daniel Chonkadze (1830-1860), was filmed twice as full-length movies in the 20th century, by the Soviet-Georgian cinematographers. The first Georgian film based on a literary text, *The Suram Fortress* (Film Department of *Gansakhcomi*, 1923, 65 mins.), was directed by Ivan Perestiani (1870-1959), one of the founders of Georgian cinema, the film director, script-writer and actor of Greek descent, born in Russian city. Later, the famous Georgian film director and artist of Armenian descent, Tbilisi-born Sergo Parajanov (1924-1990), created his film *The Legend of Suram Fortress* (Film-studio *Georgian Film*, 1984, 88 mins.). Thus, the novella, which itself depicts the multiethnic Georgian society, inspired two film-directors who had a diverse ethnic/cultural background, but were dedicated to the idea of Georgia's cultural uniqueness and unity. The author, Daniel Chonkadze, created the text which carries strong patriotic messages; at the same time, he supported Georgia's cultural diversity, he was the first to work on Georgian-Ossetic dictionary, he researched and collected Ossetic folklore. The novella and films all deal with the themes and problems related, on the one hand, with Georgia's national self-identification and, its deep historic/cultural roots, ancient history of statehood and future goals of being established as a nation-state; on the other hand, they represent the role of various ethnic communities in Georgian history and culture.

While the novella is a multi-layered text and can be interpreted from different angles, the idea of self-sacrifice of the hero for the sake of survival of the fatherland is central in it. This dimension was not ignored also by film-makers, although the Soviet literary criticism was suggesting to read the text solely as a revolt against the serfdom. The novella and films were developed in the times of Russian domination in Georgia (the Russian Empire, the USSR), and, obviously, convey some hidden anti-imperial messages; however, they seem to be intentionally veiled by the author and film-makers through medieval setting and/or metaphoric language. The novella and films all deserve rethinking while rewriting Georgia's cultural history.