

Texts and Visions Across Genres and Media: Re-thinking Arab Cultural History

Georgia as a Cultural Source for Arab writers – Moroccan Imaginary as a Model –

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Abstract:

Has Georgia become a cultural source for Arab writers, in the context of their Postcolonial perspectives towards cultural paradigms?

What space do Georgia and its culture occupy, among universal cultures, in the Arab imaginary in general?

I will try to expand these two questions, by focusing on the Moroccan imaginary, keeping in mind the impact of translation as the sole tool of communication between the Arab writers and Georgian culture.

Keywords: Georgian Culture, Source, Arab Writers, Moroccan imaginary, Postcolonial Perspectives

Keeping in mind the impact of political and cultural relations in the past between Georgia and the Arab world on the one hand and the impact of translation as the sole tool of communication between the Arab writers and the Georgian culture on the other, I will attempt to answer the following two questions:

1. *What space do Georgia and its culture occupy among universal cultures in the modern and contemporary Arab cultural field?*

2. *Has Georgia become a cultural source for Contemporary Arab writers within the context of postcolonial perspectives and cultural paradigm shifts?*

As the imaginary is not an isolated element, this paper will focus on some details which are pivotal for its elaboration.

1. Arabic translations of Georgian Literature

To better understand the process of translating Georgian Literature into Arabic, I will try to shed some light on the nature of Arab interest in Georgian culture and literature since the middle ages.

1.1. The Middle Ages:

As I believe in the interaction between dominant and rising cultures, the following questions need to be answered:

Is it possible that during the Middle Ages, even after the huge efforts made by Georgian kings (Tamar in particular) and scholars like Shota Rustaveli, to reverse the equation and become a source of Culture, no Arab interest in Georgia out of scientific, historical and geographical resources could have been found?

Is it true that the Georgian language had never been a source language during the Middle Ages?¹

¹ We take into consideration that «In general, the 11th and 12th centuries AD (5th -6th centuries AH) were a period of extensive cultural-scientific exchanges

Taking into account the invasion of Mongols on the one hand and the fact that the Georgian language is almost –till now–¹ completely inaccessible to the rest of the world on the other, the possibility that a Medieval Georgian scholar would have translated into Arabic some Georgian Literature rescued from destruction and became witness to an Oriental revival based on humanism, centuries before the European Renaissance, especially Shota Rustaveli's epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* «regarded as the crown of this cultural boom² », seems to be an important one.

What is surprising is that it was a Medieval Arab scholar, not a Georgian one who probably made the first step! Franz Toussaint, a great French expert in Oriental studies and a well-known translator of Arabian, Persian, Sanskrit and Japanese poetry, includes in his compilation of poems translated by him from Arabic into French *The Islamic Songs of War and Love*³, prosaic translations of four Georgian poems among translations of Arabic, Persian, Afghan, Belujistan, Altarian, Turkish, Egyptian, Maroconian, Hogarian, and Cherqezian texts. In The Georgian part of the book entitled: «Georgia songs»,⁴ names of Rustaveli and Shavteli are mentioned, but in an altered transliteration as following: Prince Zoumali: La Rose⁵,

between the Christian population of Georgia and various Muslim nations who were living together in Tbilisi, or its other cities» (mahvash vaheddoost, "Manifestation of Georgian Elements in Persian Literature Texts":

https://www.academia.edu/30681933/Manifestation_of_Georgian_Elements_in_Persian_Literature_Texts).

¹ Gvantsa Jobava, «Exporting Georgian Literature» ,Translated from Georgian by Philip Price, Published in: *The Past in the Present: Writing from Georgia*, Georgia:september-2018-georgia-exporting-georgian-literature-gvantsajobav%2F&usg=AOvVaw2l-kqJPOg6-UxYK6Nsczb5.

² Maka Elbakidze, «*The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and European Chivalry Romance», in: *The Knight in the Panter's Skin“ and its Place in the World Literature.Modern Interpretations*, Irma Ratiani Editor, 2016, p.28.

³ *Chants d'Amours et de Guerre de l'Islam*, Robert Laffont , Marseille , 1942.

⁴ «Chants de Géorgie», p.147-150.

⁵ «Dans tous les jardins , j'ai vainement cherché une rose qui aurait la couleur de tes joues ... p.147-148.

Chavtali: L'Embarras¹, **Roustoual:** La Peau de Léopard (Extrait)², Anonyme: Nuit³. Bearing in mind that the majority of the Georgian part is devoted to the long extract of the poem attributed to Rustaveli, which reinforces the idea that Rustaveli's epic poem was considered a model of high poetry.

According to some Georgian experts, Franz Toussaint "was able to obtain the information concerning Georgian poetry from a compilation of Arabic poems"⁴ by the famous Christian Syrian writer Abu Al-Faraj Ibn al-'Ibri⁵ who was born in 1225.

This hypothesis led us to conclude that Arabic is the first foreign target language for Georgian Literature in the Middle Ages! Maybe the only one, if we take into consideration the fact that no translation into Persian was reported during this period, despite the close cultural relationship between Georgia and Persia since the Achaemenid period which resulted in mutual influence as it is attested by the manifestations of Georgian elements in classic Persian literature (Naser Khorow's Safarnama for example)⁶. To prove it, I believe that deep research must be conducted.

¹ Je lui dirai que je ne peux vivre sans elle et que j'irais la chercher au bout du monde...». p.148.

² «Je suis faible comme le brin d'herbe qui vient d'être foulé par le pied d'un montagnard .Aie pitié de moi ! Je le jure , j'irai chaque soir te retrouver près de la fontaine !Les guerriers de mon père ne pourront reconnaître mon visage...». p148-149-150.

³ «Comme un mendiant altéré , je bois à mes souvenirs d'amour... ».p.150.

⁴ «The Mystery of the Unknown Poem by Rustaveli», kartvelologi: <http://kartvelologi.tsu.ge> archive

⁵ This famous Syrian writer, translator and a compiler served as a bishop in Armenia and lived in Azerbaijan. His written records have retained information on Iberians, conversion of Georgian people to Christianity and Georgian-Mongol relationship». in: The Mystery of the Unknown Poem by Rustaveli – kartvelologi: <http://kartvelologi.tsu.ge> archive.

⁶ mahvash vaheddoost, op.cit. v. cf :

- GEORGIA iv. Literary contacts with Persia, Encyclopaedia Iranica: www.iranicaonline.org%2Farticles%2Fgeorgia-iv.

- Elguja Khintibidze, *Rustaveli's 'The Man in the Panther skin' and European Literature*, Bennett& Bloom, 2011, p.13-14.

What is obvious is that nothing happened later on. For Centuries, there were no more translations of Georgian literature into Arabic nor mentions of Georgian culture in any Arab work of fiction, except references to “AlKorj”¹ (Georgia), as being under The Ilkhanate hegemony during the 14th century in the famous Moroccan traveler Ibn Battûta’s Journey². The image we have of “Alkorj”, and other countries divided among Mongol princes after the death of Sultan Abou-Said Bahadour, without any commentary of Ibn Battûta, is so brief but so expressive.

Ibn Battûta, who had crossed on his way to the capital of the Khân of the Golden Horde, the Black Sea to the Crimean Peninsula, then to the northern Caucasus, did not visit Georgia as it is known, but he visited Cairo and Bilâd a-Shâm twice during Mamluk dynasty: the Caucasian Culture in general (the architecture in particular) had become a part of the Arab Islamic culture during this period, especially during the second period of Mamluk dynasty, called by Arab historians Burji dynasty³.

This complicated and rich past period has become a source of inspiration for modern Arab novelists since the beginning of the second millennium from a negative perspective⁴. It will also be the origin of a new kind of contact with Georgia and its culture as it will be demonstrated later.

¹ The name given by Arabs to Georgia.

², Tuḥfat an-Nuẓẓār fī Gharā’ib al-Amṣār wa ‘Ajā’ib al-Asfār, reviewed by Abdel-Hâdi Tazi, Vol. 2, *Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco Editions*, 1997, p. 73.

³ Burji danasty ruled Egypt from 1382 until 1517

⁴ Among Arab famous novels fictionalizing Mamlûk ‘s period from a negative side:

- Jorge Zaydân , *Istibdâd Al-Mamâlîk* ,Al Hilâl, 1900.

-Mohamed Said Al-’aryân , ‘*Ala Bab Zouila* , prefaced by Taha Hussein,1951.

.-Sa’d Makkâwî, *Assâirûna Niyâmane* ,1963.

-Jamal Al- Ghitanî, *Azzîni Barakât*, Churûk , 1974 .

1-2. The Nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

Following the Nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly during the period of *Nahda* (also *known* as the *Arab Renaissance*), Arab scholars in Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon translated a lot of works from major European languages, French and English in particular. In this context, the enthusiasm of the *Nahda* masters for great Russian writers should be highlighted. According to Richard Jacquemond, „The case of Russian literature is interesting. During *Nahda*, this literature held a prominent place for a long time, competing with French and English literature¹.“

As is the case for the majority of scholars belonging to systems in crisis, Arab scholars targeted dominant cultures for a long time, that is why we had not been surprised by the lack of interest of Arab translators and scholars in Georgian literature during this period even if we know that except for some translations into English and French, Russian has been the first target language for Georgian literature for a long time since the nineteenth century to the decolonization period.

This general conclusion does not mean that some of *Nahda*'s writers had not been in contact directly or indirectly with Georgian culture and literature. Rizkallâh Hassûn's² poem 'A trip in Caucasus' published in 1868 selected works in London is one of the scarce proofs. "This fictional poetic work of forty-eight baits" conveys the author's impressions while making a journey in Georgia³.

¹ Richard Jacquemond, « La traduction en arabe du roman mondial (1991-2015). Jalons pour une enquête », Maxime Del Fiol et Claire Mitatre (dir.), *Les Occidents des mondes arabes et musulmans, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, 2018. fflshs-01838369.

² 1825-1880.

³ «In 1862 Hassûn immigrated to Russia. Initially he came to Harbor city of Georgia Poti from Constantinople through the Black Sea, then he visited Tbilisi where he spent a month. Then he went to Russia along with Georgian military road.» Leila Kvelidze, *From the history of Arabic and Georgian Literary Relationships*, in: *Yearbook*, Vol. 2, Kutaisi, 2010, p. 220.

The second proof is Eliâs Abû Shabaki's¹ collection of poems *Serpents of Paradise*², published in 1938. To our surprise, the famous Lebanese poet, who was one of the founders of the literary League of Ten³ known for its important role in the development of Arab poetry during this period, mentioned Shota Rustaveli's epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* in the preface of his collection. The Lebanese poet had known about the Georgian epic thanks to Edmond Jaloux's article⁴ praising the publishing of the third translation of the epic poem into French⁵ in 1938, and emphasizing the greatness of the Georgian medieval poet.

About this, Eliâs Abû Shabaki said: 'I have just read an article written by the French writer Edmond Jaloux about a great poet from the 12th century called Shota Rustaveli, [...]. Edmond Jaloux said that this recently discovered poet had written a surprising poem or epic, which is a praise of humans as they were in the late Middle Ages, in their strength, their feelings of pride and justice, their naivety at thresholds of revival. He said "as soon as we read this poem (*The man in the Panther's Skin*), We fall in a daze about this oriental drunkenness. It's because we lost – poor occidental people – the habit of slurred speech, and We almost suffocate in this atmosphere of incense and colors⁶ ."

Did Abû Shabaki read the third French translation of the epic poem? There is no way to prove it, but what is clear in his book's preface is the fact that Rustaveli's poetic style was a witness which supports his thesis about poetry creation and his effort to persuade his contemporaries to liberate themselves from the chains of the imitation of Occidental theories and poetry schools⁷. Apart from Rizkallâh Hassûn's poem and Elias Abû Shabaki's preface, no matter

¹ 1321-1947.

² *Afâ'i al-firdaws*, Almakchûf, Beyrouth, 1938.

³ In 1930.

⁴ Appeared in 'Nouvelles Littéraires', 1938.

⁵ Chota Roustaveli, *L'Homme à la peau de léopard*, trad. Giorgi Gvazava et Anie Marcel, Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1938.

⁶ *Afâ'i al-firdaws*, Hindâwi, Cairo, 2014, p.12-13.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.13

how hard I searched, I could not find any other mention of Georgian culture as the long real process of new contact between modern Arab scholars and Georgian culture and literature began in the sixties.

1-3. The Soviet period : The beginning of a modern process

How Georgian Literature made its way into the modern Arabic language during the soviet period?

Substantially, it is Georgian Arabists who took the first step, when they proposed to the Syrian translator Nizar Khalili to translate *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* into Arabic, during his short journey in Tbilisi in 1966. The choice of the work does not surprise us, as it is considered not only as a model of High poetic and thinking of Georgian culture but also as a symbol of Georgian Identity.

Translation made from French and English, with the substantial support of Georgian Arabists, Gouram Tchicovani in particular, comparing the result with the Georgian original text¹ took about twenty-two years , during this period Nodar Dumbadze's novels (*I Can See the Sun², and Granny, Ilico Illarion, and I³*) were translated from Russian into Arabic by famous Arab translators known by their translations of Russian literature into Arabic (Ghâib Tu'ma Farmân, Abderrahmân Habîbî, Jalâl Al-Mâchita, . .).

In 1984, the Arabic translation of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* finally appeared in Damascus. It was financed by Levan Sagradzé, a Syrian businessman from Georgia very attached to his origins. According to the translator preface, Nizâr Khalilî aimed to

¹ Al- fâris fi ihâb an-namir, translated by Nizâr Khalilî, Preface: Nizâr Khalilî and Gouram Tchicovani, Al-matba'a al- jadida, Damascus, 1984, p. 14.

² Arâ as-shams , translated:

- Ghâib Tu'ma Farmân, At-takadum ,Moscou, 1971.

-Hamid Chamaqi, At-takadum, Moscou, 1981.

³ Anâ wa Jaddatî wa Ilico wa Illârion , translated by:

- Abderrahmân Habîbî, Moscou, 1975.

- Jalâl Al-mâchita, Radoga, 1984.

share with Arab readers his own discovery of the greatness of the Georgian epic poem and the specificity of Georgian culture and literature; while drawing their attention to the Arabic heritage in the epic.

Reception of Khalîlî's translation in the Arabic literary field was good but limited: It was celebrated right after its appearance as the first one in Arabic¹, with the participation of the translator and the Syrian novelist Walîd Ikhlâsi who had participated in the revision of Khalîlî's Arab version of the epic poem.

The Syrian and Lebanese articles that appeared in some important newspapers, such as 'Al-Ba'th'², Tishrîn³, An-ahâr⁴, appreciated Rustaveli's new ideas of the Enlightenment that they considered as being the soul of the Modern Renaissance, the prevailing tolerance in the whole epic poem, and celebrated in general what they considered as the most beautiful thing Georgia gave to humanity during its long History. According to Hasan M. Usuf, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is on an equal footing with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Ferdawsi's *Shahnameh* and Virgile's *Aeneid*⁵.

Similarly, no mentions of translations into Arabic of Nodar Dumbadze's Novels have been detected. Nevertheless, by translating the most important work in Georgian literary history and the masterpiece of world literature, Nizar Khalîlî had been seen by these Critics as a leader contributing to filling a void denoting the ignorance of a country and its culture. This was, therefore, supported later on by some Georgian Arabists like Gouram Tchicovani who translated some Georgian poems into Arabic, besides his contribution to the translation of Shota Rustaveli's poem. Supported by a few Arab translators at the end of the eighties, like the Iraqi Sa'di El

¹ In Soviet center in Damascus.

² 'Abdun-nabî Hijâzî, Chota Rustaveli wa Malhamat Al- fâris fi ihâb an- namir, Al-Ba'th, December 9, 1984 .

³ Hasan M. 'assûf , Al- fâris fi ihâb an- namir: yanâbi' ash-shi'r, yanâbi' al-hikma, Tishrîn, August 31, 1985.

⁴ Waddâh Yûsuf Lahlû , Malhama Georgia wa tarjama 'arabia, An-nahâr, January 18, 1985.

⁵ Hasan M. 'assûf, Ibid .

Mâleh¹ and the Soudanai Abderrahîm abou Dhekrî², Nizâr khalîlî continued his efforts in the eighties, by translating poems of the nineteenth century poets (Nikoloz Baratashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli³), and narrative fiction of the Soviet period (Constantin Lordkipanidzé, Leo Kiacheli, Nodar Dumbadze, Otia Ioseliani, Niko Lordkipanidzé⁴): the choice of poets and authors is very significant.

Did these few important translations of Georgian ancient and modern Literature from Russian and French Into Arabic make a deep change in its reception in the Arab World? Unfortunately, these translations did not make a big change, no interest in academic works, and no influence on Arab imaginary. Hence, Georgia and its culture stayed unknown to the majority of Arab writers and readers! But the Arab world was not an exception, “until the mid-2010s Georgian literature was almost entirely unknown abroad⁵”, according to Ana Mezvrishvili.

In this context, it is important to note that the Arabic translation of some Georgian literary works between 1971 and 1989, was among the exceptions in the history of Georgian literary translation into foreign languages during the Soviet period, thanks to the efforts of Georgian Arabists and some left-wing Arab intellectuals and translators. According to Gvantsa Jobava, during this hard time for Georgia and its culture, except the twelfth-century epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* “that could not be hemmed in even by the almighty Iron Curtain, such was its genius[...]it was

¹ Sa'dî Al-maleh, *Nâmûs al-khulûd*, Radoga, 1989.

² *Anâ anmû Anâ akbur*, Radoga, 1989.

³ «Qadaru Georgia» (1987). – «An-nâsik » (1987). «Al-muaddab» (1988) ,Dâr AlHiwâr, Latakia.

⁴ Khamisu qisasin mina al-adabi al-George , 1988.

⁵ How Georgian literature has made its way into 35 languages, Investor.org, Analytical Business Magazine, how-georgian-literature-has-made-its-way-into-35languages%2F&usg=AOvVaw3DHGYVvHCIPGRE1w-Rtnp. v. cf: Ana Kvirikashvili, «State Cultural Policies in Georgia's small Book market. Case of the translation grant program», *Georgian Literature in translation* (2010-2018), Knygotyra, vol. 75, 2020, p. 96.

essentially impossible to have translations and original writing published outside the Soviet sphere, and even within that sphere, publishing was always tightly controlled by the regime¹.”

1.4. The independence Period: from 2010 till now

*** In The Machrek**

During the first decade of the independence period of Georgia, the Syrian newspaper «Al-Jamâhîr» published² Gouram Chikovani's translation of the verses of Galaktion Tabidze, Vazha Pshavela and Akaki Tsereteli from Georgian into Arabic. Arabic Translations of Georgian Literature focusing on Dumbadze's fiction, continued growing at the same pace in the eighties with new translators (Nawfal Nayyûf, 'Adil Isma'il, Ali Haddâd, ...³) till 2014.

In fact, the movement of translating Georgian literature into foreign languages began to improve, starting from the 2010 in consequence of the “Georgian Book and Literature Program⁴ [...], aimed at promoting the translation and publication of Georgian literature in foreign languages. This process was facilitated by an annual forum-dialogue for foreign and Georgian publishers, supporting Georgia's participation in international book fairs, and the participation of Georgian authors in literary festivals and symposia⁵”.

¹ Exporting Georgian Literature ,Translated from Georgian by Philip Price, op.cit

² December 17, 1997.

³ Nodar Dumbadze:

- Ar-râyât al-baydâ', translated by Nawfal Nayyûf and Adil Ismâ'il, The Syrian General Organization of Books, 2007.

- Zâirû al-fajr, translated by Ali Haddad, Alkhayal, 2007.

- Qânûn al-abadiyya, translated by Chawkat Youssef, Damascus, 2010.

- Lâ Takhâfî yâ Mama, translated by Ahmed Nâsir, Arab Wirters Union publications, Damascus, 2012.

⁴ It was launched with the funding of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia.

⁵ How Georgian literature has made its way into 35 languages, op.cit.

Translation of Georgian culture and literature significantly gained prominence starting from 2014. Among thirty books¹ translated this year and forty-seven² books translated in 2015, there are translations into Arabic of new famous Authors³! And since the Georgian language was completely inaccessible to the Arab world, Arabic translations were conducted from French, English, and Russian. Thanks to the financial support of the Georgian National Book Center, and the dynamic cultural Georgian diplomacy, Georgia succeeded in being the guest of important Arab international book Fairs: Dubai 2020 and Doha International Book 2022 namely.

At Dubai Expo -23 January 2020, postponed to 23-24 January 2022 because of covid 19 pandemic a series of activities dedicated to Georgian literature and writing had been held, at the initiative of Production in Georgia Agency and with the support of Tbilisi City Hall and Tbilisi –World Book Capital, as it was announced by Elene Dobordjgnidze in 2020⁴. Moreover, Doctor Nino Surmava, presented a paper about Shota Rustaveli's epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and the Arabic translation that was reissued in 2016 in Cairo⁵. And to celebrate and encourage the relative growth and openness of the process of translation of Georgian Literature into Arabic, two recent Arabic translations of contemporary Georgian novels were presented: David Turashvili's novel *Flight from the USSR* translated by Samâh Ja'far⁶, and Dato Gorgiladze's novel *The*

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Jemal Karchkhadze, *Antonio wa David*, translated by Amir Zakî, Al-kutub Khân , Cairo, 2014.

- Lasha Boughadzé, *Express Al-adab*, translated by Mohamed Majdî Mohamed, Al-kutub khân, Cairo, 2015.

- In 2016: Achil sulakauri, *Mughâmarâtes Pikolo*, translated by Jihâd Chbînî, Al-kutub khan, Cairo.

⁴ Georgian literature series to be held at Expo Dubai 2020,

<https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/georgian-literature-series-to-be-held-at-expodubai-2020/>

⁵ General Egyptian Book Organisation.

⁶ David Turashvili, *Rihla mina Al-Ittihâd Assûviâti* , Translated by Samâh Ja'far, Al-Kutub Khân, 2015.

Club of Elderly Harlots, translated by Hâla Salâh¹. Master classes on Georgian writing were also organized for the visitors. During two days, Expo Dubai 2020 hosted Georgian culture, sports, cuisine and tourism showcases at the Georgian pavilion².

In 2022, during Doha International Book Fair, a collection of Nodar Dumbadze's stories³ translated from Russian into Arabic by Abderrahîm Dhekrî in 1987 and published in 2019 in Qatar thirty years after his death, was presented with the participation of Dumbadze's daughter. In addition, the Arabic translation prefaces⁴ highlighted the interest of Georgian Embassy, and the efforts made by Arabists Doctor Darejan Gardavadze and Doctor Sobio Nozadze to revise the translation while comparing it with Georgian origin.

***In the Maghreb: Morocco**

Contrary to countries of Machrek (Egypt and Syria in particular), Morocco does not have a long history of cultural exchanges with Georgia. The fact that the Moroccan king Abdelazîz Ibn Al-hassan first's⁵ mother was Georgian did not make any difference. Moroccan universities despite their openness to foreign culture and literature did not show considerable interest in Georgian or Caucasian culture and literature until the end of 2012. The reception of Georgian participants in some of these universities congresses earlier, particularly in Marrakech (2000), Fez (2009) for example, can be considered as a cultural curiosity towards an unknown country and culture. Even though congresses proved to be efficient, the Sixth Alexander von Humboldt & Ibn Battûta international Congress in 2011 was so beneficial.

¹ Dato Gorgiladze, *Nâdi al-ghâniyât al-musinâte*, Translated by Hâla Salâh A-sayâd, Dâr Safsâfa, 2022.

² Georgian literature series to be held at Expo Dubai 2020, *op.cit*

³ *Al-mulâzim Kukaracha*, Qatar National presses.

⁴ - Speech of former Georgian ambassador, Ekaterine Meiering-Mikadze, *Ibid*, p. 7-8.

-Darejan Gardavadze, The Writer of love and smile, *ibid*, p. 11-15.

⁵ 1878-1943.

Ibn Battûta did not certainly visit Georgia and thus did not circulate any idea about its culture, but thanks to his international reputation a Moroccan professor had the opportunity to visit the country and have access to Georgian culture and literature.

During international Conferences held at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra and at Mohammed V University in Rabat, I had the second chance to meet my colleague and friend Doctor Darejan Gardavadze upon her visit to Morocco to participate in the congress. The first chance was in 2009 at the International Scientific Conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Cairo University. A year after, The Sixth Alexander von Humboldt & Ibn Batouta International Conference, I received an invitation from Ivane Javakhi-shvili University within the framework of the project implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, which meant inviting professors from foreign universities to Tbilisi State University and integrating them into the lectures.

To be honest, before my stay in Tbilisi in 2012, my information about the country and its culture was basic: nothing deep about its long history and rich culture and literature, which reinforces my conclusion about the limited impact of the few Arabic translations of Georgian literature before 2014, because of the lack of critical and academic interest in it. However, thanks to the Georgian cultural diplomacy, and the great esteem that Georgian people and scholars have for their own culture and heritage, supported by the process of more openness and changing directions in the Arab field, these Arab translations managed to reach some Arab academic receptors.

I was in Tbilisi when I read for the first time Nizâr Khalîllî's translation of Shota Rustaveli's epic poem which I received as a gift from Doctor Nino Dolidze. The joy of the first contact with Georgian national literature in translation together with the direct contact with Georgia and Georgian people and scholars prompted me to read more translations of Georgian literature into Arabic and French.

Back to Morocco, I delivered my first public speech in Arabic about the epic poem of Shota Rustaveli “The bright image of Arabs in World Literature: *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* as a case study” in December 2012, during an international congress in Fez about ‘Arabity Between Mediation and Conceptualization’. Moroccan and foreign Scholars, hearing for the first time about Shota Rustaveli, focused their debate on the singularity of the Georgian Medieval epic poem and the part on the role of translation in the global cultural and literary exchanges. Having been encouraged by this good reception, and fascinated by the quality of Georgian modern literature, I translated in the same year a chapter of Nodar Dumbadze’s Novel “The law of eternity”¹, and the year after a short text of Niko Iortkipidze entitled: “Waiting”².

With this public communication and translations shared with my colleagues and students in the master of General Literature and Comparative **Criticism** at Mohammed V University, I was preparing the official introduction of Rustaveli’s epic into the Master’s program which focuses on postcolonial theories, reconsidering notions of central and marginal.

My students, becoming used to new cultural spaces and spheres, expressed high interest in Georgian literature and culture, and their good reception of the work exceeded my expectations. This good result can be attributed to the impact of the enlightenment ideas on the one hand and the Arab positive image in the poem on the other. Fortunately, direct contact with Georgian scholars reinforced the positive effect of the epic poem.

In the same year, taking part in an international colloquium in Rabat organized by the master with the collaboration of the Laboratory of Comparative Studies, Professor Darejan Gardavadze chose to talk about the courteous love phenomenon in *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*. She, therefore, gave an inaugural conference for our students about cultural and literary exchanges between Georgia and

¹ ‘*Alim bil-firâsa*, Al-’alam, 25-11-2012.

² *Al-intiââr*, An-nûr Center Site, 2013:
<http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=225845>

the Arab world in the present time. During this conference, she introduced them to *A Modern Arabic -Georgian Dictionary – for the manual of Modern Standard Arabic*¹. This marked the start of a real process of cultural and Literary exchange between Moroccan and Georgian universities.

In the following year, 2014, the Laboratory of Comparative Studies hosted professor Darejan Gardavadze's doctoral student Nino Surmava for months. This event participated in consolidating Moroccan students with Georgian culture and gave a Georgian student a chance to have a deep idea about the unknown Moroccan productions in literature and criticism.

There is no doubt that translation is an important element in the expansion of literature out of its borders, but to help this element give the best and fastest results it seems that the best way is to introduce translation literature into academic programs. It helps this literature to expand its broad questions and answers and to have a new life according to different questions and expectations of the host culture, especially with a succession of generations of students.

And as my students became colleagues in different Moroccan academic institutions in Rabat, Kenitra, Beni Mellel, Agadir, to name a few, they supported my own efforts to introduce Georgian Literature to Moroccan scholars and then to Arab Scholars. Attesting to this is the paper about *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* as a symbol of the Oriental Renaissance and a proof of the richness and singularity of Georgian culture and literature, published in the annual book² of the Laboratory of Narratives at the Faculty of Letters, Ben M'sik – Casablanca, comprising articles of famous Arab writers and critics (Nabil Suleiman, Shahla 'Ujailî, Said Ghanîmî, ...) and presented in the International Moroccan Book Fair 2022 in Rabat.

¹ Maia Andronikashvil, Nino Antidzekakhiani, Darejan Gardavadze, IV. Javakhishvil Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, 2011.

² *As-sard wa chaghafu al-mahkiyâte*, chu'aib Halifi (Editor), N 6, Faculty of Arts and Humanities Ben M'Sick, Casablanca, 2022.

In 2016, one of my old students published in *Arab magazine* my own conference “The light image of the Arab in World Literature”¹. I noticed with satisfaction that this article succeeded in attracting the attention of some Arab readers and becoming a main reference for some Arab translators and researchers writing about Rustaveli².

Other students, some of whom became critics, mentioned Rustaveli and Georgian literature in their papers published in Moroccan or Arabic print or digital newspapers and magazines³. Thus, my students-colleagues and I, as a team, became interested in Georgian Literature in the midst of our interest in world literature based on a new postcolonial definition of it.

In collaboration with the young Moroccan researchers Fatima Zahra Ajjoul, Younes El Yousfi, Hamid Issafi, who participated in the Arab Panel “Texts and Visions Across Genres and Media: Re – thinking Arab Cultural History” in the ICLA XXIII Congress held in Tbilisi 2022⁴, we translated more Georgian narratives from English and French into Arabic, making, at the beginning of July 2022, the first Moroccan Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Georgian Writers, which comprises a bunch of selected Georgian short stories written by famous modern and contemporary Georgian writers⁵: Niko Lortkipanidze: Waiting, Grigol Rukabidze: Tbilisi, Cons-

¹ Al-wajh al-muchriq li al-'arabi fi al-adab al-'âlamî (Al- fâris fi ihâb an- namir namûdhajane): www.arabicmagazine.com/arabic/articleDetails.aspx?Id+4780

² Nadia Abdelwahâb Khunda, Qîrâa fi Al- fâris fi ihâb an-namir: Whispering Dialogue, Periodical for Arts and Humanities, 15/10/2021.

³ -Usâma Sghir, Al-muqâwama ath-thaqafiyya fi *Hub lâ yahtâju ilâ tarjama*, Al-quds Al-arabi Newspaper, April 17, 2019.

- Larbi Qandil, Binyât at-tanâdhur fi as-sard almaghribî fi al-mutakhayyal al-Georgei – Majmû'at *Hub lâ yahtâju ilâ tarjama* namûdhajane, Tangea al-adabia, 26-07-2022.

-Khaled Ait Tahmidite, Talaqqî malhamat Chota Rustaveli fi an -nasaq ath – thaqâfi al-'arabi, Al-'alam al -electronia, 28 July, 2022.

⁴ Re-Imagining Literatures of The World: Global and Local, Mainstreams and Margins.

⁵ *Contemporary Georgian fiction*, translated and edited by Elisabeth Heighway, Dalkey Archive Press, London, 2012.

tantine Gamsakhourdia: The Dexter of the grand master, Zaal Samadashvili: Selling Books, Mamuka Kherkheulidze: A Caucasian Chronicle, Mariam Bekauri: Debi, David Dephy: The Chair, Zurab Lezhava: Love in a Prison Cell, Ana Kordzaia-Samadashvili; Rain, and Kote Jandieri: Cinderella's Night.

Georgian culture and literature are thus becoming a source for a new generation of Moroccan Comparatists, the participation of five young Moroccan scholars in the Arab panel at the ICLA XXIII Congress held in Georgia was not by sheer coincidence. It is the result of all those efforts in the Arab World: Georgia is on its way out of the margins! And the appearance in the Arab field (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco,...) of books and articles, caring about the Caucasus in general or about Georgia specifically, is a remarkable phenomenon in the third millennium.

History books focusing on the classical Islamic period¹, some ideological journeys starting from the present to regret the past², and short cultural articles reflect, on the one hand, the pleasant surprise of discovering a beautiful country closed to foreign visitors for a long time, on the other, the extraordinary interest in the country and its literature and culture. This recent production, enriched by a novelistic production where Caucasus, since the nineties, and Georgia are a rich source of Arab imaginary, is on the way to growing up.

2. Contemporary Arab Imaginary

2.1. In The Machrek

Fundamental changes in the social and Arab cultural field took place recently, among which is the reconsideration of the Arab identity as a complex one. In this context, we notice the impact of Mamlûk period and the forced displacement of the Caucasian people at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth

¹ Isa Mohamed Bislanûw, *Al-Cucas min khilâl al-masâdir al-'arabia*, min bidâyati al-fath ilâ nihâyati al-'ahd al-umawî, Mujama' al-atrach, 2005.

² Mohamed ben Nâsir al-'aboudi, *Biladu al-'arabia ad-dâ'a -Georgia*, 2003.

centuries, on the Contemporary Arab Imaginary, specifically in Jordan and Egypt.

In Zahra Omar Abchadze's novels *To get out of Sûsrûka*¹, *Sûsrûka behind the fog*² and Maymûna A-Chichani's Novel: *A Wolf tear*³, for example, Characters assume their double and complex identity⁴: Caucasian / Arab, as the name of the Jordanian writers Zahra Abchadze, Maymûna A-Chichani show, and Caucasus is a narrative space sharing power with Jordan, through its myths, history, tales, traditions, policy, etc.

In Egypt, Caucasus in general is also a source for successful contemporary historical and political novels⁵. However, since the appearance of Mohammed Said Al-'ariane's famous novel *On Bab Zuweila*⁶, prefaced by Taha Hussein in the fifties, it has become clear that the impact of Mamlûk period is an important one in Egypt. And Egyptian writers approach this period from different points of view.

One of the most successful and prized novels⁷ which reconsider Egyptian identity by focusing on the intermarriage between Mamlûks and Egyptians in parallel with the urban and social progress of that long period is Rûm Bassyûni's novel *People's sons: Mamlûk's Trilogy* which appeared in 2018⁸.

Thanks to the reconsidering of Egyptian identity and the dynamism of Georgian cultural policy – diplomacy that the first Arab novel where modern and contemporary Georgia is hailed as an

¹ Zahra Omar Abchadze, *Al-khurûju min Sûsrûka*, Dar azmina, Amman, 1993.

² *Sûsrûka khalfa ad-dabâb*, Dar azmina, Amman, 2001.

³ Maimûna Chichani, *Dam'atu dhi'b*, Dar Akyul at-turkia, 2019.

⁴ The praise of complex identity, is present implicitly in the lebanon Raja Neama's novel *Hal raaytum Warda?* appeared in 2007; warda's mother is from Caucasus and her father from Turkey.

⁵ Munîr Al -'otaiba, *Asadu al-qafqâs*, Dar al-kitâb al-Arabi, 2017.

⁶ Op.cit.

⁷ Najib Mahfoud Price, 2019-2020.

⁸ Rîm Basyûni Rîm, *Awlâdu an-nâs, Thulâthiyât al-mamâlik*, Dar Nahda, Egypt, 2018.

important narrative space, appeared in Cairo in 2019¹. The author May Khaled commented:

I was invited to a literary conference in Georgia, I was surprised by some people talking to me proudly about their Egyptian origin, they told me about their Fatimide and Mamlûk ancestors, coming back to Egypt other people talked to me about their Georgian Origin. These exchanges inspired me, supported by the editor Sherif Bakr, and by a lot of stories from Dr. Hamdi Essissi of Georgian ancestry, to spin the threads of my novel².

The celebration of cultural differences in this novel is announced on its cover, the title: *Tamar* referring to Georgia's mythology and history (in Arabic and Georgian Characters تمار/ თამარო). And the praise of the Egyptian plural identity is clearly demonstrated by the name of the main character: "Tamar Abuladze Iashvili" تمارا أبولادزه ايلشوفيلى. As to Tbilisi -Symbol of Georgia - it is on an equal footing with the symbol of Egypt: Cairo. The first part of the novel is entitled 'Cairo', and the second "Tbilisi". Tbilisi in May Khaled's novel is not just a passage like in Khalil Alrez's novel *Strawberry napkin*³, but a major source of creativity! Tbilisi is a character, a principal narrative space, with its lifestyle, its details, boulevards (Shota Roustaveli, Abkhazi, Erakli, Agmachinibili...), arts, and stories ..etc.

What is as important as the novel itself is its good reception, not only in Egypt, where the author received a prize from the Cairo international Book Fair in the same year of the appearance of the novel (2019), but also in some Arab Cultural circles⁴.

¹ May Khâled, *Tamâr*, Al- 'arabi.

² May Khâled, Aktubu biquwwati al-jadhb, interview with Mona Nasr, Al'ayn al-ikhbaria:

<https://al-ain.com/article/mai-khaled-interview>

³ Khalil Alrez, *Mindilun bi al-farawla*, Difâf –Al-ikhtilâf, 2022.

⁴ Shaikh Ebrahîm Center in Bahrain for example.

2-2. In Morocco

I'm going to speak from my own experience, because as far as I know, apart from my stories, no Moroccan novelist, short story writer or poet has yet considered Georgia and its culture as a source of creation. But it is only a matter of time, I think!

My first **story** “A love with no Need to Translation” is inspired from my stay in Tbilisi in 2012. Its title –given after to the whole collection of stories, prefaced by a known Moroccan critic¹ and published in 2018 – is inspired from a Georgian music and poetry activity I had attended in Tbilisi. Tbilisi is the space of narration in this story, and Georgian popular songs, classical and modern history, painting, music and style of life in the present time are the main source of course.

A year later, the story was translated into French by the Moroccan translator Driss El Baouchari², and into Georgian by Doctor Darejan Gardavadze³, the whole collection to which I also added my translations of a chapter of Nodar Dumbadze’s novel ‘The law of Eternity’ and Niko Lortkipidze’s short prose-poem text ‘Waiting’, were celebrated in Khenifra and El Jadida during two activities organized by Ansâr⁴ and Mazagan⁵ associations, which were an opportunity to discuss ideas about Georgia and its culture. The collection was also introduced in English by Darejan Gardavadze in an article published in the international site *Orients Disoriented*⁶ with the support of the well-known French comparatist Professor

¹ Nûr Eddine Sadûq.

² Un amour qui n'a point besoin de traduction:

<https://www.dafatir.net/vb/showthread.php?p=1213644>

³ A short story “Love does not need Translation” by Fatiha Taib with the foreword “Moroccan writer and researcher fallen in love with Georgia”, translated into Georgian and introduced with the foreword of Darejan Gardavadze. Literary magazine “Sail (Afra)” # 19, Caucasian House Publishing, Tbilisi, 2013, pp.94-96.

⁴ 2018.

⁵ 2019.

⁶ Fatiha Taib’s Book “Love does not need translation” (hubb lâ yahtâju tarjamâ), publ. Rabat, 2018): Forword of Darejan Gardavadze (Tbilisi State University, Georgia), *Orients Désorientés*, 2018. <https://lesordesor.hypotheses.org/693>

Jean-Pierre Dubost who was among the first audience to receive with enthusiasm my first paper on Roustaveli's epic poem in Fes in 2012.

The second story "Live the child"¹, inspired by Georgian culture and modern history, appeared in 2019 in **Nor** Center site after winning its first prize². In this Story discussing Mikheil Javakhi-shvili's³ identity hypothesis, Batumi, where I have stayed for a few days, and its university are narration spaces. Thanks to **Nor** Center prize, the story was published, as a guest text, in the Egyptian writers union Newspaper "A-Dad" 's double Volume in 2020 dedicated to Criticism.

Based on my stay in Tbilisi as well, the main events of my recent published story "Tbilisi Blessed Tree"⁴, focus on Georgian contemporary history (events of 2008). However, Rustaveli Boulevard where the events take place connects implicitly and explicitly, the past to the present. To bring out more of the specificity of Georgian characters, while fictionalizing Georgian culture, literature, spaces, and events in my first and third stories, I used a few Georgian words in some dialogues!

Conclusion:

In sum, what is the place of Georgia and its culture among universal cultures, in the Arab imaginary in general?

In the Arab world, Georgia has almost ceased to be an unknown country. The names of some of its great poets and novelists (Shota Rustaveli⁵, Nodar Dumbadze, ...), are becoming more and

¹ <https://anwarpress.com/51205.html>

² <http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=353754>

³ 1880-1937.

⁴ *Chajartu Tbilissi al-mubâraka*, Al -'alam , 2022.

⁵ The name of Shota Roustaveli is present in the second part of the recent Arabic encyclopedia entitled: *Mawsûratu al-a'alam al-'arabes wa al-muslimines wa al'alalmiyyines*, Aziza Fawwâl Babtî, Dar Al-kutub, 2009.

more popular. Georgian myths, history, and stories are also on their way to becoming familiar: Just do a search on Google and you will notice that Arab readers are becoming more and more interested in Georgian culture in general: *Ali and Nino*¹, *King Tamar* (Georgian mother), and other characters.

What is important in the Arab world is the beginning of a narrative process based on the part of Georgian culture and identity in Arab culture and identity, especially in Egypt, on the one hand, and on the efforts of Arab intellectuals to challenge Western literary dominance by opening up to other cultures, on the other.

It is only a matter of time before Georgian Culture and Literature will occupy a place among the great sources! The magic solution is the Nobel Prize. In this case, I am sure that Georgia will achieve its goal: It is such an achievable thing due to the quality of Georgian literature and its specificity and to the Georgian smart cultural diplomacy which forces admiration. While waiting for this to happen, it is desirable to create a prize for the translation of Georgian literature into Arabic

¹ Qurbân Said, *Ali wa Nino*, translated by Abd Al-maqsûd ‘Abdelkarim, General Organization of Culture Palaces, 2010.

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