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# Linguistic, Historical and Literary Parallels of Folk Meta-proverbs (In the Footsteps of Georgian Folklore)

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**Abstract:** Proverbs belong to a small folklore (also literary) genre, which use laconic oral expressions. Proverbs describing the reality in a figurative manner reflect the perception of any language and the nation. There are many proverbs in Georgian folklore. They are thematically diverse and are the treasury of pearls of folklore. Originally the figurative expression of thought was immensely powerful as the means of imagery thought. We have unique collection of oral heritage that has survived from Sumerians, Akkadians, Hittites, Semites, Greeks, Romans, Colchians, Iberians, Scandinavians, Slavs and other people, which was enriched by collective knowledge and itself was reflected upon the new forms of arts. Among those, the most famous and widespread is the proverb. In 1993, Galli-Hassan Rokem published a collection of Georgian proverbs in Jerusalem. The first proverb of this collection is “A front man is a bridge to the next one”. According to the researcher, the idea of “man is a bridge to man” is expressed in it, and in his opinion it is a meta-proverb. This proverb is really unique, which reflects and presents the main vectors of human solidarity and mutual understanding habitual to the several thousand-year-old historical reality of the Georgian people. In the consciousness of Georgian people, the concrete reality, in particular, the bridge between the two banks of the river is not only directly perceived, but at the same time this real situation is understood in a figurative sense, which is revealed in the contexts of linguistic, historical and literary parallels. Accordingly, the proverbs-aphorisms of the famous poem “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” by the well-known poet of the Renaissance period Shota Rustaveli are especially special.

**Keywords:** Proverb, Meta-proverb, Folklore, Bridge, Parallels, Linguistic, Ideology, History, Literary

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## 1. Introduction

Proverbs in a smart way describe the practical norms of human life, which are manifested in mutual relationships, conversations with each other or dialogues [6]. Linguistic particularities are immediately replicated the functioning of the real speech in the dialogue. The structure of a dialogue can be determined by the third person, who attends the verbal interaction between two persons as an observer from the initial moment until its completion. Consequently, observer’s role is diverse, i.e. the person who listens to the conversation willingly or unwillingly influences the discourse and text that the speaker sets for his or her addressee. The topic of conversation is defined by place, time, the interests of the speakers and the motives and goals of the relationship, the content of which is determined by social and ethical factors [17]. Except for this, it is universal for all languages the regularity of a text, that includes functioning dialogue. In

addition, the meaning of a particular expression in the text, the combination of linguistic tools, as well as the stylistic characteristics of the expression, which have common situational conditions of use, are determined by the typological features of the linguistic system [15]. The proverb both formally and substantively is a micro-model of the life and thinking of the world in which it was created and functions. Its main goal is the direct perception and in-depth understanding of reality, which qualitatively fits into the system of a unified national thought. Peoples of different countries convey it individually. An in-depth study of a proverb, along with language and speech of the society, involves the study of the ethnic identity and mental characteristics of the people who created it, as well as the norms and concepts established in a given society. Consequently, the proverb can even be used as the key to ethno-psychology [23]. The intensive use of proverbs in oral and written communications proves that people are constantly keen to use metaphors during their

speech. Paremiology studies the function of proverbs in traditional and modern cultures. A proverb is a kind of statement of wisdom and knowledge accumulated over the centuries. Consequently, it is essential to conduct a contrasting study of the data of different cultures in order to establish a certain fund of proverbs of different peoples and to determine their diverse functions [7]. Proverbs in Georgia are so widespread that they fully cover different parts of the country [19, 22]. Undoubtedly, it is important and remarkable that the famous scientist and researcher, Prof. Galit Hasan-Rokem was especially interested in Georgian proverbs. He published a collection of examples of this genre in Hebrew with extensive research and explanations – “Man is the Bridge of Man” [8]. In the English abstract of the collection, the researcher indicates: “The present volume is based on research process in which dialogue has been the core idea. The dialogic approach has guided the field work as well as the analytical discussion of the material. The field work methodology concretized the idea of ‘A man is a bridge to a man’, expressed in proverb 1, which has proven to be a meta-proverb of the whole project. My coresearcher of Georgian origin, Dr. Ytzhak Atanelov, interviewed 58 informants and recorded 232 proverbs including a short discussion about each proverb. The pragmatic and semantic dimensions of each proverb elaborated. In the para-proverbial discourse”. He concludes on the metaphorical understanding of the meta-proverb: In any case, it seems that the tendency to present a contrast of a general, super-temporal nature characterizes the material presented as an interpretation and distinguishes it from the material presented as the context of the contrast. This is evident from the perception of interpretation as a level of meaning independent of specific contextual factors. Clearly another self-reflection appears, and that of the proverb is the work of the previous generation's experience is the bridge on which the younger generation successfully walks, proverbs are poetic formulations of collective experience, passed down from generation to generation, and are, therefore, an important representation of that bridge”. Galit Hasan-Rokem is the first and non-Georgian scientist who grasped, recognized and understood the real metaphorical content of this proverb. Based on this, he attributed to this proverb such a wide-ranging ideological meaning and a function of carrying human moral values. Later the researcher devoted a special article “Georgian proverbs of dialogue and dialogue of proverbs in Israel” to the issue: “The proverbs were all collected in field work from immigrants of (formerly Soviet) Georgia in Israel. The project itself was in an unusual manner for research of this kind, but typically of the cultural resourcefulness of Georgian immigrants in Israel, initiated by the Georgian community itself. It can therefore rightly, I think, be considered a dialogic gesture from the Georgians towards the Israeli society, a gesture saying in so many words “Listen to us”. The choice of folklore as a means to communicate with Israeli society is typical of the high status of folk culture in Georgian tradition, a phenomenon which seems to be common to cultures with a canonized or semi-canonized epic tradition (cf. Finnish folklore and folkloristics), also reflected in a strong academic tradition of folklore studies.

The field work and the analysis was carried out in an intricate process of cultural translation, informed by a conscious reflexive notion of dialogue. Due to my initial lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, when I in any case (unwisely, maybe) decided to undertake the project, I had to resort to an indirect research process (and finally also study Georgian). Inspired by strong theoretical voices in the field of ethnography, however this situation, which was basically one of disadvantage, became a methodological and eventually also a theoretical resource. It heightened the aspect which is always true in folkloristic field work, namely the fragmentary mode of the empirical work, and the need for a theoretical frame work within which the fragments are structurally interpreted. The key concept for the research became dialogue, in which the process of field work translated by the field worker, Dr. Ytzhak Atanelov, to me became a second, reflexive stage of field work. The process of relatively new immigrants talking to a more veteran immigrant, Atanelov, and him talking to me, reflected as a blueprint the general processes of communication between immigrant community and host society. The consciousness of the power related to knowledge as being processed in the academic establishment and transformed into a product which can be publically consumed, was an active factor of the research. The results have created an analysis dealing with the political, cultural and humanistic hermeneutics of folklore in Israel” [9]. In the consciousness of Georgian people, the concrete reality, in particular, the bridge between the two banks of the river is not only directly perceived, but at the same time this real situation is understood in a figurative sense, which is revealed in the contexts of linguistic, historical and literary parallels. Accordingly, the proverbs-aphorisms of the famous poem “The Knight in the Panther's Skin” by the well-known poet of the Renaissance period Shota Rustaveli are especially special.

## 2. Linguistic-Metaphorical Parallels

The secondary meaning of the word “bridge” (“ბოჯო“ “khidi” in Georgian) and other words derived from it (in particular, the word “შეხიდება” “shekhideba” – literally means - to become a bridge for someone, share someone's task) is widely prevalent in the Georgian language and speech – support, help, assist, lend a hand to.

## 3. Ideological-worldview Vectors of Georgian Meta-Proverb

The mentioned lexical items acquired figurative meaning and metaphorical context in Georgian folklore. The meta-proverb “A front man is a bridge to the next one” is completely unique in its essence and moral purpose (or “a man is a bridge to a man”). Noteworthy to mention ideologically it is radically different and completely opposite to the famous Latin proverb *Homo homini lupus est* (“Man is a wolf to man”). At the same time, the perception of the nature of the wolf is also different in Georgian folklore,

which is not only a symbol of intolerance and cruelty, but also a symbol of unbreakability and toughness, which you cannot train and tame, thus making the wolf an ideal of resistance for the Georgian people. The famous folklore poem says: “სამი არ გაიწრთვნება - მგელი, არწივი, კაი ყმა”. “The three can not be tamed – a wolf, an eagle and a brave warrior”. In the poem “They will be born again”, we see the metaphor of a wolf in more distinct and poetic nuances: “კიდევაც დაიზრდებიან ალგეთს ლეკვები მგლისანი; ისე არ ამოწყდებიან - ჯავრი შესჭამონ მტრისანი”. “There will be born again The pups of wolves in the gorge of Algeti, They will not dye Until revenging against an enemy”. “They will be born again” is a manifesto of national independence and freedom in the folklore poetry.

#### 4. Historical and Metaphorical Parallels

In the Georgian historical narrative, there is given an interesting understanding of a wolf's image. In particular, in the historical collection: “The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia)” there is a chapter: “Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali”, where we read: “ხოლო ვახტანგ მეფესა შეექმნა ჩაბლახი ოქროსი, და გამოესუა წინათ მგელი და უკანათ ლომი; და რომელსა კერძა იძლეოდიან ქართველნი, მუნითცა მიმართოს და მოსრის სპისა მისგან სპარსთასა, ვითარცა ლომმან კანჯარნი. მიერთიან ვერდარა შეუძლებდეს სპარსნი წყობად მისა, რამეთუ დაისწავლეს იგი, რომელსა ეწერა მგელი და ლომი, და ვითარცა იხილიან ვახტანგ, თქვან: “დურ აზ გორგასალ”, რომელ არს ესე: “მირიდეთ თავსა მგლისასა”. და მის მიერ სახელ-ედვა ვახტანგ მეფესა გორგასალ”; “Vakht'ang had made a golden helmet for himself with an image of a wolf on its front and of a lion on its back. And he rushed to the places where the Georgian forces were weakening and the Persians fell under his pressure like an onager under a lion's charge. The Persians could not withstand him, and when they saw the helmet with a wolf and a lion, knowing it was Vakht'ang they cried: “Duraz Gorgasal”, which means “Take care of the wolf's head”. After that they named King Vakht'ang – Gorgasali” [10]. In the given episode the image of a wolf is a representation of disobedience against the enemy, whereas the image of a lion is representing a monarch's majesty. In 5th c. A.D. the distinguished monarch of Kartli (Iberia), who is known to us as Vakht'ang Gorgasali, led the fight against the Persian army when he is the first to lead the loyal Georgian fighters with his helmet which has a multivalued image.

#### 5. Historical Routs of Concrete Tolerance Among Nations

It is worth to mention that in national narrations there was widespread an idea of a meta-proverb from the folklore (“A man is a bridge to a man”), which was generalized to different nations and people and meant to protect and help each-other. Such a high human tradition of support should be

a key reason for Georgian-Jewish historical relations that was obvious soon after the Jewish nation immigrated to Georgia. In particular in the monuments of Georgian Historical chronicles “Moktsevai Kartlisai” (Conversion of Kartli), and “Mepeta Tskhovreba” (“Lives of the Kings”), there are documented several tales about coming and settling of Jewish people in Kartli - Leonti Mroveli, in his historical chronicle tells: “მაშინ ნაბუქოდონოსორ მეფემან წარმოსტყუენა იერუსალიმი, და მუნით ოტებულნი ურიანი მოვიდეს ქართლს,... არაგუსა ზედა, წყაროსა, რომელსა ჰქვან ზანავი”; “After... King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem. The Hebrews who fled from there came to Kartli;... of the river Aragi by the spring, which is called Zanavi” [10]. The written source for Leonti should be considered “Moktsevai Kartlisai” (The Conversion of Kartli), where we read: “მაშინ მოვიდეს ნათესავნი მბრძოლნი, ქალდეველთაგან გამოსხმულნი, ჰონნი,... და დასხდნენ იგინი ზანავს”; “Then came warriors by descent, driven out by the Chaldeans, Honni, and they settled in Zanavi” [13, 16]. We can assume that Leonti had a better manuscript of “Moktsevai Kartlisai”, where instead of Honni, were Hurrians. Regarding Kaldians, the author meant “Babylonians” and immigration of Jews to Kartli connected to the well-known historical fact – exile of Jews from Babylon by the king Nebuchadnezzar II (VI century B.C.). This connection can not be regarded as chronologically correct. Because the author of “Moktsevai Kartlisai” starts his narration from the epoch of Alexander Macedonian and the above-mentioned fact is presented as a late occurrence that logically means that it could not happen during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. In the “Moktsevai Kartlisai” there is also given the date of coming of Jews in Kartli: “არიან წელნი, ვინათგან აქა მოვიდეს: ფ`გ წელსა”; “These came F-G years ago” (=503), and after conversion of Kartli “არიან წელნი, ვინათგან აქა მოვიდეს: ფ`გ წელსა”; “Is three hundred thirty four”, So, 334 A.D. - 503 = 169 B.C. The date of immigration of Jews to Kartli should be considered 169 B.C. On the other hand, the data from the Georgian source is in a full correlation with the well-known historical fact from the history of Judea. As we know, in 169 B.C. as a result of the order of the king of Seleukides, Antiochos IV Epiphanus, the conditions worsened for Jews, because the king has blasphemed against the Jewish religion. We can assume that some Jews rebelled against Antiochus's order and thus started the movement against occupation. In particular, for defending national identity and religious belief, and because of severe conditions, they had approached a hard decision to leave homeland. Jews have passed Syria, Cappadocia and finally landed in South Caucasus, the Iberian Kingdom, where they had settled since they had support of the King, the Royal family, and also being supported by the local population. The historian's direct message makes evident their strong protest and combat mood (“მოვიდეს ნათესავნი მ ბ რ ძ ო ლ ნ ი”; “Came fighting people”). They named Iberia the country, where they settled, which in Jewish language means “The country beyond the mount/sea, or river” (This toponym was absorbed later by the Greeks and

Romans and others). Supposedly they were settled in Zanavi with the purpose, because, here was located “The Great Castle Sarkine” (“Rkena” in old Georgian means fight, wrestling. “Sarkine”, supposedly had fighting purpose), from where the territories were defended in military sense. In the given period the Kartlian kingdom fought against neighboring Armenian kingdom, which had occupied southern parts of the country and Castle of Huri. Armenians were supported by Selevkides and named the city as “Hajatun” (City of Deus). The Georgian army, together with Judean and North Caucasian warriors met Armenians in the battle near the City Hajatun, where was a big battle and they have won. From this era started collaboration of these two nations in military and civil life. So, in 169 B.C. in Kartli had come and settled Jews “ნათესავით ჰურიანი” “Hurrians by origin”. The fight of Jews started in Iberia, soon continued in Jerusalem. In particular, famous rebel of Maccabees started, as a result of which was reached one of most distinguished victory in the history of Jews. Considering the chronological occurrence, it is not excluded, that the rebel was started after the victory of coalition of Georgians, North Caucasians and Jews, against Armenians and Selevkides, in South Caucasus. According to the same historical source, since then, they are called “ჰურიანი ქართველები” “Georgian Hurrians” [4]. It is remarkable, that after one century, some Jewish people were forced again to move to Iberia. This stage of migration was resulted by invasions of Gneus Pompeus. After military actions in Caucasus and Middle Eastern countries, in 63 B.C., Pompeus invaded Judea and conquered Jerusalem. Two brothers Hirkanes and Aristobules fought each-other and they have been supported by Pharisees and Sadducees. Pompeus supported Pharisees. Enormous oppression of Sadducees started in Judea. In this period, new wave of immigration moved to Kartli. In particular, to Mtskheta and its suburbs, where immigrants have brought the religious ritual Hanukkah, established in Maccabean era. By this, they have reinforced own national and religious traditions, that determined reserving own ethnical and religious identity. About this second wave of immigration of Jews to Kartli is described in “Conversion of Kartli”, where there is told that during the dual reign of Kardzami and Bratman, “Hurrians came to Mtskheta and settled down”. Movses Khorenats, in his “History of Armenians” mentioned the king of Kartli Kardzam, who has imprisoned the Armenian prince Zareh in “The Prison on the mount Caucasus” [12]. The episode in Khorenats’ “History”, where there is mentioned Kardzam, tells history of the epoch of the Armenian King Tigran II (95-55 B.C.). On the other hand, according to the Greek and Roman sources (Apian, Don Cassias and others), in 65 B.C. the ruler of Kartli is Artoc (Artag), then Kardzam should have been ruling Kartli in 65-55 B.C. In these years (in 63 B.Sc.), the Roman commander Pompeus has moved from Syria to Palestine, conquered Judean kingdom and converted it into the province of Rome [2, 4]. My publication regarding this issue was firstly published 23 years ago in the scientific magazine “Kalmasoba” of the Shota Rustaveli Georgian Institute of

Literature. It is remarkable that after 10 years the same conclusions have reached the scientists Prof. Konstantine Lerner [14] and later, in 2016, Prof. Lili Baazova [1] in their monographic researches.

## 6. Literary and Folklore Parallels – Meta-proverb and Quotes of Shota Rustaveli

By its meaning, the meta-proverb “Front man is a bridge to the next one” and other proverbs with similar meaning (“A man is an ointment to a man”; “A man is a medicine to a man”) has a huge impact on the Georgian Literature. These proverbs represent high values of the humankind that determined their value in the national literature. By this, the exceptional poem by Shota Rustaveli has a great value. Rustaveli was first worldwide, who created a poem according to Renaissance philosophy. He presented characters, who are free in their thinking, physically and spiritually perfect. His artistic view and deep worldview is original. “The Knight in the Panter’s Skin” represents humanist ideals of the new era. As a verbal form of art, the poem by Rustaveli proceeds European literary monuments. These processes in art, has developed independently from each other because of difference in geographical distance and time [5]. Shota Rustaveli’s “The Knight in the Panter’s Skin” is a representation of the Georgian spirit and the nation’s philosophy, which is presented in the poetic form. It shows historical face of a Georgian man, as well as general humanistic ideals. It simultaneously contains values of the nation and humankind, medieval and Renaissance, Oriental and Western, aesthetic and ethic, suained and beautiful. Such correlance and amusement is wise, because, as Rustaveli says himself, poetry, and art in general is a branch of wisdom. “The Knight in the Panter’s Skin” establishes highest ideals for developing national conscience and rebirth, for this reason it deserved the love of nation [20, 21]. Rustaveli’s “The knight in the Panter’s Skin” was created on the footprints of the Georgian mythic-folklore and old literary traditions that is evidenced in consequent artistic side of the poem. It is interesting, how the highly moralistic idea (“A man is a bridge for a man”) of the folklore meta-proverb (“The front man is a bridge for the next one”) is presented in Rustaveli’s proverb-aphorism: ხამს მოყვარე მოყვრისათვის თავი ჭირს არ დამრიდად, გული მისცეს გულისათვის, სიყვარული გზად და ხ ი დ ა დ (703, 1-2) A friend should spare himself no trouble for his friend's sake, he should give heart for heart, love as a road and a b r i d g e (685, 1-2) It is well-known, that only distinguished proverb can be called an aphorism, where the wisdom is expressed in laconic form. “The Knight in the Panter’s Skin” is rich with aphorisms. Shota Rustaveli is considered to be a master of the aphorisms. In the poem there are several dozens of aphorisms and aphoristic expressions. Usually, each aphorism is presented in one stanza. It is a fact that Rustaveli’s aphorisms were widespread in national folk wisdom [11]. The characters of “The knight in the Panter’s

Skin” are devoted to their friends, to all humans. E.g. Tinatin is a bridge for Avtandil, Avtandil is a bridge for Tariel, Tariel is a bridge for Pridon, and all three of them – Tariel, Avtandil and Pridon are bridge for Nestan who should be released from the Kaj fortress (which metaphorically represents the kingdom of devil [18]. Comparison of the Georgian historical narrative to the Rustaveli’s poem shows that name of the Kaj fortress and its inhabitants are synonymous. It is remarkable that the Kaj fortress can be compared to only the Georgian historical realities of late antique period (and not to any other oriental countries), that testimonies continuous historical and literary tradition from early medieval epoch up to the period of the historian Leonti Mroveli (11th c. A.D.). This creative process continued up to the king Tamar’s reign and Rustaveli’s era. (12th – 13th cc.). The final victory of the poem’s characters were determined by their high moral, spiritual and intellectual holiness, hope, destiny, braveness, personal perfection, and, what is the most important - their cordial devotion for support and compassion for each-other, which has been presented in aphorismic sentence: “სიყვარული გზად და ხ ი დ ა დ”; “Love as a road and a b r i d g e”. That is determined by the divine belief, strengthened by the wisdom: “ზოროტსა სძლია კეთილმან, არსება მისი გრძელია” (1361, 4) “Good hath overcome ill; the essence of (good) is lasting” (1337, 4). The idea expressed in the proverb-aphorism is replication of the deep Biblical wisdom expressed in the book of Isaiah (5): “შიგან მათთა საბრძანისთა თხა და მგელი ერთგან სძოდეს” (1664, 4) “Among their domain the goat and the wolf fed together” (1571, 4). The Biblical wisdom (წინასწარმეტყველება ესაიასი - 11, 6: “მაშინ მოვდეს მგელი კრავთა თანა, და ვეფხი თიკანთა თანა განისუენებდეს, და ზუარაკი და ლომი და კუროი ერთად მოვდენ”; 65, 25: “მაშინ მგელნი და კრავნი მოვდენ ერთბამად და ლომი, ვითარცა ხარი ზუესა ჭამდეს”; Isaiah 11, 6: “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together”; 65, 25: “The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox”) of the aphorism metaphorically and allegorically represents the united peace established by the three characters in their kingdoms, which could be realized by their collaboration, support and help, by which it was possible to conquer and eliminate Kaj’s fortress.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Research Directions of the Given Topic

Consequently, after consideration of linguistic, historical and literary parallels (only one part of them), the contexts show vividly, how deep and broad meaning has absorbed meta-proverb’s ideologically moralistic values in Georgian everyday life and historical and artistic spheres. Analogically, immensely interesting are the metaphorical and ideological-philosophical parallels, which we see also in regards of other Georgian proverbs. The research showed that about the given problem exist much more materials, for revealing of which

needs to be done in future more research, examination and detailed analysis by the method of field collection, as well as researching literary relations. In this regard, the first substantial scientific work has already been carried out by the Center for Folk Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where the search for relevant materials (in particular, proverbs) has resumed and active research is underway.

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