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Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 2023

A zoological riddle from Medieval Georgia

Jost Gippert

There are not many literary works from the Middle Ages that have influenced the society they emerged from to a similar extent as Shota Rustaveli's epic on the friendship of Avtandil and Tariel has in Georgia: up to the present day, all school children of the country learn verses or even complete strophes of the work and remember them by heart for their lifetime. At the same time, the impact of Rustaveli's *opus magnum* has expanded far beyond Georgia; with translations (full or partial) into more than 50 languages worldwide,¹ the epic has gained a much wider distribution than any other text of the 12th–13th centuries. This is all the more astonishing as the language it is composed in is not always easy to understand today, including its lexics,² and the poetic style is hard to imitate in other languages.³ The difficulties of grasping the original ideas of the author and rendering them adequately in a translation manifest themselves right in the title of the epic: the skin the ვეფხისტყეოსანი as the protagonist of the work is clad in is attributed to zoologically quite diverse *felidae* throughout the different versions. The image we receive if we track the history of the translations back is indeed astonishing; to illustrate this, let us begin with the languages that provide several versions side by side.

One of the first complete translations into a foreign language was the German one by Arthur Leist, which appeared in 1889 under the title “Der Mann im Tigerfelle”.⁴ The “tiger” remained the referred-to animal in the subsequent German versions by Felix Pecina (“Der Mann mit dem Tigerfell”, re-narration, 1931), Georg Proneli (“Der Ritter im Tigerfell”, 1935), Hugo Huppert (“Der Recke im Tigerfell”, 1955), Viktoria Ruika-Franz (id., 1976), and Nikolos Dschanelidse (id., 1983); in contrast to this, other authors such as Ruth Neukomm (“Der Mann im Pantherfell”, 1974), Hermann Buddensieg (id., 1976), and Michael Tseretheli (“Der Ritter im Pantherfell”, 1975)⁵ preferred the “panther”. A peculiar case is the translation by Marie Prittwitz, cre-

1 The bibliography by Chkheidze and Taktakishvili (2016) covers translations into 51 languages, extending from Abkhaz to Yakut (with Yiddish being subsumed under Hebrew, Moldavian under Rumanian, and Crimean Tatar under Tatar); to these, we may add Korean (Jo 2016 and Heo 2017), Hindi (Parihar 2020), Megrelian (Zhvania 1966, Shanava 1991, Petelava 2020, Jalaghonia 2022), and Svan (Oniani 2016). Two narrations in Svan that are somehow related to the epic were published by Sergo Zhghenti (1938). For a first register of translations cf. Chachanidze (1980).

2 This is clearly indicated by the necessity of adding lots of explanatory notes to editions as in Natadze's (1990).

3 This is why many translations, beginning with Marjory Scott Wardrop's of 1912, substitute the metrical form by a prose adaptation. In a current project, Manana Tandashvili, Mariam Kamarauli and many others are trying to explore the techniques and methods that were applied in the different translations on a digital basis; cf. <https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/caucasica/rustveli/rgd.html> and <https://rustaveli-goes-digital.de/>.

4 Leist (1889); a year earlier, a part of Leist's translation was included in the four-language edition by Stalin-skiy (1988, 25–40: “Der Mann im Tiegerfelle”).

5 This title was probably the source of Dutch “De Ridder in het Pantervel”, which is used in the Taalmuseum of Leiden to introduce the translation of verses 802–3 of the epic as exhibited on a house wall in the city; cf.

ated in the 1940s,⁶ which was published first under the title “Der Recke im Parderfell” (2003),⁷ then as “Der Ritter im Tigerfell” (2005), and lastly as “Der Ritter im Pantherfell” (2011). A variant of Prittwitz’s *Parder*, an obsolete designation of the “leopard”, is *Pardel* as appearing in Tilman Spreckelsen’s re-narration “Der Held im Pardelfell” (2018).

A likewise colourful picture is provided by the French and English translations of the epic. As early as 1828, Marie Félicité Brosset had published the first extracts of the “roman géorgien intitulé *l’Homme à la peau de tigre*”.⁸ Much later, the “tiger” was again addressed in the translations by Serge Tsouladzé (“Le chevalier à la peau de tigre”, 1964), Elisabeth Orbéliani and Solomon Iordanichvili (“Le preux à la peau de tigre”, 1977), and Anne Guimezanes (“Le chevalier à la peau de tigre”, 2015). In contrast to this, the animal was taken to be a “leopard” in the first longer translation into French by Achas Borin (“La Peau de Léopard”, 1885)⁹ as well as that by Georges Gvazava and Annie Marcel-Paon (“L’homme à la peau de léopard”, 1938), and a “panther” in that of Gaston Bouatchidzé (“Le chevalier à la peau de panthère”, 1989). In English, the latter animal is the first to be named, in the title of Marjory Scott Wardrop’s translation “The Man in the Panther’s Skin” (1912). In a later edition of the same work which was revised by E. Orbeliani and S. Iordanishvili, the title appears as “The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin” (1938), whereas the “panther” remains envisaged in the translations by Venera Urushadze (“The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, 1968), Rosa Abnerashvili (id., 1976, aphorisms only), Katharine Vivian (“The Knight in Panther Skin”, 1977), Manana Bakradze (id., 2012), Robert H. Stevenson (“The Lord of the Panther-Skin”, 1977), and Lyn Coffin (“The Knight in the Panther Skin”, 2015). Only the “leopard” seems to be missing in the English realm.

In Russian translations, too, there is notable variance. Beginning with the first attempt by Ippolit Bartdinskiy (1845),¹⁰ the epic was mostly styled *Барсова кожа*, with an adjective derived from the noun *барс*; this term was used by Ivan Evlakhov (1846), A. Abashidze (1849), Evgeniy Stalinskiy (1888), Iona Meunargia (1888, re-narration), Nikolay Marr (“Витязь в барсовой кожѣ”, 1910, excerpts), Konstantin Bal’mont (“Носящий барсову шкуру”, 1917), and S. Sharti (1918–19), as well as in theatre plays based on the epic (e.g., *Поэма* 1882; Kinvari 1901). After 1935, the Russian tradition switched to another denomination, based on the word *тигр*; this is true, first of all, for Konstantin Bal’mont’s translation, which was now styled “Витязь в тигровой шкуре” (1936), then also for those by George Tsagareli (1937), Nikolay Zabolotskiy (1937), Panteleymon Petrenko (1937), G. Iosseliani (1938), Shalva Nutsubidze (1940), Solomon Iordanishvili (1966), Lyudmila Zhukova (2006), George Keburia (“Облаченный в шкуру тигра”, 2014), Archil Khalvashi (2015), and several anonymous translators (Rustaveli 1938; 2004). More rarely, the epic is simply referred to by its Georgian name; this is true, e.g., for its first mention in Russian by Evgeniy Bolkhovitinov, who provided a transcript and translation of the first strophe “из Руставелевой поэмы Вепхисткаосани” (1802: 90–91), or for the translation by George Devdariani (“Вепхисткаосани”, 2004).

Beginning with the Polish translation by Kazimierz Łapczyński (1863), the animal is a “tiger” in all other Slavic languages (Ukrainian: Bazhan 1937, Khalimonenko 1991; Czech: Jedlická 1958; Polish: Sikirycki 1960, Zagórski 1966 and 1976; Belarusian: Zvonak and Khve-

⁶ <<https://m.facebook.com/taalmuseum/photos/de-ridder-in-het-pantervelals-het-lot-dat-allen-treftook-mij-zal-treffenzal-ik-s/2869954289758441/>> (last accessed on 07.10.2023).

⁷ Cf. Steffi Chotiware-Jünger’s preface to her edition of Prittwitz’s translation (Prittwitz 2011: 28–30 and 34–45).

⁸ An excerpt was published in the same year in an anonymous article of the journal *Georgica* (Prittwitz 2003a).

⁹ In a subsequent series of articles (1830–31), Brosset used the designation “roman du Tariel”.

¹⁰ Partly also contained in Stalinskiy (1888: 41–50), where the translator is named “Achas Borih”.

¹¹ Partly also contained in Stalinskiy (1888: 5–8).

darovich 1966; Bulgarian: Bakarjiev 1975; Slovene: Pavček 1975; Slovak: Krmo 1980; Serbian: Sibinović 1989) as well as the two Baltic ones (Lithuanian: Graičiūnas 1975; Latvian: Jansons-Saiva and Skalbe 2009). The same holds for the Eastern Romance languages (Rumanian: Roman 1947, Kernbach 1949; Moldavian: Kretsu 1957, Ruštaveli 1997), as well as for Spanish (de la Torre 1964, Leon 1974, Martínez 2000, Roca 2003), Basque (Kintana 1999), Greek (τίγρη: Mētafidēs 1974), Yiddish (טיגער: Fininberg 1938, Khashtshevatskiy and Hofshiteyn 1937), and Esperanto (Makashvili 1989), while Italian shows a diversified picture again, with *tigre* (Ivanitsky-Inghilo 1941) opposing itself to *leopardo* (Beridze 1945, Bonelli 1998) and *pantera* (Picchi 1981). The “tiger” is further preferred in Estonian (*tiigri*; Bedia 1991) vs. the “panther” in Finnish (*panteri*, Linnus 1990); Hungarian has both the latter (*párduc*, Vikar 1917) and the former (*tigris*, Weöres 1954). Among Turkic languages, only Chuvash (*музӑр*: Yukhma 2008) and Yakut (*мууӑур*: Rufov 1982) show a related name, in the latter language contrasting with *баабыр* (Pavlov 2013). Russian *барс* reappears in Mongolian *барс* (Gombozhav 1965) and in a compound in several Eastern Turkic languages (Uzbek *yolbars*: Qurbanov et al. 1937, Davran 1941; *yulbars*: Saykhzoda 1959; Kazakh *yolbars*: Carokip et al. 1938, Ruštaveli 1966, Abdullin 1974; Tatar *yulbars*: Ruštaveli 1939;¹¹ Kyrgyz *yolbars*: Osmonov 1940), while some other Turkic languages use the word *qaplan* (Turkmen *qaplan*: Tangrykuliev 1957; Turkish *kaplan*: Dindar and Makas 1991; Balqar *къаплан*: Gurtuev 1982), in its turn borrowed into the Circassian languages (Adyghe *къэплъан*: Beretere 1989; Kabardian *къаплъэн*: Tkhaqazitov 1982) and East Caucasian Dargwa (*къаплан*: Hamidov 1994). Azeri *pələng* / *pələnk* (Vurgun et al. 1937, Cavad 1978, Məmmədli 2003) is a borrowing from Persian *palang*¹² (Fatemi and Giunashvili 1966, Delshad 1998, Yusup-pur 2000; also in Tajiki: Tursun-zoda et al. 1938, Aslam et al. 1966, Aslam 1979), which denotes a “panther” or “leopard” like its Kurdish counterpart, *piling* (Esed 2007). The animal is a “panther” also in Chechen (*улокъ* = *çoq*: Muzaev 1969), Hebrew (נמר = *nāmēr*: Gaponov 1969), and Arabic (نمر = *namr*: Khalil 1984), and a “tiger” in Chinese (虎 = *hū*: Bei Wang and Shi Hu 1944, Lu Qie 1944, Tang Yuqiang 1984, Wu Qirou et al. 2015, Yan Yongxing 2002), Korean (호 = *ho*, Jugwan Jo, 2016), and Japanese (虎 = *tora*: Fukuro 1955/1972); in the latter language, it once also appears as a “leopard” (豹 = *hyō*: Ōtani 1990), and in Hindi, exceptionally, as a “lion” (शेर = *šer*: Parihar 2020). Some of the terms used in the translations are ambiguous in that they can denote both tigers and other feline predators; this is true, first of all, for Russian *барс* and its Turkic and Mongolian cognates¹³ but also for Turkic *qaplan*,¹⁴ Abkhaz *abzas*¹⁵ (*абгас*: Gulia and Kutsnia 1937; *абыз*: Gulia 1941; *абжъас*: Gulia 1959, Lasuria 1978, Lakerbaia 2003), Lak *çinik*¹⁶ (*çиникъ*: Khappalaev 1984), Ossetian *staj* / *cmaj*¹⁷ (Saulokhty 1943/1960, Beštauty 1975), and Megrelian *ყოლო* / *ქოლო* = *qilo* / *?ilo*¹⁸

11 The edition comprises translations by Äxmät İsxaq, Şäyxi Mannur, Äxmät Fäyzi, and others.

12 Cf. Räsänen (1969: 382b), who notes the meaning “Tiger” for Azeri *päläng* and Turkmen *peleng* but “Leopard” for Kuman *palan*.

13 Cf. Vasmer (1953: 57) as to Russian *барс* and Räsänen (1969: 63–64) for Uyghur etc. *bars* “Panther, Tiger, Leopard”, and ib. (206) for Chagatay etc. *jol-bars* etc.

14 Cf. Räsänen (1969: 234) as to Ottoman Turkish etc. *kaplan* “Tiger, Leopard”.

15 Cf. Chirikba (1996: 17 s.v. **bž’asə*) who notes “tiger” for Abzhuy *a-bž’as* and “lynx; tiger; leopard” for Bzyb *abž’as*.

16 Cf. Khaydakov (1962: 304b s.v.) with the meanings “1. тигр; 2. леопард”.

17 Cf. Guriev (2004: 385a s.v.) with the meanings “рысь, барс”; in accordance with Miller (1929: 1122 s.v. *Cmaj*, *cmaj*) who gives only “рысь; Luchs (Lynx)”, only the latter meaning is supported by Abaev (1979: 143 s.v. *staj*|(æ)*staj*: “рысь”, “Lynx”), who states that “значение ‘тигр’ в некоторых современных текстах ошибочно.”

18 Cf. Kajaia (2002: 213 and 27) who notes the meanings “1. ვეფხვი” and “2. ლომი” s.v. *ქოლო* but only the former s.v. *ყოლო*.

(Zhvania 1966, Shanava 1991). In the Svan translation by Arsen Oniani (2016), the Georgian borrowing ვეფხ is used throughout. Starting with Bašameants (1888), the Armenian translations usually refer to the animal with the word *hūā* = *inj* which means a “panther” or “leopard” (mostly in the derivative *hūāhēnuuḥner* = *ənjēnavor*: Mirimanyan 1896, Teryan 1916, Asatowr 1966, Karayan 1983), but *hūaqrhēnuuḥner* = *vagrenavor* from *hūaqh* = *vagr* “tiger” also exists (Muradyan 1927–30 [2020], Asatowr 1937).

The chaotic picture we arrive at by comparing the different titles can partially be explained by taking interdependencies into account. There is no need here to dwell upon the designations of the protagonist as a “knight”, “hero”, “warrior”, “lord”, or simply “man”, given that ვეფხობცყობანბო in Georgian does not specify the person wearing the skin at all; the epithets used in the different translations are therefore a mere matter of (poetic) taste. With respect to the zoological implications, however, it is clear that the Russian translations played an important role, at least in Eastern Europe; it was especially the celebration of the 750th anniversary of the epic in 1937 that instigated a lot of secondary translations, with the switch from *бара* to *муэр* in the Russian tradition being decisive for their wording. It is further clear that the use of *муэр* agrees with the meaning of ვეფხვო (*vepxvi*), the Modern Georgian successor of Rustaveli’s ვეფხო (*vepxi*). This, then, raises another question: Did the word always denote the “tiger”, or is it possible that it changed its meaning over time, just as it changed its form?¹⁹ In order to answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at the use of the term in Old and Middle Georgian.

Old Georgian *vepx-i* is indeed well attested, both in biblical contexts and elsewhere. In the Georgian versions of the Old Testament, it appears seven times throughout the different witnesses, beginning with the Song of Songs (4.8) and continuing with the prophets Isaiah (11.6), Jeremiah (5.6 and 13.23), Hosea (5.14 and 13.7), and Habakuk (1.8); in all but one of these cases, it corresponds to Hebrew *nāmēr*, Greek *πάρδαλις*, and Armenian *inj*.²⁰ Most of these verses mention other wild animals, too, with a similar consistency in the correspondences:

	Hebrew	Greek	Armenian	Georgian	Attestations
lion	<i>ʾāriy</i>	λέων	<i>aṙewc</i>	<i>lom-i</i>	Cant. 4.8, Jer. 5.6
young lion	<i>kāpīr</i>				Is. 11.6
wolf	<i>zəʿēb</i>	λύκος	<i>gayl</i>	<i>mgel-i</i>	Hab. 1.8, Is. 11.6, Jer. 5.6

Of special interest for our question are the two attestations of Old Georgian *vepxi* in the book of Hosea. In Hos. 13.7, we find the usual correspondence of the word with Hebrew *nāmēr*, Greek *πάρδαλις*, and Armenian *inj* again, contrasting in the same verse with Hebrew *šahal*, Greek *πανθήρ*, and Armenian *yovaz* which is obviously represented by Georgian *avazani* in the Oshki and Jerusalem Bibles²¹ (და ვიქმბე მათ ვითარცა ავაზანი და ვითარცა ვეფხი გზასა ზედა

19 Cf. Gippert and Tandaschwili (2014: 12) and Gippert (2021: 340, n. 106) as to this question.

20 For Arm. *inj*, the OT text of the so-called Zohrab Bible (Zohrapean 1805) uses the variant spelling *inc* throughout. If the etymological connection with Sanskrit *simha*- “lion” (from **singho-*) as proposed by Acharyan (1973: 243) and Martirosyan (2010: 161 and 762) is correct, the variant with *j* must be the primary one.

21 Manuscripts Ivir. georg. 1β, 377r (“O”) and Jer. georg. 11, 1v (“J”); in the latter manuscript, the passage is heavily damaged, only the *v-* of *vepxi* having remained. Cf. *Biblia* (2017: 2386a) where *avaza* is put in the text for O and J and *avazani* is noted as the reading of O but without the indication that J does not witness to the word at all.

ასურასტანელთასა “And I will be for them like an *avazani* and like a *vepxi* on the road of the Assyrians”); the later Bible versions have *lomi zu* “female (lit. suckling) lion” instead of *avazani*.²² Hebrew *šahal*, Greek *πανθήρ*, and Armenian *yovaz* (here spelt *yavaz*) also appear in Hos. 5.14, here contrasting with Hebrew *kāp̄īr*, Greek *λέων* and Armenian *aṙewc*; while the latter is translated as usual by *lomi* in all Georgian witnesses,²³ the former is this time represented by *vepxi* (რამეთუ მე ვარ ვითარცა ვეფხი სახლსა ზედა ეფრემისსა და ვითარცა ლომი სახლსა იუდაისსა “For I am like a *vepxi* over the house of Ephrem and like a *lomi* in the house of Judah”). This, then, is the only case within the Georgian Old Testament tradition where *vepxi* does not correspond to Hebrew *nāmēr*, Greek *πάρδαλις* and Armenian *inj*.

The case of Hosea 5.14 is peculiar in one more respect: it is quoted in a remarkably divergent form in the treatise on the “panther” within the so-called *Physiologus*, an early Christian text that exists in an Old Georgian version in the famous 10th-century codex of Shatberdi.²⁴ Here the verse reads თუ ვიყო ვითარცა ლომი სახლსა იუდაისსა და ვითარცა პანგილი სახლსა ეფრემისსა და ვიყო ვითარცა ავაზნი – “If I were like a *lomi* in the house of Judah and like a *panpili* in the house of Ephrem and [if] I were like an *avazni*”.²⁵ Leaving aside the metathesis of the two “houses” referred to, we may note two striking divergences here: first, the animal related to the house of Ephrem carries the name *panpili*, a *hapax legomenon* that obviously reflects Greek *πανθήρ* (ἐγενόμην ὡσεὶ λέων τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδα καὶ ὡσεὶ πάνθηρ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἐφραΐμ,²⁶ with the same metathesis as against *διότι ἐγὼ εἶμι ὡς πανθήρ τῷ Ἐφραϊμ καὶ ὡς λέων τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδα* in Hos. 5.14 in the Septuagint), via Armenian *pant'ēr* as appearing in the Armenian version of the *Physiologus* (Եղիցի ևս որպէս առնէմ սասնի Յուդայ, և որպէս պանթեր սասնի Եփրեմի. որ է յովազ,²⁷ vs. Չի ևս ևս իբրև յաւազ ի վերայ եփրեմի, և իբրև զառնէմ ի վերայ սասն յուդայ in the Zohrab Bible);²⁸ the quaint form *panpili* may have been influenced by the name of Pamphylia, appearing as *panpilia* in the Georgian Bible (e.g., Act. 14.24).²⁹ The second peculiarity is the addition of “(if) I were like an *avazni*” in the Georgian *Physiologus*, which must reflect the gloss *որ է յովազ* “which is a *yovaz*” in the Armenian version; this is not only one more indication of the dependence of the Georgian text on the latter³⁰ but also a confirmation of the variant *avazani* which we met with as the equivalent of Hebrew *šahal*, Greek *πανθήρ*, and Armenian *yovaz* in Hos. 13.7.³¹ The fact that the Georgian *Physiologus* uses not *vepxi* but *panpili* (and its gloss *avazni*) in relation to the house of Ephrem renders the wording of Hos. 5.14 in the existing Bible versions even more obscure. It may suffice here to point out that the Greek tradition itself is rather diverse in this verse as illustrated by Origen’s *Hexapla*: instead of ὡς πανθήρ of the Septuagint, we find ὡς λέαινα “like a lioness” in Aquila’s translation, ὡς ἐπιβολή λεαινῆς “like

22 The Mtskheta (“S”) and the Bakar Bible (“B”); cf. *Biblia* (2017: 2386b). The reading *lomi zui* indicated in the edition is only found in B (Bakar 1743: 713b); S has *lomi zu* instead (Dochanashvili 1986: 50 n.).

23 O and J as well as S and B; cf. *Biblia* (2017: 2379).

24 Manuscript S-1141 of the Korneli Kekelidze National Centre for Manuscripts (hereafter KKNCM) in Tbilisi. Cf. Gippert (2021: 305–350) for a detailed account of the Georgian *Physiologus* and the Shatberdi codex.

25 Cf. Gippert (2021: 532–535) for an edition of the chapter on the “panther” in the Georgian *Physiologus*; cf. also Gigineishvili and Giunashvili (1979: 183 ll. 33–35) for the passage quoted here.

26 Cf. Macé (2021: 512–517) for an edition of the chapter on the “panther” in the first Greek recension (“Phys. Gr. α”) of the *Physiologus*.

27 Cf. Muradyan and Topchyan (2021: 528–531) for an edition of the chapter on the “panther” in the Armenian *Physiologus*.

28 Zohrapean (1805: IV, 439).

29 Cf. Gippert (2021: 339 n. 105) for this suggestion.

30 Cf. Gippert (2021: 327–342) as to the relation of the Georgian *Physiologus* to the Armenian.

31 Cf. Gippert (2021: 339–342) for further observations concerning Georgian *avaz(a)ni* etc.

the shelter (?) of a lioness” in Symmachos’s, and ὡς λιῶν “like a lion” in the Theodotion.³² These variants also give an idea where the “suckling lion” in Hos. 13.7 in the Mtskheta and Bakar Bibles derives from, even though the *Hexapla* indicate no such variation for the latter verse.³³

Summarizing the biblical evidence, we may safely state that *vepxi* here stands for the animal that is named *πάρδαλις* in Greek, which via Latin *pardalis* was the basis for German *Pardel*, *Parder* (see above) and, in the compound *λεόπαρδος* = Lat. *leopardus* consisting of *leo-* “lion” and *πάρδος* = Lat. *pardus*, for English *leopard* etc.; the Greek term itself is likely to represent a borrowing from an Iranian source which is lastly manifested in Persian *palang* (see above).³⁴ The correspondence of Old Georgian *vepxi* with Greek *πάρδαλις* is further supported by patristic texts. One of them is Gregory of Nyssa’s work on the “Making of Man” (*De opificio hominis*), which exists in two versions in Georgian. In the older one of them, contained in the same Shatberdi codex as the *Physiologus*, we find the following passage on several relevant animals in chapter 7: და აწ ესერა ვხედავთ ლომსა და ეშუსა, ავაზსა და ვეფხსა და სხუათაცა ცხოველთა, რამეთუ აქუს ბუნებასა შინა თვისსა საკმარი განრიხებისათვის თვისისა ძალითა მით, რომელ არს მათ შინა³⁵ – “And now, behold, we see the *lomi* and the *ešu*, the *avazi* and the *vepxi* and other animals, for they have in their nature a means of escaping by the power which is in them.” In the Greek text, on which the Georgian version is based, the equivalent of the *vepxi* is clearly a *πάρδαλις* again: Νυνὶ δὲ λέων μὲν, καὶ σῶς, καὶ τίγρις, καὶ *πάρδαλις*, καὶ εἴ τι τοιοῦτον ἕτερον, ἀρκοῦσαν ἔχει πρὸς σωτηρίαν τὴν ἐκ φύσεως δύναμις.³⁶ In contrast to the Bible, where a “tiger” is not attested,³⁷ the *πάρδαλις* is here listed together with a *τίγρις*, translated into Georgian by the term *avazi* that can be regarded as a variant of the *avaz(a)ni* we met with in the book of Hosea and the *Physiologus* as rendering Greek *πανθήρ* and Armenian *yovaz*.³⁸

The second Georgian version of Gregory’s work, worked out by George the Athonite in the 11th century, uses *lomi* = λέων “lion”, *ešu* = σῶς “boar”, and *vepxi* = *πάρδαλις* in the same meaning as the older version; for the “tiger”, however, we here meet with a different word, namely, *vigri*: ხოლო აწ ლომსა და ეშუსა და ვიგრსა და ვეფხსა და რომელიცა რაჲ არს სხუად ესევითარი, კმასყოფელი ძალი აქუს ბუნებით საცხორებელად თვისა³⁹ – “And now, the *lomi* and the *ešu*, the *vigri* and the *vepxi* and whatever other (animal) of that kind there is, they (all) have sufficient power in (their) nature to save themselves”. At first sight, *vigri* may look like a distorted form of *τίγρις*; another assumption, however, is suggested by the Armenian version of the text which uses, alongside the common *inj* for the *πάρδαλις*, the term *vagr* for

32 Cf. Field (1875: 949) and Macé (2021: 493–494).

33 Field (1875: 961) gives no variation at all for Hos. 13.7. Note that within the Greek Old Testament, *πανθήρ* is only attested in the two verses of Hosea.

34 Cf. Frisk (1970: 104 and 473 and 104) s.vv. *λεόπαρδος* and *πάρδαλις*, including the latter’s possible connection with Russian *bars* (“aus dem Turkotatar.”). Persian *palang* must reflect an older **prdanck-* as visible in Sogdian *pwrδnk*. Note that the latter word appears once in the expression *pwrδnk’ crm* denoting the “leopard-skin garment” of a warrior named Rustam (Sims-Williams 1976: 54–57: “Fragment 13”, l. 26–27).

35 Gigineishvili and Giunashvili (1979: 76, ll. 22–24).

36 Cf. Forbes (1855: 134CD) for the Greek text and ib. (135CD) for the Latin version by Dionysius Exiguus, which runs: *Nunc autem leo quidem et aper et tigris et pardus, vel si quid his simile est, sufficientem pro salute sua virtutem naturaliter possidet*. Note that the Syriac version as contained in ms. Vat. Sir. 106 of the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana (fol. 45v, col. b, l. 22–23) uses *nmr* for the *πάρδαλις*, which is the cognate of Arabic *namr* and Hebrew *nāmēr*.

37 *Τίγρις* in the Bible always refers to the river: Gen. 2.14, Dan. 10.4 (*τίγρης*), Jud. 1.6, Tob. 6.1–2, Sir. 24.25.

38 Actually, *avaz(a)ni* is a plural form; cf. Gippert (2021: 339–342) for details.

39 Cf. Kochlamazashvili (2009: 109 ll. 1–3) for the Georgian text; the passage is contained on f. 112r of the Athos manuscript Ivir. georg. 49, an autograph of George’s, cf. Fig. 1.

the “tiger”: *Իսկ այժմ առիժ էւ վարսագ էւ վագր էւ ինձ, էւ որ ինչ միսուկամ աղ սրսիսիս ինչ, բասկան ունի առ ի փրկյաթին զ՝ ի բնյաթնէն զարկյաթին*.⁴⁰ Armenian *vagr* has for long been regarded as a borrowing of a Middle Iranian cognate of Sanskrit *vyāghra* “tiger”,⁴¹ which is also represented by Middle and New Persian *babr* “id.”;⁴² the phonetic differences notwithstanding, Old Georgian *vigri* might stem from a related source.⁴³

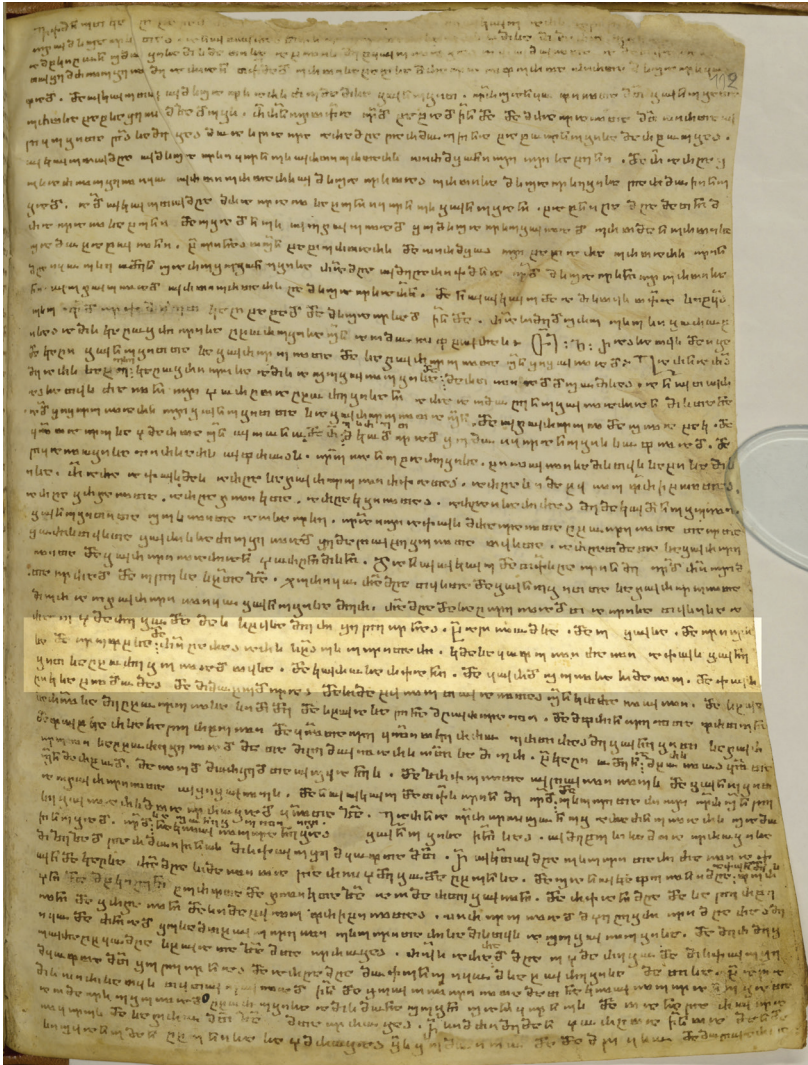


Fig 1: ms. Ivir. georg. 49, f. 112r, with the sentence comprising *vigri* and *vepxi* highlighted.

40 Text as edited by Vardanyan (2009: 65 ll. 16–18), with the variant readings *ařwec* for *ařwec* and *inc* for *inj*.
41 Cf. Acharyan (1979: 292) and Martirosyan (2010: 428).
42 Cf. MacKenzie (1971: 16) for the Middle Persian and Steingass (1963: 154a) for the New Persian word, which is also concealed in Turkic terms such as Yakut *baabir* (see above).
43 Cf. Andronikashvili (1966: 239–241) for this proposal. The Georgian word might have been secondarily influenced by Greek *τίγρις*.

The correspondence of Georgian *vigri* with Greek τίγρις is met with even earlier than this, in a text contained in the so-called *mravaltavi* (“polycephalion”) of Mt Sinai (ms. Sin. georg. 32-57-33 of 864 CE).⁴⁴ The text in question is a homily on the Beheading of John the Baptist attributed to John Chrysostom (*CPG* 4570), which is also preserved in Armenian. Here, *vigri* is again contrasted with *vepxi* and *lomi*: მე უწყი, რამეთუ ასპიტნიცა ნელითა სიტყვთა დაიმწყემსებიან და ვეგხნიცა ფუფუნებით დამშვდდიან, ლომნიცა და ვიგრნიცა, ხოლო დედაკაცსა ზოროტსა აგინებდე თუ, აღობორგდეს – “I know that even snakes can be tamed by a gentle word, and *vepxis* by caressing, also *lomis* and *vigris*, but if you scold a wicked woman, she will become angry with you”.⁴⁵ Even though the arrangement of the three animals is a bit different, it is clear that *vepxi* here renders Greek *πάρδαλις* again: Ἐγὼ οἶδα καὶ ἀσπίδας κολακευομένας ἡμερούσθαι, καὶ λέοντας καὶ τίγρεις καὶ παρδαλεῖς τιθασσευομένας πρᾶνεσθαι· γυνή δὲ πονηρά καὶ ὑβρίζομένη μαίνεται – “I know that even snakes become intimidated by flattering and that *lions* and *tigers* and *leopards* are calmed by being tamed; a wicked woman, however, is furious when being insulted”.⁴⁶ The Greek order of “lions”, “tigers” and “leopards” is more closely followed by the Armenian version, which runs:⁴⁷ *Բն տեսույ է և զիծս ընտանացուցուս սիրեսանօք, և առիծս և վագերս և զիննս վայրենասկանս ընտանացուս. իսկ կին անգամ և սայիրստ թշնամանեալ մողեցի* – “I have seen even snakes becoming intimate by supplication, and wild *lions* and *tigers* and *leopards* growing tame; but an insane and wicked woman becomes furious when offended”.

On the basis of these attestations, we may safely conclude that *vepxi* denoted a “leopard” while a “tiger” was named *vigri* in Old Georgian. The question whether this still held true for Rustaveli’s times cannot easily be answered, given that the poet did not describe the animal’s skin that was worn by his hero, Tariel, in more detail; in introducing him sitting on the bank of a river and weeping, he simply wrote: მას ტანსა კაბა ემოსა, გარე-თმა ვეგხის ტყავისა, | ვეგხის ტყავისა ქუდივე იყო სარქმელი თავისა, | ხელთა ნაჭედი მათრახი ჰქონდა უსხოსი მკლავისა; | ნახეს და ნახვა მოუწდა უცხოსა სანახავისა⁴⁸ – “His body was clad in a tunic, with a furcoat from a *vepxi*’s skin; | a cap of *vepxi*’s skin was also the cover of his head. | In his hands he held a forged whip, thicker than an arm; | they saw and were pleased to see that strange spectacle”. However, there is clear evidence that the skin was perceived as that of a leopard at least until the 17th–18th centuries when illustrations were added to the text of the epic in manuscripts. The most famous of these illustrations are those by a certain Mamuka Tav(a)karashvili (or Tav(a)kalashvili) who in 1646 created manuscript H-599 of the KKNCM for the Prince of Megrelia, Levan II Dadiani, and those of the so-called “Tsereteli-manuscript”, S-5006 of the KKNCM, which comprises a total of 87 miniatures.⁴⁹ In both these codices, the skin Tariel wears is depicted not with a tiger’s stripes but with speckles all about (see Figures 2 and 3); a feature that has been regarded as characteristic for the leopard since Antiquity as we learn from the book of Jeremiah (13.23):⁵⁰ εἰ ἀλλάξεται Αἰθίοψ τὸ δέρμα αὐτοῦ καὶ πάρδαλις τὰ ποικίλματα αὐτῆς “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his

44 Cf. Gippert (2016: 56–64) for the “Sinai Mravaltavi” and its dating.

45 Cf. Shanidze (1959: 214 ll. 14–16) for the Georgian text.

46 Cf. *PG* 59 (1862: 487BC) for the Greek text and a Latin version.

47 Cf. the edition in *Oskeberan* (1862: 615 ll. 11–14).

48 Strophe 85 in the *editio princeps* (Rustaveli 1712, 15).

49 Cf. Gippert and Tandaschwili (2014, 11–12) as to the illuminated manuscripts of the epic. Some of the illustrations from these manuscripts are accessible on a dedicated website of the UNESCO (<https://en.unesco.org/memoryoftheworld/registry/483>); 54 out of the 87 illustrations of ms. S-5006 are published in Huppert (2014) and Rustaveli (2016).

50 The speckles are also thematized in the story on the “panther” in the *Physiologus*; cf. Macé (2021, 494–496). Given the close zoological relation between panthers and leopards, this is in the nature of things.

spots?”, rendered in Georgian as უკუეთუ ცვალოს ჰინდომან ტყავი თვისი და ვეფხმან სიჭრელე თვისი.⁵¹ Lastly, if Rustaveli had imagined his hero in a tiger’s skin, he could have resorted to the expression *vigris iqavi* which is attested in the *Vita* of king Vakhtang Gorgasali, a text attributed to a certain Juansher that forms part of the chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba* as compiled by Leonti Mroveli in the 11th century; here we read: და განაწესნა ვახტანგ სპანი და დაადგინნა განმზადებულად; და აღჯდა ტაიჭსა შეჭურვილსა ჯავშნითა. და აღილო ფარი მისი ვიგრის ტყავისა, რომელსა ვერ ჰკუეთდა მახვლი, და ჩავლო გუერდი და მიდგა მახლობელად მდინარისა⁵² – “And Vakhtang arranged the troops and arrayed them for preparation; and he mounted his horse, armed with his breastplate. And he took up his shield of *vigri*’s skin, which no sword could cut, and he rode past and halted near the river”.



Fig. 2: Tariel in M. Tavakarashvili’s illustration in ms. H-599, f. 15v.

51 Instead of the singular form სიჭრელე of O and J, S and B have the plural სიჭრელენი in agreement with Greek ποικίματα. The substitution of the “Ethiopian” by an “Indian” (ჰინდო) in O and J is also suspended in the two younger versions which, however, use the geographical name ეთიოპემან instead of its derivative, ეთიოპელმან. The confusion of Ethiopia(ns) and India(ns), frequent in the Georgian tradition, may have been triggered by I (III) Esdras 3.2 where both countries are named together as the outposts of the empire of the Achaemenid king Darius.

52 Cf. the edition by Qaukhchishvili (1955: 154 ll. 17–19); for a second mention of the shield cf. ib. (175 l. 14).



Fig. 3: Tariel in a miniature of ms. S-5006, f. 18r.

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