

ნინო გაგოშაშვილი

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Women in Christian and Mazdean Canonical Traditions (5th century)

ქალი ქრისტიანულ და მაზდეანურ კანონიკურ ტრადიციებში (V ს.)

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ქალისა და მამაკაცის თანასწორობას, რომელიც ადრექრისტიანული სამყაროსთვის სრულიად ახალი და უცხო კონცეფცია იყო, „შუშანიკის წამების“ ერთ ეპიზოდს უკავშირდება. აქ ვკითხულობთ, რომ ქრისტიანი ვარსექნ პიტიახში, თავისი მეუღლის, შუშანიკისგან, ფარულად იღებს მაზდეანობას და მეორე ცოლსაც გამოითხოვს „სპარსთა მეფისაგან“. „შუშანიკის წამების“ ქართული ტექსტის მიხედვით, ეს „ცოლი“ შეიძლება ყოფილიყო სპარსეთის მეფის ასული, სომხური ვარიანტით – სიდედრი, ხოლო ვრცელი სომხური ვერსიით – თვით ვარსექნის ქალიშვილი.

მოხმობილი ფრაგმენტი წარმოშობს რამდენიმე მნიშვნელოვან კითხვას: რა ადგილი ეკავა ქალს ქრისტიანობასა და მაზდეანობაში? არსებობდა თუ არა ამ რელიგიებში მრავალცოლიანობა? დაიშვებოდა თუ არა სისხლის აღრევა? რას ფიქრობდა V საუკუნის ქართლის ორი მთავარი რელიგიის კანონიკური წიგნები – „დიდი სჯულის კანონი“ და „ავესტა“ – ამ საკითხებზე?

ცხადია, ყოველი ტექსტი დაკავშირებულია არა მხოლოდ თავისი ეპოქის, არამედ წარსულის მითოსურ, რელიგიურ თუ კულტურულ-ესთეტიკურ აზროვნებასთან. აქედან გამომდინარე, კვლევის მიზანი, გაანალიზდეს ქალის სოციალური, რელიგიური და სამართლებრივი მდგომარეობა V საუკუნის ქართლში და პასუხი გაეცეს ჩვენ მიერ დას-მულ კითხვებს, ეპოქებისა და კულტურული კონტექსტებისგან მოწყვეტით ვერ განხორციელდება.

ზოროასტრიზმის მთავარი წიგნის, „ავესტას“, კანონთა ანალიზი გვაჩვენებს, რომ ზარათუშტრა თავის ჭეშმარიტ მიმდევრებს, კაცებს თუ ქალებს, *na განა ვა -ს*, ანუ თანასწორს უწოდებს, მაზდეანთა ქორწინება მონოგამიურად ითვლება, კატეგორიულად იკრძალება ოჯახის

შექმნა ნათესავებს შორის და ა. შ. თუმცა წესები ალბათ ირლვეოდა კი-დეც ან დროთა განმავლობაში სხვა ინტერპრეტაციით ვრცელდებოდა. ამას ადასტურებს ე. წ. იშობოხტის სამართლის კოდექსი (VIIIს.), რომლის თანახმადაც, ზარათუშტრა „შეაჩვენეს დედასთან, დასთან და ასულთან შეუღლების წესის შემოღებისთვის“.

მაზდეანობაში მსგავსი წესის არსებობა ვრცელი სომხური რედაქციის ავტორისათვის, სავარაუდოდ, ცნობილი უნდა ყოფილიყო, თუმცა არც ზარათუშტრასა და ვარსქენის შესახებ შემორჩენილი ინფორმაცია, არც პიტიახშის სასტიკი ბუნება თუ პოლიტიკური გავლენებისადმი სწრაფვა არ იძლევა იმის მტკიცების საფუძველს, რომ ვარსქენის მიერ რელიგიის ცვლილება საკუთარი ქალიშვილის ცოლად შერთვას დაუკავშირდეს (შესაძლებელია ეს ინფორმაცია არმენოფილურ ტენდენციადაც მივიჩნიოთ).

როგორ უმკლავდებოდა მსგავს პრობლემებს ქრისტეს ეკლესია? ქრისტიანობა ქალისა და მამაკაცის თანასწორობის ქადაგებს და ღვთის წინაშე მათ თანაბარ ღირსებას აღიარებს. ეს სწავლება აისახა მსოფლიო და ადგილობრივ საეკლესიო კრებებზე შემუშავებულ საკანონმდებლო ნორმებში, რომლებიც შესულია „დიდ სჯულისკანონში“. ამავე კანონებით მკაცრად იგმობა ცოლქმრული ღალატი, მრავალცოლიანობა, ახლად შობილ გოგონათა მკვლელობის პრაქტიკა, სისხლის აღრევა (მაგ. ბასილი დიდის 67-ე კანონი) და სხვ. ასევე მეტად საინტერესო ცნობებს გვაწვდის კანონები ქალთა შესახებ, რომელთაც საეკლესო სამართალი „ჩუეულებას“, „უწერელ წესს“ უწოდებს და ძალით კანონთა თანასწორად აცხადებს.

ტექსტისა და მაზდეანურ-ქრისტიანული კანონიკური ტრადიციის ანალიზი ადასტურებს, რომ V საუკუნის ქართლში მცხოვრებ ქრისტიან ქალთა საზოგადოებრივ და რელიგიურ ყოფაზე ჯერ კიდევ ძლიერია წარმართობის გავლენა, თუმცა ნელ-ნელა მკვიდრდება ქრისტიანული ცხოვრების წესი და სამართლებრივი ნორმები, რომლებიც მოგვიანებით ზოგიერთ მაზდეანურ კანონზეც აისახა.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: საკვანძო სიტყვები: ქალი, კანონი, ავესტა, ტრადიცია, ჰიგიენა

Keywords: woman, canon, Avesta, tradition, hagiography

For centuries, Georgia maintained a polytheistic tradition. Pagan gods were worshipped, although earlier there had been a recognition of a Creator God, who, over time, was forgotten as people turned to the worship of the sun, the moon, and the five shining stars (See *The Life of Kartli*, 1955, p. 11). In other words, they came to venerate the created rather than the Creator.

After the decline of pagan cults, the Iranian religion of Mazdaism gained an important place in Kartli. Its followers worshipped a single invisible god – Ahura Mazda – whose personification was fire. In addition to fire, Mazdaists also revered other elements: air, water and earth. The widespread influence of this religion in Georgia is confirmed by the life and words of Saint Nino, the Enlightener of the Georgians: „*I saw a nation serving fire, and I wept because of their fire worship and their error*“ (Shatberdi Collection, 1979, p. 334). Apparently, Zoroastrianism found fertile ground among Georgian beliefs due to its similarities with earlier ancestral faiths, particularly the worship of astral deities and the forces of nature. It should also be noted that „*the Georgian national faith initially offered strong resistance to Mazdaism*“ (Japaridze, 2012, p. 83).

For the pre-Christian pagan world, it was difficult to accept the new faith – Christianity – or to adapt to its beliefs, canons, forms of worship, and way of life. This resistance was largely shaped by cultural and historical contexts that clashed with Christian values. Each faith and its canons shape the traditions and way of life of its followers. Accordingly, this study examines the distinctive features of the transitional period from paganism to Christianity, focusing on traditions reflected in both Mazdean and Christian practices, as captured in Georgian hagiographic literature, particularly in the *Martyrdom of Shushanik*. This issue is analyzed against the backdrop of two different genres – hagiography and canonical tradition. A comparative analysis of the cultures, historical contexts, and traditions under consideration, supported by a historical-literary approach and historical overview, helps to illuminate several aspects concerning the place and role of women in two distinct religions: Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

The pre-Christian pagan societies found it difficult to accept the new faith – Christianity – or to adapt to its beliefs, canons, forms of worship, and the lifestyle of its adherents. This resistance was largely shaped by the cultural and historical values that Christianity directly challenged. Christianity proclaimed the fundamental equality of men and women, based on the doctrine of humanity's creation in the image and likeness of God, the possibility

of human deification, and the salvation of the human race. However, it is evident that in its earliest centuries, Christianity struggled to fully realize this ideal, especially since the Christian understanding of womanhood differed significantly from prevailing social norms.

The surviving pagan sources, which shed light on the rights and duties of women in the pre-Christian era, focus primarily on marriage, loyalty to husbands, childbearing and rearing, family life, the model of the "good wife," and the woman's role in daily life. In contrast, Christian sources provide a broader perspective, highlighting Christian women who, alongside their traditional responsibilities, also played significant roles in the spread of the faith and in public life.

The situation of women was shaped, to a certain extent, by political interests; much depended on the rulers, the ideology of the conquering powers, and broader sociopolitical factors. This was especially evident during the early stages of Christianity. Pagan philosophers of the Greco-Roman world often portrayed women as inherently flawed, asserting that their nature predisposed them to serve any cult – including Christianity – without discernment. Women were labeled as „*believers*“; naïve, and incapable of distinguishing between false cults and traditional values (<http://library.church.ge>). Such gender-based arguments were commonly used to undermine the credibility of the emerging Christian faith.

It is important to note that many foundational theological ideas regarding the nature and purpose of women, developed by the Christian Church in its earliest period, as well as the obstacles it faced, found full expression in Georgian reality. These developments are reflected in Georgian historical writings, most notably in the fifth-century hagiographic work *The Martyrdom of Shushanik*. Since every literary work is connected with the mythological, religious, and aesthetic thinking of its own time – as well as its historical background – this ancient monument must be analyzed within that broader context.

One particularly interesting episode is found in *The Martyrdom of Shushanik*: according to the Georgian version, Varsken, the Christian satrap of Kartli, renounces the true God and becomes a fire-worshipper. In an effort to further please the Persian king, he "asked the king for a wife." According to the Georgian text, the woman he requested was the king's daughter (I 29-32), whereas in the Armenian version, she is identified as the king's mother-in-law (I 36) (The Martyrdom of Shushanik 1938: 39). Ano-

ther extended Armenian version goes even further, claiming that Varsken changed his religion in order to marry his own daughter (for a detailed discussion, see Garakanidze, 2018, pp.89-96). According to this version, Varsken, whether out of fear or of his own volition, embraced the Mazdean faith to pursue the marriage. Saint Shushanik, refusing to condone his apostasy, denounced him and entrusted his evil deed to God's justice (The Martyrdom of Shushanik 1964, p. 50).

The same episode reveals that Varsken, without consulting his lawful wife and children, promised the Persian king that he would compel them to convert to Zoroastrianism. Other parts of the text further highlight Varsken's despotic and cruel behavior, both toward Shushanik and the clergy, whom he abused without mercy. For this reason, Shushanik believed that justice could not be achieved in this life; she expressed her hope to find equality only in the afterlife, „where there is no distinction between man and woman“ (The Martyrdom of Shushanik, 1964, p.41).

These fragments from Shushanik's martyrdom raise important questions: What role did women occupy in Mazdean society? Did polygamy exist? Was incest permitted? How did fifth-century Kartli, where Mazdean influence was significant, confront these challenges, and what stance did the Christian Church and its canons take on these matters?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to the "Avestan" traditions. It is noteworthy that the sacred Zoroastrian texts contain far more ritual prescriptions concerning women than men. The Avesta outlines the mandatory norms of Mazdean behavior, addresses in detail issues related to traditions and rituals, emphasizes the respect accorded to women, discusses their roles and rights in both society and the household, and elaborates on conjugal duties, the sanctity and inviolability of the family, marriage regulations, rules of divorce, and related matters.

The *Avesta* presents the family, headed by a man, as the foundation of social relations; however, this did not diminish the role of women in the family or society, nor did it restrict their freedom of choice. This is confirmed by later sources as well. In the Gathas of the *Avesta*, Zoroaster refers to his true followers – both male and female – as *nā gənā vā*, meaning equals (<https://lib.kunstkamera.ru>).

The 12th Fragard (chapter) of the *Videvdat (Law Against Evil)* outlines mourning practices, emphasizing that individuals are distinguished not by gender but by the merits they have earned during their lives. The number of

mourning days is identical for both women and men, and the terminology used to express mourning is the same. This equality in mourning practices implied that their bodies were considered equally pure in life and equally impure after death (<https://lib.kunstkamera.ru>). From a ritual perspective, such an attitude suggests a recognition of gender equality within Mazdeanism. However, the question remains: how was this reflected in everyday life?

It is worth noting that during the Achaemenid era (558–330 BC), the status of women was considerably better. Women occupied a prominent place in the spiritual sphere: they served in temples, acted as priestesses of various religious cults, and in the esoteric branch of Zoroastrianism known as **Zarvanism**, they even held the highest ranks. Women could also participate in secular affairs; for instance, there were “Arsharars” – overseers who ruled over large groups of women, children, and men.

In contrast, during the Sasanian period (3rd–7th centuries AD), many practices changed. While Orthodox Zoroastrians allowed women to pray in the temple, they no longer permitted them to perform religious services or to exercise authority in governance. Nevertheless, women from the higher social classes retained many rights (<https://www.parstimes.com>).

Regarding polygamy, the *Avesta* indicates that Mazdean marriages were generally monogamous. However, there were cases where a Zoroastrian believer could take a second (and occasionally a third) wife, typically if the first wife had not borne a child after seven years of marriage. Importantly, under the marriage laws, a husband could not take a second wife without the consent of the first. It is possible that this tradition was also influenced by accounts suggesting that the prophet Zoroaster himself was married three times (Doroshenko, 1982, p. 80).

As for incestuous relationships, the *Avesta* firmly prohibited marriage between close relatives, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the purity of bloodlines (Nurullaeva). However, it appears that in practice, such unions sometimes occurred. After the *Avesta*, one of the most important legal texts for the Mazdeans was the so-called *Code of Law of Ishobokht* (8th century), which remained relatively authoritative (showing clear influences from the Sasanian *Book of a Thousand Rulings*). This code discusses permissible marriage ties and kinship restrictions. Notably, Zoroastrians later sought to regulate such problematic issues in accordance with Christian norms. According to the *Code of Ishobokht*, it was asserted that „Zarathustra

himself had sanctioned marriages between a man and his mother, sister, or daughter“ (Gamsakhurdia, 1995, pp. 58-59).

It can be assumed that the Armenian version of the *Martyrdom of Shushanik* drew on similar sources when it portrayed the satrap’s unspoken behavior as the cause of the conflict between Shushanik and Varsken. This detail is found only in the more extensive Armenian recension of the *Martyrdom*, and even then, only in certain manuscripts. The longer Georgian version of the *Martyrdom* does not mention this episode. Therefore, when the Armenian short version alludes to it, it is evidently borrowing from the Armenian extensive text. As I. Abuladze explains, „this information appears in only one manuscript tradition of the Armenian extensive version, while another manuscript omits it entirely“ (Martyrdom of Shushanik, 1938, p. 22).

Although Varsken is portrayed as a cruel and treacherous figure – an image supported by historical accounts – this does not warrant the conclusion that his conversion to Mazdeanism was linked to the marriage of his own daughter. Furthermore, it is possible that this episode, included only in certain Armenian versions, reflects an Armenophile interpolation, particularly given the presence of similar tendencies in early Georgian written sources.

The characterization of Varsken is reminiscent of an episode from the introduction to the *Life of Kartli*, specifically chapter 2 of the *Life of Kings*, which recounts the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the migration of Jewish refugees to Kartli. It was during this time, we are told, that "the Georgians adopted the most evil law, disregarding kinship in matters of marriage" (Life of Kartli, 1955, pp. 1, 16). In scholarly literature, this section of the *Life of Kartli*, and the *Life of Kings* more broadly, is considered to reflect Armenophile tendencies. Consequently, it cannot be treated as reliable evidence that such practices actually occurred in Kartli – or, in this particular case, in the village of Tsurtavi.

How did Christianity deal with such problems? Christianity was faced with a pagan heritage that it had to replace or temporarily adapt to. The Church fought for centuries to establish Christian ideals, convening ecumenical and local councils whose legal decrees were adopted by the entire Church. These laws strictly prohibited incest, adultery, polygamy, the practice of killing newborn girls, divorce, and similar offenses.

In the legislative monument of the Christian Church, the *Great Canon*, about 100 laws have been found that apply to women. The largest number of laws regarding women were adopted at the last three Ecumenical Councils

and local councils. In addition to these written laws, church law attached special importance to the tradition, the so-called „unwritten rule“ (an unwritten rule, law that must be enforced). These old rules became the basis for many laws developed at the Ecumenical and local church councils and were declared equal in force to the law (Great Canon, 1975, p. 498). Church law contains several laws that determine the place of women in the church according to the traditional law.

It is precisely the tradition that explains certain canonical laws that impose different obligations on women and men. For example, the 21st canon of St. Basil the Great requires that a woman forgive her husband who has 'converted' from fornication, whereas a man is forbidden to admit a 'cursed woman' into his household, despite the fact that, in both cases, the sacrament of marriage has been equally violated. Similar provisions can be found in the 9th, 48th, and other canons of St. Basil (Great Canon, 1975, p. 472).

Basil the Great states that the obligations imposed by such laws are not easily explained, yet „custom commands us to do so.“ Thus, he suggests that certain traditions are not easily subject to change, although this does not diminish the divine nature of Christianity (Gagoshashvili, 2024, p. 139).

Naturally, such unwritten rules were heavily influenced by pre-Christian religions and pagan cults, which had long shaped local traditions. This influence remained evident in fifth-century Kartli, situated at the crossroads of two major religions-Mazdeanism and Christianity. According to the *Martyrdom of Shushanik*, during this period, the beliefs and customs of the pre-Christian era were still deeply rooted and continued to affect many aspects of national life, including the status and role of women. Nevertheless, Christian lifestyles and canonical norms were gradually gaining a foothold, eventually even influencing certain Mazdean laws.

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