

AMIRANI*

In a forest where the trees were so tall that they scratched the sky, there stood a narrow but very high rock. Beside this forest lived a hunter who from time to time hunted there. One day, after a long hike, the hunter came to the foot of the rock and heard a strange noise coming from it. It was very much like a woman's scream. He looked up at the rock but could not see its top. He tried to climb up but it was impossible, so he turned around and went home.

The hunter had a very malicious wife who limped. He asked her to prepare a supply of food, and he went to the blacksmith and asked him to make a bunch of iron spikes and a hammer. The next morning, his wife had prepared the food, and the blacksmith, the iron spikes and hammer. The hunter woke up and went off to the rock. When he reached the foot of the rock he set to work and began hammering in the spikes. That many spikes he hammered, that many stairs he made. Up and up he climbed. When the spikes ran out and the hammer wore down, there lay the top of the rock.

In the top of the rock he saw something which looked like a door. He entered. Inside was a cave, and there lay Dali.** Dali was astonishingly beautiful. She had golden braids. When they looked at one another--and, by the way, the hunter's name was Dardjelani--they immediately fell in love. They embraced and fell down unconscious for a while. The hunter spent the night there. He made love to Dali. At first Dali was against making love but love conquered her and she could not resist. The next morning Dali told the hunter to go home but he would not agree, and they spent the second night together. Dali insisted on the hunter's going home, "Your wife is a witch," she said, "she's used to your daily return and surprised by your absence. She will follow your trail and will come here and do us harm." "Have no fear," the hunter replied, "my wife is lame and can hardly walk at home; how can she climb up here?" And he spent that night as well with Dali.

The third day passed and the hunter's wife was indeed surprised that her husband had not returned. She waited two nights. On the third day she prepared food for the long journey and followed her husband's trail which led her to the foot of the rock. She climbed up the rock and entered the cave where the hunter and Dali lay together asleep. The hunter's wife found Dali's golden scissors and cut off her golden braids. She took the hair and scissors with her and returned home.

The next morning the hunter and Dali woke up. Dali lifted up her head and it seemed too light. Putting her hand to her head, she felt that her braids were gone. She looked for the scissors, but the scissors were nowhere to be found. She became worried and told the hunter this: "I warned you that your wife would

*Dodona Kiziriā, with the assistance of Peter Gold, has translated "Amirani" directly from a Georgian text that appears in M. Chikovani's Midzhachvuli Amirani / Amirani enchained (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1947). Chikovani is Professor of the History of Georgian Literature at the Scientific Research Institute at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, with a special interest in the connections between Greek and Georgian mythological materials.

**Dali: the goddess of the hunt, protectress of animals, the Georgian Artemis.

do us harm; now I can no longer live. Take my knife, cut open my belly--as I am pregnant by you--and take out the child. If it is a boy give him the name Amirani. If it is a girl, name her anything you wish. My son will be a hero, and had he spent the usual time in my belly, he could have even fought with God. Now, he will not be that strong. Carefully do what I tell you. Keep the child in a calf's stomach for three months, then in a bull's stomach for three months, and after that place him in a cradle. Take it to the spring of Iamani* and there his baptiser will come along and baptise him, and he will tell Amirani everything he will need to know." The hunter became very sad and refused to cut her belly open. But Dali insisted. With trembling hands he cut open her belly out of which came a boy-child-like-the-Sun. The hunter fulfilled all her wishes. He placed the cradle near the spring of Iamani and went home.

People who passed by the cradle asked him, "Who are your parents, and who is your baptiser?" "I don't know who my parents are," answered the youth, "but my baptiser is Sir Angel."

At last an Angel came by and asked the youth the same question. The youth replied with the same answer. The Angel repeated his question three times and revealed who he was. He baptised him with the name Amirani and presented him with a dagger. Amirani was told to keep the dagger in the side of his boot and never to use it unless it was absolutely necessary. The Angel prayed over Amirani and told him that there would be no man stronger than he, and departed.

To the spring came the water-bearers of Iamani; they began to laugh at Amirani laying there in the cradle. Angry, Amirani stepped out of the cradle, broke their jugs and beat them. They ran to Iamani without their water and told him the story. Iamani got angry and went to the spring himself. When he saw the boy in the cradle he was very delighted and said to himself, "He will be the brother of my sons Usibi and Badri." He took the cradle and brought it home. His wife was happy too.

The next morning, Iamani's wife put Usibi and Badri in their cradles with Amirani between as she went out to milk the cows, and told him to rock the cradles. After she left Amirani took a thick needle and pricked Usibi and Badri with it. When the children began to cry their mother got angry and yelled at Amirani, "How dare you annoy my children; even Dali's son Amirani would not dare such a thing." Then Amirani said in a low voice, "It's me who is Dali's son, Amirani." When Iamani's wife heard these words she became very happy and kissed Amirani, washed him in the milk, and dressed him in very fine clothes. From that day on she treated Amirani as her own son.

The boys grew up and then came the time for heroic deeds. Everyday they would go out and beat up everyone they met. And the people they beat would run away from them and cry to them from afar, "If you are such heroes, rather than beat

*Iamani: a man's name.

us, try to find out what happened to Iamani's eye." On hearing this they went to Iamani's wife and asked her to tell them all about it. Their mother, not wishing to divulge the secret, said to them that Iamani had been sick with smallpox and lost his eye to it. Twice she gave this answer, but the third time Amirani, Usibi, and Badri cunningly asked her to bake cheese bread for them. When the cheese bread was done Amirani and Usibi took one loaf each and shoved the hot bread up against her breasts, telling her, "We will burn your breasts if you don't tell us the real story of Iamani's eye." She could do nothing but tell it all.

"A Dev * became the enemy of Iamani," began the woman. "When Usibi and Badri were born the Dev came to us and told us to give him either Usibi or Badri, 'If you can't give me a child then give me Iamani's right eye.' Iamani could not give his child away so instead he gave his eye." When the boys and Amirani heard this story they immediately began to prepare for the fight with the Dev. They asked Iamani to make them bows and arrows out of iron. This he did. But Amirani broke his bow and took the pieces to a blacksmith who made him a new one. The next day the three went off to fight the Dev.

They walked and they walked and far into a field they came upon a Dev. The Dev owned a beautiful apple orchard and under the apple trees lay many sheep. When the Dev saw them he said, "If you are such strong boys, shoot down an apple from out of my apple trees." Usibi and Badri tried hard but they failed. Amirani shot his arrow, and half the apples in the orchard fell down. Then the Dev said, "If you are such strong boys, try to make my sheep stand up." Usibi and Badri tried but failed. Amirani first made the whole flock stand up and then threw them down to earth so violently that he half-killed them. The Dev got angry and herded his flock into his yard with Amirani caught in the middle of it. He locked the gate leaving Usibi and Badri outside. The Dev cooked four sheep for his supper saying, "Tomorrow my breakfast will be Amirani," and fell fast asleep. Amirani went over to the Dev's sister, who was chained to the corner of the house, and asked, "Tell me how to kill the Dev." The Dev's sister replied, "My brother can only be killed by his own sword which he keeps in oil. The sword is so heavy that you cannot pull it out by yourself. Over there is a thick cord. Tie one end to the sword and bring me the other. Let's pull together and we'll manage to get the sword out of the oil. Then take the sword to my brother and put it on his neck. The sword itself will cut off his head." And the Dev's sister asked Amirani, "Promise me in the name of Christ that when you kill the Dev you will not kill me, but let me go." Amirani promised in the name of Christ. Together they pulled the sword out from the pot of oil. Amirani placed the sword on the Dev's neck and the sword began to cut. When the neck was cut halfway through, the Dev woke up and began thrashing about, but it did not help him. His head was severed. But instead of freeing the sister of the Dev, Amirani killed her and so doing broke his promise in the name of Christ. All the property of the Dev went to

*Devi were giants of enormous strength somewhat similar to the Greek Cyclops. In Georgian folktales they are often stupid, and the hero often forces them to serve him. Sometimes the Devi are replaced by dragons.

Amirani and his brothers, and they took everything they could carry and left.

They walked and they walked until they came to a fir forest. There is a rock there and on the top of the rock a Dev sits twisting yarn into wool. For a spindle he uses a fir tree, and for the spinning wheel, a millstone. This very Dev had stolen the eye of Iamani. When the Dev saw Amirani and his friends he called to them, "You three flies, get out of here lest I eat your meat and crush your bones." And answered Amirani, "You dirty creature, just try and then we'll see how well you boast." The Dev got angry and stopped his threats and climbed down from the rock to fight with them. They fought him for a long time with bows and arrows; Amirani shot one arrow for himself and two for Usibi and Badri. Finally both sides tired and the Dev rushed at Amirani, opened his mouth, and swallowed him.

The Dev turned his back on Usibi and Badri and entered his house, but before he had closed the door, Badri reached him and cut off his tail. As soon as the Dev entered his house he felt a pain in his stomach. "Woe is me, Mother, I have a belly-ache," said he to his mother. He rushed to the house pillar, and rubbed his belly against it. He tried to climb up the pillar but his tail was cut off and he fell back down. When the mother saw her son's sufferings she asked him, "Have you seen any creatures today?" The Dev answered, "I saw three flies. One of them I swallowed." "Woe to your mother if you have swallowed Amirani, the son of Dali." Meanwhile, Usibi and Badri came to the window of the Dev's house and called to Amirani: (sung) "Amirani, alam chalamsa,* you have a dagger by your leg, you have chosen a bad place to sleep, in that dragon's belly. Take out the dagger which you have in your boot and stab every which way in the dragon's belly." When Amirani heard this he took out the dagger and stabbed the Dev. The Dev began to cry, "Don't kill me; get out of my belly any way you like, from my mouth or my behind." Amirani got angry saying, "You dirt, I don't want myself vomited up or spit out from behind." Then replied the Dev, "Take out a piece of bone from my side and get out." Amirani cut out its entire side and climbed out. But Amirani was missing one eye and he said to the Dev, "Cure my eye immediately or I won't let you go alive." The Dev replied, "Cut off a little piece of my lung and a little piece of my liver. Rub your eye socket with them and you will have an eye better than your own." Amirani cut off nearly one half of his lung and nearly one half of his liver. He rubbed his eye socket with them and his eye was cured.

The Dev asked him to replace his side, but instead of the side Amirani put in a wooden sieve. Had he not done so the world would have perished. When there is an eclipse, it is because the Dev (or dragon) swallows the Sun. The Sun very soon burns through the wooden sieve and emerges to illuminate the world once more; that's what the people say. After that, Amirani asked the Dev to give back the eye of Iamani; the Dev did not dare refuse. He pointed to the house pillar and said, "Inside that pillar there is a box; in-

*These are nonsense words used only for the rhythm of the verse.

side that box there is another, and in that box is kept the eye of Iamani." Amirani found the eye. They left the Dev and went back home, put the eye into Iamani's socket, and rested for a while.

Time passed and Amirani wished to do heroic deeds once more. He asked Iamani to keep his children, Usibi and Badri, at home because they were not of great help in times of trouble. When Usibi and Badri heard this, they beseeched and beseeched Amirani to take them with him. Amirani finally agreed and the three went off to do heroic deeds.

They walked a long way and in a field they met three Devi. They called to Amirani and his brothers, "You would be great heroes if one of you married the daughter of King Keklutsa*. Her name is Ketu. Many heroes have wished to marry her but all of them have failed." Amirani asked, "Where is the king or his daughter?" The Devi showed him the kingdom of Keklutsa and said that he keeps Ketu in a tower which hangs from the sky by a chain.

Amirani and his brothers left the Devi and went to the kingdom. On the way, they came to a sea. There they saw a Devi woman on the shore. Amirani asked her, "Do you know the way to King Keklutsa?" She answered, "The only way is over the sea and if you become my friends I will carry you over it." Amirani gave his word in the name of Christ. She cut off one of her braids and put it over the sea like a bridge, and they walked over it. First Usibi and Badri, then Amirani and, at last, the Dev. began to walk. But when she was in the middle of the sea Amirani cut the braid with his dagger and the Dev fell into the sea. And so Amirani broke his promise in the name of Christ for the second time.

They walked and they walked, and in a field they met a man whose name was Andrerobi. He was lying in a cart and was so big that nine pair of oxen were dragging the cart along. A lot of people were pulling it, too. They were carrying Andrerobi to the cemetery now, because after his death he would become even heavier and then they would not be able to get him to the grave. One of Andrerobi's feet fell down from the cart and was dragging along the road. It was so heavy that it scratched the earth like a plough, and the entire crowd could not put his foot back into the cart. Amirani whisked up Andrerobi's foot on the end of his bow and threw it into the cart. Andrerobi was very surprised, "Who is that strong man," he thought, "who took care of my foot so easily?" The people pointed to Amirani. Andrerobi stretched out his hand to Amirani but the latter was scared of having his hand crushed and instead extended a long stone. Andrerobi pressed the stone so hard that he squeezed the juice out of it. Once again, Andrerobi asked Amirani to extend to him his hand. This time Amirani did so. Andrerobi begged Amirani to treat his son as a brother and never betray him. Amirani promised in the name of Christ. Then the people carried Andrerobi along his way and Amirani took his son with him. They walked a lot;

*Keklutsa: a man's name meaning "the handsome one."

Amirani got sleepy and lay down. While he was sleeping Andrerobi's son caught two deer on foot and hung them in a tree. When Amirani awoke and saw the deer he asked for an explanation. When he found out it was done by Andrerobi's son he got angry. "He's such a hero already in his young age; when he becomes an adult he'll be better than I." Amirani decided to kill him, and he did. And so Amirani broke his promise in the name of Christ for the third time.

They left the body of Andrerobi's son there and went off to King Keklutsa. They walked and they walked and they came to the town where Ketu was kept. Amirani said to Usibi, "Jump up and try to cut the chain with your sword." Usibi tried but failed. Then Badri tried, but also in vain. Then Amirani jumped up and he cut the chain with his dagger. The tower fell to earth, and the three of them entered the tower. When Amirani and Ketu saw one another they fell madly in love. Ketu's father found out about it and brought his army which encircled the tower three times around. When Amirani saw the army he told Usibi to go out and fight them. Usibi went out and killed one line of soldiers, but Keklutsa blew on him and Usibi gasped for air and died. Then Badri was sent. He, too, killed one line of soldiers, but Keklutsa blew on him and he also died. Amirani was troubled as he prepared for the fight. Ketu gave him some advice, "My father wears on his head a millstone which is tied to his neck by a golden sinew. Try to cut the sinew because the weight of the millstone will make him bow his head, his neck will appear, and then you can cut off his head with your dagger. You cannot kill my father any other way." Amirani remembered her advice; he went out to the army, killed all the soldiers left alive and came to Keklutsa. He blew on Amirani and Amirani fell to his knees, but he immediately stood up and cut the sinew. King Keklutsa bowed his head, showed his neck, and Amirani cut off his head with his dagger.

Amirani returned to the town where Ketu was waiting and began mourning over the deaths of Usibi and Badri. "I can't go home without them," he moaned, "what shall I say to their old parents?" Ketu asked, "Can you recognize them among the dead?" "Yes," said Amirani, "Usibi has between his shoulder blades a spot like the Sun, and Badri, a spot like the Moon." Amirani and Ketu began searching for them and finally they found them.

Ketu rubbed their wounds with her towel and both returned to life. Amirani was very happy. They took all the property of Keklutsa and went to Iamani. Iamani was glad that Amirani and his sons had returned home in peace and victory. Amirani said decidedly to Iamani that he would never take his sons to do heroic deeds again.

From that time on, Amirani did heroic deeds alone. No one could rival his power. And it happened that he left remaining on earth only three Devi, only three wild boars, and only three oak trees. During his lifetime Amirani committed many blasphemies. He broke his promise three times in the name of Christ, as well as many other things. That is why he was punished by God. He was chained to an iron post and the post was hammered into the rock. To the same post was chained Qursha, a dog that killed many deer which belonged to God. During the entire year Amirani and Qursha pulled on their chains and little by little they dragged the post out of the rock. On the day that the post is ready to come out, a little bird sent from God comes and perches on the post. Angered, Amirani strikes at it with an iron beam. The bird flies off. The beam strikes the iron post and hammers it back down into the rock. It happens this way every year.