The Woman of the Myths: the Satanaya Cycle

The Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia 2: 3-11., 1989

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Privotal to the entire Nart saga tradition is the multi-faceted figure of Lady Satanaya. There are other female figures whose identities stand fully apart from hers, but it is Satanaya who plays the most prominent role in the vast majority of myths, so much so that many female figures merge into her and her name is at times elevated to the status of a little conferred upon women to honor them. She is simultaneously a figure of beauty, eternal youth, passion and lust, devotion and treachery. She is the embodiment of profound wisdom and intelligence, while also being a sorceress and seeress. She is often within the same myth both a victim, usually of rape or seduction, while at the same time a manipulator and victimizer. In her figure have been drawn together a vast spectrum of themes ad features associated in the Caucasian tradition with the role of woman. Whatever complex mixture of Chivalric, Medieval, Classical and more ancient traditions may still be seen in the Nart corpus, whatever odd overlay and mixing of what we think of as Oriental and Occidental themes may emerge in the sagas, few traditions, either literary or cultural, afford woman such a central position and such a high status as does that of the Caucasian Nart sagas.

Preserved for us in this tradition is a glimpse of what some of the important female cults of the Ancient world may have been like, specifically those of Aphrodite and the Semitic goddess Ishtar, (Astarte, Ashtaroth). Indeed Satanaya shows a host of features that may be found in Aphrodite, but often only faintly limned in the Classical Greek accounts (cf. Friedrich 1978:9*ff*). Many details of these parallels emerge in the course of various myths involving a host of heroes and will be discussed in another work. Here I present only a few myths that involve Satanaya or a cognate figure, Psatina or Meghazash, either alone or as a central goal of a quest, and I discuss only major features. These have been grouped together as a Satanaya Cycle by the great Circassian folklorist, Asker M. Hadaghat'la (1968, vol. 1).

First, the name *Satanaya* itself reflects her fertility role. She is literally mother of a hundred Narts. The name is compounded from an Iranian */sata-/ '(one) hundred,' a Northwest Caucasian (henceforth 'NWC') /na/ 'mother' and an attributive adjective suffix 'the one who is,' /-ya/, which is the same in either Indo-Iranian (and Indo-European in general) and in NWC. In East Circassian Kabardian a purely Circassian form sĕa-q'^{w}ə́-na has undergone a semantic shift so that it is used as a respectful title for husband's mother, but it transparently 100-son-mother, 'Mother of a Hundred Sons,' and is found in one Ubykh myth as the name of the Satanaya-like figure. Satanaya's ''sister'' in the myth ''The Tale of How Warzamas and Yimis came to Be'' (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 3.1:86-90), who is merely an *avatar* of Satanaya, has the name of ''Psatina'' and this may be glossed as 'Life-Giving Mother,' Bzhedukh West Circassian /psa-t^{h}ə-na/ life-give-mother.

An interesting consequence of being the mother of all the heroes is that she must aid some against others in the numerous fraternal conflicts that will emerge in many of the later sagas. Thus in some myths she takes on a treacherous, ‘‘bad mother,’’ role and contributing to this development is the fact that within Circassian there is a suffix /-ya/ ‘bad’ that is homophonous with the attributive adjective suffix. In the myth ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 13:124-126), there is in fact an obscure female figure named ‘Anaya’ and this may be directly glossed as /ha-ná-ya/ the-mother-bad, ‘‘The Bad Mother.’’

The myths that follow exemplify a number of traits that have direct cognates in various goddesses of fertility, many of which after a long development found some embodiment in the Greek Aphrodite (cf. Friedrich 1978, for a definitive and insightful discussion of these developments, many of which span several millenia and cultures).

In the myth ‘‘Why the Sun Pauses on the Horizon at Sunset’’ (Hadaghat’la 1967, 1:266), Satanaya presents a theme of competence, in this case competence in weaving and sewing. Weaving itself has an almost magical connotation for female figures from Ireland to India, but in the case of Satanaya appears chiefly to be an exemplification of her competence in womanly activity. To finish her work in time she must ask a boon of the sun. She is granted her wish that the sun pause before sinking below the horizon. This smacks of magic, but is downplayed by the Narts. In point of fact, however, this incident suggests links between Satanaya and the sun, links that also hold between Indo-European Dawn and the Sun. Finally Satanaya shows her erotic and social skills by putting on her newly woven cherkesska (curiously a man’s garment, but see the myth ‘‘How Satanaya was Led Astray,’’ Hadaghat’la vol. I, 23:155) and gaining the admiration of her competitor, a Nart youth who is a harness maker. One receives the impression that not only does the youth admire her skill, but also that he is impressed with her as a beautiful woman, and the whole scene has a faintly erotic overtone to it. In later myths Satanaya will present herself to other men, but most often to be spurned by the hero with disastrous results ensuing from this rejection of her beauty and love.

In the myth ‘‘The Blossom of Lady Satanaya’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 1:81) Satanaya’s love of natural beauty is portrayed as she seeks to transplant a rose before her house door. After several vain efforts she finally succeeds in having a flower grow after she has learned the life-giving qualities of water. This episode has two important and wide-spread features. First, Satanaya is linked to water, a feature important to fertility goddesses, particularly for Greek Aphrodite and her predecessors, Indo-European Dawn and some of the female figures of Old Europe. Secondly, she is credited with the discovery of water’s ‘‘life force.’’ This discovery is just that, a discovery. Satanaya’s ‘‘magic’’ is often seen as being based upon a sort of early science. Satanaya is not merely powerful and all-knowing, but she is capable of examining certain matters and divining their nature by her intelligence. This scientific skill is evident again in the myth ‘‘Lady Satanaya and the Magic Apple’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I,3.2:86-90), wherein Satanaya has ‘‘discovered’’ the capacity of a gold and white apple to impart immortality and everlasting youth to any who taste of it. She has not divined its properties by magic or some act of revelation, but rather by inquiry.

The myth ‘‘The Tale of How Warzamas and Yimis Came to Be’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 3.1:86-90), presents another woman whose link to Satanaya is only indirect, Lady Meghazash. The etymology of her name is obscure. In Circassian one can perhaps see something like, /mə-γa-zá-š^{hy}/ not-let-alone-tend, ‘‘One Who does not Leave Others Alone, Gregarious One,’’ but the name also has an Iranian cast to it and one might see more readily therein an original */ma γa-zæč/ ‘great, many-descendants,’ cf. Iranian Ossetic /zæic/ ‘descendants, progeny’ (Benveniste 1959:126), and this would be an appropriate sense for her name, since she is the first woman

from whom important Nart heroes spring, men who will be contemporaries of Satanaya, such as her husband, Warzamas, and his brother Yimis.

There are two important aspects to Meghazash. First she steals the apples of the Narts in consort with her two sisters while they are disguised as doves. This recalls not only the bird imagery associated with the goddesses of Old Europe, but it also has precise parallels in Aphrodite's association with doves (Graves 1955, vol. I:49-50, n. 2). Second, she is taken as a bride from the sea by one of two brothers. This sea origin is precisely like that of Aphrodite (Gk ἀφρο-διτή ''foam-born'') and recalls aquatic dimensions associated with the Semitic Ishtar-Astarte-Ashteroth, and perhaps the Keltic Guinevere, with her famous sexual indiscretion with Lancelot, Welsh *Gwenhwyfar,* Irish *Findabhair,* both from Proto-Keltic */windo-bṝ-y-ā white-born-one-feminine = 'foam born woman.' The presence of two brothers also reflects certain details of the myth of Dawn and the Divine Twins, the morning and evening stars. Although one brother wins her hand, both ride back to their people with her as though they were co-husbands, a feature that would make no sense if divorced sister or fiancée, Dawn, from the sea or sea shore, a feature also evident in this myth. In fact the Nart myth gives a general impression that we are dealing with a more complete and faithful account of a fertility figure being won from the sea than any we have handed down to us from other sources. The tying in of diverse themes, such as magical apples, doves, two brothers, the aquatic bride, plus the purpose for the myth — the explanation of how the family of the earth became linked with that of the sea, all these suggest that this version of the advent of the aquatic fertility figure is very old and preserves many of its original themes with very little alteration.

The myth ''Lady Satanaya and the Magic Apple'' (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 3.2:86-90), returns to Satanaya, but takes up the theme of the magic apple. This myth might also be linked with that of the smith Tlepsh and the Mother of Trees, ''Tlepsh and Lady Tree'' (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 76:263-5). Apples or apple-like fruit play prominent role in many mythological traditions, from that of Genesis (pomegranate) to Greek mythology, as with Atalanta being distracted by the golden apples of Aphrodite (Graves *op. cit*., vol. I:266, k) and the Golden Apples of the Hesperides (*ibid*., vol. 1:50, 127, vol. 2:145-6, 192-3, 246). In this myth the apple is a seat of moral and biological activity, insuring good manners, attitudes and health to whoever should taste of it. Here again Satanaya knows of this apple's powers because she has apparently experimented with the fruit and inferred its potentialities, not because she is merely magical and omniscient. This is another example of her quasi-scientific talents, (cf. ''The Blossom of Lady Satanaya'' (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 1:81)).

The myth ''How Warzamas, the Son of Meghazesh, Won the Damsel Psatina'' (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 12:113-124), is a lengthy tale that has a myth within a myth. The basic plot is the hero's successful return of a life-giving force, here embodied by the damsel Psatina. This return of a vital force is echoed widely in the Indo-European world, in Indra's release of life-giving waters in the *Rig Veda* of India, in Wodan's returning of the Mead of Inspiration in pagan Germanic mythology, and perhaps most famously of Prometheus' bringing back of fire in Greek mythology. This Circassian tale appears to be another example of this type. A giant has abducted the life-giving princess from her wedding celebrations. This giant appears in another story as a dragon or giant serpent and in this regard has strong parallels with Vrtra, the stifling serpent who is the enemy of Indra in the Vedic tradition. Other striking parallels lie with Greek Charon and Hades. The hero Warzamas, in the only myth in which he is a youth, must be ferried across a river (cf. the Greek river Styx) by a little old man to a land of the dead reminiscent of the intercalation of a sub-myth, that of a popular Slavic and Caucasian myth involving the aiding of animals in distress and being aided by them in turn.

A very interesting detail of the main myth is that of Zhaqa, the horse of the giant. The etymology of this name appears to be /žá-a-q^{h}a/ mound-connective-grave, ‘‘The (Horse of the) Grave Mound.’’ This appears to be a name harkening back to Scythian traditions, more generally to a widespread and ancient Iranian steppe tradition, cited by Herodotus, of burying a horse in the grave mound of a chieftain. This precious relic gives us an insight into the mythic significance of a custom otherwise known only from passing mention by Herodotus and from archeological data.

This myth takes us from the generation of Lady Meghazash, the first generation in which the Narts are in any way well delineated, to the second generation, the one to which Satanaya and the older Narts belong, the one immediately before the hundred Nart warriors.

An important feature first seen in ‘‘How Warzamas, the Son of Meghazesh, Won the Damsel Psatina,’’ is the abduction of the fertility figure. The damsel Psatina is abducted at her own wedding celebration. Her original husband is never mentioned and she eventually becomes the wife of the young Warzamas. This theme of abduction and its sexual consequences is taken up in most of the remaining myths of the Satanaya cycle, the myths ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 13:124-6), ‘‘How the Narts Captured Ghund-Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 17:137-40), ‘‘How Satanaya was Led Astray’’ (Hadaghat’la vol. I, 25:155). In the myths, ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas’’ and ‘‘How the Narts Captured Ghund Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya,’’ she is explicitly raped. In ‘‘How Satanaya was Led Astray,’’ she is seduced. In the various versions of ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas,’’ her treatment at the hands of her abductor is never spelled out, the bards seemingly having become sensitive regarding the sexual implications of this abduction. All these ‘‘sexual accidents’’ are reminiscent of the sexual misconduct of Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite, and Guinevere, but in sharp contrast to the surviving myths of the Ancient World, the Circassian myths do not blame the woman for her sexual fate. (Similarly, it is a diagnostic feature of the true hero in ‘‘How Warzamas, the Son of Meghazesh, Won the Damsel Psatina’’ and ‘‘How the Narts Captured Ghund Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya’’ that he permit the woman her choice of husband.) The prime emphasis in the Nart tradition falls instead on a number of other fascinating themes.

First, the man who abducts Satanaya in ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas’’ and ‘‘How the Narts Captured Ghund Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya,’’ is a herdsman of one sort or another. This is cognate with Aphrodite’s tryst with the shepherd King of the Dardanians, Anchises (Graves, vol. I:68, f.n). In the Greek tradition Anchises is a worthy mortal for Aphrodite’s passion, but in the Nart sagas the shepherd is a boorish, stupid giant with some unusual features, singularly inappropriate as a match for Satanaya. In the versions of ‘‘The Marriage of the Nart Warzamas,’’ he is a swineherd and there is an odd inventory of his pigs which a messenger must perform as evidence that he can count and hence is competent to take the swineherd’s place. The significance of this inventory is totally unclear. The herder in all the myths has enormous size and strength, and is stupid, buy beyond compare in swiftness and might. In ‘‘How the Narts Captured Ghund Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya,’’ he reveals his heroic aspects in a very Vedic manner by eating a superhuman amount, just as the Vedic hero Indra does. The herder’s name is extremely interesting. It has three variants: Argwana, Yergwan and Gwargwan, the last in Abaza (W. S. Allen 1965:164). The name has a distinctly Northwest Caucasian cast, but its etymology remains unclear as does the choice of which variant to take as original. What is important is that the form Gwargwan, /g^{w}arg^{w}áan/, would be pronounced [gorg^{w}án] and might be viewed as the source for the Greek Gorgons, originally *Gorgo* in Greek but later built upon a stem *gorgon-*. The Greek root originally meant ‘grim, fierce, terrible,’ *gorgo-s*, and fits well with Gwargwan’s image. Thus this

strange shepherd offers an unusual mythological link with some of the more obscure aspects of Ancient Greek mythology and casts the Greek Medusa and Gorgons in a new context.

Another interesting feature of these abductions is the quarreling and insult-hurling that goes on between the haughty young Satanaya and the scruffy old Warzamas. This exchange has a well-defined verse form, but the significance of its details remain obscure. It is reminiscent of the difficult relationship between Aphrodite and her unsuitable husband Hephaestos, the God of the Forge, though the Greek tradition does not give us many details of this mismatched pair. Here again, however, Satanaya considers her suitor to be singularly unsuited to her.

Warzamas is never a smith, though some work has tried to link his name with that of the Roman Vulcan, (*vl̥-k-an- → Lat. Vulcanus, *vl̥-k-an-mégha- → Iranian *warzan-ma-γa- → Ossetic Uryzmæg, Shapsegh West Circassian (borrowing) /warzamag^{y}/, perhaps based upon the root *wel-(s)k- for 'foreigner' seen in English 'Welsh,' Latin 'Volscii,' Balkan 'Vlach,' Germanic (?borrowing from Keltic) *folk-, *i.e.*, smiths were foreigners, outside the tribal structure). This disparity might appear at first glance to form a distinct barrier between comparing this match to that of Aphrodite and Hephaestos, but in other myths where Warzamas is always absent, Satanaya is intimately associated with the smith Tlepsh, though he is never presented as her husband. In ''How Satanaya was Led Astray,'' it is Tlepsh's son, however, who succeeds in seducing Satanaya, even though in this myth she is presented as the loyal wife of Warzamas. Thus there is a strong social and even sexual link between Satanaya and the two smith figures of the sagas and this s parallel to the link between Aphrodite and Hephaestos.

In ''How the Narts Captured Ghund Ghund City and Carried Off Satanaya,'' we have an abduction from a city named Ghund-Ghund, /γ^{w}əndγ^{w}ə́nd/. The origin of this name is opaque. Nevertheless what is astonishing here is that Circassians depict this city as a labyrinth, carving it on wooden plaques as a complex rectilinear pattern. Thus this myth and perhaps even the name of the city itself may preserve Minoan themes that appear elsewhere in the Greek myths surrounding Theseus and the Minotaur. In this myth the herder goes by the title of Chamakhozh, Bzhedukh West Circassian /č^{y}am-a-x^{w}á-ź/ cow-connective-herder-old, ugly. He explicitly rapes Satanaya and from this union comes the hero Pataraz. In most of the myths Pataraz is a son of Khimish the ploughman of the Meghazash. This is the only tale in which he is the son of the herdsman, although his vengeance for his father's murder is very much like the rescue of the father by the heroic son in a number of other myths.

In ''How Satanaya was Led Astray,'' Satanaya is pictured in settled connubial union with Warzamas. Here she is led astray into committing adultery in order to obtain two magical daggers from Nagurashkho, Bzhedukh West Circassian /na-g^{w}ə-r-á-šx̌^{w}a/ eye-zone-around-dative-big, ''big around the eyes''), the son of the smith Tlepsh. With remorse for her transgression she runs off the disguised as a man (note her donning of man's clothing in ''Why the Sun Pauses on the Horizon at Sunset''), whereupon she runs into her husband Warzamas in a shepherd's hut (Anchises met Aphrodite, who was also disguised, in a shepherd's hut). Now knowing that he is talking with his own wife he admits that had he been born a woman he too would have committed adultery just to have the daggers. The couple is thus reconciled.

The last myth of this cycle, ''Satanaya and the Great Nart,'' is taken from the first part of two conflated myths, presented as one in the sources (Hadaghat'la vol. I, 20:145-149). In this tale Satanaya tricks her husband, (here called only the Great Nart, but undoubtedly a Warzamas figure), in order to save her marriage to him. She must pay an unfair price for her great powers and knowledge. She overshadows her husband in the eyes of jealous Narts who do now want to admit that the Great Nart is a better man than they and this culminates in her

husband announcing that he intends to divorce her in order to regain his eclipsed fame. He generously allows her to take whatever she values in their house with her. She cleverly contrives to make this her husband himself.

These last two myths have the most Caucasian tone of any in this cycle. The others all show remarkable parallels with ancient traditions outside the Caucasus, most of which have come down to us in a form far poorer in detail and showing far less internal cohesion than do these Nart sagas. These myths thus afford us a precious insight into one of the most fascinating aspects of Classical paganism, and Indo-European goddesses in general.

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