Tamara the King

By Marjory Wardrop

When the disciples cast lot among themselves to decide in which part of the world each was to preach the gospel, Mary the Mother asked to have her share in the work. Iberia, now called Georgia, was allotted to her and ever since this has been her favourite land. This is what Georgian tradition tells of.

In few countries have women played a greater role than in Georgia, the beautiful romantic land which lies between the Black sea and the Caspian. Through all the long centuries the Georgian woman has striven to attain the noble ideal of the Christians religion. Her country has been laid waste again and again by Musulmans and Mongol invasions and she has been carried into captivity, forced to become one in the conqueror's harem and martyrs for her faith. Yet she has held aloft the torch of truth and purity and sent forth her sons to fight for fatherland and faith. According to tradition Georgia, the ancient Iberia, fell to the lot of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, when the disciples set forth to preach the gospel of love and peace to the world. She accepts it as her heritage and it would almost seem as if some divine power (a gentle mother) had watched over the Georgians through the ages. A mere handful of people, they have withstood countless hordes…

Tamara legends

The inhabitants of Murghuli, in Artvin, claim that she is buried there and that anyone who steps over her grave becomes mad. One evening a shepherd fell asleep on her grave and in the morning he was mad. He wandered in the forests and wild beasts did him no harm. The people asked him where the grave was but he had forgotten. Once again he was led by God's Command to Tamar's tomb and prayed to the King to cure him. He became well, but could not remember where the tomb was.

The legend is that Tamar, the King, is not dead but living; she rests in a golden coffin in a rocky cave, at her feet are never ending candles, sometimes she will rise in Murghuli.

At Nino Tsminda near Mt. Gartchkhali there is a beautiful wood full of lovely wild flowers, trees, and cool springs. A huge coffin was found hewn out of a single stone: the lid was stone too. Inside they found a marvellously large head and bones, also various precious weapons and objects. The peasants were afraid, covered it up again and buried it untouched. They put thorns around the place to know it again. The old people who were there say that it was the remains of one of Tamar's heroes and the Queen would be angry if they touched them.

Near Cartchkhalis Mt. there is a big stone for tying ropes to. They say that in Tamar's time the Black Sea came up to this mountain and the ships were tethered there and that Queen Tamar made this ships [intentional blank space]. The mountain has changed so much since that the stone looks natural.

Turks continually invading the country. Tamar threatened to [intentional blank space] them and make them wear women's veils. They came again and were defeated. Tamar only ceased fighting when they agreed to do this.

Tamar, as well as her father and grandfather, loved to live at Cartchkhalis Mt., the highest mountain in W. Georgia. In one of its valleys she built a beautiful house, fairer than any in any land. Here she had her throne and Councillors. A town grew around it and a large church was built. A lake was made by Tamar's orders and stocked with fish. The mountain had a different name then. Old people say that there was fish in the lake called Cartchkhali. Signs of the lake can still be seen.

Shikabeddin Elkalkashendi, Arab author, (+1418) writes the following of Queen Tamar.
"And may Allah glorify the life of her Highness the glorious, high souled, renowned, fearless, heroic, holy, spirited empress, the glory of the followers of Messiah, the treasure of the Cross bearing nation, the pride of the Christian faith, the Monarch of the Abkhazians, the Georgians and the [Jurijans?], the friend of monarchs and of Sultans; the mighty sovereign, the watchful champion, the lion, possessor of throne and crown, the superintendent of her religion, just to her subjects the best of the Lazian monarchs, Sultana of the Georgians, the treasure of the sovereigns of the seas and gulfs, the protectress of the place forbidden to knights, the inheritor of her throne

and crown from ancestors, the defender of the lands of Rum and Iran, the essence of the Syrian Tsars, the choicest of the possessors of thrones and crowns, the lustre of the Christians, the prop of the religion of Jesus, the anointed of the Messianic verses, by her resolution the elevator of the holy house (Jerusalem) the stay of the baptized, the ally of Popes, the friend of Musulman, the most fair friend of Tsars and Sultans."

Tamar's coins: on face in Georgian, "Tamara, David" reverse in Arabic "Queen of Queens, glory of the world and religion, Tamara, daughter of George, follower of Messiah, May God bless her."