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FOR "AVTANDIL'S" ETYMOLOGY

The lexis of Shota Rustaveli's immortal poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" has been attracting the attention of many scholars. In spite of this, there are still quite a few words of eastern origins in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" the etymology of which still needs to be defined or redefined. This includes a wide spectrum of lexemes, including first names. In the article below the etymology of the poem's main character "Avtandil" is studied.

"Avtandil" was previously studied by Iustine Abuladze. In 1936 he suggested that "Avtandil" consists of two words, the first part being Arabic *avtan* (pl. of word *vatan* – "homeland"), while the other part is Persian *dil* – "heart". Thus, the scholar concluded "Avtandil" should mean "the heart of a homeland".

In our opinion, the plural form of *vatan* – *avtan* – "homelands" as a first part of the composition is not natural and less realistic for a first name. In the Arab/Persian world, the plural form of *vatan* for first names is not found and to attribute it to "*avtandil*" seems artificial and hard to accept. Respectively, here I present a different etymology for Avtandil.

In my opinion, Avtandil is truly a composite and consists of two parts (*avtan* – *dil*). First, (*avtan*) must come from Arab word *'afḍal* (أفضل) "best", "better", "finest", "greatest", "perfect", "unsurpassed", "indispensable". The second part of the composition is Persian/Arabic *dīn* (دين) "religion", "faith". The meaning of the name composed is "greatest, finest, indispensable amongst religions, amongst faiths". It was formed the following way: *'afḍalu-d-dīni* / *'afḍal ad-dīn* > *afḍal-dīn* > *afdal-dīn* > *avtandil*.

Phonetically it does not represent a challenge to get *avtandil* from *'afḍal-dīn*. Examples of Arab origin words in Georgian find replacing *f* with *v* consonant. For example, *oil* – "*navt-i*" (< *naft* نفط), *wire* "*mavtul-i*" (< *maftūl* مفتول). It is also a natural transition of *ḍ* into *t*: *ḍ* > *d* > *t*. As of sonorant dissimilation, phonetically it is fully acceptable for Georgian. For example, "*nishani/lishani*".

In Arabic, *'afḍal* is an elative form. Grammatically, Arabic elative form expresses superlative degree followed by a noun in the genitive case, which may have definite or indefinite status.

The root of *fḍl* in Arabic has a meaning of kindness, grace, mercy. From this root the first names were shaped *afḍal*, *faḍl*, *faḍl al-lāhi*, *faḍlān*, *fāḍil*. Among them are the famous figures from the Islamic world.

The presented etymology of Avtandil is reinforced by one very important argument. From the Middle Ages in the Arab/Persian world the first name *'afḍal ad-dīn* (أفضل الدين) is found. Here are the names of some historical figures: Afdal al-Din al-Khunji (أفضل الدين الخونجي) passed away in 1248, Muslim scholar and philosopher, worked in Cairo; Afdal al-Din Kashani (أفضل الدين كاشاني) passed away 1213, famous Muslim poet and philosopher, author of *robā'i* (quatrains) and philosophical tractates. The mentioned name is also found today in the East. Additionally, the first name *akram ad-dīn* (أكرم الدين), which means "most noble, indispensable amongst religions" is found and it is almost synonymous with *afḍalad-dīn*.

As for the second part of the composite, we give preference to *dīn* instead of *dil* ("heart") because in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" we have composition names with *dīn* as a second part, such as Nuradin-Pridon (*nurad-din* "light of religion, faith") and Shermadin (*sharmad-din* – "conscience of the faith"). According to this in the composite name of "Avtandil" the second part should be *dīn* "religion, faith". At the same time, it is important and, in our opinion, worth mentioning also that *dīn* as the second part of composed first names was and is widely spread in the Arab/Persian Eastern world. For example: *faxr ad-dīn* "pride, glory of the religion"; *ṣalāh ad-dīn* "truth, justice, nobility, kindness of the faith"; *šams ad-dīn* "the sun of the faith"; *badr ad-dīn* "the moon of the faith"; *nağm ad-dīn* "the star of the faith"; *rašīd ad-dīn* "the true believer of the religion"; *ğalāl ad-dīn* "the glory of the faith" and so on. First names of such compositions, Nuradin-Pridon and Shermadin, are clearly outlined in Shota Rustaveli's poem. Next to them, in our opinion, we should consider Avtandil from now on as well.