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The Islamization and Ethnogenesis of the Fereydani Georgians¹

Babak Rezvani

Introduction

Fereydani Georgians are the only Georgian-speaking ethnic group in Iran. Despite being all that is left of the once vast and important Georgian-speaking community in Iran, this ethnic group is still largely unknown, both inside and outside Iran. There is a general consensus that Georgians have played a pivotal role in Iran's history since the seventeenth century. Despite this, the Fereydani Georgians are also still relatively unknown within Iran itself. Also in Georgia there is some (popular) knowledge about them. Nevertheless, even this knowledge is rudimentary and is plagued by a large number of misconceptions. The Fereydani Georgians are virtually unknown outside Iran and Georgia.

While a few Persian and Georgian publications are available on the Fereydani Georgians, the few works in English are often factually inaccurate. This is due to the failure of this literature to distinguish between Iranian Georgians in general and the Fereydani Georgians in particular. These works rely primarily on the seventeenth-century historical sources which provide information on Iranian Georgians and their role in Iranian politics, as well as the position of Georgia and Georgians in the context of Safavid imperial relations. However, these sources fail to address the role and origins of the Fereydani Georgians specifically. The process of academic analysis is, however, helped considerably by the preservation of Fereydani Georgian oral history, traditions and ethnic self-awareness.

The main objective of this paper is to introduce the Fereydani Georgians and to address a number of prevalent misconceptions about them in the few available sources. The main sources of these misconceptions are writers who have relied exclusively on written historical sources. In order to comprehend the ethnogenesis, settlement and Islamization of the Fereydani Georgians, an integral and integrated approach is used in this paper, based on historical sources, the oral tradition, the dialect, family (i.e. clan) names and geographical toponyms. This analysis was facilitated particularly by the fact that Fereydani Georgians respect their local traditions and are keen to conserve their traditions and moral values.² Locals have made a conscious

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effort over time to preserve both their local traditions and history. Nevertheless, it is important not to make a rigid binary distinction between written and oral sources as the latter (may) have been recorded as well. With a view to verifying the reliability of (recently) written oral histories, the content has been checked by (informally) interviewing the locals. Whenever a large number of locals corroborate a certain statement or fact, we may safely assume that it is reliable (e.g. when an aged illiterate man narrates the same story as written in a book, then we may conclude that the information in that book is reliable). This integral approach (of historical sources, the oral tradition, dialect, family and clan names, and geographical locations/names) allows for a more thorough analysis of the geographical and social origins of Fereydani Georgians, and the locus and time of their Islamization.

Who are Fereydani Georgians and What is Said About Them?

Fereydani Georgians are a relatively small community in Iran. They are concentrated mainly in Fereyduhshahr and its vicinity in the historic region of Fereydan which is a region 150 kilometres to the west of Esfahan (the capital of Iran in the seventeenth century) (see Figure 1).

The three constituting *shahrestans* (administrative units) of Fereydan all belong to the *Ostan-e* Esfahan³ and are governed by their corresponding *farmandari* offices which report and are subordinate to the *Ostandari* (Governorate) of Esfahan. The Shahrestan of Fereydan (proper) is governed from the town of Daran, the Shahrestan of Fereyduhshahr is governed from the town of Fereyduhshahr and the recently established Shahrestan of Chadegan is governed from the town of Chadegan. There is also one *bakhsh* (sub-unit) called Buin-Miandasht which belongs to the Shahrestan of Fereydan proper and is governed from the town of Buin-Miandasht. The usage of the term “Fereydan” in this paper is a reference to the whole historic region of Fereydan.

The Fereydani Georgians, and their descendants elsewhere, are all that is left of the once large Georgian-speaking community in Iran.⁴ The Fereydani Georgians speak a Georgian dialect called Phreidnuli. Therefore, a Fereydani Georgian can be referred to as a Phreidneli (plural: Phreidnelebi). Although the aforementioned designations and proto-Phreidnelebi, derived from Phreidan (=Fereydan in Georgian), are used in this paper, it should be noted that the local Georgian self-designation is Kartveli (Georgian; Kartvelebi=Georgians), but occasionally also the ethnonyms, Gorj, Gorji, or even Gurj-i (after the Persian Gorji=Georgian) are used, and they call their language Kartuli. This is not surprising given that all other Georgian dialects in Iran are extinct. Fereydani Georgians call each other Chem-Dzowli (Chemi Dzvali in Standard Georgian), which means my bones. This designation indicates a sense of primordialism and ethnic solidarity among the Fereydani Georgians.

The number of Georgians living in Fereydan could be estimated at (around) 61,000.⁵ If we take into account the number of migrants and descendants of Fereydani



FIGURE 1 Location of Fereydan in Iran.

Georgians outside Fereydan,⁶ the total number of Fereydani Georgians and their descendants all over Iran could be (around) 100,000.⁷

Georgians of Fereydan are concentrated in the Bakhsh of Buin-Miandasht and Shahrestan of Fereydunshahr, in the western part of the historic region of Fereydan. Unlike the Georgians in Georgia, who are predominantly Orthodox Christians, the Fereydani Georgians are Shi'ite Moslems. Fereydan is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups, including Georgians and Armenians, Turkic speakers and Persian speakers and Bakhtiari. Despite linguistic similarities, Bakhtiari tribes of the western Iranian highlands have a different traditional lifestyle from that of the Persian speakers of the (lower) eastern Fereydan. Armenians are Orthodox Christians and all other ethnic groups in Fereydan are Twelver Shi'ites.

Examination of the histories of numerous ethnic groups reveals that a religious conversion by the minority to the religion practised by the majority often results in the loss of the ethnic group's original ethnicity and assimilation into the ethnic majority. This prevails in the case of migrants and to a much lesser extent those who were converted

in their original homelands. Nevertheless, the latter case is exemplified by the Christian Orthodox Assyrians who converted to Islam and became Arabs in their original homeland Syria as well as the majority of the Christian Egyptians (Copts) who converted to Islam and were Arabicized in their native Egypt. The Fereydani Georgians constitute an atypical example in this respect because, while they are Shi'ite Moslems, they have not assimilated into the ethnicity of their Shi'ite Moslem neighbours. Perhaps the most unique fact is that Fereydani Georgians take pride in their ethnic identity consciously as Shi'ite Georgian-speaking Iranians. A Fereydani colloquial expression with respect to this identity is "What a pleasure is hidden for an Iranian, in being a Georgian and being a Moslem."⁸ This identity (i.e. Georgian-speaking Shi'ite Moslem Iranians) has been clearly articulated as such by "The Georgian Iranian Association of Tourism in the Esfahan Tourism Exhibition of 2005," as published by the Esfahan Organization of Cultural Heritage in *Aghvam's* (ethnic groups) special edition: "We Georgians of Iran, or rather the Georgian Iranians . . . are immensely proud, that we are Shi'ite Moslems, that we are Iranians, and that we speak the sweet Georgian language."⁹

Georgian (i.e. from the Republic of Georgia) historiography traces the origins of Fereydani Georgians back to the Kakheti region of south-eastern Georgia. The website of Persian Historical Documents, preserved at the K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Science of Georgia (founded in 1958), states:

in 1614–1617 Shah Abbas marched into Kakheti four times, devastating it . . . During these campaigns up to 200000 residents were deported to various regions of Iran—mainly to places where attacks by incalcitrant tribes were expected, with a view to creating a "live" barrier. The province of Fereydan—the central mountainous region of Iran—is one such place where Georgians live to the present day. The Fereydan Georgians speak Georgian among themselves, preserving the memory and love of their homeland left several hundreds of years ago.¹⁰

Generally speaking, Iranian historians do agree that the Fereydani Georgians are indeed the descendants of the (100,000) Kakhetian (and Kartlian) captives, who were deported by Shah Abbas I,¹¹ and were Islamized after their settlement in Fereydan.¹² Many other (non-Georgian) historians and experts on Georgia agree. For example, Keith Hitchins, in the *Encyclopedia Iranica*,¹³ refers to some Georgian and non-Georgian sources and states:

[T]he Kakhetians were to be wiped out or deported and their country settled by qezel-bâš and other Turkmen tribes, while the nobles of Kartli were to be resettled in Persia¹⁴ . . . Abbas undertook another campaign in 1614 against Kartli and Kakheti, replacing their kings with Muslims. When nobles of Kakheti rose in revolt in 1615, his troops ravaged the country . . . Perhaps as many as 70,000 people were killed and over 100,000 deported to Persia . . . [T]he majority of the Georgians were settled in widely scattered parts of Persia and became cultivators of the soil. The most important of these Georgian colonies was in Farîdan (q.v.) in Isfahan province, where their descendants still speak Georgian and retain their Christian faith.¹⁵

The origins of the Georgians in Fereydan, (or Farîdan according to Hitchins¹⁶), could be a matter for historical debate. Nevertheless, the Fereydani Georgians are by no means (Crypto-)Christians. The “Phereidani P’at’ara Sakartvelo”¹⁷ (Fereydan, the Little Georgia) website, which was launched in, and is operated from, Georgia (<http://fereidani.site.ge>), attempts to gather some (more or less unconvincing) indications of the Christian past of the Georgians of Fereydan. Nevertheless, these indications do not imply that the Fereydani Georgians are now Crypto-Christians. The conventional claim made by (Iranian) historians is that the Fereydani Georgians settled in Fereydan as Christians and were Islamized there later, in the early seventeenth century.¹⁸ Already by 1882, in his book *Tarikh-e Nesf-e Jahan*, Mohammed-Mehdi Esfahani had stated that no Christians were present among these Georgians.¹⁹ While no signs of Christianity could be found among the Fereydani Georgians, numerous Shi’ite symbols are still present. This is reflected by the presence of numerous mosques and Imamzadeh shrines in the Georgian areas of Fereydan. An Imamzadeh is literally a son of an Imam,²⁰ a Shi’ite saint, and is regarded by the locals as a spiritual guardian of their region. Georgian Fereydan is also home to two other sacred Shi’ite sites which are neither mosques nor Imamzadehs. One is the split rock, called Tamziani Tskheni (Tskheni=horse), or Kowa (Kwa in Standard Georgian=rock), from which local Georgians believe that Imam Zaman, the Shi’ite Lord of the Times, appeared. Another is Amoghloba (from standard Georgian Maghla=high) located on the same mountain ridge, above the split rock, which Fereydani Georgians believe to be the site of the footprints of Imam Ali, the first Shi’ite Imam. Traditionally, Fereydani Georgians have always visited the Imamzadeh shrines and strictly observed Shi’ite traditions and rituals.²¹

Two historical battles influence the historical awareness of the Fereydani Georgians to this day, namely the war against the Afghans and the battle of Tsikhe. These two events are key historical peak experiences in the history of the Fereydani Georgians.²² They take pride in both but the battle of Tsikhe has a painful side to it as well.²³ Both events touch on Shi’ite elements. For example, the battle of Tsikhe resembles the events of the battle of Karbala, where Imam Hossein, the Shi’ite saint and the Lord of Martyrs, fought against the superior army of the Arab caliph Yazid. Like Imam Hossein in the battle of Karbala, the Georgians refused to surrender to a superior army. In the war against the invading Afghans (seventeenth century), Georgians “avenged the blood of 400 Georgian royal guardians” who were defending Esfahan “until the last drop of blood” and were killed by the Afghans. In this battle Georgians were reportedly led by the Shi’ite saint Imam Zaman (the living and hidden Lord of the Times), who appeared in a miraculous way from a split rock, where the Fereydani Georgians traditionally burn candles.²⁴ Locals of Fereydan still proudly show the visitors the Owghanis Gora (the Afghan Hill) where Fereydani Georgians killed so many Afghans. Similarly, in the battle of Tsikhe, the Fereydani Georgians declined an initial invitation to unconditional surrender and engaged in a battle on the Tsikhe Mountain. The main cause of this battle was the fact that Orojgholi Beyg, the chief of

Fereydunshahr, supported Ali-Mardan Khan Bakhtiari, the regent and the de facto Iranian king at that time, against his rival Karim Khan Zand, who was attempting to establish his sovereignty by force. Although in the battle of Tsikhe the Georgian casualties were substantial, and although they were defeated in a military sense, their tenacity and martial ardour were acknowledged and praised by Karim Khan, who had become the (de facto) Iranian king at that time. Karim Khan repented his deed after he realized that Fereydani Georgians were Moslems, and not Christians, and offered them some positions in his administration. These two events (in the eighteenth century) reveal the integration of Fereydani Georgians in the Iranian political arena, but also demonstrate the fact that Fereydani Georgians were already Shi'ite Moslems by that time.

The Georgians of Georgia²⁵ often claim that the Fereydani Georgians originate from the region of Kakheti in the south-eastern part of modern Georgia where they were captured and deported by Shah Abbas I to Iran, and were forcibly Islamized thereafter. A source of confusion is the assertion that the original name of Fereydunshahr was Mart'q'opi, after a town in south-eastern Georgia in Kartli, where Giorgi Saakadze fought a war against the Safavid army in 1625.²⁶ Although plausible, similarities in toponyms do not necessarily refer to the origin of this population. While it is true that the Georgians of Buin-Miandasht refer (red) to Fereydunshahr as Mart'q'opi, this toponym is largely unknown to the Georgians of Fereydunshahr themselves, who harbour no such memories of the aforementioned battle or the town itself. Moreover, it should be noted that the Georgian settlement and the conventionally accepted Islamization in Fereydan pre-date this battle (see below).

Many Georgians (from Georgia) believe that the Fereydani Georgians suffered an agonizing ordeal as Islamized "slaves." This has led to the demand that the Fereydani Georgians be re-converted to Orthodox Christianity, so as to become "true Georgians."²⁷ It is certainly possible that the official educational system of Georgia may have contributed to the dissemination of this demand among ordinary Georgians. Historiography serves as an instrument of identity representation both in Georgia and elsewhere. "Politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical textbooks in the present."²⁸ Georgian ethno-national historiography is concerned with the presentation of Georgians as a primordial category. Put simply, it regards Georgians as an Orthodox Christian nation which has fought against mighty empires and has managed to preserve its identity. Deviant categories such as Moslem Georgians are then described as something "unnatural" and a re-conversion to Christianity as something natural and desired.²⁹

Considering the fact that Shah Abbas I fought many wars in Kakheti, after which large numbers of Georgians were deported to Iran, as well as the fact that Georgians as a Christian people were inevitably exposed to the forces of assimilation in Shi'ite central Iran, these Georgian historical assertions and claims may sound plausible. Nevertheless, not all of these assertions and claims can be supported by solid facts.

This paper endeavours to discuss and challenge the aforementioned Georgian historical assertions and claims regarding the Fereydani Georgians. The claims of a Kakhetian (and Kartlian)³⁰ origin for the Fereydani Georgians and their Islamization in Iran are not fully established as evident historical facts and there are plenty of facts by which this can actually be contested, not only from the local Fereydani oral history but also from “solid” primary historical and other sources. The migration, settlement and Islamization of Fereydani Georgians are closely interrelated issues. Therefore, after a brief introduction to the history of Georgian settlement in Fereydan the discussion of the Islamization of the (proto-)Fereydani Georgians is followed by an examination of their origin. As noted above, these discussions are undertaken in the context of historical materials, dialectical features, family names, and toponyms.

Georgian Settlement in Fereydan

According to local oral traditions, the Fereydani Georgians are descendants of the Georgians who moved from the Abbas Abad neighbourhood of Esfahan, first to Najaf Abad, and then to Fereydan.³¹ The Fereydani Georgian collective memory has lost all memories of its ancestral homeland in Georgia but it continues to retain the memories of migration from Esfahan, and Najaf Abad. There are various versions of this story. According to the Fereydunshahri version, 19 clans (or extended families) moved from Esfahan, by way of Najaf Abad, to Fereydunshahr and spread from there to other parts of Fereydan. According to one version prevalent among people of Afus, the settlers first arrived in Afus, in the western part of Fereydan (the contemporary Bakhsh of Buin-Miandasht), and from there spread to other parts of Fereydan. It is plausible to assume that there were more than 19 clans, and to regard these 19 clans only as the ancestors of the Georgians of Fereydunshahr and its surrounding villages located in the mountainous south-western part of Fereydan. It is unlikely that all Fereydani Georgians have descended from just 19 clans, assuming that each of these was a traditional Georgian extended family. To this day Georgian family names exist in the villages of Fereydunshahr, which are also found in Fereydunshahr and there are also Georgian family names such as Shishiani and Gulani in Afus,³² and Papiani and Lomidani in Buin-Miandasht³³ that are not found in either Fereydunshahr or in south-western Fereydan. In addition, minor dialectical differences in vocabulary exist between the Georgian spoken in the northern and southern parts of western Fereydan. Nevertheless, all Fereydani Georgians call each other Chem-Dzowli (Chemi Dzvali=my bones) and are aware of their kinship.

The migration of Armenians and Georgians occurred in the early seventeenth century. According to Fereydani oral traditions, the Georgian migration to Fereydan occurred either simultaneously or (shortly) after the Armenian migration to Fereydan. The exact date of this migration is unknown, but we can assume that it took place after the Armenian settlement in Esfahan, which is dated at 1605.³⁴ Assuming the veracity

of the Fereydani Georgian oral tradition, the arrival of Fereydani Georgians' ancestors in Fereydan should be dated to after the establishment of Najaf Abad. The city of Najaf Abad, where the ancestors of the Fereydani Georgians once lived, was planned in 1022 Lunar Hegira (AD 1611).³⁵

The ancestors of the Fereydani Georgians (were) moved to and settled in Fereydan, mainly for strategic reasons. According to the oral traditions, the western part of Fereydan, where the Georgians were settled, was originally devoid of inhabitants. The only trace of previous sedentary settlements was a Jewish cemetery, which might be related to the nearby discovered ruins of Kuhastegan (or Ghohastjan, also called Ghohestan) of the pre-Islamic (presumably) Achaemenid era. Before the Georgian settlement, western Fereydan was the summer quarters of the (semi-)nomadic Bakhtiari (Luri) tribes that at times harassed the sedentary peasants. Owing to its proximity to the Safavid capital, Esfahan, full control of Fereydan by Bakhtiari warlords could endanger Esfahan's security.

Fereydan had water resources and had the potential to become a very important agricultural centre in Iran. Many Armenian peasants were settled by Shah Abbas I in the Fereydani fertile areas which were used for silk and wine production. There is ample evidence of a previous wine production and consumption culture in Fereydan, which has been traditionally attributed to the Fereydani Armenians.³⁶ Fereydan, which was also important for fruit and wheat cultivation (as well as food supply to the Iranian capital, Esfahan) often had to be defended against the raids and encroachments of the Bakhtiari warlords. For this reason and also to hinder the potential Bakhtiari warlords' advances to Esfahan, Shah Abbas settled Georgians in or near the mountainous areas in the western part of Fereydan.³⁷ According to a number of locals,³⁸ there were buildings in Fereydan in the recent past that (occasionally) were used as shelters. This type of building, which was called Gorji-Push (=something that covers up Georgians, in Persian), had thick stone walls and resembled the traditional types of building in the northern areas of Georgia.³⁹ These facts suggest a northern Georgian ancestry of the Fereydani Georgians, as northern Georgian highlanders were better trained than their ethnic kin in the Georgian lowlands when it came to fighting similar warriors (i.e. the Bakhtiaris).

Fereydani Georgians' Ancestors and their Islamization

In any analysis of Georgian Islamization it is necessary to differentiate between the Islamization processes of the upper classes and the ordinary people.⁴⁰ While the former were easily Islamized (due mainly to political reasons), the latter had less reason to do so. If the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors belonged to the aristocracy, it is highly probable that they were already Moslems before their settlement in Fereydan. In contrast, one may assume that if the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were from the lower social strata, their religious affiliation would most likely have

been Christian. At first sight, the rural character of Fereydan makes it probable to trace the origins of the Fereydani Georgians to the peasant, and hence Christian, Georgian settlers.

As mentioned above, the dominant Iranian and Georgian historiographies have caused people to claim that the Fereydani Georgians first settled in Fereydan as Christians and were Islamized there later. This claim is based on a passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, written by Eskandar Beyg Monshi, the Safavid court historian, in the seventeenth century. The *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi* mentions that Shah Abbas decided to Islamize some Christians in Fereydan, and hence strengthen their social position vis-à-vis the Luri (i.e. Bakhtiari)⁴¹ tribes who were harassing them. This Islamization process reputedly occurred in 1030 Lunar Hegira, in the 33rd year of the reign of Shah Abbas I (AD 1619 or 1620). According to this passage, the Islamization of Fereydan and Farah Abad (of Mazandaran) were delegated to Abol-Maali Natanzi, and Mohammad-Ali Tabrizi, respectively.⁴² Nevertheless, there are many reasons why it is very problematic to accept this passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi* as proof of the Islamization of Fereydani Georgians in Fereydan. First, while it is true that the Islamization of Armenian Christians is referred to in that source, no such process or event is mentioned with respect to the Georgian Christians.

Second, no more than 5,000 individuals were Islamized. This number included adult males as well as females and adolescents. In addition, the passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi* states that Fereydan was home to both Moslems and Dhimmis at the time of the conversions.⁴³ This is another indication that the Islamization referred to in Fereydan did not affect a (large) proportion of the population that was already Moslem.

Third, forced Islamization was not an official Safavid policy during the reign of Shah Abbas I. This is verified by a number of European travellers such as the Italian Pietro Della Valle⁴⁴ and the Frenchman Jean Chardin, who visited Iran during that period. Their writings categorically state that Christians were a tolerated religious minority. Chardin, who visited Iran many years after Shah Abbas I, noted that the Georgians of Persia had been given the choice to remain Christian or to convert to Islam.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, a conversion to Shi'ite Islam would have been financially beneficial to the peasants since it exempted them from having to pay back the royal loans that had been granted to enable them to build and manage their households after their relocation.⁴⁶ Although the Safavid policy towards the Christians was relatively "benevolent,"⁴⁷ there have been cases of obligatory and forced Islamization in Iran. Nevertheless, the passage in *Alam-Ara* does not refer to Islamization in Fereydan being of an obligatory or forced nature. However, it does state that the Armenian priests tried to prevent people converting to Islam by intimidation. Apparently, many of them chose not to convert. Because if all were forcefully converted there were no Christian villages left in Fereydan until this date.

According to Rahimi it is possible that some Fereydani Georgians were assimilated into the local Armenian community.⁴⁸ As Armenians have traditionally been the

dominant Christian community in Iran, Rahimi's assertion may make sense and be valid if (a) evidence is uncovered that the Georgian assimilation into the Armenian community had indeed taken place in Iran, and (b) if there is evidence of the existence of a Christian Georgian community in the past in Fereydan itself.

There is substantial evidence suggesting the existence of a Christian Georgian community in Iran in the seventeenth century which interacted closely with the Armenian community. Georgian graves can be found in Armenian cemeteries and Esfahani Armenian churches also contain primary Georgian documents.⁴⁹ The latter cases indicate that Christian Georgians relied on the Armenian clergy for Christian religious services.⁵⁰ It is also worth noting that the lack of Armenian Moslems in Iran is indicative of the intense grip that the Armenian clergy had on the local Armenian population.⁵¹ Owing to Armenian clerical dominance over Christian religious affairs in this part of Iran, an Armenian conversion would mean excommunication from the Armenian community and hence the loss of Armenian ethnicity, while a Georgian conversion was less likely to lead to the loss of Georgian ethnicity.

The most notable example of a person, who was probably an Armenianized Georgian, is Jahangir Khan, the Iranian minister of industry and armament in the late nineteenth century. Jahangir Khan died in 1891 as an Armenian,⁵² and is buried in an Armenian cemetery in Tehran.⁵³ Jahangir Khan's uncle was Manuchehr Khan Motamed-od-Dowleh, who fought the Russians as they advanced on Gilan, quelled the rebellion in Khuzestan and was appointed as the (military) ruler of Esfahan, Luristan and Khuzistan in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Although Hovian⁵⁵ mistakenly claims that Manuchehr Khan was an Islamified Armenian from an upper class family, his Georgian origin can be demonstrated by a number of facts. Manuchehr Khan is known as Manuchehr Khan Motamed-od-Dowleh Gorji. Gorji, like any other ethnic designations in Persian, refers to the ethnicity of peoples and not to their (original) place of residence. Gorji is the Persian equivalent of Kartveli and is attributed to Georgians. Armenians, on the other hand, retain the designation Armani (Armenian in Persian). For example, Yephrem Khan is known as Yeprem Khan-e Armani, Yephrem Khan-e Sardar, or Yephrem Khan Sardar-e Armani (and not as Azeri, despite his residence in Tabriz).⁵⁶ Manuchehr Khan was born in Tbilisi as Chongur (the name of a Georgian musical instrument). According to Hovian he was an Armenian with the family name of Enagolopian or Enagolobian.⁵⁷ The (corrupted) Persian version of this name is written in numerous documents as Enagalobo, Engalbo, Angalboo, etc. Contrary to Hovian's claim, this name is Georgian and can be reconstructed as Enak'olopishvili (ena=tongue ko'olopi=box).⁵⁸ This is a Georgian family name which indicates linguistic expertise.⁵⁹ Muliani,⁶⁰ Rahimi⁶¹ and Katouzian⁶² all classify Manuchehr Khan as a Georgian. This case confirms that Shi'ite Islam had become an ethnic marker of the Iranian Georgians to the extent that Christians of Georgian ancestry lost their Georgian identity and became Armenian. Apparently, some ethnic boundaries did exist⁶³ by which the ethnic groups distinguished themselves from one another. It would seem

that Jahangir Khan, as a Christian Georgian, could not fit into the Georgian realm in Iran, crossed this boundary and entered the Christian Armenian realm.⁶⁴

It is obvious that a Christian Georgian could be assimilated into an Armenian in Iran, but is there any evidence that this had occurred in the region of Fereydan itself? Information is examined below which may provide evidence of the Armenization of some Georgians in Fereydan. The Armenian village of Zarne, in Fereydan, is located near a large number of Georgian villages. Zarne can be reconstructed in Georgian as *Zar-ni*, an archaic plural of *Zar-i* (bell). This toponym may refer to church bells and hence the relative antiquity of the Christian community in that village. The association of a Christian village with church bells is not surprising in a predominantly Shi'ite Moslem area. There are also villages called Zarna in the Caucasus, one in the republic of Azerbaijan, in an area which is partly inhabited by Georgians, near the border with Georgia and Daghestan, and the other in Georgia, in areas populated partly by Armenians near the border with Turkey and not far from Armenia. It is suggestive that the Fereydani Zarne might be a namesake of those villages in the Caucasus, but it is not certain whether those villages in the Caucasus were inhabited by Georgians or by Armenians in the seventeenth century. Moreover, the name Zarne may be derived from the Persian *zar* (gold). According to the local knowledge and in view of the antiquity of Armenian bibles and artefacts found in the church of Zarne, this Armenian church is very old. Given that the Christian religious affairs in Iran have generally been in the hands of the Armenian clergy, it is plausible to assume that this village, which harbours an old church, was inhabited by Armenians from the beginning.

While no evidence has been found in Fereydan that Fereydani Georgians were ever assimilated into the Fereydani Armenian community, there are Georgian families in Fereydan which are designated as Ghelich Mosalman by the locals and which, according to the locals, are of Armenian origin.⁶⁵ Ghelich Mosalman is a word of Turkic/Persian origin and literally means "Sword Moslem." Although it may indeed refer to a forceful Islamization, given that the more likely meaning of this word is "Moslem of Sword" rather than "Islamized by sword," it is more probable that these were Armenians who Islamized in order to join the military and bear arms because this profession was open only to Moslems. This fact is in accordance with the assertion that religion served (and still serves) as a social and ethnic boundary in the Iranian social arena. Given the fact that Shi'ite Islam was the dominant religion, and a conversion to Shi'ite Islam in seventeenth-century Iran would mean social upward mobility, the assimilation of Armenians into Shi'ite ethnic groups was a more probable option than vice versa.

The lack of evidence for the assimilation of Fereydani Georgians into Fereydani Armenians does not necessarily mean that the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were not Christians. Hypothetically it is possible that they were Christians and were converted to Shi'ite Islam, while retaining their Georgian ethnicity. There are various facts that may indicate that Fereydani Georgians had a Christian past. These facts are examined below in order to establish to what extent they can serve as

evidence of the existence of a hypothetical Fereydani Christian Georgian community in the past. When Seyfollah Ioseliani established the first modern school in Fereydunshahr, the mollas of the time opposed the modern school, allegedly because the school bells resembled those of churches⁶⁶ and might evoke uneasy associations with Christianity. This fact, however, cannot serve as evidence of a Christian past. We should note that Fereydani mollas did not behave very differently from mollas in other regions. Mollas, who fulfilled the role of teachers in the old education system, had every reason to oppose the introduction of a modern education system.

Another fact that could be indicative of the early Fereydani Georgian settlers adhering to the Christian confession is that there is no authentic folkloric Fereydani Georgian music. In Iran, people's attitude towards music could frequently be explained by their religious traditions. It is no secret that within the old-fashioned conservative Shi'ite circles in Iran playing music is regarded as something low class and inferior. It is remarkable that the non-Shi'ite and less conservative Shi'ite areas in Iran do have their folkloric music, while the more conservative regions such as Yazd and Kerman do not. It seems that while Lezgin music has been fashionable in northern Iran, the music of the less conservative semi-nomadic Bakhtiari tribes was fashionable in these central-western parts of Iran. In speaking to Fereydani Georgians, it became clear that they do not hide the fact that music, and entertainment in general, is not a matter for Georgians. "A Georgian is not a *motreb* or a *dalghak*," is a much-heard statement when talking to Fereydani Georgians about music and entertainment. *Motreb* and *dalghak* are two negatively loaded, and somewhat derogatory, words for entertainer and clown, respectively. According to my Georgian Fereydani informants, "usually the Bakhtiari musicians were invited to wedding parties. In former times the music was generally played by Bakhtiaris and Armenians⁶⁷ (who played Bakhtiari music), and not by Georgians."⁶⁸ If we assume "that the recent followers of a faith were more enthusiastic followers"⁶⁹ and hence that a conversion most often leads to a more conservative attitude of the converted groups, the renouncement of Georgian music may be indicative of their conversion after their settlement in this part of Iran. Indeed, Fereydunshahr was traditionally known as the city of pious Moslems, *Dar-ol-Momenin*, owing to the firm Shi'ite faith of its inhabitants.⁷⁰ However, this conclusion, being based on such an indication, is not a reliable one. Unlike the Fereydani Georgians, the Georgians of Mazandaran (on the Caspian coast of Iran), whose ancestors were also Christians, are traditionally very famous for their skills in playing folkloric music.⁷¹ In addition, it should be noted that Fereydani Georgians do play and love Iranian classical music and they do listen to folkloric music as well. Their disdain for music is merely a disapproval of actively playing folkloric music. This disdain for playing folkloric music is more probably due to the aristocratic, or in any case high social class, origin of the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors, rather than to their conservatism following their conversion to Shi'ite Islam. The aforementioned derogatory designations for musical entertainers may be indicative of their contempt for lower class professions. The aforementioned

Fereydunshahr's nickname of Dar-ol-Momenin (therefore) does not necessarily mean that Fereydunshahri, or Fereydani Georgians in general, were conservative Shi'ite Moslems. It is more probable that Fereydunshahr acquired this nickname because it was the largest Shi'ite town in the region.

According to Rahimi, the early Georgian settlers in Fereydan had a Georgian Koran.⁷² The existence of a Georgian Koran among the early settlers could be evidence of the Moslem origin of the early Georgian settlers. It is unlikely that the aforementioned missionary Abol-Maali Natanzi from the town of Natanz on the outskirts of Dasht-e Kavir could have translated the Koran into Georgian, or could have understood it. Logically, this Koran must have been written, either before their settlement in Fereydan or very early in Iran, by Georgian Moslem clerics who were apparently conversant with the Georgian alphabet.

In addition there are two historical events which indicate that the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians adhered to the Moslem confession before the aforementioned Islamization in Fereydan (AD 1620). However, this conclusion can only be regarded as possible if Georgians lived in Fereydan during that period of time (AD 1614–1617).⁷³ In 1025 Lunar Hegira, in the 27th year of his reign (AD 1614), Shah Abbas went to Georgia to “punish” the “infidel Georgians” of the Caucasus, while he stopped in Fereydan (for indistinct reasons). However, there are no references to the “infidel Georgians” in Fereydan.⁷⁴ In 1028 Lunar Hegira (AD 1617 or 1618), in the 30th year of his reign, Shah Abbas sent large numbers of pigs as a gift to the Christians of Farah Abad (and elsewhere in Mazandaran), for use in animal husbandry and as food,⁷⁵ but he did not do the same for the Fereydani Georgians who were even closer to his capital of Esfahan.

As mentioned above, a higher social class origin of Fereydani Georgians' ancestors makes a Moslem origin more probable than a Christian one. According to Fereydani oral history, Georgians were a privileged ethnic group and there were regular contacts in the seventeenth century between Fereydani Georgians and the Safavid capital Esfahan. Fereydani Georgians travelled twice a year to Esfahan for trade reasons and were protected on the way by armed escorts. Moreover, while Esfahan supported Georgians by providing security in Fereydan, the Fereydani Georgians served as military personnel in Esfahan.⁷⁶ The Iranian military domain at that time was exclusively open to Shi'ite Moslems. Moreover, if we believe the Fereydani Georgian oral history which states that the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors lived in the Abbas Abad neighbourhood in Esfahan, strong doubts ought to be cast on their Christian origins. Abbas Abad, which was named after Shah Abbas, was and still is an affluent neighbourhood of Esfahan, located on the northern shore of the Zayandeh Rud in a traditionally aristocratic Moslem area. On the other hand, the Christian quarter of New Julfa is located on the southern shore of Zayandeh Rud. If the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were Christians, they would have been more likely to settle in the Christian part of Esfahan on the southern shore of the river. It is therefore more probable that the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were already Shi'ite Moslems in Esfahan because, according

to the Fereydani Georgian oral tradition, they were located in Abbas Abad from the beginning of their settlement in Iran.⁷⁷

It is indeed very possible that the ancestors of the Fereydani Georgians were converted to Shi'ite Islam while still in their original homeland in Georgia. According to *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 30,000 Georgians in Tianeti and the vicinity⁷⁸ were converted to Islam (in AD 1614)⁷⁹ and presumably were moved to Iran. Reading this passage of *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*⁸⁰ makes it clear that those captured included many Aznauri (nobility) and people from the upper classes. It should be pointed out that Eskandar Beyg Monshi uses the term Tianat and Erzad.⁸¹ Tianat is obviously a plural form. In his book and in Modern Persian it is common to make plural forms with “-at,” which means a place and its vicinity (e.g. Shemiran-at, Qaen-at, Estahbanat, etc.). The exact location of Erzad is still unclear. If we read the above-mentioned passage carefully⁸² we can see that this area was not very far from Gori, a town in central northern Georgia, to the south of the modern-day South Ossetia. Interestingly, the Ossetians are mentioned in this passage.⁸³ It can be speculated that Erzad refers to the town of Ertso,⁸⁴ or to the town of Ereto, on the eastern borders of contemporary South Ossetia.⁸⁵ The author might have intended to set the limit of the area by mentioning Tianeti and Ertso or Ereto. In other words, the author intended to refer to the northern Georgian location of that area. Although it is very speculative and uncertain that Eskandar Beyg Monshi might have meant Ertso or Ereto by Erzad, many Georgians lived in that area at that time (and many still do). Eskandar Beyg Monshi writes that this area was one of the dependencies of Kakheti. Indeed, Ertso-Tianeti is known as one of the dependencies of the *Kingdom of Kakheti*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Kingdom of Kakheti was confined only to the area of the contemporary region of Kakheti, in (south-) eastern Georgia. From the descriptions mentioned in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, it is clear that Eskandar Beyg Monshi is describing an area in the mountainous northern Georgia to the west of Kakheti and to the east of Rach'a.

Given their assumed skills as regards fighting in mountainous terrain, it does make sense that Fereydani Georgians' ancestors were of Tianetian (and generally northern Georgian) origin, if we consider the fact that they were settled there in order to protect the area against the advances of the Bakhtiari (Luri) tribes of the highlands. A Tianetian and in general northern Georgian origin of Fereydani Georgian's ancestors is also in accordance with Fereydani Georgian dialectical peculiarities.

The Story Told by the Fereydani Georgian Dialect

Phreidnuli (the Fereydani Georgian dialect) has many peculiarities, most of which reveal north-eastern or (central) northern dialectical features. One of the main features of this dialect is the omission of the initial *m*. Similar to many northern Georgian dialects, to which the Tianetian dialect also belongs, the Phreidnuli dialect drops the

initial *m* before a consonant; e.g. *geli* instead of *mgeli* (wolf). *Tianeti* itself is believed to be the same as *Mtianeti*, which in standard Georgian means the mountainous land.⁸⁶ The Fereydani Georgian dialect uses the suffix *-chi* (=in, inside) instead of the Standard Georgian *-shi*. This dialectical feature also reveals a northern Georgian affiliation. Other peculiarities of Fereydani Georgian are the usage of the short *a* (*ä*), instead of the standard Georgian *a*, the transformation of the combination *-va-* to *-ow-*, and the usage of expressions such as *ras ik* (how are you), and *Ghmerts ebare-bode* (good bye), which are absent in contemporary Standard Georgian, which is based on the Eastern Georgian dialects from Kakheti and Kartli.

Another fact, which may serve as evidence to back up the idea of a northern Georgian affiliation of the (proto-)Phreidnuli dialect, is the usage of the particle *-q'e* in the Phreidnuli construction of some verbal tenses. This particle was present in 12th-century Georgian literary works, but disappeared later to the extent that it is now present only in some “conservative” northern Georgian dialects.⁸⁷ Another fact which is an indication of the conservative character of Phreidnuli is that it uses *diloba* (morning) instead of *dila*. The usage of the suffix *-oba* is remarkable because *-oba* is usually used for abstract nouns (e.g. *Mshvidoba*=peace), or for verbs and nouns derived from verbs (e.g. *gatboba*=to make warm, or *nadiroba*=to hunt, hunting). If we assume that a verb *diloba*⁸⁸ once existed, this would indicate the more archaic state of Phreidnuli Georgian in comparison to the contemporary Standard Georgian of Georgia. *Diloba*, as a noun, could mean (the process of) “becoming morning” or, put differently, “becoming *dila*.” This makes sense if we take into account that the word for breakfast in Georgian is *sauzme*, while the word for lunch is *sadili*, which itself is derived from *dila*. We can therefore state that in the more archaic forms of Georgian *dila* meant a later stage and *diloba* an earlier stage of the day. The conservativeness (or better the antiquity) of Phreidnuli should be attributed to the original proto-Phreidnuli dialect because, after its relocation to Fereydan, it was exposed to the neighbouring Persian, Bakhtiari, Armenian and Turkic languages, of which the influences are still very tangible to this date. Moreover, the very fact that in the seventeenth century Persian *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi* the place is written as *Tianat* and not *Mtianat* indicates that the dialectical feature of dropping the initial *m* before a consonant was indigenous and was already present in its seventeenth-century dialectical environment.

Moreover, a key fact is that Phreidnuli uses the word *qevi* for river instead of *mdinare* (or even instead of the hypothetical Phreidnuli *dinare*, if the phonetic peculiarities are taken into account). *Qevi* sounds like *khevi*, which in standard Georgian means “canyon.” This phonetic transformation itself supports the thesis of a northern Georgian original homeland of the Phreidnelebi. In the central northern and north-eastern Georgian dialects as well the consonant *kh* is often pronounced as *q*. *Q* (as pronounced in the Fereydani and northern Georgian dialects⁸⁹) is a consonant which is absent in the neighbouring languages in Fereydan, i.e. Armenian, Standard Persian, Bakhtiari and Fereydani Turkic. Furthermore, the fact that Phreidnuli uses

a word for river, which in standard Georgian means canyon, supports the view that the original homeland of proto-Phreidnelebi (i.e. the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors) should be sought in the mountainous northern parts of Georgia, rather than in the flatter (southern) Kartli and Kakheti, where major rivers such as Kura, Alazani, and Iori flow. The above-mentioned facts mean that we have every reason to assume that the location of proto-Phreidnelebi ought to be in the area occupied by people who spoke northern Georgian dialects, which were already more conservative in the seventeenth century.

The Story Told by the Fereydani Georgian Toponyms

What (other) lessons can be learnt from geography? The toponyms of Georgian towns and villages might tell us something about the original homeland of the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors and the history of their settlement. This paper discusses the toponyms which can be reconstructed as meaningful words in Georgian, or which could be a namesake of other toponyms in Georgia. It should be noted that many Georgian towns and villages have toponyms which are not Georgian or cannot be reconstructed to form a Georgian, e.g. *Dashkasan*, and *Darband*.⁹⁰ On the other hand, there are towns and villages which are not inhabited by (self-aware) Georgians but which do have Georgian toponyms or their names can be reconstructed to form a meaningful word in Georgian. These latter toponyms are discussed only if their reconstruction to form Georgian words results in more satisfactory results than words in other local languages. Conclusions will be drawn after having discussed all these toponyms.

There are many other Georgian towns and villages in Fereydan whose toponyms could be related to a place in the Caucasus. *Akhore*, the former name of Fereydunshahr, resembles the name of the River *Akhurian* on the shores of which is located the old deserted town of Ani, on the border between modern-day Armenia and Turkey. There are, however, good Persian etymological explanations for *Akhore* as well. Many locals believe, or speculate, that it is derived from the Persian words *Akhare* (=the last point), or *A(b)khore* (=where there is drinking water). It can also be linked to *Khorre* (or *Farre*), which means divine blessing. Fereydunshahr was previously called *Mart'q'opi* by Georgians from Buin-Miandasht. *Mart'q'opi* is a town in southern Lower Kartli (Kvemo Kartli) in Georgia. On the other hand, it is unknown to the Georgians from Fereydunshahr itself. Fereydunshahr is called *Sopel-i* (=village in Georgian) by the inhabitants of Fereydunshahr and the villages around it. There are many hills and farms on the outskirts of Fereydunshahr which have Georgian names, e.g. *Chuguli* and *Nakereli*. These names are, however, locally given designations and do not necessarily refer to any hypothetical namesakes in the Caucasus.

The toponym *Sibak* is related to *apple*. *Sib* means apple in Persian, and hence *Sibak* means little apple. *Sibak* seems to be inspired by *Vashlovani*, the older name of this village, which means apple garden. *Vashlovani* is the name of a park and nature

reserve in central eastern Georgia. This toponym may be inspired by Vashlovani Park in Georgia but it may also be a name, given by the locals, that refers to the apple gardens there. According to the locals, the village of *Choghurti* (also called Choghurti by the locals) used to be called Choghur(i)-ta,⁹¹ which apparently means (or meant) the low mountain in the local Georgian dialect.⁹² The Fereydani Georgian word *ta* is equivalent to the standard Georgian word *mta*, and means mountain. In the local dialect, *choghuri* is translated as low or deep. Choghuri is probably related to the standard Georgian *chaq'ra* (= to pour, *chaq'ara*=he poured into). Indeed, if one looks at the mountain, it seems as if the houses are pouring down over it. Another good explanation is that it is named after *Chughureti*, an old neighbourhood of Tbilisi. Similarly, the village *Aghche* could be named after an old castle in Georgia,⁹³ somewhere along the way from Tbilisi to Mazandaran.⁹⁴ Indeed, there is still a village in the Kartli region of Georgia which is/was called *Aghchak'ala* or *Aghchas Tsikhe*.⁹⁵

Some Georgian villages with Georgian toponyms, such as Jagh Jagh (also pronounced as Jegh Jegh), seem to have names which are not namesakes of any other places in Georgia and are given by the locals. There are many etymological explanations for this particular toponym. It may be derived from the Georgian *Jogi* (=herd in Georgian), or *Jikhvi* (=mountain goat in Georgian), an animal that could be found in this area. Another possible explanation is that it is related to *Jojokh-et-i* (=hell or purgatory in Georgian). One plausible good explanation is that it comes from *Jaq'-Jaq'-i*, which in colloquial Georgian of Georgia means shaky and trembling. Although there is no evidence that this village has ever been hit by an earthquake, earthquakes are quite common in these mountainous areas of Iran. Another possible explanation, which excels among many others, is that it means very fruitless, abortive or idle. The consonant combination *jgh-* is found in some Georgian words, e.g. *Jghabna* (=scribble, and very bad writing and unreadable) and *Jghani* (=old and damaged shoes).⁹⁶ The duplex character of the word strengthens the poor quality. This explanation makes sense if we consider the fact that this village is located in a mountainous place, which is not very suitable for large-scale agriculture.

An area in the north-western part of Fereydan is called *Karchembo*. The Georgian village Shahyurdi and some Armenian- and Turkic-speaking villages are located in this area. The aforementioned village of Zarne is also located on the outskirts of this area. This toponym includes the root *Kar(t)*, which is a designation of Georgian ethnicity.⁹⁷ This toponym can best be explained as a corruption, or better an aggregation, of *Kart-Chem-o*, or *Kart-Chem-oba*, which means, respectively, my Georgian (in the vocative case) and my Georgianness. As in the Fereydani Georgian self-designation of Chem-Dzowli, Chem- is used as a primordial labelling and refers to one's own group. Therefore this word can be translated as "our (type) of Georgians," which might refer to the local Georgians. Many villages in this area have toponyms that can best be explained in Georgian alone. The village of *Baltaq* (also pronounced as Baltakh) could be a derivation from *Bal-ta Khe* (=cherry tree in Georgian); *Bal-ta* is the plural genitive case of *Bal-i* (=cherry in Georgian) and *khe* (=tree in Georgian).

It can be also derived from *Bal-tq'e* (=cherry forest in Georgian); from *Bal-i* (=cherry in Georgian) and *Tq'e* (=forest in Georgian). It may also have been *Bal-ta Q'evi* (=the canyon of cherries in Georgian) and may have been named after a corresponding village in Georgia, namely *Balebis Khevi*—a village located en route between Tbilisi and Tianeti. *Bal-ta* is the archaic form of *Bal-eb-is*, and *Khev-i* in Standard Georgian is virtually the same word as *Q'ev-i* in Fereydani Georgian. Indeed, realizing that the Georgian version of this name is Baltaqi, the latter explanation seems to be the most convincing one. Aznavole (also pronounced as Aznavule and Aznaule) most likely refers to Aznauri (the Georgian noble class), or to Aznavor (the Armenian noble class). Nevertheless, its similarity to the Georgian word Aznaveli (related to or originating from the nobility)⁹⁸ is yet another reason to accept that this village has Georgian origins. In addition, this toponym shows similarities with a town in Georgia called Znauri. Znauri is located in Samachablo (present-day South Ossetia in northern Georgia), near Gori. As stated above, according to the *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*⁹⁹ there were many Azanauri (nobility) and upper class people among those northern Georgians who could be regarded as the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians. Another toponym in Fereydan, associated with northern parts of Georgia is Racha.¹⁰⁰ Racha is (now) a non-Georgian-speaking village to the west of the Georgian-speaking area in Fereydan. Similarly, Racha (Rach'a in Standard Georgian pronunciation) is the name of a region in northern Georgia, to the west of the region that this paper argues is the Fereydani Georgians' ancestral homeland.

Another toponym, which can be explained in Georgian, is *Beltije*. Beltije could be derived from *Balet-chi* (=in the land of cherries in Georgian). Bal-eti means the land of cherries, and -chi (shi in standard Georgian=in or inside in Georgian). Although less convincing, Beltije could also be a corruption of *Bel-t'uchi* (=young bear's lip, or a young bear-like lip), from *Bel-i* (=young bear in Georgian) and *T'uchi* (=lip in Georgian). Indeed, there are numerous bears in Karchembo. In Bakhtiari the vowel *u* is often pronounced as *i*. As this village is close to Bakhtiari areas, a Bakhtiari impact on the transformation of Beltuchi to Beltije is, therefore, very probable. Indeed, the latter explanation referred to above provides a strange meaning, but strange toponyms in this region are not rare. Though not located in Karchembo, Enaluje is also a toponym, for which a meaningful explanation is available only in Georgian. *Enaluje* is most probably a corruption of *Ena Lurji* (the blue tongue in Georgian), from *Ena* (=tongue in Georgian) and *Lurji* (=blue in Georgian). It is not certain whether it refers to a cattle disease, a physical geographical feature or to something else. It is possible that these toponyms refer to the (nick)names of certain tribes, clans or genealogical lineages. The fact remains, however, that it is very difficult and almost impossible to provide etymological explanations of these toponyms in other languages.

Towreli is an older name for Miandasht, which is one of the two constituent parts of the Georgian town of Buin-Miandasht. Two toponyms exist in Georgia which could provide a very plausible explanation for Towreli. There is an area called *Tori* in

Meskhethi or rather the contemporary region of Samtskhe in south-western Georgia near the border with Turkey. Tor(i)jeli would then mean someone from Tori. There is also a town which was called *Tora* somewhere to the north of Tbilisi, near Tianeti and the aforementioned Balebis Khevi. Tor(a)jeli would then mean someone from Tora. These etymological explanations make sense if we assume that the final Georgian *a* tends to be pronounced as the long (Persian) final *e*, and also that the *w* in Towreli is an unstable one. A (not very popular) local explanation is that Towreli is related to the Phreidnuli word *towre* and the Standard Georgian word *mtvare*, both of which mean moon. This part of Iran is part of the historic Media. Media is called Mad in Persian, for which the word Mah is often used as well, which means moon in Persian. It is therefore possible, but not very probable, that Towre in these toponyms is a mistranslation of Media. This association with media and its mistranslation is not very probable because there is no evidence of the existence of an older Persian toponym containing mah for this town.

Towreli can also be reconstructed as *Mtavari* in Standard Georgian. *Mtavari* means “main,” i.e. “the most important of the many.” This is indeed very possible and is supported by the (non-Fereydunshahri) oral tradition which states that the first Georgian settlements were established in this area. *Mtavari* also meant prince in old Georgia. This indication of a possible aristocratic origin of Towreli can be supported and enhanced by its proximity to the aforementioned villages of Aznavele and Shahyurdi (from the Turkic Shah-Yurdu=royal camp), and its relative proximity to the Imamzadeh shrine near Fereydunshahr called Taj-Ali (=Crown Ali or the Royal Ali).¹⁰¹ Shahyurdi was and still is called Shaurdi by local Georgians. Shaurdi may also be a corruption of Sha(h)-ur-eti (which roughly means royal land, the land of those who relate to the shah). These facts are also in accordance with (and support) the idea of Fereydani Georgians having aristocratic origins. Nevertheless, some caution is called for. The association of *Mtavari* with “princely” or “royal” may be problematic because, as mentioned above, *Mtavari* also means “main,” and hence a “central place,” and this may be its actual meaning. Buin, the other constituting part of Buin-Miandasht, means a main or central place in Persian. If we assume that Buin’s original name was *Towri* (the Fereydani Georgian version of *Mtavari*), then it is logical that the adjacent town is called Towreli. Towreli means (those) from Towri. It makes sense to assume that Towri (Buin) has been the centre of lower Fereydan, and the population of Towreli (Miandasht) has migrated to Minadasht from Buin. On the other hand, Buin (=centre in Persian) could itself be a mistranslation of *Mtavari* (princedom). The two explanations do not exclude each other, because the upper class towns in imperial Iran have usually been the regional centres too. As mentioned above, according to oral tradition Fereydani Georgians’ ancestors were located in Abbas Abad, an affluent aristocratic neighbourhood of Esfahan. The assumptions that the toponyms Towreli and Buin are related to *Mtavari* as centre and hence were the (administrative) centres of this part of Fereydan, and that they are related to *Mtavari* as princedom, support the theory that the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians belonged to the upper

social classes. The analysis of toponyms reveals interesting facts. Two conclusions are relevant for the scope of this study. Although the analysis is generally unclear about the ancestral homeland, it tends to support the hypothesis that it should be sought somewhere in northern Georgia to the north of Tbilisi and Gori and to the east of Rach'a. Indeed, the toponyms that are named after a place in the Caucasus in general, and Georgia in particular, are not geographically very close to each other. It is therefore not logical to attribute the Fereydani Georgians' origins to such a large area that covers all those places. Yet the analysis of (nearly) homonymous toponyms in Fereydan and Georgia is very illuminative (as well as suggestive), because many toponyms are identical or similar to toponyms in the northern part of Georgia, the place which this paper argues is the Fereydani Georgians' ancestral homeland. Two toponyms are very suggestive in this regard. As stated above, Fereydunshahr was previously called *Mart'q'opi* by Georgians from Buin and Miandasht. Remarkably Fereydunshahr is located to the southeast of Buin and Miandasht (the hypothetical centre of the Georgian Fereydan in the seventeenth century), and *Mart'q'opi* in Georgia is located to the south-east of the northern Georgian areas, which in this paper is discussed to be the original homeland of Fereydani Georgians' ancestors. In addition, the existence of a village called Racha in Fereydan, to the west of the Georgian-speaking area, possibly means that Fereydani Georgians were conscious of the northern location of the ancestral homeland of past generations.

Another conclusion which could be drawn from the toponyms is that the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors belonged to the noble upper classes. This conclusion is in accordance with the Fereydani Georgian oral tradition that states that the Fereydani Georgians originally settled in the aristocratic Esfahani neighbourhood of Abbas Abad. This makes a Shi'ite Moslem origin prior to their settlement very plausible. These conclusions are consistent with the theory of Fereydani Georgians' ancestors being from the upper classes of northern Georgia based on the aforementioned passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*¹⁰² which deals with the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors.

The Story Told by Fereydani Georgian Family Names

Most Fereydani family names end in -ani and most are also similar to family names which are found in Georgia and which end in -shvili, e.g. Sepiashvili and Sepiani, Gugushvili and Gugunani, Khutsishvili and Khudsiani, etc. As Kakhetian and Kartlian family names traditionally end with -shvili, one could assume that the family names support the theory of Fereydani Georgians' Kakhetian and Kartlian origins. There are, however, some Fereydani Georgian family names that do not end in -ani and these can be reconstructed to form a Georgian family name ending in -dze. Examples are Tavazoi (and Tavazohi), which can be reconstructed as Tavadze,¹⁰³ and Onikazi, which can be reconstructed as Onikadze.¹⁰⁴ It is also possible that this name is a corruption of Enukidze, a common family name in Georgia. Tavadze means literally the

offspring of head (i.e. a noble or a prince). The existence of such a family name among Fereydani Georgians is indicative of the upper social class origins of their ancestors.

Although it is hypothetical that -dze and -shvili have been used interchangeably in the past as suffixes for family names, the reconstruction of many family names to those ending in -shvili is not possible. In addition to the aforementioned Onikazi, and Tavazo, Lomidani is another family name which can be reconstructed only to form a family name that ends in -dze. In Lomidani the *d* of -dze is still preserved and therefore we cannot assume that Lomidani was ever Lomishvili. Aside from the western part of Georgia, family names ending in -dze are found in the north(east)ern part of Georgia.

An interesting fact is the existence of the family name Ioseliani among Fereydani Georgian family names. This family name is found in Rach'a, a region in northern Georgia to the west of Samachablo (contemporary South Ossetia). Another interesting fact is the existence of the family name Mirmanani in Fereydan, which the elderly tend to pronounce as Mirmananti. Like Ossetian family names, this family name ends in -ti (a plural suffix in Ossetian). The existence of a Rach'uli (i.e. from Rach'a) family name among Fereydani Georgians indicates that their ancestors must have been from an area which might have included Rach'a or bordered it. The analysis of family names makes it highly improbable that the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors originated in south-eastern Georgia and supports the alternative theory that they originated in northern Georgia.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

The pieces of evidence and the conclusions drawn from facts offered in this paper show that the assertions that the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were from southern or south-eastern parts of Georgia, and that they were forcefully Islamized in Fereydan, are not based on solid facts. Those assertions can be contested by serious arguments and facts and therefore should *at least be modified if not rejected*.¹⁰⁵ Relying on more solid facts and evidence, the conclusion could be drawn that most probably the ancestors of Fereydani Georgians were likely to have been from northern parts of Georgia, that they were Shi'ite Moslems prior to their settlement in Fereydan, and that they were from the upper social classes.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, Eskandar Beyg Monshi's passage on the Islamization of Georgians of Erzad and Tianat is in accordance with a significant body of evidence "on the ground." The dialectical features, family names, toponyms, the Fereydani Georgian oral history and, not to forget, the rationale behind the Georgian settlement in Fereydan all support the often neglected passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*.

The contemporary area of Fereydan is a mainly rural region and its (assumed) aristocratic past has been lost in the depths of time. The very geographic isolation which naturally protected Fereydan, and hence enabled its inhabitants to maintain its identity,

is now more of a curse than a blessing. Many (young) Fereydani Georgians have migrated to the larger Iranian cities in order to make a living. This migration might inevitably lead to a loss of Fereydani Georgian identity.

Recent developments in communication technology are not necessarily having a negative effect on maintaining the Fereydani identity. Indeed, such developments may have a positive effect in the sense that they enable the dissemination of Fereydani Georgian identity among Fereydani Georgians all over Iran and worldwide. The independence of Georgia plays a role in this respect. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the contacts between Iran and Georgia were problematic or nearly impossible (due to the fear of communism on the part of the Iranian regimes). Contacts between Fereydani Georgians and Georgians of Georgia (and Turkey) may enhance both the Georgian identity in general and the Fereydani Georgian identity in particular. It is unlikely that Fereydani Georgians would adopt a Caucasian Georgian identity. As the Fereydani Georgians are Shi'ite Moslems, contacts between them and Georgians of Turkey (Sunni Moslems) and Georgia (predominantly Orthodox Christians) would accentuate their unique identity.

The prospects for maintaining Fereydani Georgian identity are fairly good. The region is endowed with a wide range of natural attractions which could attract echo-tourism, and by this generate a source of income for the region. Moreover, the Georgian culture of Fereydan could be attractive to tourists and could generate income.¹⁰⁷ Considering the facts on the ground, it is unlikely that the Georgian language and traditions will disappear in Fereydan in the near future. The maintenance of the Fereydani Georgian identity, itself means that the Fereydani Georgian language, and (oral) traditions, remain available as sources for and subjects of further research.

NOTES

1. This paper was presented at the ASN 2007 World Convention, 12–14 April 2007, Columbia University, New York, 14 April 2007.
2. The Fereydani Georgian region is known as one of the least criminalized regions in Iran. Rahimi sees a clear relationship between this fact and the preservation of local moral values. See Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 15.
3. An Ostan is an Iranian first-order administrative territorial unit.
4. Based on numerous Georgian and Iranian sources, Muliani estimates the number of Georgians that (were) moved to Iran during the Safavid until the Qajar periods (the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, with a peak during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), to be 240,000–297,000. See Said Muliani. *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 203–04.
5. These estimations are based on the information and official statistics offered by Mr. Mohammad Gugunani at the Fereydan's farmandari office in Daran (summer 2000). The number of Georgians (in 1998) could be estimated, at (over) 22,000 in the sub-unit (Bakhsh) of Buin-Miandasht (total population 33,257). Georgians comprise approximately 90% of Shahrestan of Fereydunshahr (total population 44,177 in 1996),

- i.e. more than 39,000. These numbers include the number of Fereydani Georgians who do not speak Georgian as their first language (any more).
6. Many locals/experts found this estimation an exaggerated one, but many others agreed with it. Although there are no official statistics, given the fact that there have been waves of emigration from Fereydan to the large cities in Iran, this estimation is not necessarily an exaggerated one.
 7. Although there has been large-scale Georgian migration since the twentieth century to Iran's largest cities, notably Esfahan and Tehran, the migrants have not abandoned their Fereydani homeland. Only a few Georgians left for Georgia in the 1970s because of mainly economic reasons. According to Mr. Mohammad Gugunani of the Governorate of Fereydan, fewer than 1,000 Fereydani Georgians left for Georgia and most of them returned immediately or some time later. Even those few who migrated to Georgia and did not return still preserve a sense of Iranianness, and maintain contacts with their community in Fereydan. According to Sepiani, the numbers have been even more modest. He estimates that only 18 families having emigrated to Georgia, of which 15 were poor peasant families. Sepiani, like Rahimi and Muliani, is a Fereydani Georgian and has reliable "insider information" at his disposal. See Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 127. This is in sharp contrast to the case of Armenians who were settled in the region in the same period and under similar conditions. In Iran, in 1856, only the region of West Azerbaijan had a larger Armenian population than the region of Esfahan. Within the region of Esfahan, Fereydan—with its 21 Armenian villages—was still one of the largest, if not *the* largest, rural Iranian Armenian centre. Hovian, *Armanian-e Iran*, 210. Although, according to the locals, many Armenians left the region after the Second World War and before the Islamic Revolution (and moved to the Iranian cities but also foreign countries, including Armenia), in 1979 Sepiani (the same source) counts 17 Armenian villages and one mixed Armenian/Turkic-speaking village in Fereydan. Although the emigration from Fereydan has been steady, some villages, notably Zarne and Khoygan, are still important for Iranian Armenians due to the presence of important Armenian churches there, and it is unlikely that they will become totally deserted.
 8. Quoted from an article, by Fereydani Georgians, about the Fereydani Georgians: "Ghowmi Gomnam ba Tarikhi Derakhshan" [An Unknown Ethnic Group with a Bright History], included as an appendix to Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*.
 9. This Persian text is also available online as "Ghowm-e Gorji" [The Georgian Group], the web log of "Gorjian-e Iran dar Tarikh" [The Georgians of Iran in the Course of History], 2005; 23-9-1384, available at <http://www.kartvelebi.blogspot.com/?PostID=120> (accessed 2 February 2007).
 10. The website of Persian Historical Documents, preserved at the K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Science, *Iranian-Georgian Relations in the 16th-19th Centuries*, <http://www.persian-doc.org.ge/relations.html> (accessed 16 March 2007).
 11. See, for example, Amir-Ahmadian, *Gorjestan dar Gozar-e Tarikh*, 86.
 12. See, for example, Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 240.
 13. Hitchins, "History of Iranian-Georgian Relations," 264-70. Also available online at <http://www.iranica.com/articles/v10f5/v10f504b.html> (accessed 16 March 2007).
 14. He refers here to Berdzenishvili et al., *Istoriya Gruzii*, 358.
 15. He refers here to Oberling "Georgians and Circassians in Iran," 128-43 and to Sharashenidze, *Akhali masalebi pereidneli kartvelebis shesakheb*.

16. The Arabic-based Persian alphabet causes some ambiguity, mainly with regard to vowels, and there were, therefore, many versions of pronunciations of the same words.
17. The website “Phereidani, P’at’ara Sakartvelo” was launched in and is operated from Georgia. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it operates as a propaganda machine in order to assimilate the Fereydani Georgians into Christian Georgians. The initiative was motivated by sheer interest in this community, and the whole website is a non-political one and is not intended to undermine the Fereydani Georgian identity. In fact, a few Fereydani Georgians from Iran actively cooperate with this website (<http://fereidani.site.ge>).
18. This claim is based on a passage in *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, written by Eskandar Beyg Monshi, the Safavid court historian in the seventeenth century. See Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1588–89, vol. 2. As it can also be read in this paper, such a claim based on this passage can be challenged. In addition, there are no signs of Christianity existing among the Fereydani Georgians today, nor has any evidence or “hard” historical indications been found that a Christian Georgian community once existed in Fereydan. A more detailed discussion is included in this paper.
19. M. M. Esfahani is referred to in Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 10. The original source is Esfahani, *Nesf-e Jahan Fi Tarif-e Esfahan*. An older published version is Esfahani, *Nesf-e Jahan Fi Tarif-e Esfahan*, edited by M. Sotudeh.
20. In the Shi’ite vocabulary, unlike that of many Western societies, Imam does not mean an Islamic cleric. In Shi’ite Islam an Imam is a saint appointed directly by God to lead the Shi’ite believers.
21. For a full description of Fereydani Georgian religious traditions and rituals see Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 144–53, 194–98.
22. Dijink has discussed the influence of peak experiences on the national orientation of different peoples both regarding their own identity and regarding the outside world. As national identity is not the only source of identity in multi-ethnic identities, it is apt to assume that historical peak experiences at an ethnic and regional level do matter in the (representation) of identity and sources of pride and pain at the corresponding levels. For a more elaborate discussion of this concept see Dijink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions*.
23. Written references to these events are rare. Rahimi therefore relied on the oral traditions of elderly individuals, especially on Gholam-Ali Ioseliani, who was more than 90 years old at the time. I was told the same when I interviewed the Fereydani Georgian elderly. Even the elderly, who were illiterate and were therefore unable to read Rahimi’s book, narrate these events (more or less) in the same fashion as they are written by Rahimi. For a more elaborate description of both events see Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 24–45.
24. *Ibid.*, 31.
25. It should be noted that the arguments and statements in this paper are only used for a description of a discrepancy in the historical convictions and facts. The scope of this paper does not cover showing that the Georgians of Georgia disrespect the Shi’ite Moslem Fereydani Georgians. In fact they do respect the Fereydani Georgians as ethnic kin.
26. See, for example, Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 51; Amir-Ahmadian, *Gorjestan dar Gozar-e Tarikh*, 86–87.
27. I interviewed (at least) 38 Georgians (both academicians and ordinary people) from Georgia (from 1998 until 2007). All of them stated that the ancestors of the Fereydani Georgians were Kakhetians. Five people referred to south-eastern Kartli and three referred to Kartli (in general). Only one person referred to Gare-Kakheti (the Outer

Kakheti) as the possible homeland, without concretizing the location of Gare-Kakheti. Of these, all believed that the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors were forcefully Islamized in Iran, 21 believed that they underwent harsh treatment and were enslaved and seven people stated that they had to re-convert to Orthodox Christianity like "true Georgians." They base their argument on the fact that many Georgians were "gholams" of the Iranian Royal Court. Gholam is often (mistakenly) translated as slave. Gholam of the Royal Court, however, is not the same as slave. Although these gholams were loyal, dependent and dependable, they had the opportunities that accompanied upward mobility and were able to progress to important political and military positions. Of course, a deportation, or even a voluntary relocation, is harsh. However, as we will read in this paper, the history of Fereydani Georgians is not characterized by harsh treatment. In fact, the opposite appears to be true.

28. Friedman, "Myth, History and Political Identity," 207.
29. See, in this regard, Pelkmans, "Religion, Nation and State in Georgia," 249–73.
30. Of course, Kakheti's and Kartli's territories might have comprised territories which are not known under these names today. Nevertheless, the (ordinary) Georgians of Georgia believe that Iranian Georgians are from the territory of the contemporary region of Kakheti, and some add the south-eastern Kartli as a possibility too. This paper offers evidence and proof that they are from other parts of Georgia and that they were already Shi'ite Moslems when they arrived in Fereydan.
31. According to Muliiani, Sheikh Bahai, the Iranian scientist who had planned and engineered Najaf Abad, had himself proposed the Georgian settlement in Najaf Abad. The reason for leaving Najaf Abad was reportedly a conflict between Georgians and other people there. See Muliiani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 230. It is remarkable that the Fereydani Georgian collective memory still reproduces this event in Najaf Abad. Sepiani (citing Fathollah Ioseliani, one of the Fereydani Georgian elders) even mentions that four locals of Najaf Abad were killed during this conflict. It is remarkable that he refers only to four people and does not want to make the event more sensational by exaggerating the number. See Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 173.
32. Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 257.
33. *Ibid.*, 246.
34. According to Vartan Gregorian the Armenian settlement in Esfahan occurred in the period 1603–1605, and the first Armenian church in Esfahan was built in 1606. See Gregorian. "Minorities of Isfahan," 39–41. According to Hovian, the Armenians settled in Esfahan in 1605 and the first Armenian church in Esfahan was built in 1607. Hovian, *Armanian-e Iran*, 141–42.
35. For more information see "Miras Najaf Abad," the website of the Association of Friends of Najaf Abad's Cultural Heritage (<http://www.mirasnjf.com/>).
36. One famous rumour tells how, for example, the babies of Chigan, which is traditionally an Armenian village, have red cheeks because their parents give them red wine to drink!
37. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 16.
38. According to many elderly individuals, they were eyewitnesses to the existence of such buildings in their lifetime. Also, many younger locals believe that they have seen rests of gorji-Push in Fereydan.
39. "Gorji-p'oshash" is mentioned as a type of Fereydani Georgian building, in a conversation between Y. N. Marr, Jr. and a Fereydani Georgian soldier in Esfahan in 1925 (reported by Basil Nikitin). Although the descriptions are poor, it refers most probably to Gorji-Push, the type of building which is discussed in this paper. See Nikitin, "Life and Work of Y. N. Marr, Jun," 284–85. Quoted in Oberling, "Georgians and Circassians in Iran," 131.

40. Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 238–39.
41. Lur often serves as an umbrella ethnonym and refers to a variety of ethnic groups, including the Bakhtiari in the western Iranian highlands.
42. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1588–89, vol. 2.
43. Dhimmi, Zimmi or Zemmi refer to the non-Moslem followers of other Abrahamic religions (i.e. Christians and Jews) and Zoroastrians. They are also called the “Ahl-e Ketab,” the followers of monotheistic religions that have their own holy books.
44. Della Valle, P. *Viaggi in Turchia, Persia et India descritti da lui medesimo in 54 lettere famigliari*. See also reference list. Pietro Della Valle lived from 1586 to 1652. His “The Travels in Persia” (two parts) were published by his sons after his death. There are Persian translations. See Della Valle, *Safarname-ye Pietro Della Valle* (Travels of Pietro Della Valle). (Older Persian versions also exist.)
45. Chardin, *Siahatname-ye Chardin, jelde 4om*, 147. The original source is *Voyages (de Monsieur le) (du) Chevalier Chardin, en Perse, et autres lieux de l’Orient* (published in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).
46. According to Pietro Della Valle there were Georgians in seventeenth-century Iran who en masse chose to convert to Islam because the shah “had given the migrants some financial assistance, which they were required to pay back. Islamization meant that the obligation to pay back was lifted”). Nevertheless, this does not mean that these Georgians were Fereydani Georgians. Pietro Della Valle’s statement is discussed in Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 48.
47. Gregorian, “Minorities of Isfahan,” 29.
48. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 10.
49. According to Rahimi, Georgian inscriptions are found in the Armenian churches of “Surp Minas,” “Surp Nerses,” “Vank” and “Julfa,” in Esfahan. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 23. I have personally seen paper documents in Vank, written in the pre-thirteenth-century old-fashioned Georgian alphabet.
50. Georgians and Armenians belong to two different “churches,” but both are traditionally Orthodox Christians.
51. To date the only living (but assimilating) community of Moslem Armenians is that of Hemshinli. Hemshinli is as an Armenian-speaking community in Turkey which is not regarded as Armenian either by the members of the community themselves or the Christian Armenians. Reportedly there were Hemshinli families among the Meskehtians in Georgia, who Stalin deported to Central Asia.
52. On his gravestone is written: “the resting place of Jahangir Khan Enagolopians Mamigonian, the minister of industry and armament. Born in 1828, died in 1891.” Hovian, *Armanian-e Iran*, 154.
53. *Ibid.*, 379–81.
54. *Ibid.*, 370.
55. *Ibid.*, Chap. 11.
56. Yephrem Khan Davidian was a revolutionary leader in the Iranian constitutional revolution (1905–1909). Although born in Ganja in the Russian-held Transcaucasia, he later moved to Tabriz in the Iranian Azerbaijan, and was buried in Tehran after a public funeral procession. See Hovian, *Armanian-e Iran*, 397–403.
57. *Ibid.*, Chap. 11.
58. It is tempting to reconstruct this family name to Ena-galobani (Ena=tongue and Galobani=related to Galoba=vocal singing). This family name, which roughly means related to vocal singing, fits the name Chongur(i), which is a musical instrument.

- However tempting this reconstruction, it is invalid and the family name should be reconstructed correctly as Enak'olopishvili.
59. However, this multilingualism is consistent with Hovian's claim that this particular family had upper class origins, but in no sense suggests its Armenian ethnicity.
 60. Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 293.
 61. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 86–87.
 62. Katouzian, "The Short-Term Society," 11.
 63. For a discussion on "ethnic boundaries" see Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.
 64. Although Armenians could assume political, diplomatic and even military positions in the late nineteenth-century Qajar era, apparently religion still defined the social boundaries of the Christian Armenian and the Moslem Georgian realms in Iran.
 65. These days Ghelich Mosalman is a rather negatively loaded designation in modern Fereydan. Some Fereydani Georgians tend to call certain groups (that they somehow dislike) Ghelich Mosalman. These include a certain Georgian family that is said to be stubborn and somewhat aggressive. On the other hand, the merchant Islamized Jews, who have migrated to the Georgian part of Fereydan from the town of Khansar, are not known as Ghelich Mosalman, despite their relatively late Islamization. Therefore, the attribution of Ghelich Mosalman to that Georgian family does not necessarily indicate its Islamized status, but rather its assumed aggressive and stubborn conduct. It should be noted also that these stereotypes and name-callings might be due to recent grudges between a few families, and their antiquity should be doubted.
 66. Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 188–9.
 67. Basil Nikitin reports a conversation between Y. N. Marr, Jr. and a Fereydani Georgian soldier in Esfahan in 1925, in which the latter informed the former that Armenian musicians played during a Fereydani Georgian wedding ceremony. See Nikitin, "Life and Work of Y.N. Marr, Jun," 284–85. Quoted in Oberling, "Georgians and Circassians in Iran," 131.
 68. Communications with the locals (2000–2006).
 69. Kahl himself held this view first but later reached a more balanced conclusion in his case study of the Islamization of Meglen Vlachs. See Kahl, "The Islamization of the Meglen Vlachs (Megleno-Romanians)," 74.
 70. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 10.
 71. "Farhang-e Gorjiha dar Behshahr barresi shod" [Georgian Culture is Studied in Behshahr], Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism website, 2003; 1-20-1382 Solar Hegira, http://iranmiras.ir/fr_site/newsf/82488.htm (accessed 16 March 2007).
 72. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 11. Rahimi most probably bases this claim on local oral traditions. Until now I have not seen that Koran with my own eyes. As stated previously, Rahimi's book is, however, reliable in the sense that there is a high degree of consensus among the elderly on most of its content.
 73. It can be seen further on in this paper that the event of presenting pigs (AD 1617 or 1618) surpasses the date of possible migration of northern Georgians to Iran (1614) and predates the passage on (hypothetical) Islamization (AD 1619 or 1620). However, the *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi's* passage which mentions "the stop in Fereydan before marching to Georgia" (AD 1614) could have preceded the settlement of Georgians in Fereydan. Presenting pigs to Mazandaran and not to Fereydan would seem to be very shallow evidence of the Fereydani Georgians adhering to the Islamic confession. After all, the fact that there are no reports does not necessarily mean that Shah Abbas I did not act in the same way as regards the Fereydani Georgians. Nevertheless, it is fair to state that it was very likely that if these Fereydani Georgians were Christians, Shah

- Abbas most likely did send pigs to them as gifts and that, owing to the proximity of this region to the capital of Esfahan, this event was more likely to be reported. It is therefore fair to state that this event *can be interpreted* as evidence that the Fereydani Georgians were (already) Moslems at that time.
74. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1433–34, vol. 2.
 75. It should be noted that Georgians were not the only Christians in Mazandaran. Armenians lived there too. Della Valle speaks of Armenians, Georgians, Jews and Moslems (in Farah Abad, Mazandaran) as separate categories, which implicitly indicates that those Georgians were not Moslems. Della Valle, *Safarname-ye Pietro Della Valle*, 170–74; Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah Abbas-e Avval. 5 Mojallad*, 1138, vol. 3; referred to in Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 227–28.
 76. Rahimi, *Gorjiha-ye Iran*, 26.
 77. It is very remarkable that even the elderly with limited knowledge of Esfahan remember Abbas Abad and that, traditionally, only the Abbas Abad neighbourhood (of such a large city as Esfahan) is mentioned as the first residential area of the Fereydani Georgians' ancestors. Those outsiders or (younger) Fereydani Georgians who state that Fereydani Georgians' ancestors might have lived in New Julfa base their argument on their assumption that they were Christians and do not base their statement on any evidences. There are also other examples of "reasoning the other way around." For example, one Fereydani Georgian informant referred to the existence of a Christian community in the past in Khong, near Fereyduhshahr, as evidence of the existence of Christians among Fereydani Georgians, but others reminded him that that village was inhabited by Armenians (communication with locals in Fereyduhshahr, 2003). In general, there is no evidence of the existence of Christian Georgians in Fereydan, and those who believe in such statements disregard the Fereydani Georgian oral tradition which is kept by the elderly from generation to generation.
 78. Eskandar Beyg Monshi uses the terms Tianat and Erzad.
 79. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1443, vol. 2. Muliani refers to this event too, but (even) he does not link it, in his book, to the Fereydani Georgians. See Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 140, 238–39.
 80. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1433–46, vol. 2.
 81. *Ibid.*, 1443.
 82. *Ibid.*, 1436–44.
 83. *Ibid.*, 1445. Eskandar Beyg Monshi speaks about a Christian people called O(w)s. Interestingly, O(w)s-i is the designation used by Georgians as an ethnonym for Ossetians!
 84. The Persian long *a* (*ā*) vowel often inclines towards *o*.
 85. Georgians contest an (exclusive) Ossetian "ownership" of this area and this area is therefore often called the Tskhinvali region or Samachablo in Georgia.
 86. There is another area in northern Georgia, of which the dialect shows similar peculiarities, and of which the toponym has the same meaning, namely Mtiuleti.
 87. Although Tuite does not make such a claim and places Fereydani Georgian in the category of central and eastern lowlands, he remarkably highlights the similarities between Fereydani and some northern dialects, especially Mokhevian, Mtiulian and Ingiloian, when he discusses the atypical usage of the particle -q'e. See Tuite. *Kartvelian Morphosyntax Number Agreement and Morphopolosyntactic Orientation in the South Caucasian Languages*, 64, <http://www.mapageweb.umontreal.ca/tuitekj/publications/TuiteThesis.pdf#search=%22%20Georgian%20babunashvili%20tuite%22> (accessed 27 August 2006).

88. The verb *dileba* is possible too. Many verbs in Georgian end with *-eba*, while at the same time can have nouns derived from it ending with *-oba* (e.g. *Sheneba*=to build, and *Shenoba*=building).
89. In Fereydani and north Georgian dialects *Q* is pronounced half way between *gh* and *kh*. This consonant (as pronounced this way) is absent in the Armenian, Bakhtiari, Persian and Turkic dialects of Fereydan. In contrast to the standard Georgian *q'*, *q* is pronounced without a glottal stop.
90. There is a city with the same name in Daghestan, Russia and is often spelled today as Derbent in a Russian fashion.
91. This name also shows a resemblance to Chokhur Saad (or Chokhur-e Sa'd), the name which was used in the seventeenth century for the territory of roughly present-day Armenia and adjacent areas in Turkey. There might be a connection between all these names.
92. Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 218.
93. Muliani, *Jaygah-e Gorjiha dar Tarikh va Farhang va Tamaddon-e Iran*, 236.
94. *Ibid.*, 151.
95. Kala is derived from the Turkic and Persian *Qale* or *Qala* (castle). Tsikhe is its Georgian equivalent.
96. This combination can also be found in the Persian word *Jeghele*, which means a small and physically weak person. *Jeghele* might be from the (hypothetical) Georgian Jghili, because Persian does not use *-ili* (and not even *-ele*) to make adjectives, while Georgian does.
97. Elguja Khintibidze discusses elaborately how the ethnonym(s) of Georgians is related to Kart. Khintibidze, *Kartvelta sakhelts' odebebi da mati et'imologia*. In this regard see also Amir-Ahmadian, *Gorjestan dar Gozar-e Tarikh*, 46. A popular Persian belief is that the ethnonym *Gorj* (i.e. Georgian) is derived from the Persian word *Gord* (strong warrior), which in turn is related (by them) to the English word guardian. Although Khintibidze does not refer to it, *Kart* is phonetically very close to *Gord*.
98. *Azna-uri* is itself an adjective, and hence its root is *Az(na)*. *Azna-v-el-i*, then, means originating from *Az(na)*. *Az-na* could be a corruption of *Az-ni*, the plural of *Az* (nobility). The same root is preserved in the Persian word *Az-ad*=free.
99. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1433–46, vol. 2.
100. *Racha* is spelled as *Racheh* in Standard Persian. Words in Standard Persian cannot end in a short *a*. The Bakhtiari and Georgian locals, however, (used to) pronounce it as *Racha*.
101. Shahyurdi was officially renamed Ghaem Abad following the abolition of the monarchy in Iran, after Hazrat-e Ghaem, a religious name of Imam Zaman, the Shi'ite Lord of the Times. Similarly, the Imamzadeh Kaj-Ali on the outskirts of Fereyduhshahr used to be called Imamzadeh Taj-Ali (Crown-Ali). See Sepiani, *Iranian-e Gorji*, 197.
102. Eskandar Beyg Monshi, *Tarikh-e Alam-Ara-ye Abbasi*, 1443, vol. 2.
103. Some other family names, although ending with *-ani*, resemble family names in Georgia, which end in *-dze*, e.g. Lomidani (Lomidze), and Moliiani and Muliani (Molidze).
104. Oddly, I know an Iranian Georgian who has lived in Georgia for a long time and whose family name has been changed to Onikashvili, a family name that ends with *-shvili* and therefore sounds Kakhetian.
105. Although it is very intriguing to state that those assertions should be totally rejected, it would be very arrogant to say so. On the contrary, the author of this paper invites all researchers to research this issue better. Indeed, the final word has not yet been spoken.
106. Although hypothetical to a certain degree, the aforementioned conclusions are more in accordance with facts and evidence, and they can therefore be regarded as very fair conclusions.
107. In the report entitled *Gorjiha-ye Esfahan Jazabei Nashenakhte* [The Georgians of Esfahan, an Unknown Source of Attraction], Iranian Cultural Heritage News Agency,

2005; 19-9-1384 Solar Hegira. This report states that, besides the natural attraction of the region, Georgian culture and traditions are attractive aspects of the Georgian Fereydan. The report is available at <http://www.chn.ir/news/?section=1&id=12613> (accessed 16 March 2007).

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