

“ ALAVERDI SHENTAN :”
A UNIQUE BLESSING FORMULA

ABSTRACT

In the course of their centuries-old history, Georgians created a unique culture of festive and sombre supra. In Georgia, the country that embraces the Christian tradition, the process of feast has become an opportunity for political discussions, poetry or verse improvisation events.

The Georgian supra is led by a chairman of a feast, a toastmaster (Tamada) who introduces a certain toast. The latter is a discussion around a particular issue.

After the toastmaster finishes the toast, he then **offers Alaverdi** or asks a particular chosen guest attending the supra to continue giving a toast of his own for everyone to hear on the theme proposed by the toastmaster.

Proposing Alaverdi has been one of the active traditions of the Georgian official feast. A toastmaster’s “**Alaverdi** ”could be considered as a friendly invitation to a guest (/ a member of supra) to propose a toast in a graceful manner. The Alaverdi challenge may sometimes grow into a wine-drinking contest.

A toastmaster’s request for a toast and the relevant response on the part of the guest have come down to us in the form of two sentences reflected in a well-established formula:

-Alaverdi to you! - May the grace of Alaverdi (church) be with you!

There are different scholarly opinions as well as popular etymological interpretations concerning “Alaverdi.”

Considering the Christian origin of the Georgian supra, “offering Alaverdi ,”first of all, is a request for pronouncing a toast in a distinct way rather than just drinking. Therefore, we believe, “Alaverdi to you ”is a shorter version of an ecclesiastical blessing.

The phrase “Alaverdi to you ”is derived from a Christian prayer (blessing) wide-spread in Kakheti:

-May the grace of (the church of) St. George of Alaverdi be with you!

The combination of words “Alaverdi to you ”that manifested as a ritual formula has spread throughout Georgia from Kakheti, the region famous for its wines.

Keywords: Georgian supra tradition, Alaverdi tradition, blessing formula, vocabulary.