

FEMALE NAMES NANA AND NINO AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE
GEORGIANS' BELIEFS

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Abstract

The popularity of female names Nana and Nino, common among the Georgians, should be closely connected with the Georgians' religion. Nana, with mythical great mother and Nino, with the real teacher of faith and enlightener of the Georgians, who converted the Kingdom of Kartli. The study of how these names got into Georgian environment led us to some hypothesis. If basing on the existing rich scientific literature we may assume that there existed certain ethnic, linguistic and cultural relations between Sumer and Georgia, which were also reflected in similar beliefs. Thus, the name of the goddess Nana may have been derived from the Sumerian *Inanna* /*Nin-ana* and introduced in Georgia. This could particularly be supported by the fact that *Inanna* was not only the most popular goddess throughout the Sumerian existence in Sumer, but rather, because of its universal popularity, the name was generally used to denote a goddess. If our reasoning is correct, it is not surprising that the greatest pre-Christian Georgian goddess Nana was named after *Inanna*.

However, the great mother Nana and *Inanna* / *Ishtar* are somewhat different in nature. Mother Nana is great mother, the goddess of childbearing; connected with universal fertility, earth, paradise, life-and-death, the goddess of astral cults, who originated during the period of high development of solar religious beliefs. Unlike Nana *Inanna* / *Ishtar* is the goddess related with carnal love, war, heaven, Venus the star, and in some cases has androgynous nature. She is believed to have nothing to do with childbearing, and is the mate of Dumuzi – mortal and retrievable male deity. Since *Inanna* / *Ishtar* is not the "wife of the deity", she does not reveal any connection with childbearing, with one exception, her corresponding deity in Georgian mythical-religious beliefs is Dali. Like *Inanna*, Dali is the goddess of carnal love, nature, especially hunting in our case and at the same time the patron of hunters. Actually, she also has one son, Amiran. Lastly, Dali, too, is associated with Venus the star and is depicted as ibex (deer), plant and star in early landscape painting.

Keywords: History of religion, goddesses, Sumer, Georgia.

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აბსტრაქტი

საქართველოში გავრცელებული ქალის სახელების ნანას და ნინოს პოპულარობა მჭიდროდ უნდა უკავშირდებოდეს ქართველთა სარწმუნოებას. ნანა, მითიურ დიდ დედას, ხოლო ნინო კი რეალურ, რჯულის მასწავლებელ და ქართლის სამეფოს გამაქრისტიანებელ ქართველთა განმანათლებლს. კვლევამ, თუ როგორ მოხვდნენ ქართულ გარემოში ეს სახელები გარკვეულ ჰიპოტეზამდე მიგვიყვანა. თუ არსებულ მდიდარ სამეცნიერო ლიტერატურაზე დაყრდნობით ვივარაუდებთ, რომ შუმერსა და საქართველოს შორის გარკვეული ეთნიკური, ენობრივ – კულტურული ურთიერთობები არსებობდა, რაც მსგავს რწმენა – წარმოდგენებშიც აისახა, შესაძლოა ქალღვთაების სახელი *ნანა* ჩვენში შუმერული *ინანა ნინ-ანა*-დან გავრცელებულიყო. ამისთვის განსაკუთრებით ხელი უნდა შეეწყოს იმ ფაქტს, რომ *ინანა* არა მარტო შუმერის არსებობის მანძილზე იყო ყველაზე პოპულარული ქალღმერთი, არამედ, საყოველთაო პოპულარობის გამო მისი სახელი ზოგადად ქალღმერთის აღმნიშვნელად იხმარებოდა. თუ ჩვენი მსჯელობა სწორეა, არ უნდა იყოს გასაკვირი, რომ ქართველთა ყველაზე დიდ წინაქრისტიანულ ქალღვთაებას *ინანასაგან* გამომდინარე დარქმეოდა სახელი *ნანა*.

თუმცა, *დიდი დედა ნანა* და *ინანა/იშთარი* თავიანთი ბუნებით გარკვეულწილად სხვაობენ. *დედა ნანა* დიდი დედაა, შვილიერების, საყოველთაო ნაყოფიერების, მიწასთან, სამოთხესთან, სიკვდილ–სიცოცხლესთან დაკავშირებული, ასტრალური კულტების, კერძოდ მზის მაღლგანვითარების პერიოდში წარმოშობილი ქალღმერთია. მისგან განსხვავებით *ინანა/იშთარი*, ხორციელი სიყვარულის, ომის, ზეცის, ვარსკვლავ ვენერასთან დაკავშირებული ქალღვთაებაა და ზოგიერთ შემთხვევაში ანდროგინული ბუნებისაცაა. ითვლება, რომ ის შვილიერებასთან არ ავლენს კავშირს და მომაკვდავ და აღდგენად, მამრ ღვთაება დუმუზთანაა წყვილში. ვინაიდან *ინანა/იშთარი* არაა „ღვთაების მეუღლე“, არ ავლენს შვილიერებასთან კავშირს ერთი გამონაკლისის გარდა, მისი შესატყვისი ღვთაება ქართულ მითო–რელიგიურ წარმოდგენებში არის დალი; *ინანას* მსგავსად ხორციელი სიყვარულის, ბუნების, ჩვენს შემთხვევაში განსაკუთრებით ნადირობის ქალღმერთი და იმავდროულად ნადირთ პატრონი. ფაქტობრივად, მასაც ერთადერთი ვაჟი, *ამირანი* ჰყავს. და ბოლოს, დალიც ვარსკვლავ ვენერას უკავშირდება და ადრესამიწათმოქმედო მხატვრობაში ჯიხვით (ირმით), მცენარით, ვარსკვლავით გამოიხატება.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: რელიგიის ისტორია, ქალღმერთები, შუმერი, საქართველო.

In Georgia widely-spread female names Nana and Nino, are closely connected with the Georgians' religion. As Vera Bardavelidze studied, in pre-Christian Georgia, Nana was great mother, reviver of nature, the greatest deity of solar origin who granted childbearing, health; greatest deity and great mother for the Georgians. The traces of her worship have survived to this day, especially in the rituals for infectious diseases, in the song lyrics associated with them, in mythological narratives or fairy tales (Bardavelidze, 2007: 78, 86). Still very popular holiday Atengenoba must have been related to Mother Nana (Gambashidze, Alaverdashvili, 2018: 232-233, 230-231). Her worship was so popular that the Georgians gave and still give the name of great mother to their children. The first Georgian Christian queen, the first baptized queen of Kartli, was also called Nana. Name Nino in our opinion, is introduced via the enlightener of the Georgians, St. Nino, "Mother of Kartli" and became a popular and favorite name. Thus, in Georgia both names are associated with the religious history of the Georgians, one of whom is a mythical great mother, and the other – a real person, teacher of faith and the woman who converted the Kingdom of Kartli to Christianity.

Nana is woman's name in Japan, Korea, Georgia, Greece (and not only), man's name in Ethiopia and India, both sexes are named Nana in Ghana and Indonesia. In Ghana, as a sign of respect, the king or queen can be addressed as Nana even without mentioning their names. In English language *nana* means grandmother (Kobina Antobam, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nana#h1>, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nana>).

The name Nana is also encountered in the Bible: "For when the leader was come into Persia, and the army with him that seemed invincible, they were slain in the temple of Nanea by the deceit of Nanea's priests..." (2Maccabees, 1-13). "And when the priests of Nanea had set forth, and he was entered with a small company into the compass of the temple, they shut the temple as soon as Antiochus was come in..." (2 Maccabees, 1-15). (Old Testament, II, 2017-1792)

According to the Bible comments, Nanea means "Nanaia" in Greek Nanaia"/!/Ananaia", *Nani* in Syrian and *Nanae* in Latin. Strabo refers to this deity of the Persians as *Numen patrium*. She was the moon goddess who corresponded to Artemis and Aphrodite. Some linked it to the planet Venus. This Persian goddess was worshiped in many countries of Asia Minor (Armenia, Medes, etc.) (Explanatory Bible, 1987: 127; Sir William Smith, Rev. J. M. Fuller, 2004:462).

The name *Nino* / *Nina* is also common in the Mediterranean world and Latin America, related to it. It is well known, that in most cases *Nino* is man's name, and its female form is *Nina*. According to Merab Chukhua's research, *-nen*, *nen-al* meant language, as well as *-nin*, *-nina* / *I*, *-nin*. In Kartvelian languages, *nena-i* / *nene-i*, *nene-i*, *nana*, *nan* mean mother, grandmother, great mother, grandma (Chukhua, 2000-2003: 143, 164-165).

Where could the names Nana and Nino come from? As mentioned above, Nino could have been introduced with Christianity. In any case, it should have gained popularity in honor of the Georgian enlightener and as a sign of her worship. The research, which included the study of issues related to the deity Nana, also led us to some issues of the Georgians' ethno genesis. We will explain the reason below.

One of the oldest ethnic groups in Asia Minor must have been widespread in Mesopotamia, where other unknown tribes could also reside; their language is conventionally called "banana" language, also Proto Tigris or Proto-Euphratean. The vocabulary of this language was characterized in three-syllable words, with the repetition of second and third syllables. Such as in the names of the deities: *Inanna*, *Kubaba*, *Zababa*, *Vunene*, *Bilulu*. It is suggested that some cultural terms: *urudu* (copper), *zimbar* / *zabar* (copper discharge from which we get bronze), *tibira* (tinsmith), *simug*

(blacksmith) and others should have been introduced in Sumerian from the same language (Giorgadze, 2002: 12-13).

It is also supposed that in the III-II millennia, B.C. Kartvelian tribes had relations with Sumerians, Semites, Hittites, Hattians, Hurrians ... This assumption bases on the vocabulary borrowed by the Kartvelian ethnos or the existence of similar structural features (Giorgadze, 2002: 10). It is well known, that the Kartvelian tribes inhabited the area allowed to have direct or indirect cultural or ethnic relations with the countries of Old East. According to scientists archeological material confirms that these relations must have originated from the formation time of the Kartvelian language family.

The first Georgian Assyriologist Mikhako Tsereteli expressed the view that the Sumerians should have come to Mesopotamia from the north. According to Tsereteli, in the south of the ancient Caucasus there was a large group of genetically related peoples, which, in turn, was divided into different relatively small groups. One of these ethnic groups was the Sumerians, who moved south and settled in southern Mesopotamia, where they formed their own culture. Later, Mikhako Tsereteli rejected his own viewpoint that the Sumerians were the ancestors of the Georgians (Giorgadze, 2002: 15). However, in this context, we are reminded of Mircea Eliade, according to whom, a certain group of Sumerian-speaking people did not belong to the Semitic-speaking ethnic group, and in general, they spoke the language from the group of unknown languages. They came from the north and settled in southern Mesopotamia. Unlike the Akkadians, who also came to Mesopotamia from the north (Eliade, <http://abhidharma.ru/A/Simvol/IV/IctorVer1.pdf>).

According to Grigol Giorgadze, the Caucasus is a contact point between the Georgians and Sumerians, from where in olden time the Sumerians were to migrate to southern Mesopotamia, or South Caucasus, where the Georgians' residence is confirmed. As he also says, southern Mesopotamia is completely excluded because the settlement of Kartvelian tribes here is not confirmed for a number of reasons. This may justify M. Tsereteli's assumption about the Sumerian migration from the Caucasus to southern Mesopotamia - Grigol Giorgadze concludes (Giorgadze, 2002: 168-169).

It is true that genetic links between Sumerian and Kartvelian languages have not been established yet, but, scholars note that Sumerian is somewhat close to the vocabulary of the Kartvelian languages (Giorgadze, 2002: 168). Rismag Gordeziani notes that in addition to four hundred lexical parallels, the peculiarities of the phonetic changes characteristic of Sumerian are typical of Kartvelian and Aegean languages. In Kartvelian languages plural can be formed via reduplication, like Sumerian. Also, innumerable indication of number, by which Sumerian differs from its successor Akkadian, and Georgian – from its non-Georgian-speaking neighbors, etc. (Gordeziani, 2007: 51, 54-55, 74-75, 152).

Jemal Sharashenidze believes that Georgian language has preserved not only cultural terms of Sumerian, which are relatively easy to translate into each other but also a certain number of shared lexemes, reflecting the activities characteristic of domestic life. This proves the existence of either genetic connections or quite close, long contacts between the Sumerian and Kartvelian worlds. The author explains the existence of common lexical units in the Sumerian and Kartvelian languages by two circumstances: in case of the kinship of these languages, they must have taken common linguistic facts from the common preceding language; after its disintegration, para-Kartvelian and Sumerian inherited a certain number of lexemes with approximately the same sound and similar content from the root language. On the other hand, the author supposes the existence of a limited level of contact between Sumerian and early Kartvelian languages, which may have been carried out by means of some intermediate language or languages. Or the Georgian-speaking world had direct relations and contacts with the Sumerian world. The author does not exclude the possibility of both intermediate

and direct contacts. He considers Akkadian to be such an intermediate language, and considers the turn of the 4th-3rd millennia B.C. as the time for having direct contacts.

The Sumerians are known to have never moved north beyond the 33rd parallel. If this is the case, then common Kartvelian ethnic unity could make contacts only in the northern Mesopotamia, more precisely, when residing in the border zone of the 33-35 parallels. It is possible that a part of this ethnos (Para-Kartvelian) went to north Mesopotamia, and ended up in the zone of Sumerian linguistic influence. And later, after the Khurite invasion of this area, again moved north to the Caucasus (Sharashenidze, 1997: 14-17).

The comparison of Sumerian basic lexical fund and phonetic and semantic similarities of a few Sumerian lexemes with main lexical fund of different languages revealed the largest number of common lexical units between Sumerian and Kartvelian languages (Zan and Svan).

For example, units of Sumerian measure system should have been introduced in the Georgian-speaking environment, and possibly at the turn of the 4th-3rd millennia BC (Sharashenidze, 2009: 10).

Jemal Sharashenidze shares the opinion that common words appear in two languages when the peoples speaking these languages either have been in cultural-economic relations with each other for a long time because of their direct neighborhood; or when these languages are kindred. The author does not rule out the possibility that Sumerian-Kartvelian linguistic encounters manifest genetic connection of the para-Kartvelian language with Sumerian. In particular, common words of both languages must have been taken from the parent language, which disintegrated no later than 5th millennium B.C. (Sharashenidze, 1996: 34-40).

If our reasoning is correct, it may be assumed that female name Nana came to us as a result of Sumerian-Georgian relations (e.g., ethnic, linguistic). To some extent, this view leads to *Nanna* / *Inanna* / *Ishtar* / *Nanaia*. The name Nino, which was introduced through Christianity, may belong to the same Sumerian cultural environment.

Planetary Sumerian gods was comprised of a triad: *Nana-sin* (the moon), *Utu* (the sun), and *Inanna*, the goddess of Venus star. In Akkadian it corresponds to *Ishtar* and later to *Astarta*. The cult of *Inanna* was especially strong during the Babylonian period. She was the most popular goddess in the Middle East (Eliade, 2002: §19.) and all-time Mesopotamia (Black, Green, 2003, 2004: 108).

According to Sumerian cosmology, the universe consisted of *an-ki* or heaven and earth. Between them there was *Lil* - the air from which celestial bodies were created. *Namu* was the first goddess, mother, sea, who created the cosmic mountain, the heaven. *An* – anthropomorphic male deity and *Ki* Earth – anthropomorphic female deity. *An* and *Ki* gave birth to *Enlil*, God of air. Goddess of air *Ninli* and *Enlil* gave birth to *Nanna*, God of the Moon. With *Ningal* he gave birth to *Utu* (*Shamash*) (Black, Green, 2003, 2004:108) and *Inanna*. She was sometimes considered *Enki*'s child. She had many local manifestations (*Zabala's Inanna* in Babylon, *Kishi's Inanna*, Assyrian *Arbail's Inanna*, etc.). *Inanna* was closely associated with goddess *Nanaia*, who was worshiped with her in Uruk and Kish. In Uruk, Inanna planted a sacred tree, *Halub*, from which her chair and bed were made later (Black, Green, 2003, 2004: 108-109).

Inanna was associated with planet Venus and was sometimes perceived as the deity that encompassed entire heavens.¹ In this context, it was also referred to as *Insianna* (Black, Green, 2003, 2004: 109). In Mesopotamian mythological narrative she says: Father gave me heaven as a crown and the earth as sandals. The New Year consisting of 12 days and nights came on the first full moon

¹ Its symbol also was the morning and evening star.

following the vernal equinox (Leick, 2003: 88).² For the Mesopotamians (perhaps, as for other pre-Christian peoples' beliefs) sexuality and birth were in connection with the divine. Consequently, *Inanna's* worship was based on physical love and carnal relationships. Even though, she was not the deity of marriage and child bearing. According to Mesopotamian beliefs, the ritual participants acquired *Inanna's* vital energy, power, her ability to give life through divine prostitution. The culmination of this major holiday – New Year was hierogamy between supreme Priestess and King in ziggurat. The supreme Priestess was considered to be the earthly incarnation of *Inanna*. The festivities dedicated to *Inanna / Ishtar* were sharply of carnival nature, saturated with eroticism and love lyrics, where strict prohibitions and rules gave way to "lawlessness". *Inanna* is a deity with dual and androgynous nature (Loveridge; Haris, 1991:261, 263, 268, 274-276, Leick, 2003: 87) as well. As Rivkah Harris says *Inanna* comprises the opposing sides, fundamental and paradoxical, structure and anti-structure, order and disorder. She is a player. She is neither here nor there. She is the goddess of bipolar nature. Gebhart Selz explains her bipolarity with a natural phenomenon, the fact that Venus appears twice on her path (Gebhart J. Selz, 2000: 37). Mesopotamian mythology made the goddess *Inanna* say: It is true that I am a woman, but I am also a noble young man. *Inanna* is the queen of Heaven, the goddess of Earth and Sky (Loveridge; Haris: 269). Gebhart J. Selz notes that *Inanna* is a goddess-like Venus, conceived in prehistoric times, whose main "earthly" duty was to fertilize the earth. As Selz writes, this function of *Inanna* is indicated by her connection with Uruk economy and her role in the ritual of divine marriage. Chief Akkadian deity, the "Amazon Ishtar" as Zurab Kiknadze refers to her (Kiknadze, 1997: 26.), merged with the early Sumerian goddess *Inanna*. According to Selz the apparent difference between them soon disappeared. Similar to *Inanna* Semitic deity *In (n) in (a)* (Leick, 2003: 86),³ supposedly was the deity of war. The phonetic similarity of functions and names led to the confusion of *In (n) in (a) Inanna / Ishtar*. Also according to him, *Anati* mentioned in the Bible is connected with Western Semitic deity *Anunitum (An(n)ūnītum)* (god of war), which, in its turn, is related to *Inanna* and *In (n) in (a)*. According to Gebhart Selz, *Inanna* already had the aspect of Venus or the function of the goddess of Eros, love, fertility, in the early prehistoric period. The scientist explains this viewpoint via using iconography.

There is an opinion (I. Gelbt) that the *Inn-in⁴* and *Inanna* are Semitic and different deities; that (Jacobs and Roberts) *I-nin* is a doubled form of the root *anānum* (literally throwing here and there, quarreling). Lambert also offers the idea that *In-nin-na*, at least in Akkadian context, is the same deity as *I-nin*. Another variant of this name is *A-nu-na*. Essential similarity of these deities to *Ishtar* led to the merge of these two, ancient Akkadian deities.⁵ It is thought that *Inanna* is derived from *Nina-ana*, which means "lady of heaven". In Sumer she was also referred to as *Inin* (Black,

² In her dictionary Gwendolyn Leick notes since *Inana* was the daughter of the Moon God Nana, the change of the moon phases was celebrated on her feast day. However, in the texts dedicated to her, *Inanna* is more astral in nature than the lunar i.e. is associated with Venus. Her tough and ruthless character acquires maternal qualities after post-Sumerian period, becoming compassionate to the pain and sufferings of people. Gwendolyn Leick, A Dictionary of Ancient Near East Mythology, London and New York, Routledge, This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003, p. 88, <https://epdf.tips/a-dictionary-of-ancient-near-eastern-mythology.html>, 1.02.2019.

³ *Inanna* was also linked to war. Gwendolyn Lake refers to the goddess as *Inanna / Innin / Ninnin*. Ibid, Gwendolyn Leick, A Dictionary of Ancient Near East Mythology, London and New York, Routledge, This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003, p. 86, <https://epdf.tips/a-dictionary-of-ancient-near-eastern-mythology.html>, 1.02.2019.

⁴ *Inana* is also read as *Inn-in*.

⁵ According to Gebhart Zelts.

Green, 2003, 2004: 108). According to Otto Edzard, the name means "Lord of Heaven" (Edzard, 1965: 81).

It is noteworthy that according to Joseph Campbell, the excavated material dating back to the IV-III millennia, B.C., is the epitome of a popular myth, when the male deity, in the form of a bull, fertilizes the goddess of the earth (Campbell, II, 1962: 37), which is also confirmed in Georgia (the figure of a man, with bull horns, sitting at the hearth or as the symbol of hearth, as the sun, male deity fertilizer of great mother). Basing on the excavated material of this and earlier periods (VI-V millennia), Otar Lortkipanidze notes, that this culture belongs to the "cultural world of Asia Minor" (Lortkipanidze, 2002: 66, 81). Campbell also notes that by closest dating to the IV-III millennia, the earliest six Middle Eastern temples, including that of *Inanna*, were based on the main religious idea of the time (fertilizer bull as the male moon and female cow as deity).

If from the above-mentioned we assume that there were close ethnic, linguistic and cultural relations between Sumer and Georgia, which was also reflected in similar beliefs, it can also be assumed that the name of the goddess *Nana* was derived from the Sumerian goddess *Inanna/Nin-ana* and introduced in Georgia. Moreover, it seems that because of her universal popularity, *Inanna* denoted goddess in general (Penglase, 2005: 13). Thus, if our reasoning is correct, it is not surprising that the biggest pre-Christian Georgian deity was named *Nana* after *Inanna*. On the one hand, proceeding from the fact that the Georgian world belongs to the cultural world of Asia Minor, where *Inanna* was so popular that her name was commonly used to denote goddess; and on the other hand, it should have been easy to assimilate this name in Georgian language thanks to Sumerian-Georgian linguistic parallels. It should also be noted that, despite this, the great mother *Nana* and *Inanna / Ishtar* are somewhat different goddesses of different types and functions.

According to the surviving materials Mother *Nana* is Great Mother, related to childbearing, universal fertility, earth and paradise at the same time; related to children's infectious diseases, the governor of death-lif. As Vera Bardavelidze notes, she originated in Georgia during the period of astral cults, high development of the sun, in particular (Bardavelidze, 2004: 97). I.e. in Georgia the sun is of feminine nature, not masculine, as in other mythologies. Unlike her *Inanna / Ishtar* is not the goddess of family union, but the goddess of carnal love, war, heaven, Venus, and in some cases has androgynous nature. She is believed to have no connection with childbearing, and is coupled with mortal and retrievable male deity Dumuz. Since *Ishtar* is not the "wife of the God", she does not reveal any connection with childbearing, with one exception [Later, in Babylonian time, she rarely has a son, *Shara* (Edzard, 1965: 83; Myths of the World peoples, vol. 1, 1980: 510)], In Georgian mythological-religious beliefs, the goddess corresponding to *Inanna* is Dali as Elene Virsaladze notes. Dali, who like *Inanna*, is the goddess of carnal love (relationship with hunters), nature, especially hunting, in our case and at the same time the master of wild beasts. She is not directly related to war, but in our opinion, is connected with one of the combat activities, hunting. Actually, she also has one son, Amiran. And in the end, according to Irakli Surguladze, she is connected with Venus - the star. In early landscape painting she was depicted as: ibex (deer), plant, star (Surguladze, 1993: 145–146).

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