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MEDEA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EAST/WEST RELATIONSHIPS

It is universally acknowledged that Medea has developed to be one of the most important and complex figures of the Greek mythology, being one of the most popular artistic images from the dawn of the European literature till modern era - XXI century at the same time. One of the secrets to Medea's tremendous popularity and her fascination throughout the centuries seems to be her complexity, the irreconcilable traits of her personality, the fact that she defies simple description - she is simultaneously a betrayed wife and a mother-murderer, a figure having superhuman facets and a woman overwhelmed with human passions, a lovelorn maiden and a manipulative witch. Among the contradictions of Medea's figure, one of the most interesting is the relationship/contradiction of the two worlds - two value systems, that of the East and the West, or as it is called sometimes in the modern scholarship, the problem of "self and "other". Medea is not just the simple member of the dichotomy - Greek/barbarian. The complexity of her figure consists in the fact that to certain extent this dichotomy is encapsulated within her mythic figure, as she veers between Greek and foreigner.³⁷ This phenomenon is unusual, but it is still the reality when regarding Medea. Let's recall Euripides' *Medea*. Initially, Medea seemed to have been tamed by Jason and seemed to be a woman incorporated into Greek life³⁸. However, her barbarian blood comes to the front later on. We can encoun-

³⁷ Medea, *Essays on Medea in Myth, Philosophy and Art*, ed. by Claus J.; Johnston S., Princeton 1997, 8.

³⁸ Such treatment of Medea we see in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where she is depicted as "a subject to Jason, shepard of the people" (Hes., *Theog.*, 992-1002).

ter in her iconographic images the tendency of veering between the East and the West. The traditional Greek clothing, which according to some scholars served to present her as a more-or-less normal Greek woman from the end of the V BC changed into the oriental costume, signaling her abandonment of Greek world and her alignment with the foreign, the other and the barbarian one.³⁹ Step by step Medea is transformed into cultural stranger in the land of Greece.

Therefore, the question can be asked here: Is this relationship of East/West (or confrontation between them in the later period) in Medea's mythic figure just accidental, or it reflects some very old historical realities? To answer this question we should first look through her genealogy. Even the brief overview of these data presents a very interesting picture to us: Medea is a granddaughter of Helios. Helios, or Sun, is the mediator between the members of the binary opposition between the East and the West, as he starts his journey from the East to the West (not from the South to the North) and then circulating returns back. In Gordeziani's opinion, the land of his son – Aeetes is also related with the movement of Helios⁴⁰. A certain Greek tradition existed where the "Swift Helios shines in golden strength in the city of Aeetes at the edge of the Ocean" (Mimn., 11/11aW). It is important to note, that in the ancient mythology Helios' descendants move in accordance to the sun's journey. The dwelling of Aeetes' sister Circe in Homer's poem is in the East (*Od.*, XI, 3-4), but Hesiod places Circe in the West. According to the *Theogony* the sons of Odysseus and Circe rule in the midst of the isles over the famous Tirseniensians.⁴¹ Apollonius of Rhodes goes further as he speaks not only about Circe's present dwelling, but also tells how Circe was brought by her father's chariot to Italy, though he doesn't mention the name of the starting point of the journey (*Ap. Rh.*, III, 309-310). Still if we take into the consideration the trajectory of sun's movement – the movement from the East to the West, we can conclude that Apollonius of Rhodes suggested Circe's former dwelling to be in the East. Circe's removal from the East to the West is attested in the works of the later writers (*Diod.*, IV, 45, 2-5; *Val. Flac.*, VII, 217-219). Aeetes second sister – Pasiphae also dwells in the West. Her settling is on the island of Crete, where she is the wife of Crete's

³⁹ Sourvinou-Inwood C., *Medea at a Shifting Distance: Images and Euripidean Tragedy*, in: *Medea*, 1997, 8.

⁴⁰ Gordeziani R., *The Greek Factor in the Context of the Opposition – Europe/Asia, Phasis*. *Greek and Roman Studies*, 13-14, 2010-2011.

⁴¹ It means that Hesiod places Circe's land in the country of Etruscans.

legendary king – Minos. According to one source, her mother is the eponym of the island itself – Crete. Aeetes brother Perses is the ruler of Taurians and lives on the west-north coast of the Black Sea. According to Diodoros, Perses' daughter is Hecate, who after poisoning her father becomes the ruler of Taurians and marries Aeetes (Diod., IV, 45). According to Tinatin Kaukhishvili, the marriage of Aeetes and Hecate suggests uniting of the land of the Colchians and the Taurians, i. e. the East and the West in this context.⁴² In the framework of the East-West relationship, the son of Aeetes is to be mentioned as (the source – doesn't give his name) the one who founded Pantikapeon at the north coast of the Black Sea (Eus. ad Dion. Perieg.). And Aeetes grandson Thetallos (Medea's son) is suggested to be the eponymous hero of Thessaly.

On the other hand, the sources also attest the withdrawals of Helios' descendants in the opposite direction – from the West to the East. Helios divided his land among his sons in the poem of the early period that of Eumelos of Corinth (VIII BC). The one part that was bound by the river Asopos, he gave to Aloeus, while the other part – Ephyra (the late Corinth) he gave to Aeetes. Aeetes voluntarily entrusted the land to Bounos to guard, until he himself might come, or some other member of his line, whether a son or a grandson. He himself arrived at the land of Colchis (Eum., fr. 2K = Schol. Pind., *Ol.*, XIII, 74a). And indeed the situation turns out in such a way, that his descendant, his granddaughter Medea became the ruler of Corinth. According to the same Eumelos, the inhabitants of Corinth invited Medea, who had come from Colchis to Iolcus, to rule upon them. Jason becomes king as her husband, through her (Eum., fr. 3K=Paus.II, 3, 10). Simonides also calls Jason the co-ruler of Medea (Sim., fr. 31PMG). There exists the other version of Medea's life in Corinth. Medea lives in Corinth and saves Corinthians from the hunger. Zeus falls in love with her. But Medea, who wants to avoid Hera's wrath, refuses Zeus's love. Grateful to Medea, Hera promises her that she will immortalize her children, but fails and the children die. Corinthians start to worship Medea's dead children (Eum., fr.2 = Schol. Pind., *Ol.*, XIII, 74). According to the variant version, Medea herself hides the children in the temenos of Hera in order to make them immortal. However, the children die. Jason becomes angry over this and returns to Iolcus. Medea too leaves Corinth and gives the throne over to Sisyphus (Eum. fr. 3K=Paus, II, 3, 11). These facts provide us with a possibility to conclude that Medea's

⁴² Kaukhchishvili T., *The Ancient Greek Sources of the Georgian History*, Tbilisi 1976, 118.

connection with Corinth is very close and is based on an early tradition that connects Medea with Corinth through her genealogy, independently of her being Jason's wife. Medea's close ties to Corinth are testified by the existence of the cult of Medea's dead children to whom Corinthians serve yearly sacrifices. Some sources name Medea the introducer of Here Acraia's cult and her annually celebrated festival. The ritual services on one hand and the mythological evidences about her connections with Corinth on the other made scholars suggest that Corinthian Medea was originally a goddess, whose cult was displaced later by that of Pan-Hellenic goddess Hera.⁴³ It seems to us, that this tradition played the major role in connecting Medea with the western world and therefore encapsulating the opposition Greek/barbarian within the heroine's soul in the early artistic interpretations of Medea.

In connection with this ambiguous interpretation of Medea's eastern/western relations, Pindar's *Pythian IV* deserves an attention. Pindar's version also places Medea within a context of earlier movement between the East and the West⁴⁴. Here, for Jason to accomplish the hard tasks given by Aeetes, he has to rob Medea of αἰδώς ("shame") for her parents and interestingly enough, he must flare up a passion for Hellas in Medea's heart. It is remarkable that the poet puts the stress here on the passion towards Hellas, rather than for Jason himself. As O'Higgins notes, one can hardly overstate the importance of the passion that made Hellas so irresistible to Medea.⁴⁵ This movement from the East to the West in the symbolic word of the poem can be regarded as a desire of the East to come close to the western world seen from the viewpoint of a western poet.

In the period of Greek-Persian wars, (VI-V cc. BC) the tension between the East and the West sharpens intensely. The change of the political vectors greatly influenced the cultural context, where the dichotomy between the self and the other, Greek and barbarian, acquires quite a distinct character. Herodotus already discusses the reasons for the conflict between Europe and Asia. Ascribing the arguments concerning the rise of this conflict to the Persian historian, Herodotus writes that there were two stages in this conflict. The conflict was confined to the abduction of women by both sides at the first stage. Medea appears here among the women who traverse the space between Greece and the East in a vengeful interchange: Io, removed from Greece by Phoenicians, Europa removed

⁴³ Johnston S., Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia, 44-71 in: *Medea*, 1997, 46.

⁴⁴ O'Higgins, Medea as Muse: *Pythian IV*, 103-127 in: *Medea*, 1997, 119.

⁴⁵ O'Higgins, 121, in: *Medea*, 1997.

from the Phoenician town of Tyre by Greeks, Medea, removed from Colchis by the Greek ship and Helen captured by barbarian Paris. The last act entailed not a countertheft, but a great military expedition – the Trojan War (Her., I, 1, 3), which was already the second stage of the conflict between the East and the West.

Medea's artistic representations in this period present a very interesting picture of the drastic changes taking place in the interpretations of this popular heroine. Nonetheless, this is the theme of a separate article.⁴⁶ We can just briefly note the following here: Medea gradually becomes the cultural "other", a paradigmatic outsider in Greek context. Now lets return to Medea's further withdrawals, namely her moving back from the West to the East this time. After Corinth, where the most tragic events of her story had developed, Medea first flees to Athens and then to the East. Where does she go? The different versions of her myth name the different places of her withdrawal. From these various versions the most popular one is the story according to which Medea arrives to the land of Arians, who change their name and start calling themselves Medeans/Medes after her settling. This account was first attested in Herodotus (Her., VII, 22). Pausanias follows Herodotus in naming Medea as the eponymous hero of the Medes, but adds a son, Medus by Aegeus. Some authors credit the son, rather than mother with the naming, but in their accounts Medea is either also presented or has some connections with the Medes (Apoll., I, 9, 28, also Eus. Chron., Ip. 61; Step. Byz. s.v. Μηδία; Tzet. Lycoph., 175, 1443; Prob. Georg., II, 126). According to Strabo, the eponyms of the Medians are both – Medea as well as Medos (Strab., XI, 13, 10). According to Dionysus Scytobrachion, on the other hand, after her long journey, Medea arrives first to the land of Phoenicians and then travels upward to the Asian countries. She marries some Asian king there and bears to him a son Medos, who names the people after himself (Diod., IV, 55).

In another version, Medea arrives at Perses' kingdom and falsely claims to be a priestess of Diana. After some time her son Medus arrives there as well. After much peripeteia, when the mother and the son recognize one another, Medea asks him to kill Perses. Medus kills Perses, gains his grandfather's kingdom and calls the country Media (Hyg., XXVII).

⁴⁶ This material was presented in our paper "Changing the Political Vectors in Europe/Asia Relationship and its Influence on Artistic Icons: Development of Medea's Image" delivered at the annual conference of ACLA 2012 held at Brown University.

A separate question arises on whether Medos can be considered an eponym of the Medes. It is generally accepted in the modern scholarship that the last part of the *Theogony* (1001), where Medeios is mentioned, as well as the change from Μᾶδοί to Μηδοί in Ionic-Attic, need not be older than II half of the VI c. BC. Neither two are the Medes mentioned in the Greek sources before Ibycus. Outcoming from these arguments the scholars mostly suggest that Medos/Medeios can hardly be the eponym of the Medes.⁴⁷ But what is more important for us here is the fact that the Greek way of looking at the world demanded that the Medes must have an eponymous hero and this eponymous hero in turn must have a genealogy. According to Graf, Medea was obvious candidate for the role because of her name, of her genealogy and of her home country, which was roughly in the same part of the world.⁴⁸

Other sources narrate about Medea's removal from Greece to the East, this time to Colchis. In Apollodorus Medea secretly arrives to Colchis and when she learns that Aetes was deprived from the throne, she kills Perses herself and returns the throne to Aetes (I, 9, 28). According to Valerius Flacus, Medus participates in returning the power to Aetes (681 ff.). Hyginus also mentions the killing of Perses by Medus (244). In Iustinus' story, Medea also comes back to Colchis, but together with Jason and Medus here. Jason returns the throne to Aetes and afterwards conquers the neighboring lands. When Jason dies, Medus founds the city called Media in honor of his mother and establishes the Median kingdom (Ius. Epit., XLIII, 2). Tacitus also narrates the arrival of the couple in Colchis (Tac. Ann., VI, 34). All of Medea's journeys back to Colchis need an explanation as they contradict the logic of her story at a first glance. Logically speaking, Medea has no way back due to the evil she has committed to her motherland and her family. She knows this very well too. Indeed, in all versions of the myth, Aetes' daughter desperately blames Jason in betraying her and especially marks out that the things she had done were for his sake and as a result she had forever cut all her ties with her family and country.

An interesting story exists in Medea's mythic biography. After her earthly life, as some ancient authors (Ibycus and Simonides) write, Medea becomes the wife of the prominent Greek hero Achilles and as the distinguished soul settles in the Elyseian Islands (fr. 291PMG; fr. 558PMG).

⁴⁷ West M. L., Hesiod: *Theogony*, Oxford 1966, 430.

⁴⁸ Graf F., Medea, The Enchantress From Afar, 21-44 in: Medea, 1997, 38.

After studying the evidence concerning the relationship between the East and the West in Medea's figure, we will try to answer the question we had put in the beginning of our paper, namely if this relationship reflects some very old historical realities about the connections that existed between the East and the West. Before discussing this problem we would like to emphasize the following: the settlements chosen by the descendants of Helios after their removal from the East to the West do indeed coincide with the regions of the dwellings of the Kartvelian tribes in the Mediterranean area: Aeetes is connected with one of the main regions of the diffusion of the protogreek tribes, namely with Ephyra, Circe with the region of the settling of these tribes, namely with the land of the Etruscus, Pasipae lives on the island of Crete – in the main region of the Protogreek culture. As Gordeziani states in his major study on this topic, the migration of one part of the Kartvelian tribes from Caucasus to the Aegean area towards the end of the third millennium seems to be quite acceptable in the modern scholarship. This migration became the basis of emerging of the Pelasgian ethnos. One part of this ethnos moved afterwards to Crete, another – to Italy.

On the other hand, the process of new migration begins approximately in 1200 BC in the Anatolian region. The moving away from the Aegean area splits into two directions: a) to the East and the North-East including the Caucasian region; b) to the West. The possibility of the migration of the East Mediterranean tribes to the Caucasus is attested in the written sources, in the linguistic data and in the archeological material. It is noteworthy that the Medians (Madai of the Ancient East sources) appear indeed on the historical area towards the end of the II millennium BC. It seems possible that during their settling in the East, they had certain relationship with the Caucasian tribes. We see Muschks (Moskhs) and Kashks (considered to be Kartvelian in origin by some scholars) at the sources of the river Tigris in XII BC. The possibility that the above discussed data about the return of Medea and her son Medos in the Caucasus reflect the activation of the migration process of the Aegean tribes (one part of them) back to the Caucasus cannot be excluded.⁴⁹

Therefore our study aimed to show, that the multidimensional relationships of the East and the West revealed in Medea's image, namely: a) Medea's close connections with Corinth; b) Medea's affection towards Hellas (Pind., *Pyth.*, IV); c) Medea's withdrawals from Colchis to the West

⁴⁹ Gordeziani R., *Mediterranea-Kartvelica*, Tbilisi 2007, 23; 431 ff; *The Argonauts, Story and Commentaries* by Gordeziani R., Tbilisi 1999, 130.

and from the West to the East; d) Medea's being the eponymous hero of the Medes should not have been accidental.

Naturally, we do not affirm that these withdrawals of Medea and her relatives from the East to the West and backwards were the direct responses to the Kartvelian tribes' migration first (towards the end of III millenium) from the Caucasus to the Aegean area and afterwards responses to the withdrawal of one part the Aegean tribes back to the Caucasus (towards the end of II millenium). Though we must not exclude the possibility that the above migration processes to a certain extent were reflected in the myths of Medea and her geneology, presenting the complex interrelation of the East and the West in the ancient world.