

Zaza Khintibidze (Tbilisi)

**GREEK-GEORGIAN CULTURAL AND LITERARY DIALOGUE:
PLATO, ARISTOTLE, RUSTAVELI**

The contacts between Greek and Georgian civilizations or the dialogue between cultures, as labeled in modern scholarship, is rooted in the depths of centuries. As known, the earliest stage of the dialogue is veiled in legends and survives in mythopoetic thought. Naturally, I refer to the Argonauts' campaign, Aetes' Colchis, rich in gold, the story of Medea and Jason, and the legend of binding Prometheus-Amiran to the hills of the Caucasus, preserved in the Greek and Georgian tradition.

More tangible manifestations of the contacts are the countless linguistic parallels vigorously studied by European and Georgian researchers for several decades. In this regard, the works by Professor R. Gordeziani are especially noteworthy. We should first of all mention *Pre-Greek and Kartvelian* (1) published in 1985 and the most recent summarizing work *Mediterranean and Kartvelian Encounters*, Tbilisi 2007-2008 (2).

Another material manifestation of the contacts are archeological excavations conducted in the Georgian Black Sea littoral, despite the fact that the full-fledge and intensive study of Greek colonies in the Black Sea basin is only starting up and the most important geographical locations, such as legendary Phasis and Kytia, have not yet been specified. Hence, it is obvious that the mythical land of Colchis still has many secrets to reveal, in order to shed light on the contacts between Greek and Georgian civilizations.

As known, the so-called second stage of Greek-Georgian relations spanning over almost the whole of the Middle Ages has been explored more profoundly. It conventionally lasts up to 1453, the actual end of the Byzantine Empire. The common Orthodox Christian past of the two

friendly nations has been studied intensively by Georgian researchers for many decades, covering a big number of highly diverse aspects, whose mere enumeration would take us too far. Therefore, in the present paper I will confine myself to Greek-Georgian literary contacts, which, without exaggeration, proved decisive for the development of Georgian culture to its present form. To illustrate the mentioned, I will only refer to several widely-known facts:

1. Though the rudiments of the Georgian alphabet may date from pagan times, its ultimate, documented reformation known to us obviously took place in the Christian era – i. e. such a reformation of the Georgian written language must have been implemented with the knowledge and in consideration of the earliest European alphabet, the Greek one.

2. The completed and revised Georgian redaction of the Bible, as applied in modern Georgian church, was developed in the 10th-11th centuries in Greece, in the Iveron Monastery on Athos, as a result of its multiple juxtaposition with the original text.

3. The translation of the Bible and other theological works from Greek contributed to the development of Georgian language – its colloquial, literary and scholarly registers – which gradually laid the foundation for the development of modern Georgian language.

Naturally, the Greek-Georgian cultural dialogue was not unilateral: the Medieval Georgian culture was not only fostered and enriched by the Byzantine culture, but to a possible extent contributed to its diversity. These relations have been dealt with in the works of several generations of Georgian scholars starting with Shalva Nucubidze. Exhaustive information about the works, corroborated by new ideas and arguments, has recently spread beyond the borders of Georgia – I am referring to *Georgian-Byzantine Literary Contacts* by E. Khintibidze, published in English in Amsterdam in 1996 (3). I will not further dwell on the point but will only recall the following fact, now widely known thanks to K. Kekelidze's works: many Byzantine literary pieces, whose Greek originals have not survived, or are available in later, modified redactions, have been preserved in medieval Georgian translations from Greek or sometimes Arabian sources.

The Knight in the Panther's Skin, the immortal poem of Rustaveli, an epic poet of the end of the 12th century, has been rightly recognized as the peak of the Georgian literature and culture in general, and as the most brilliant manifestation of Georgian intellect not only of the Middle ages but of all times.

The relationship of the poem with Greek culture has been covered in many scholarly works. However, their overwhelming majority is focused on the study of Rustaveli's philosophical reasoning, his *weltanschauung* relative to the Greek philosophical thought and do not aim at examining literary parallels. This can be explained by the fact that the poem makes no direct reference to any Greek poet or Greek literary character, unlike eastern and specifically, Persian epic poetry. Moreover, Rustaveli mentions only two Greek philosophers – Plato and Dionysus the Areopagite, and each only once. This may appear even more surprising bearing in mind the findings of Georgian Rustvelologists who argue that in his reasoning, Rustaveli more often follows Aristotle as compared to Plato, especially his Nicomachean Ethics and Poetics.

This may prompt the following question: how can we explain Rustaveli's mentioning of Plato by name and no nominal allusion to Aristotle? I found an answer to this elusive question in a recent publication called *Reference to Plato in the Man in the Panther's Skin and Its World Purport* (4), which also cites all relevant scholarly literature.

The research revealed that the Platonic 'wisdom', rendered through the words of a protagonist knight, Avtandil (KPS, 787, 3-4) (5) fully corresponds to the Greek Philosopher's ethical teachings about *justice*, expounded in his well-known dialogue *The Republic* or *On Justice: Political*, specifically, in several passages of Book II (363 e, 382 a-c) and at the end of the final Book X. However, Rustaveli does not give a rigorous account of any of Platonic statements but renders in his own words the main idea, the main thesis of Plato's entire teachings. Moreover, the antonymous concept *injustice* of the Platonic *justice* is substituted in the poem by its logical counterpart *deceit and hypocrisy* ("სიცრუე და ორიპრობა"). The substitution is compelled by Line 787 as well as by the overall context of the whole chapter, *The Will of Avtandil*. However, despite the change, the reasoning of the Rustavelian hero follows the logic of the Platonic teaching: a man who is deceitful and hypocritical according to Rustaveli, and unfair according to Plato, will first be appropriately punished in this world, in his life time ("აენებს ხორცსა", KPS, 787, 4), and then in the next world, after his death ("მერმე სულსა", KPS, 787, 4).

As we can see, though the essence of the Platonic statement is not altered, the reference to the Greek philosopher is quite vague and without mentioning the source, the attribution of the statement would be unclear to the reader. I believe that for this very reason Rustaveli might have found it necessary to mention Plato by name, i. e. refer to the primary source of the passage containing allusion.

Rustaveli's numerous allusions to Aristotle, in my opinion, is an altogether different case: the passage so rigorously follows one or another teaching of Aristotle that it becomes unnecessary to mention the author by name. For example, the theory of friendship, or rather its essence, expounded and corroborated by Aristotle in Books VIII and IX of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, is rendered by Rustaveli poetically but with maximum precision in a sole verse (KPS, 775), again through the protagonist Avtandil. More specifically, according to Avtandil, there are three ways man may express his attitude to his friend: the first is the desire of man to be beside his friend, and the inability to endure the distance. The corresponding Aristotelian statement is 'τὸ συζῆν' – "living together" (NE, 1157b); [The second way is] readiness of man, as Rustaveli states, to give away everything to his friend, which excludes any form of envy. This closely resembles the Aristotelian 'χαίρειν ἀλλήλοις' – "to delight in each other" (NE, 1158a). [The third way is] providing help and actual benefit, which corresponds to Aristotle's 'τὸν βουλομένον καὶ πράττοντα τὰγαθὰ', – "who wishes and does what is good" (NE, 1166a). In *Nicomachean Ethic* (Book VIII, Chapter 5), Aristotle mentions the three signs of friendship, but this time all of them are given together and what I believe is the most important for the present discussion, they are given in the same order as in Rustaveli's poem. In particular, according to Aristotle, true friends are those who live together, delight in each other and confer benefits on each other: '... οἱ μὲν γὰρ συζῶντες χαίρουσιν ἀλλήλοις καὶ πορίζουσι τὰγαθὰ ...' (NE, 1157b), (see and cf. 6, 577-8).

Professor V. Asatiani's monograph *Byzantine Civilization* (7), published with the support of the *Dyonisios Varelis Foundation for the Byzantine Studies*, devotes a chapter (see 7, 258-464) to the wide range of Byzantine and Georgian relations. The Georgian historical, literary and religious materials presented and analyzed in this chapter attest to the popularity and reputation that Aristotle enjoyed in Pre-Rustavelian and Rustaveli's contemporary Georgia. It suffices to recall Rustaveli's senior contemporary eulogic poet Chakhrukhadze, who unambiguously states in the poem *Tamariani* that not merely he is unable to duly praise Queen Tamar, but even Socrates, Homer, Plato and Sophocles would appear powerless; only the mastery of Aristotle and Dionysus the Areopagite would make this possible (see 7, 331-332).

Considering the above-mentioned, no further comments are needed to understand why Rustaveli's reference to Aristotle is not explicit: in medieval Georgia Aristotle was so popular and his thoughts were so widely known through Georgian translations of Greek or Arab

philosophical works that the readers of the Rustaveli's poem did not need a nominal allusion to Aristotle. As concerns the explicit reference to Plato, this should not be understood as indicative of the Georgian readers' low awareness of Plato in those times, but as an indispensable clue to remove any possible ambiguities in terms of attribution, which might be caused by the employment of periphrasis and the poet's original interpretations when rendering this particular ethical statement of Plato.

In the end, I would like to draw your attention to a fact that might appear somewhat unflattering. *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* – rightly included in the treasury of world literature, a masterpiece that amply considers Pre-Christian as well as Christian Greek philosophical heritage, and at the same time, as I try to highlight in my recent researches, implying quite interesting and far-going references to the Homeric epics (see 8; 9; 10), – has been translated in many languages worldwide, including almost all European languages – even several times into some of them – has not yet been completely translated and published in Greek. However, I believe that the filling of this gap will mark a new, modern stage of Greek and Georgian centuries-old cultural relations.

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