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GREEK SYMBOLS IN GALAKTION TABIDZE'S POETIC LANGUAGE

The works of Galaktion Tabidze, one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, are noteworthy in many aspects. One such aspect is that his poetry cannot be described within the frameworks of any literary trend. Several main trends are identified in G. Tabidze's poetry: symbolist, those stemming from Georgian classical literature and folklore, and realist, which is a mechanical division of G. Tabidze's poetry, which "elucidated its own and the whole Georgian culture's relationship with the 'immense global lyre'. That is why G. Tabidze so easily manages to get into conversation and sometimes argue or compete with the global culture of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the 19th and 20th centuries."⁷

However, G. Tabidze's poetry attracts attention first and foremost for the poet's great interest in and respect for Old Greece. With the intensity and depth of its reference to the Greek cultural traditions, G. Tabidze's poetry is an absolutely special event in the Georgian literature of the 20th century. On the one hand, ancient Greece is for G. Tabidze an everlasting value and the foundation of the world civilization, which people in various epochs regularly revert to and, on the other hand, the Greek civilization is his own country's historical and mythological past – the legends of the Argonauts' trip to Colchis and Prometheus chained to the Caucasus ridge. Therefore, the poet often refers to Greek themes in the context of his own homeland's history. In addition, ancient Greece was the landmark, which was to link Georgia's past glory with the most important values of the global culture.

⁷ Tvaradze R., Galaktion, Tbilisi 1972, 124 (*in Georgian*).

At the same time, Hellas as an image and symbol can be regarded as most intensively represented in G. Tabidze's works. I do not mean the frequency of the use of this specific term, but the depth of perception of this term as an image and symbol, i. e. the amount and nature of the information linked to them. Hellas as an image and symbol is represented in poems in quite different parameters:

1. Geographic and ethnic: Athens, Lesbos, Rhodes, Spartans, Salamis, Thermopolis, Illis, Megarians, Olympus, Phaleron Bay, Hellespont, Lacedaemon;
2. Historic and social: Hetaera, Harmodius, Aristogeiton, Hipparchus, Aspasia, Dionysus ritual;
3. Literary: elegy, Demosthenes, Homer, epitaph, Pindar, Sappho, Anacreon, Archilochus, Thucydides, Hesiod, Tyrtaeus, Simonides, catharsis, iamb, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, ode, paean;
4. Scientific: Archimedes, atom, logos, academy.
5. Art: Parthenon, altar of Borea, amphitheatre, Praxiteles, Doric and Ionic columns;
6. Mythology: Medea, Argonauts, Dionysus, Musa, Titans, Sphynx, Aphrodite, Zeus, Zephira, Jason, Nymph, Niobe, Orpheus, Aristaeus, Niobids, Prometheus, Maenads, Tethys, Artemide, Actaeon, Hydra, Gratiae, Gryphon, Demeter, Daemon, Helen, Diomedes, Themis, Calypsos, Tydeus, Achilles, Phoenix, Hermes.

I would like to add that the multi-functionality of Greek images also attracts attention in G. Tabidze's poetry. In this regard, Dionysus is most remarkable, bearing various symbolic overtones in seven cases out of eight (the divine prototype of the poet; the symbol of vegetation; the symbol of those, who aroused the muse of sculptors for creating masterpieces; the symbol of theatricality; the symbol of divine perfection; the symbol of a deity suffering for humanity; and the symbol of satisfaction and hedonism). It is noteworthy that the most popular symbol of Dionysus (Bacchus) remains almost without any attention with G. Tabidze. It is also noteworthy that the poet is quite consistent in using Greek images and symbols in his narrative poems and verses. In addition, the poet uses many Greek images and symbols as artistic images in absolutely different manner. G. Tabidze manages to establish completely new connections with already known and traditional images, transforming them into a basis for non-traditional and unexpected comparisons ("Although

wrinkles covered his forehead like epitaphs a tombstone",⁸ "Argonauts' belt, a cloud in colourfulness"⁹). If we take a statistic look at this issue, the poet uses 114 Greek images and symbols 231 times at various levels:

1. A Greek poetic image as a component of a small structure within a verse. In such cases, Greek terms are used as symbols or arguments for a poetic idea with their functions organically linked to the general structure and purpose of verses.
2. A Greek poetic image as a component of a large structure within a verse. In such cases, we may have various kinds of works. They may be based fully on a mythological theme or the poet may be creating a world linked to completely different periods of history of ancient countries. There are cases, when the author eliminates chronological barriers and represents himself as part of this large harmonious universe.

To illustrate the aforementioned, one work will be considered from each block. The first verse to be discussed is "He made friends with it", which, in my opinion, is quite interesting for interpreting. The verse describes the problem of confrontation between humans and nature. It starts with the following first line: "Man made friends with nature itself." The rest of the work, however, effectively describes alienation between man and nature. The following passage is quite interesting in this confrontation:

It will respond to everything with revenge.
 What does he pin his hopes on?
 The clumsy rage of the old fever of natural forces,
 Which makes Archimedes sad even today.¹⁰

Many discoveries that enabled man to make an impact on nature are linked to Archimedes. It is also known that people in Antiquity regarded as sacrilege to use talents bestowed by gods against nature and humans.¹¹ It is known that Archimedes was involved in the following episode: When the Roman fleet attacked his native town of Syracuse, the ruler of Syracuse, Hiero, asked him, as a great scientist, for help. Archimedes created an amazing defensive system for the town based on the practical application of the laws of mechanics he had discovered. The Roman fleet found itself in a terrible situation and had to retreat. However,

⁸ Tabidze G., Complete works in 12 volumes, vol. VII, Tbilisi 1968, 28, 52 (*in Georgian*).

⁹ Tabidze G., 1968, 88.

¹⁰ Tabidze G., 1968, 263.

¹¹ Geschichte des wissenschaftlichen Denkens in Altertum, hrsg. F. Jurs, Berlin 1982.

Archimedes seems not to have forgiven himself this sin, so he did not leave any drawings linked to the use of his laws in battle equipment and did not even try to create a similar defensive system, when Romans attacked again. He fell victim to the Roman conquest of Syracuse together with his fellow citizens.¹²

Given the aforementioned, I think that G. Tabidze uses Archimedes as a symbol of concern about humanity and thoughts on establishing harmonious relations between nature and humans and combining theoretical ideas of humans with practical deeds with respect to nature. That is why the line "Which makes Archimedes sad even today" should be understood as a symbol of the problem that has worried humanity since Antiquity: confrontation between humans and nature (Discussion of the confrontation between nature and humanity started back in the times of Hesiod.¹³).

To better understand the function of the Greek images and symbols of the second block, I would like to concentrate on one aspect in G. Tabidze's works, which has not been sufficiently explored. It is his poetic treaty "Conversation about Lyrics" (1940), where he describes in a poetic form the main function of poetry and lyrics. The author says that poetry should first and foremost convey the heartbeat of the public and serve the country:

Let us serve
Our Homeland again,
Listen to its call.¹⁴

How seriously G. Tabidze prepared to write this narrative poem, becomes obvious in the so-called prosaic version of the poem, which is effectively a kind of scientific prooemium written before the poem itself.¹⁵ We will revert to the comments at the end of this article. Here, I would like to say a few words about the structure of the poem, which consists of 176 strophes. They can thematically be divided into the following parts:

1. Strophes I-VI are the so-called introduction devoted to the poet's memories and description of his homeland;
2. Strophes VII-XL present a lengthy discussion of the function of poetry and its connection with society;

¹² Plut., *Pelopid*. Marcell., XIV, XIX.

¹³ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. with Prolegomena and Commentary by H. I. West, Oxford 1966.

¹⁴ Tabidze G., Complete works in 12 volumes, vol. IX, Tbilisi 1971, 148 (*in Georgian*).

¹⁵ Tabidze G., Complete works in 12 volumes, vol. XII, Tbilisi 1975, 566-575 (*in Georgian*).

3. Strophes XLI-LXI are devoted to a systemic poetic overview of the archaic Greek lyrics;

4. Strophes LXII-CLXXVI describe in a non-systemic manner main aspects of the development of poetry together with a certain amount of the poet's political views. This part of the poem is mostly associative: associations linked to one theme give rise to the discussion of another theme and the poet switches from Georgian poetry to facts of world poetry.

Correspondingly, it can be said that the only passage in the whole poem, which is systemic and logical is the discussion of the archaic Greek lyrics. G. Tabidze effectively emphasized that this period was outstanding in the development of world lyrics with its logic and organic connection with the social and political contexts. In my opinion, G. Tabidze's opinion on archaic Greek lyrics is noteworthy for two aspects:

1. The poet's vision of how archaic lyrics took shape, what was most important on this path, and which poets he deems most important in the archaic period of Greek lyrics;

2. How laconic and interesting is the poet's description of the poetry, when he characterizes the works of each poet.

As I already said, for G. Tabidze, the main thing in poetry is to emphasize the position of an active citizen. He believes that in this regard, archaic Greek lyrics, which charms us with its "national spirit and modesty" is incomparable.¹⁶ Given this, G. Tabidze concentrates only on those poets, who are appropriate to public sentiments. Therefore, it is quite easy to explain the fact that we do not encounter in the poem names like Sappho, Alcaeus, or Anacreon, i. e. the poetry that can be regarded as "lyrics for lyrics".¹⁷

G. Tabidze starts speaking about the functional force of lyrics with legendary Orpheus, who is presented with the following features: people attribute magic force to him; his songs can move inanimate things and even "heartless and powerful gods" and can tame beasts. It can be said that the poem shows quite fully the features of Orpheus described in the mythological tradition.¹⁸

G. Tabidze regards Archilochus of Paros as the forefather of lyric poetry: "Archilochus was the forefather of lyric poetry".¹⁹ In this case, G. Tabidze takes into account two circumstances: first, Archilochus is the first

¹⁶ Tabidze G., 1971, 154.

¹⁷ Gordeziani R., *Greek Civilization*, I, Tbilisi 1988, 201-232 (*in Georgian*).

¹⁸ Zigler K., *RE XVIII*. 1, 1200-1316.

¹⁹ Tabidze G., 1971, 15.

poet in the history of European literature, whose phase of life can be dated more or less precisely, and second, he is the first poet, who can be described as a truly lyric poet, as his poetry is the first to show so boldly the individualism of a lyric poet.²⁰

Writing about Archilochus, G. Tabidze emphasizes three main features: iambographer, intolerance of humiliation, and sharp lyrics, which G. Tabidze describes with a capacious expression – "poison of lyrics". The poet used these allusions to describe the main features of the individuality of Archilochus of Paros as a poet and citizen.

Among the poets of archaic period, G. Tabidze mentions Tyrtaeus and, in this connection, wars between Spartans and Messenians, in which Spartans, who were few in number, defeated the enemies thanks to the poet's ardent verses that served to arouse war energy and determination. Tyrtaeus was indeed one of the forefathers of war lyrics,²¹ which is most important for G. Tabidze. As we know from the history of literature, Tyrtaeus wrote not only war elegies. He was the first poet, who glorified the political system of his own polis. Unfortunately, G. Tabidze does not concentrate on this issue.²²

In the three strophes of the poem devoted to Solon, G. Tabidze recites the well-known story of recapturing Salamina, emphasizing the decisive role of Solon's war songs in the recapture. In addition, writing about Solon's poetry, the poet describes it as elegiac poetry, which puts emphasis on philosophic and social problems, and "links to verses"²³ laws and political addresses. As a political figure and poet, Solon was interested in the future of the polis, laws of its existence, and relations between society and personalities (correlation between the divine and human spheres),²⁴ which G. Tabidze conveys in a very laconic and precise manner.

G. Tabidze also writes about a well-known representative of choral lyrics, Simonides of Ceos, being interested only in those aspects of his poetry, which depict the Greek-Persian war. It is known that Simonides devoted beautiful lines to the Spartan heroes, who fell near Thermopyles. The lines in G. Tabidze's poetry may be the first attempt of translation into Georgian of the famous epitaph that came down to us as written by Simoni-

²⁰ Gordeziani R., *Greek Literature*, Tbilisi 2002, vol. I, 175-183 (*in Georgian*); West M. L., *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, Berlin, New York 1974, 23-28.

²¹ Gordeziani R., *Op. cit.*, 186-188.

²² Arist., *Polit.*, 5, 6, 2; Strab., 8, 362.

²³ Tabidze G., 1971, 152-153.

²⁴ Latacz., *GLTD*, 184.

des of Ceos: "O Stranger, send the news home to the Lacedaemonians that here we lie at rest: the commands they gave us have been obeyed". The comments make it clear that the translation was made from Russian, because the author adds in brackets a phrase in Russian ("loyal to commands of homeland" - "верные закону родины").²⁵ G. Tabidze says nothing about other aspects of the poetry of Simonides of Ceos (as a professional and intellectual), because the main thing for him is Simonides' love for his homeland expressed in his poems as praises of homeland.

Among lyric poets, G. Tabidze gives a highest assessment to Pindar. He points out the main features of Pindar: "singing in an amazing voice", glorifying his homeland, writing odes and hymns, glorifying the winners in Olympic and Pythian games, abundance of strophes, beauty of images, eloquence, and "მისამღერო მსახველი ძალა". One aspect G. Tabidze likes most in Pindar's works is the general Hellenic nature of his poetry. The heroes Pindar praised participated in Pan-Hellenic competitions, expressing the faith of people and the force and immortality of their genes.

Let us now revert to the comments (the prosaic version of the poem), which we mentioned above. G. Tabidze creates a theoretical basis for his poem in it. He departs from the assumption that lyrics is the force that "breathes eternal vitality and develops together with the pace of development of humanity."²⁶ According to G. Tabidze, the harmonious connection of lyrics with public and political life was particularly strong in Greece in the 7th and 6th centuries BC and became one of the motive forces of society. As a summary, G. Tabidze refers to his own translation of a scholium called a song of Harmodius by a scholiast known by the name of Callistratus, who praises Harmodius and Aristogeiton for their attempt to kill a tyrant.

G. Tabidze's poem makes it clear that no one in Georgian poetry has gone as far as he did in the creative comprehension of Antiquity. His poem can be regarded as the most competent praise of the archaic Greek lyrics in Georgian poetry. In addition, it has an excellent poetic form.

Given this, it becomes clear that the frequent use of Greek images and symbols in G. Tabidze's works is due not only to paying tribute to the origins of the European civilization, but also to the poet's boundless respect and love for Hellenic culture. That is why Greek images used by G. Tabidze are so organically linked to the structure and poetics of his verses.

²⁵ Tabidze G., Complete works in 12 volumes, vol. XII, Tbilisi 1973, 569 (*in Georgian*).

²⁶ Tabidze G., 1973, 570-571.