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GALAKTION TABIDZE ABOUT ARCHAIC GREEK LYRIC POETRY

G. Tabidze's (1891-1959) works hold a special place in the 20th century Georgian literature. It is no exaggeration to say that he laid the foundation for the new Georgian verse, the 20th century Georgian poetry. The principle factor that makes his verse unique is that it cannot be assigned to the frames of any particular literary trend. Several mainstream trends are conventionally distinguished in Tabidze's poetry: Symbolism, Georgian literary tradition, Georgian folkloristic tradition and realism. However, this is a mechanical division of Tabidze's poetry, who 'explored his own relationship, as well as that of the whole Georgian culture, to 'the colossal world harp'- G.T. ... Hence, G. Tabidze could most smoothly join in a dialogue (or even a dispute) with antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the 19th-20th century world culture.¹ Consequently, his poetry is extensively reflective of world civilization, starting with ancient Mesopotamia and going up to modern days. However, antiquity is the major source for his inspiration. Galaktion Tabidze's works hold a special place in the 20th century Georgian literature in terms of the intensity and depth that are characteristic of their reference to ancient Greek and Roman cultural traditions. The poet mentions 142 symbolic images 300 times at different levels: a. ancient image being a part of the poetic symbol, of the minor verse structure; b. ancient image being a part of the major verse structure. Tabidze's use of ancient symbolic images is distinguished by plurality of functions. Besides, the poet presents anew the well-known traditional images, giving them a different artistic value. It should also be admitted

¹ Tvaradze R., Galaktioni, Tbilisi 1972, 124 (in Georgian).

that the poet is chronology-wise coherent when introducing ancient images into his poetry.²

In this article, I would like to highlight one less studied aspect of Galaktion Tabidze's literary work. This is his quasi-theoretical poetic treatise *Talking about Lyrics* (1940), which presents the main essence of lyric poetry – a verse should first of all render the heartbeat of the society, should serve national interests:

'So, let us serve / again our country, / its call.'³

The previously written prose version of the treatise, which can be regarded as a scholarly prooimion to the poem,⁴ testifies how seriously Galaktion Tabidze was preparing to compose the poem. I will come back to this comment later, in the end of the article. Now I will briefly consider the structure of the poem. It consists of 176 lines and can be divided into the following thematic units:

Lines 1-6 are the introduction, devoted to the poet's recollections and to picturing the scenes of his homeland.

Lines 7-40 are poetic reasoning over the purpose of poetry and its reference to the society.

Lines 41-61 are a systemic overview of archaic Greek lyric poetry.

Lines 62-176 are a non-systemic outline of the development of poetry, to a certain degree incorporating poet's political views. This part of the poem is mainly associative, where one theme evokes associations and thus introduces another, marking a shift from Georgian poetry to the world poetic facts.

Consequently, the only part of the poem structured to the logic of systemic presentation of thought is the one dealing with archaic ancient lyric poetry. In this way, Galaktion Tabidze accentuates the fact that the archaic period was distinguished in world literature by its coherence and the most organic links with the social and political context.

In my opinion, Galaktion Tabidze's reasoning about archaic Greek lyric poetry is remarkable in two ways:

² Gardapkhadze K., *Ancient Terms and Notions in Galaktion's Poetic Language*, Tbilisi 1995, 131-136 (in Georgian).

³ Tabidze G., *Complete Collection of Works in 12 volumes*, Tbilisi 1971, vol. 9, 148 (in Georgian).

⁴ Tabidze G., *Complete Collection of Works in 12 volumes*, Tbilisi 1975, vol. 12, 148 (in Georgian).

What is the poet's idea about the development of archaic lyric poetry? What does he find most important in the process and which archaic Greek poets does he focus on?

How laconic and interesting are the formulations that Galaktion Tabidze uses to describe the works by each poet?

As mentioned above, the principle point for Tabidze is to highlight the civil, belligerent spirit. According to the poet, archaic Greek verse, which fascinates with its 'national mood and simplicity', is matchless in this respect.⁵ Therefore, Tabidze focuses on the poets who are distinguished by adequate representation of public mood. Hence, it is not difficult to account for the absence of such names as Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon, i.e. the poetry that can be described as 'lyrics for the sake of lyrics'.⁶

Galaktion Tabidze starts his reasoning over the functional power of lyric poetry with Orpheus. The mythic poet is presented through the following sings: people ascribe to him magic power, his songs can move unanimated objects and even 'the heartless and powerful gods', can tame beasts. The poem reflects to the full the signs of Orpheus' poetic dignity, existing in mythological tradition.⁷

According to Galaktion, the forefather of lyric poetry was Archilochus of Paros:

*'The forefather / of lyric poetry itself / was Archiloch.'*⁸

In this case, Tabidze is conscious of two facts: first, Archilochus was the first poet in the history of European literature whose lifetime has been dated more or less precisely, and second, he is the first poet to be called the true lyrist, as his poetry is the first endeavor to give such a dynamic picture of the individualism of a lyric poet.⁹ Galaktion Tabidze puts emphasis on three most important traits connected with Archilochus: iambic verse, inability to endure humiliation and pungent lyrics, which Tabidze rendered through a very capacious formula 'the poison of lyrics'. In this way, Tabidze offered the main clues to the originality of Archilochus - a poet and a citizen.

Among ancient poets, Galaktion Tabidze also mentions Tyrtaeus and the wars between the Spartans and Messenians; how a handful of Spar-

⁵ Tabidze G., 1971, vol. 9, 154.

⁶ Gordeziani R., Ancient Civilization, I, Tbilisi 1988, 201-232 (in Georgian).

⁷ Ziegler K., RE XVIII, 1, 1200-1316.

⁸ Tabidze G., 1971, vol. 9, 150.

⁹ Gordeziani R., Greek Literature, I, Epos, Lyric and Drama of Hellenic Epoch, Tbilisi 2002, vol. 1, 175-183 (in Georgian).

tans, inspired with the poet's fervency and belligerent stamina and with the verses fostering resistance, overpowered the enemy. Tyrtaeus was truly among the forefathers of lyric poetry.¹⁰ This is what Tabidze found most important. As admitted in the history of literature, Tyrtaeus was not distinguished solely with belligerent elegies; he was the first poet who praised political organization of his own polis. Greek poets called the like verses 'eunomy' ('a well-adjusted constitution of government').¹¹ Regrettably, Tabidze, did not accentuate this point.

Three lines of the poem (47-50) are devoted to Solon. Tabidze refers to the well-known story of recapturing Salamis, emphasizing the decisive role of Solon's battle songs in retrieving the island. Besides, to describe Solon's poetry, Tabidze highlights the following aspects: elegiac poetry, presentation of philosophical points and social issues, associating poetry with his own laws and political slogans.¹² As a politician and poet, Solon took interest in the life of the polis and the logic of its existence, relationship between the individual and the society (relationship between the divine and human spheres)¹³, which is most laconically and precisely manifested in Tabidze's poem.

Another most interesting portrait of an ancient poet presented in Tabidze's work is that of Simonides of Ceos. Remarkably, the only aspect of Simonides' poetry highlighted in Tabidze's poem is the Greek-Persian relationship. It is common knowledge that Simonides devoted wonderful lines to the Spartan heroes fallen at Thermopyles.¹⁴ The passage from Tabidze's poem can even be regarded as the first attempt to translate the well-known epitaph ascribed to Simonides of Ceos:

*'To the Lacedemonians / carry the message, traveler, /
and tell them: / all devoted / to the homeland, / we have fallen here.'*

We can learn from the comments that the translation must have been done from Russian as it has in brackets a Russian collocation (loyal to the laws of homeland – верные закону родины).¹⁵

Galaktion Tabidze does not touch other aspects of Simonides' poetry (professional poet, intellectual poet), as he associates the main virtue of

¹⁰ Gordeziani R., 2002, vol. 1, 186-188.

¹¹ Aristoteles, *Politica*, 5, 6, 2; Strabo, *Geographica*, 8, 362.

¹² Tabidze G., 1971, vol. 9, 152-153.

¹³ Latacz J., *Die griechische Literatur in Text und Darstellung*, I Archaische Periode, Stuttgart 1998².

¹⁴ Ярхо В., *Древнегреческая литература*, Лабиринт 2001, 74.

¹⁵ Tabidze G., 1975, vol. 12.

Simonides' poems with his love for his homeland and his willingness to praise its glory.

Among the lyrists, the most credited in Tabidze's poem is Pindar. According to the Georgian poet, the properties best describing Pindar are 'singing in a wonderful voice', praising his homeland, being an author to odes and hymns, praising the winners of Olympic and Pythian sport games, abundance of strophic forms, splendor of images, 'eloquence and expressiveness of refrains'. Tabidze offers the following description:

*'The very first / among the first is Pindar -
/ the sharpness and pledge / of the Hellenic lyre.'*¹⁶

For Galaktion Tabidze, the principal asset of Pindar's poetry is its Panhellenic nature. The heroes praised by Pindar took part in Panhellenic games and embodied public faith, pride, the height of gene and immortality.

Here Galaktion Tabidze provides the so-called theoretical basis for what his poem is structured to. For him, the point of departure is the thesis that lyric poetry is the energy 'that breathes eternal vitality and develops along with the evolutionary pace of humankind.'¹⁷ According to Tabidze, in ancient Greece, harmonious relationship of lyric poetry with social and political life was manifested to the greatest extent in the 7th-6th centuries BC and became one of the driving forces of the society. Galaktion presents his own translation of a summary of a scolion ascribed to Callistratus. The scolion praises Harmodius and Aristogiton, the assassins of tyrant.

After reading the poem, it becomes clear that none of Georgian poets went so far as Galaktion Tabidze in terms of referring to ancient literature. His poem 'Talking about Lyrics' can be regarded as the most competent and exquisite praise to Greek poetry ever composed in the history of Georgian poetry.

¹⁶ Tabidze G., 1971, vol. 9, 156.

¹⁷ Tabidze G., 1975, vol. 12, 570-571.