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THE ARGONAUTS AND MEDEA IN MODERN GEORGIAN FINE ARTS

The Argonauts and Medea is a comprehensive and diverse theme, but at the same it proves very interesting even to a practicing painter and an amateur theorist.

I believe the function, the duty and even the mission of national culture and a nation in general is to realize what its culture has sacrificed to fill in the universal cultural landscape; what, which tunes and sounds, with motifs and impulses it has contributed to the universal cultural space. Admittedly, epochal cultures have specific properties relevant to the fulfillment of the universal purpose – telos (perhaps, it is not appropriate now to argue over the conception that the humankind has a high and specific purpose in the world). For example, by its attitude, world view, texts and images, the Indo-Asian culture, regarded as the origin of our civilization, is the culture of overcoming ‘Maya’, the world molded by spiritual boundaries.

Ancient Iranian-Chaldean culture is the culture of overcoming the conflict, the clash between Ahura Mazda and Angramana, which has contributed artistic masterpieces to world literature, architecture and fine art.

The next cultural stage is certainly the Egyptian-Babylonian culture, which represents the epoch of detecting and revealing wisdom in the world. It is followed by the culture which seeks for the beautiful in the world, and the wisdom in the human mind. This culture is called Greek-Roman and is distinguished by the perception and establishment of fair proportions, beauty in general, harmony and logic. If the Indian world regards the created material world as illusory, which consequently should be overcome, for ancient Persia,

this profane world is the actual area for the conflict between the good and the evil. It means that at the post-illusory stage, the material world acquired the properties of the conflict between the opposite forces. The following Egyptian-Babylonian period objectified, materialized wisdom. The humankind – or in Hegelian terms, the spirit of the age, the universal telos, exposed humans to the hidden wisdom and regularities, logic of the world, while later all was crowned with the revelation of the zeitgeist of earthly beauty in Greek and Roman period. I believe that it was in this very period that the great culture of carnal beauty developed. This very age, this very culture accepted Christ in the body, i.e. the supreme principle of the universe was embodied, which marked a new starting point for the fulfillment of cultural and epochal telos. Humankind will go through the reverse process – from the renaissance-reflective culture to the reflective process of perceiving wisdom. We have just entered this age. In fact, the Renaissance was the reflection of Greek and Roman beauties and ideals, while at present we are in the age of reflecting Egyptian-Chaldean period. Although this may seem disputable, it is beyond doubt that the Greek world largely contributed exactly to the establishment of the concept of beauty and played an important role for the humankind through the development of beautiful images. These very images convey multiple implications and messages about the deepest and most complex secrets of the universe. The source of such implications for Georgians is the central images of the Hellenic-Greek imaginary and mythological genius, the Golden Fleece and the Voyage of the Argonauts. I believe that an individual and a nation are appreciated by what they have contributed to the humankind and what they have intentionally sacrificed to the fulfillment of the universal telos. The viability of a nation is determined by the extent to which it is capable of devotion and self-preservation. The image of the Golden Fleece and the act of offering committed by Medea is in fact such a large-scale self-sacrifice for the development of European and Western culture. This is the offering which fertilized European civilization, and which is expressed through the image of Medea. Medea is the ideal symbol for selfless readiness to sacrifice and to fall as a victim. She can be regarded as the sun rising from the depth, lavishly giving away her own power, rays, warmth, without sparing herself and thus justifying her existence.

Medea is the sun of the depth and represents the mystical aspect of the sun, reflected in the female element of the universe. The sun is identified with a female element in Georgian mythological beliefs. Medea too is the sun, the bearer of the profound female astral element of the sun. Therefore, in the Argonaut myth, Georgians, Georgian painters and artists in general are primarily concerned with the theme of Medea. And interpretations offered by Georgian painters have always reflected the point of sacrifice justified in

epochal terms. Medea's offering and at the same time, her active and intentional self-sacrifice is the sign and image of this. In my opinion, the exact symbol of our contemporary Georgian reality is the great monument by M. Berdzenishvili, erected in Bichvinta, Abkhazia, the separatist region of Georgia. It is a prophetic work of art. The great figure of Medea against the background of the sea is the most splendid plastic image of tragedy and great pain. This interpretation of Medea's image follows the traditional thematic principle implying the greatest sacrifice of offering one's own children. The tragism is conveyed through the plastic meta-language, the composition is solid and at the same time it is highly dynamic inwardly, even violent. It even seems to me that through this work, the sculptor foresaw the tragedy of the two most valuable regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. I would not certainly like to speak in political terms about the idea which the artist has rendered so dynamically in the language of sculpture. Anyway, it should be admitted that great art suggests multiple interpretations and prophetic concepts. Merab Berdzenishvili's Medea seems to imply the tragedies of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as well.

An absolutely different message is reflected in Medea's monument recently erected in Batumi. It does not convey the energy of the Medea in Bichvinta; it lacks the ample plastic impulse, the energy. However, the Batumi monument also suggests sacrifice, or rather the concept of offering oneself. This is the creation which renders the idea of intentional sacrifice, or rather offering the most precious. Although it conveys this meaning barely and directly, and despite its plastic imperfections, I believe that such an idea and attempt of its interpretation has serious grounds, and primarily refers to the contribution of ancient Colchis to the development of common Western culture and thought. The mission and importance of Georgia was, in fact, expressed through the sacrifice of the Golden Fleece. In this way, our country played its extremely significant role in the development of European, Western culture. If we consider the issues in teleological terms, this gift, which Georgia had preserved and taken care of with great toil, and which subsequently Medea presented to Europe, the Golden Fleece can be regarded as one of the principle forces stimulating European thought and consciousness. And all this was accomplished through Georgia.

Georgian fine arts offer multiple interpretations of Medea's theme: Elguja Berdzenishvili's sculpture *The Sea* is distinguished by Hecatean magic and carnal attractiveness. In my interpretation, Medea is playing with fate with the cords of magic, and the monument conveys the idea of coming in touch with ancestors' experience.

I would like to make a special accent on a very unusual monument by Elguja Amashukeli, erected in Poti and dedicated to the memory of young

people killed in the World War II, the soldiers who died in the sea during the war activities, who were devoured by the waves. Even an idle look at the moment makes us feel that something different is hidden beyond its structure. Many various ideas come to mind as the sculpture itself drives us in many ways. It embodies the killed and missing youth in general. It is a fatalist work, in which hopelessly gigantic waves threaten a young body. In my opinion, the monument implies the image of Absyrtus. It is absolutely opposite to the concept of making an offering to Europe as it conveys the message of inner immobility, stiffness, numbing; and inner stiffness equals to death. So, the waves behind the lad have petrified in a strange and portentous way.

I believe that the multiple interpretations of the Argonaut myth and Medea's image produced by Georgian art reflect a desire to participate in the development of common universal cultural space and in building common European cultural structure through evoking the events of the past. It is a desire to consider and perceive the role and place of Georgian culture in the context of world culture. The theme itself is inexhaustible and suggests many diverse interpretations.

I believe that along with the tragic and sharpest resound, the theme of intentional sacrifice, of giving away one's own essence, implies also the idea of love, which is not amply emphasized in Georgian painting. As mentioned above, the theme of Medea suggests two basic interpretations: 1. The intentional sacrifice related to the accomplishment of the mission of Georgia (Colchis) in world culture; 2. The idea of magic, sorcery, which, along with healing, is related to prophecy. Both motives imply the idea of incorporating national culture and national consciousness into common universal context, i.e. at the level of imagination, Colchis-Georgia contributed to the source of European and Western consciousness, the Greek mythic and artistic perception, which is directly reflected in Georgian fine art.

It should be mentioned that our painters' interest in ancient themes is connected with the names of two great Georgian painters Lado Gudiashvili and Sergo Kobuladze. As our art has experienced neither classicism nor symbolism in the pure sense of the terms, ancient theme enjoyed free interpretation and acquired stylistic-quotational coloring in the works of these two artists as well as the painters of the following generations. Classical-academic reception of ancient themes was reflected in Sergo Kobuladze's works, which on their part follow the line of Polycletes and Leonardo. On the other hand, there is Lado Gudiashvili, who chiefly followed the Hellenistic and mannerist art with the symbolic accents of neo-algorism.

If we refer to Nietzsche's oppositions, we may say that S. Kobuladze follows the Apollonian idea, and L. Gudiashvili – Dionysian. This may certainly be so if we look through the interpretations of these impulses and

mythic images in the works of the following period. The Dionysian element marks the paintings of Zurab Nizharadze and the numerous plastic works on the same theme by Giorgi Shkhvatsabaia. Here also belong the works by the 'Three' and allegorical compositions of Temo Gotsadze. These painters in fact prepared the ground for new interpretations of ancient theme in the 1980s, and the climax of such interpretations, the Dionysian climax I would say, were the creations by Irakli Parjiani. I hope you will not consider me boastful if I say that at present the intentional rendering of the Apollonian element in easel and monumental i.e. wall painting is carried on by your humble servant, Gia Bughadze as my works simultaneously imply artistic research and analytical study. As concerns sculpture, the Apollonian, analytical impulse is conveyed by the works of Gia Japaridze.

The issue on the interpretation of the Argonaut theme and the Greek world in general in terms of fine arts is very complex. The comprehensive description of it at different levels of perception is in fact a topic for a separate scholarly research. However, it is also obvious that other nations may have not produced so many interpretations as the idea of sacrifice has not been so relevant in any other culture. This may be attributed to the fact that their genetic past lacks Medea's most valuable image, filled with love and the idea of sacrifice. Sacrifice is Medea's duty to the humanity. She sacrificed, and at the same time remained for ever in the consciousness of the following generations, which at the verbal level can be expressed in the following way: 'here is, Europe, my gift and offering to you, so that you could become stronger and make us stronger as well. The time will come when you, powerful and enriched, will respond with the same goodness, so that we could survive together and rescue our children and the future.'