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**COMPOSITIONAL FUNCTION OF THE CIRCE-MYTH
IN GREEK-ROMAN, MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN
AND GEORGIAN EPIC TRADITIONS:
TYPOLOGICAL SIMILARITY OR LITERARY RECEPTION?**

Although Circe is organically linked with the voyage of the Argonauts, she is represented as an incidental character in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius. The situation is different in this regard in the *Odyssey* by Homer. Thus, it is beyond doubt that this character must have become so well-known and popular thanks to Homer. Most likely, Homer was aware of and rested on the earliest version of the Argonaut legend one of the constituent parts of which, according to researchers, must have been the Circe-myth. The exclusively archaic character of the Homeric version of the Circe-myth, along with many other factors, is also indicated by the circumstance that, unlike the *Argonautica*, in the *Odyssey* the Aeaean island and respectively the goddess inhabiting it are localized in the East.¹ However, it is known according to Apollonius Rhodius that Circe was brought to the West by her father Helios in his chariot², and hence, her original location logically must have been in the East. Accordingly, an earlier version of the Circe-myth must be reflected in Homer's *Odyssey*, as compared with the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, the following question arises naturally: with what purpose must Homer have included the Circe-Myth in the story of the return of Odysseus, i.e. why must the image of Circe have been so interesting for him from the *compositional* viewpoint? This question is answered at length in my book *Homer and Rustaveli. Homeric Principles*

¹ See: *Odyssey*, XII, 1-4.

² See: *Argonautica*, III, 309-313.

of *Compositional Organization and the Epic Tradition*, published at the end of 2005. In particular, on the basis of the traditional Homeric viewpoint that the plot of the *Odyssey* is of the folkloric origin, I tried to demonstrate what in the poem is Homeric proper, i.e. where and how the compositional technique of the individual artist is manifested. For this purpose, the composition of the *Odyssey* was discussed in relation to the fairy tale structure established by Vladimir Propp. One of the conclusions drawn as a result of the study in this direction answers the above question. In my view, Circe, as well as her mythological and literary doublets – Calypso, Nausicaa, Aeolus, Cyclops Polyphemus – are, in Propp's terminology, the so called magic helpers, having a positive or negative function, who, respectively, facilitate or hamper the hero, wandering with one or another purpose, in reaching his goal. Thus, I suppose, by means of the Homeric insertion of the Circe episode into the *Odyssey*, the foundation was laid for a *new variant (in this case – with the participation of Circe)* of the traditional epic model, according to which, the hero, wandering over the sea and straying far outside his homeland, whose life is in danger as he finds himself in the half-real world of a strange enchantress, after entering into a love affair with her, finally succeeds in taking the advantage of his relationship with the hostess to attain his goal (in the case of Odysseus – to return to his homeland).

As is known, the situation is analogous in the post-Homeric epic tradition as well, in particular, with Apollonius Rhodius. Virgil offers a slightly different situation in the *Aeneid*, which also pictures Circe and her island. However, the compositional function of Homer's Circe is given to another, though similar character – Dido. As is noted,³ "Virgil refers to Circe and Dido by one and the same epithets and in that way indicates their interrelation." Of the compositional functions of Homer's Circe, Virgil's Dido has only that of being a sexual partner of the hero. This compositional function, as is known, culminates in the *Satyricon* of Petronius, in which Homer's enchantress and goddess is reinterpreted as a woman of easy virtue from high society, who, in spite of this, still greatly endangers the man, namely, her sexual partner – Encolpius.⁴ The compositional function of Homeric Circe-Myth, having become traditional after the *Odyssey*, I believe, may be traced in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as well, in particular, in the story of Circe and Picus.⁵ However, unlike the characters of Homer and Apollonius, and, similarly to the Roman epic tradition, here Circe has an unequivocally negative function: having

³ For more details see M. Erkomaishvili, *The Circe Myth and Its Interpretation in Classical Literature*, Tbilisi, 2002, 113.

⁴ See: *Satyricon*, 126, 1-139, 5.

⁵ See: *Metamorphoses*, XIV, 346-414.

turned Picus into a woodpecker after he left home to go hunting, she once and for all separates him from his beloved wife, Canens.

In my view, already the traditional compositional function of Homer's Circe-myth is found in the medieval Byzantine as well as West-European epic traditions. An example of the former may be an episode from the novel of chivalry *Callimachos and Chrysorrhoe* by the Byzantine Prince, Andronicos Comnenos Ducas Palaeologos (line 1270...), in which a sorceress kills the protagonist Callimachos using witchcraft and separates him from his sweetheart, Chrysorrhoe. But the sorceress, like Homeric Circe, has both negative and positive traits: the initial negative *function* of her character finally changes to a positive one. A case of realization of the above-mentioned compositional function in the West-European epic tradition can be traced in an episode from the unfinished novel *Lancelot or, The Knight of the Cart* by Chretien de Troyes (lines 938-1292): Lancelot, engaged in the quest of the Queen Guinevere, spends the second night of his travel in the palace surrounded by a water trench belonging to an unknown woman, probably a sorceress, where the hostess fruitlessly tries to seduce him, but finally does him no harm. However, it should be noted that, unlike the Classical tradition, in the above works Circe's name is not found any more, and the similarity of the sorceress to the traditional image of Homeric Circe is by far more general. Thus, this similarity apparently must not go beyond the limits of typology, the illustration of which requires a special study and is outside the main purpose of my presentation.

Along with the above-mentioned, my attention was also claimed by the circumstance that an episode of an encounter of the hero, engaged in the quest – Avtandili, wandering over the sea, and a woman associated with magic, Patmani, living in a littoral city is also found in the novel of chivalry *The Man in the Panther's Skin* of the Georgian epic poet Shota Rustaveli (the juncture of the 12th-13th cc.) This episode, from the structural and compositional viewpoint, is one of the most important parts of the entire poem. Although the heroine, according to Rustaveli, is called Patmani, not Circe, I think, unlike the examples of the medieval European epic tradition cited above, in the given case it is possible to speak not only about the typological similarity (Odysseus – Circe, on the one hand, and Avtandili – Patmani, on the other), but about the conscious, pre-Renaissance, the so-called creative literary reception as well. The main objective of my presentation is to illustrate exactly this thesis.

The above conclusion is drawn taking into account the circumstance that between Homer's story of Odysseus and Circe, on the one hand, and Rustaveli's episode about Avtandili and Patmani, on the other, structural-compositional, i.e. systemic similarity, that of the so-called general character,

as well as particular cases of lexical-phraseological and situational coincidence can be found. I focus attention on the above-mentioned because in the case of the existence of only the former, the similarity under consideration might have been explained within the limits of typology, and not necessarily that of reception, whereas in the case of the existence of only the latter – by the factor of accidental coincidence. The simultaneous existence of both types of similarity, in my opinion, can be explained exclusively by the fact of literary reception.

The circumstance that Circe is an enchantress and *goddess*, and Patmani – only *a mortal woman* of easy virtue from high society, I think, cannot be regarded as an obstacle to substantiating the possible similarity between them. The point is that the image of Circe as a result of different interpretations of various authors of the Classical and Byzantine periods underwent considerable transformation. In particular, it was entirely demythologized and desacralized. The fact is that, as was noted above, with Petronius Circe is neither a goddess nor an enchantress nor a priestess any longer, but *a woman of easy virtue from high society*. And finally, in philosophical treatises of Late Antiquity her image is interpreted as an allegory of passion, lack of restraint and other human vices. This tendency of demythologization and desacralization appears already in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius, where Circe is only a priestess, and no longer a goddess.⁶

When comparing the episodes of Patmani and Circe, from the thematic-structural viewpoint, above all the striking similarity of these two female characters should be noted. Here I imply the so-called ambivalence i.e. duality, typical of the mythological as well as literary image of Circe, which means that this character has both negative and positive traits. In Homer's *Odyssey* Circe is exactly like this. Already from the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius onward she is interpreted one-sidedly – only positively (with Apollonius Rhodius) or only negatively (with Virgil, Ovid, Petronius, philosophers and commentators of the Late Antiquity). Thus, unlike Circe, interpreted in fact partially by Apollonius Rhodius and other Classical authors, literary characters created by Homer and Rustaveli (Circe and Patmani, respectively) undergo a transformation: the initial negative function of these characters finally changes to a positive one.

In my view, the literary images of Homer's Circe and Rustaveli's Patmani show obvious similarity according to another, even more significant thematic-structural feature as well: both characters are associated with the world of sorcery, i.e. magic. According to the *Odyssey*, Circe, as is known, is an enchantress herself and can turn men into pigs. In the case of Patmani, it is

⁶ See: M. Erkomaishvili, op. cit., 152.

evident that this female character too is linked with witchcraft (this is the only case of *real* magic found in the poem, hence, the fact of its existence in Rustaveli's literary world, due to its extraordinariness, requires a special explanation). Although Patmani herself apparently is not initiated into the knowledge of magic, she has slaves "full of sorcery"⁷ and makes use of their skill.⁸

One more thematic-structural similarity between the image-characters of Homer's Circe and Rustaveli's Patmani is that both women ruin the men with whom they had a love affair. However, the similarity is not limited to the thematic-structural coincidence. In my view, the functional-compositional analogy is also evident. Circe does not do Odysseus any harm, on the contrary, she even helps him. Patmani, in her turn, remains Avtandili's faithful helper even after he reveals his identity. So, as we see, one more compositional similarity is found: if in the *Odyssey* Circe helps Odysseus to find his way home, in *The Man in the Panther's Skin* the architectonic peculiarity of development of the story-line gives Patmani the compositional function of assisting Avtandili in finding Nestani (hence, helping his friend Tarieli and *returning to Arabia*).

Although the European and American scholars participating in the conference may have information concerning *The Man in the Panther's Skin* by Rustaveli (in particular, from the book *Inspiration and Poetry* by Sir Cecil Morris Bowra, London, 1955), I have chosen to remind the reader the narrative of Rustaveli's poem. There are two protagonists in *The Man in the Panther's Skin*: Tarieli, Commander-in-Chief of India, who is in love with his king's daughter, Nestan-Darejani, and Avtandili, Commander-in-Chief of Arabia, enamoured of the king's daughter, Tinatini. As a result of the tragic events in the Kingdom of India, Nestan-Darejani is kidnapped by the Kajis, evil sorcerers. Tarieli searches for his beloved for a long time, but to no effect, due to which he becomes depressed and settles in a cave, far away from people. When hunting the King of Arabia, Rostevani, and his Commander-in-Chief, Avtandili catch a glimpse of him at a distance, and in vain try to get acquainted with him. The strange knight disappears. On the orders of the King of Arabia, his slaves during a year are searching for the stranger, but cannot find him, after which the King loses all interest in him. But the heiress to the throne, Tinatini, calls Avtandili in secret and orders him, as her lover, *mijnuri*, to find the strange knight. After looking for him for almost three years, Avtandili discovers the stranger's cave in a desert place, manages to get acquainted with him and hears from him the story of the

⁷ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1234, 1-2; cf.: *Odyssey*, X, 571, 573.

⁸ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1265, 1.

abduction of Nestan-Darejani. Avtandili makes friends with Tarieli and promises that he will try to find Nestan-Darejani's location. However, first he returns to Arabia, meets Tinatini secretly, tells her Tarieli's story and, with her consent, leaves the kingdom once again, this time without the permission of King Rostevani. Afterwards, Avtandili returns again to Tarieli, whose only desire is to meet his own death. Upon Avtandili's request, Tarieli promises his friend to wait for him during a year in the cave. In the meantime Avtandili succeeds in discovering Nestan-Darejani's location, in which, he is assisted most of all by the wife of the chief of merchants of the Kingdom of the Seas, *Patmani*, who is a woman of easy virtue from high society. Avtandili returns in time to Tarieli, tells him good tidings that his beloved Nestan-Darejani is a captive of the Kajis, in the unassailable castle. After this, Tarieli, with the aid of Avtandili and one more friend, King Pridoni, takes the castle of Kajeti by assault, liberates Nestan-Darejani and marries her after his arrival in the Kingdom of the Seas. At the end of the poem Avtandili returns together with his friends to Arabia and marries Tinatini.

In order to illustrate the systemic similarity, i.e. that of the general character between Homer's story about Odysseus and Circe, on the one hand, and Rustaveli's episode about Avtandili and Patmani on the other, I would like to focus attention on the fact that the episodes under consideration in the *Odyssey*⁹ (as well as in *The Man in the Panther's Skin*¹⁰) are created by means of the realization of one and the same structural-compositional model. In particular, this model consists of four component parts: the first one is the arrival of the hero (Odysseus / Avtandili) in a foreign land (Aeaeian island / capital of the Kingdom of the Seas, Gulansharo) and his familiarization with that place; in the second part the hero meets an unknown hostess (Circe / Patmani) and enters into a love affair with her against his own will; in the third part the hero asks the hostess to assist his friends who are in trouble, and his request is satisfied immediately; in the final, fourth part the hero takes leave of the hostess and receives advice and guidance from her before his departure. As regards particular cases of lexical-phraseological and situational coincidence of scenes, to illustrate them I would like to emphasize the following circumstances.

1. One of Patmani's sorcerer slaves during the process of fulfilling the task entrusted to him by his mistress uses a magic means called "Moly" (as it is called in the Circe episode from the *Odyssey* as well).¹¹ So, from the

⁹ See: *Odyssey*, X, 135-574.

¹⁰ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1057, 1-1321, 4.

¹¹ This word recorded with Homer as *Molū* (see: *Odyssey*, X, 305), according to the phonetic laws of the Greek language of the Byzantine period, in Rustaveli's time was already pronounced as *moli* or *Moly* (see: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1271, 3).

thematic-structural viewpoint, the similarity is not manifested only in the "coincidence" of the designations of the magic means, but on the functional-compositional level as well: in both cases "Moly" is such a magic means which is used against sorcerers (Circe and the Kajis), and with a kind purpose, in particular, to assist the travelling hero (Odysseus / Avtandili). Along with this, it should also be noted that Rustaveli refers to "Moly" as "a certain Moly", i.e. some kind of Moly. Generally, it is not typical of the author of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* to describe anything else so vaguely,¹² and the only fact of the deviation from this general rule must indicate that Rustaveli is not familiar with the properties of Moly and with the way how it worked as a magic means. This in its turn can be explained by the fact that neither did Homer describes the way Moly worked and presents only the outward appearance of this plant.¹³ In my view, the above-mentioned unequivocally points to the fact that "Moly" must have found its way into the artistic world of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* exactly by means of literary reception. I shall touch upon other similarities more briefly, taking into account the time-limit.

2. Patmani's littoral city, like the Aeaean island of Circe, lies to the east.¹⁴ According to one passage of the poem, this city is situated at the junctures of different sea routes, and moreover, as is clear from the name of the country ("Kingdom of the Seas"), at the crossroads of different seas.¹⁵ In another passage of *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, this place is definitely referred to as "the very midst¹⁶ of the sea".¹⁷ As is known, Homer refers to the island of Nymph Calypso, a mythological-literary doublet of Circe, at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus is there, as "the middle of the sea".¹⁸

3. As is known, the Greeks stayed with Circe during a year, after which Odysseus asked his hostess to let him and his friends continue their journey homewards. According to Homer, this happened "when exactly one year had passed, seasons had made their circle, / months had flown and many long days had passed".¹⁹ Avtandili stayed with Patmani for a much shorter period than a year. However, Rustaveli starts counting time from the beginning of one of the stages of the hero's wanderings of many years, and thus, Avtandili (like Odysseus) can start his parting words by noting that one year has

¹² E.g. see: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 458, 3-459, 4.

¹³ See: *Odyssey*, X, 304.

¹⁴ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 944, 3 and *Odyssey*, XII, 1-4.

¹⁵ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1061, 1, 3.

¹⁶ In Georgian: "Wipi", i.e. "navel".

¹⁷ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 579, 1.

¹⁸ See: *Odyssey*, I, 50: "ὅθι τι ἄμφαλός ἐστι θαλάσσης."

¹⁹ See: *Odyssey*, X, 469-470.

elapsed almost completely, due to which, he has to say farewell to his hostess and continue his journey. Literally, Avtandili says: "I go, I have no leisure to tarry longer, last year's time is come."²⁰ So, I think, one more lexical-phraseological coincidence is found: at the beginning of the parting scenes of Odysseus and Circe as well as Avtandili and Patmani the expiration of a one-year period of time is compared with the recurrence of seasons and the cyclicity of nature, in general.

Against the background of the above-listed general-systemic and lexical-phraseological i.e. particular coincidences, I think, it is unjustifiable to ascribe to chance numerous cases of situational similarity of scenes, of which, taking into account the time-limit, I shall draw your attention only to the following ones.

1. According to Homer, Odysseus has to go to bed with Circe. Hermes demands this from him. Otherwise the hero will not be able to help his companions, transformed into pigs, as he will not compel Circe to turn them back into humans in any other way.²¹ Like Odysseus, Avtandili fulfils Patmani's wish to enter into a love affair with her against his own will and in order to help his friend, Tarieli.²²

2. When Odysseus learns from Eurylochus that his companions, sent to reconnoiter, are in real danger, he without hesitation arms himself and immediately takes a decision to rescue them. He only asks Eurylochus to show him the way to Circe's house. However, when Eurylochus refuses to do so, he goes to Circe alone.²³ When in return for telling the story of her former lover, Chashnagiri, Patmani demands from Avtandili to kill him, the hero realizes at once that if he learns this story, he may help Tarieli, so he arises fast and taking an iron cudgel, decides immediately to satisfy Patmani's demand.²⁴ He asks Patmani to give him a man as a guide to show him the road. The guide shows Avtandili Chashnagiri's house from a distance and leaves him hastily.²⁵ Taking into account the situational similarity analyzed above, I think that it should not be accidental either that exactly in this passage Rustaveli addresses the reader and insists twice within one line that there is none other [knight] like Avtandili.²⁶

3. Both in the *Odyssey* and in *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, the hero (Odysseus / Avtandili) eventually manages to subjugate the hostess (Circe /

²⁰ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1307, 3.

²¹ See: *Odyssey*, X, 296-298.

²² See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1087, 3-4; 1088, 3-4; 1089, 4.

²³ See: *Odyssey*, X, 261-263.

²⁴ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1105, 1-2.

²⁵ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1106, 1-2.

²⁶ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1105, 4.

Patmani) to his will by threatening her, namely, he is holding a weapon (Odysseus is holding a sword, Avtandili – a blood-stained knife).²⁷

4. After Odysseus goes to bed with Circe, four housemaids of the goddess wash and dress him. Then Circe bids him eat, after which the hero returns to his ship.²⁸ After the night spent with Patmani, Avtandili too goes forth to bathe. Patmani gives him many garments, and invites him to a meal, like Circe invites Odysseus. After this the knight goes home.²⁹

5. Finally, one more plot-compositional parallel. In the *Odyssey* as well as in *The Man in the Panther's Skin* the motif of leave-taking is doubled. Naturally, this serves different compositional purposes. Odysseus and his companions, returning from the Hades, visit once again Circe's island and continue their voyage to their native Ithaca only after this.³⁰ In *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, the heroes, being on their way home after destroying the castle of Kajeti, meet Patmani once again.³¹

Thus, Homer's enchantress Circe, gradually "degraded and diminished" to the image of a woman of easy virtue within the classical epic tradition, transformed into Patmani in the artistic world of *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, by means of Rustaveli's poetic perception again acquires her original compositional function, which she had had at the initial stage of the epic tradition, in particular, in the *Odyssey*: that of assisting the wandering hero visiting her. According to Homer, this hero is Odysseus, and according to Rustaveli – Avtandili. Rustaveli, on the one hand, takes into account the medieval European epic tradition and does not mention Circe's name. On the other hand, it is obvious that Circe is familiar to the author of *The Man in the Panther's Skin* directly from the Classical epic tradition: in particular, both from its relatively late stage (literature of the Roman period and Late Antiquity, within which Homer's enchantress and goddess retained, in fact, only her name – Circe), and from the earliest stage as well, i.e. Homer's *Odyssey*, which enabled Rustaveli, by means of the creative reception of the initial, Homeric compositional function of the Circe-myth, to create an entirely new, Renaissance-type literary character – Patmani.

²⁷ See: *Odyssey*, X, 321-323 and *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1114, 4-1115, 1-2.

²⁸ See: *Odyssey*, X, 345-407.

²⁹ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1251, 1.

³⁰ See: *Odyssey*, XII, 1-144.

³¹ See: *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 1422-1441.