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New Details from the History of Georgian Emigration

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The main field of activity of a large portion of Georgian emigrants who left the country in order to escape from the dictatorial regime of the Soviet Union was a political, cultural, public, and creative arena. Unfortunately, because of the limited access to many important documents related to the history of Georgian emigration, the history of emigration has not been studied adequately, and a lot remains to be discovered.

To fill this gap, we present the life story and works of Lado Arveladze, an almost unknown emigrant, Georgian writer and public figure. Unfortunately, the works and heritage of this talented fiction writer and ardent patriot are unknown not only to the general public, but also to specialists.

According to Rusudan Kobakhidze, the director of the Georgian Emigration Museum of Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University, L. Arveladze's public and literary life was the subject of academic studies of the prominent researcher Guram Sharadze during the last years of his life. It was he who found and brought to Tbilisi several of the manuscripts published in New York and Paris; Sharadze intended to publish his studies as a single collection of works but could not realize it because of his tragic death.

The Museum of Georgian Emigration has only four typed manuscripts out of L. Arveladze's literary heritage. They are: 1. *Between Motherland and Foreign Land*, books 3 and 4, Paris, 1963; 2. *Stories*, New York, 1964; 3. *Short Stories*, New York, 1965; 4. *Between Motherland and Foreign Land*, book 4, New York, 1966. Unfortunately, I was not able to trace any materials connected to Arveladze, except for those mentioned above.

Because of the reasons mentioned, many details about Arveladze's life and works are completely obscure. Even though in his memoirs *Between Motherland and Foreign Land* the writer narrates his life story in detail, very little is known about his early life because his

first and second books are not available to us so far. Furthermore, we do not even know where and when he was born.

The above mentioned memoirs by Arveladze can be considered a literary chronicle of epochal developments of his time. Not only does the author recount impressive episodes of his life, but he often judges and evaluates these developments from a national point of view.

L. Arveladze must have been born in the late 1910s or early 1920s in a village in Imereti. As soon as the Second World War began, he was conscripted into the army. On the 6th of July, 1942, Arveladze and his companions-in-arms, surrounded by enemies near Sebastopol, surrendered to the Germans. According to Arveladze, this step was the only sensible solution from the despairing situation which these forsaken people wound up in.

L. Arveladze spent his captivity in prison camps in Ukraine, Poland, and Germany. When the war was over, he went to Italy “wandering from city to city, from village to village to earn his daily bread,” as he puts it [1. p. 23]. While in Italy, he married a local woman. According to the fourth issue of the information bulletin *Tsnobis Purtseli* issued in New York by Givi Kobakhidze, L. Arveladze's spouse was so warmly accepted by the local Georgian diaspora that she was even elected a member of “The American Council of Restoration of Georgia's Independence” in August, 1954.

Presumably, Arveladze stayed in Italy until the end of the 1940s when he moved to New York, and took an active part in the activities of his fellow countrymen's union. As we know, Georgian emigrants to America founded a non-partisan voluntary organization *The Democratic Union of Georgians* on October 5, 1952, which was renamed as *The American Council of Restoration of Georgia's Independence* on November 2, 1952. The reason why the management changed the name was that they thought it was necessary to involve Americans too. Besides, the new name clearly stated 'Georgia's independence' that was the fundamental principle of the organization [6, p. 155].

L. Arveladze took an active part in the work of this organization. 1953-54 issues of *Tsnobis Purtseli* printed in New York give interesting details regarding this. Namely, according to it, the board of *the American Council of Restoration of Georgia's Independence* formed an editorial board with Givi Kobakhidze, Grigol Diasamidze, Pavle Kvaratskhelia, and Lado Arveladze on January 27, 1953, and instructed it to publish its periodicals: journal *Chveni Gza*, and information bulletin *Tsnobis Purtseli* [7, #1, 7].

Studying these periodicals revealed that Arveladze was, not only on the board, but he was also involved as a writer; he published his own stories under his name, and under the pen names of 'Katsvia Mtskemi,' 'S.S.,' 'Anchari,' 'Ani,' and 'Damkvirvebeli' [6, p. 159].

Besides writing fiction and taking an active part in the editorial board, Arveladze also took an active part in *the American Council of Restoration of Georgia's Independence*, which is clearly proved by the materials published at that time. For example, Arveladze was unanimously elected a member of the board of *the American Council of Restoration of Georgia's Independence*, consisting of seven members, on August 16, 1954 [7, #4, 15], and later he took the responsibilities of the head of the Council.

L. Arveladze also took an active part in events conducted by *the Council*. For example, he was the key speaker at the meeting held at *the Parkside Hotel*, New York on September 13, 1953 to mark the 46th anniversary of the assassination of Ilia Chavchavadze, and 29th anniversary of the 1924 August rebellion. He presented Ilia Chavchavadze's achievements in such an interesting and comprehensive way that the participants even expressed their wish to have his speech published [7].

Materials available to us do not say exactly how long Arveladze stayed in America. What we know is that the last book he published in America was dated 1966. The writer spent the last years of his life in Rome, where he died of heart attack on October 17, 1975 [5, #4, p. 16]. The exposure and critique of Russia's colonial policy toward Georgia takes an important part of Arveladze's memoirs. Even though, when discussing this problem, the author mainly discloses the methodical anti-national policy of the communist government, he does not leave imperial ambitions of pre-revolutionary Russia without attention, and expresses some interesting thoughts in this regard too.

L. Arveladze's memoirs are also interesting in that he thinks that one contributing factor that led to the annexation of Georgia by Russia was that some Georgians sacrificed their homeland's interests to their own personal promotion in their political career. Although, according to Arveladze, these people were not exceptional, an important factor contributing to the annexation of Georgia by Russia was the fact that a large portion of the public of the 19th century and Georgia of the Soviet period did not have a clear picture of Georgia's future and were not able to perceive Russian colonialism.

According to L. Arveladze, such deformation of national consciousness of a big part of Georgian society was caused by the colonial policy that Russia carried out systematically and methodically towards Georgia since the first days of its annexation.

Namely, the author is confident that it was the result of this policy that an important part of Georgia's public of those periods had contradicting attitude, on the one hand, towards the restoration of Georgia's independence in 1918-1921, and on the other hand, towards the tragic events of November, 1921 and later the Second World War.

Not only does the writer discuss the above in general, but he also brings many factual details from both our country's history and stories of his close friends and acquaintances. For example, "Had Georgia made at least a third of the sacrifice it made during World War II, when Lenin's army invaded Georgia in 1921, the Red Gang, that was unclothed, unkempt, and poorly armed, would not have been able to annex us... There was very little life laid down for the homeland: Nobody came to protect the national border. Deserters filled the streets, squares, bazaars, forests and plains. Everybody was trying to avoid the battle. They hid behind each other's backs. There were only very few brave men who laid down their lives for their country" [1, p. 61].

By accusing his nation so severely, Arveladze actually follows the tradition of telling the truth without embellishment that was established by such prominent Georgian writers as D. Guramishvili, I. Chavchavadze, A. Tsereteli, and others. Despite the fact that Arveladze's writing ability could not be compared with that of those writers, still, he can be considered a

public figure devoted to this tradition, with his intention and impartiality, expressing his critical views without obfuscation and embellishment.

To illustrate this attitude of the author toward one section of the Georgian public of corresponding periods, I would like to refer to those episodes in his book where he talks about deformation of patriotic self-awareness of Georgian mothers with afore mentioned objectivity. According to Arveladze, during the short period of Georgia's independence "Georgian mothers of the day were not as patriotic as those of past times: no mother was willing to send her son to fight for the country, no mother reminded her son of his obligation to protect his country" [1, p. 61].

To give weight to his arguments against Georgian mothers, the author gives examples of true stories about his close relatives: "My relative Lavrenti Arveladze was killed at Atskuri; His mother wept saying: 'My poor son Lavrenti, who was raised without a father, God damn Jordania's government. Why did you have to fight at Atskuri!'

Simona Arveladze's mother – Nino - wailed the same way: 'God damn the families of Jordania and Gegechkori! Why should my Simona have died at Natanebi (Simona Arveladze was killed during a battle at Natanebi in 1918).' Such were the words of other mothers towards Jordania's government too. What were our mothers accusing Jordania of? They were accusing him because their sons died defending Georgia's borders" [1, p. 61].

To analyse the tragic results of deformation of a patriotic self-awareness of Georgian mothers in more detail, the author brings episodes completely different from those mentioned above from the Soviet period, namely from the World War: "Now that there were only few in the households in Georgia who did not feel the terror inflicted by grenades and the down pouring of shells, and at least one out of every three households put on a black mourning dress, and some households were left without a single male (from my neighbouring family of Tedore Arveladze five brothers were conscripted and none returned), nobody dared to shed a single tear, let alone express his or her dissatisfaction. Such an amazing change took place in just twenty-three years...

What caused such a change? It was the fear of the Russian bayonet which all Georgians, regardless of their sex and age, felt constantly against their throat. The fear bore devotion, love, the feeling of self-sacrifice. Is this a fake? It does not matter if it is a fake or not" [1, p. 61].

The author considers these contrasting episodes a deplorable result of dictatorial ideological policy of the Soviet Government on the patriotic self-awareness of the Georgian public, and to give his readers deeper insight into this problem, he draws such a parallel: "Only about a hundred Georgians died in the fight to protect Georgia's independence and a hundred thousand cursing and damning were directed toward the government of independent Georgia. But now hundreds of thousands of occupied Georgians were dying to protect a foreign land from invaders and not a single reproach, not a single deserter. How inspiring a fear can be!" [1, p. 63].

It was his stories that Lado Arveladze's creative energy manifested in full. These circumstances are of great importance, since emigrant Georgian writers' literary abilities

showed in poetry and journalism mostly, whereas their prose was markedly weaker and smaller in amount. It is true that Arveladze's mastery in writing cannot compare with the achievements of grandmasters of Georgian prose, with the writing ability of Grigol Robakidze – the most prominent representative of Georgian emigrant literature among them, but the readers of Arveladze's prose will have no doubt that he is one of the most notable emigrant Georgian fiction writers, considering his mastery with words, subject matter, and variety of literary characters.

The interest toward L. Arveladze's prose is kindled by the author's critical interpretation of the highly characteristic vice and governmental problems of the Soviet reality. In contrast to his colleagues living in Soviet Georgia who could not freely express their opinion because of strict ideological censorship, Arveladze is straightforward in expressing his views without masking them.

After the demolition of the Soviet empire, which was followed by the breaking these ideological shackles, Georgian writers too got rid of the oppressive tongs of censorship, and their writings reflected the characteristic vice of the Soviet era to a much greater degree than before. Although these circumstances cannot diminish the importance of Arveladze and other Georgian writers who lived abroad, in spite of their tragic fate it was them who first unveiled the Soviet vice.

In contrast to their colleagues living in Soviet Georgia who used allegories to hint to our national problems and shady sides of the communist period, emigrant Georgian writers spoke about these problems directly and honestly. It is true that their works lack the power and energy of our grand masters; still, with their works, describing the Soviet reality from a critical point of view, they deserve an important place in the history of Georgian literature of that period.

Apart from writing fiction, L. Arveladze from time to time wrote journal articles. In these articles on the past and present of our country, the author discussed many burning issues, showed the contribution of great sons of Georgia, exposed both the Russian colonialism and negative sides of ourselves, etc.

In this regard, L. Arveladze's topical satire, in which he exposes the evils of life of our compatriots living abroad, is especially interesting. The biting satire that the author uses to show the common, shady side of daily life of Georgian immigrants of his time lends intensity and weight to his words. Even though Arveladze's feuilletons did not have distinct addressees, and he used anonymous characters in his satire; publishing of those feuilletons caused dissatisfaction and indignation of a significant portion of Georgian emigrants.

For example, L. Arveladze's feuilleton “Itching of the Tongue or a Wailing of the Thorny Shepherd”, in which the author exposed the vain glory and ambitions of a large proportion of Georgian emigrants, caused outrage among some of them. According to Arveladze, it is characteristic of many Georgians that “He who reads a tale of 'Natsarkekia' and thinks of himself as Homer, or reads the treaty that Empress Ekaterina and our King Irakli made in Georgievsk and thinks of himself as a historian and mocks at Pliny and Plutarch” [7, #5, p. 11 – 12].

Such inappropriate and ambitious self assessment led to a deplorable result. According to the author, we have four scientists, three political journalists, five historians, eight iconographers, and eleven honest men per Georgian emigrant.

This caused an outrage of some Georgian emigrants as can be seen from the article “The Press and Its Rights” published by G. Kobakhidze, the editor of the bulletin, in the following, the 6th, issue of *Tsnobis Purtseli* in response to the aforementioned feuilleton.

The tendency of disclosing human vice became more prominent in L. Arveladze's feuilleton 'The Last Supper' published in the 6th issue of *Tsnobis Purtseli* under the pen name of 'Anchari,' which shows the treacherous plans and intentions of key country officials caricaturing them. It would be no exaggeration to say that the author expressed the idea that was the subject of the aforementioned feuilleton and for which he chose ironic satire, was given in such general terms that it still applies to our present reality.

Such is Lado Arveladze's literary heritage at a glance. Despite the fact that Lado Arveladze's literary heritage, which exists as manuscripts and is not readily available to the general public, is not limited to the works discussed above and issues emphasized by me. All the facts mentioned above give strong grounds to state that Georgian emigrant literature of the 20th century has an extremely interesting writer represented by this almost unknown author.

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