

Secularization of the Miracle in Medieval Georgian and European Literature

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Abstract: Secularization means transfer from the spiritual or ecclesiastical sphere to secular. In the sphere of philosophy and in literary criticism this term is used to refer to conceptualization of a definite manifestation of ecclesiastical thought into secular content. I use this term in this meaning in the present paper that deals with the reflection and meaning of miracle in mediaeval Georgian and European literature.

The transformation of miracle in the process of transition from early medieval to late medieval literature takes place along the line of secularization. It comes close to reality, accentuating man's high, moral, intellectual and physical features. From this point of view, Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin" stands at the border of a new period – that of the Renaissance.

Key words: *miracle, Rustaveli, Chrétien de Troyes*

Secularization means transfer from the spiritual or ecclesiastical sphere to secular. In the sphere of philosophy and in literary criticism this term is used to refer to conceptualization of a definite manifestation of ecclesiastical thought into secular content. I use this term in this meaning in the present paper that deals with the reflection and meaning of miracle in mediaeval Georgian and European Literature.

Significant studies have been devoted in European literary criticism to research into miracle in such broad interpretation in

medieval European, in particular French literature (Danile P., *Le Merveilleux dans la literature francaise au Moyen Age*. *Fantastic voyage*, *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. by John Clute, Goff Jacque Le, *L'imaginaire Medieval*; Kappler Claude, *Monstres, demons et merveilles a la fin du Moyen Age*; Lucienne Carasso-Bulou, *The Merveilleux in Chretien de Troyes Romance*; Meslin Michel, *Le Merveilleux, L'imaginaire et les croyences en Occident*).

Research into Georgian literature from this viewpoint yields significant material, leading to interesting conclusions from the standpoint of its relations to the European literary process as well.

I have focused on several miracles from those established in hagiographic writings and tried to review those that are typical of Christian figures and characters of the medieval romance.

I have singled out three sets of questions in which I shall try to categorize typical medieval miracles in order to show better what was inherited by the medieval hero from the image and character of the Christian saint: exaggeration of physical power and struggle with evil forces (devil, dragon); healing of the sick; relationship with animals.

The power of saints is often exaggerated in hagiographic writings. Exaggeration of human power was characteristic of the mythical. This element must have found its way from mythos to hagiography and from the latter to medieval secular literature. [5].

True, the power of saints is exaggerated, yet it does not involve the type of physical force that we encounter in mythical characters. The power of saints is based on their belief and the stage of spirituality attained at which they can stop a rolling rock with the force of faith, to drive out demons from the human body, and with the force of words to conquer a dragon. According to the Christian view, a saint who is capable of miracles is omnipotent and, as well as mythological heroes, fights evil forces that in Christian writings are united under a single term: devil or demon. In some cases a saint fights even a dragon. Such episodes occur in Christian literature as well as in iconography.

The Georgian classical literature is renowned for three works: "The Visramiani", "The Amiran-Darejaniani" and "The Man in the Panther's Skin". In each of these works we encounter miracles that differ from those performed by hagiographic characters, in content they come close to them. Works by the French writer Chrétien de Troyes were written in the same period. I shall try to discuss Georgian secular works "The Amiran-Darejaniani" and "The Man in the Panthers Skin" as well as romance by Chrétien de Troyes "Yvain, the Knight of the Lion" in the context of the miracles described above.

The Georgian chivalrous romance "The Amiran-Darejaniani" in particular, is full of miraculous elements.

Rustaveli rarely mentions miracles in his poem. In the poem, as in hagiographic works, miracles are considered as real and authentic events. There is more mystery and more surprise in the appearance of Tariel – a fully human character - in the story than the existence of the magician slave, invisible cloak, magic armor, "devis" and kajis.

Unlike the characters of Rustaveli, the main characters of "The Amiran-Darejaniani" and those of Chrétien de Troyes' are in constant search for adventure and risk. Their search is not based on any condition or intrigue and is often dictated by the search for glory or by the request from a beloved woman. In contrast, the actions of Rustaveli's characters are dictated by the ideals of high morality that go beyond the individual's glory and beyond the request of a beloved. Dedication and sacrifice for friendship are elevated by Rustaveli to the level of altruism.

Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther's Skin" can be considered to anticipate its contemporary West-European works in terms of realism and artistic expression. And the ideals that are raised in the poem indicate that for Rustaveli miracles represent a narrative part rather than bearing an ideal purpose.

Unlike hagiographic writers, medieval authors (Rustaveli and his contemporary Chrétien de Troyes) look for their ideal not in a concrete person or historical character but create it in fantasy.

It can be suggested that for "The Man in the Panther's Skin", as for the French chivalrous romance, the magic environment is a tool for a full depiction of the person, and for the expressive description of reality.

In Rustaveli's view, a human being approaches the ideal with his personal virtues and qualities, reflecting the strong drive for the ideals present in medieval society.

The views of a medieval man on the environment, his mentality and perception of reality are in some ways expressed in the literature and the art of the period.

It has been noted that "the process that emerged from progressive thinking in Europe in the 12th-13th centuries is already present in the pre-Rustavelian Georgian literature and culture of the 12th century" [6].

Similarly to the Classical romance, the medieval romantic epic and courtly romance comprise numerous separate subjects, independent episodes, and adventures, whose common characteristic feature is adventure.

Along with other themes (principles of struggle and heroism), the motif of adventure moves from church writings to works of secular literature, though the area of the manifestation of its area is reinvented and the same action is broadened. Themes, such as defeat of the devil or the pleasures of the flesh become elevated to the altruistic interpretation of individualism. To get willingly into trouble in order to help a neighbour becomes a common theme. Bringing into the Georgian secular writings the image of a knight and a traveling adventurer is the highest typological similarity with images of the characters of the European chivalrous romance.

The adventure romance is a work of literature in which multiple, mostly fantastic adventures and travels of its main character are described in artistic form. In this way the romance of this type is related to movement from one place to another, romance of "travels" and "adventures".[4]. The adventure romance found its full expression in the "chivalrous romance". A knight, either at the request of a beloved, or filled with a desire of military and heroic

glory, or moved by a desire to see foreign lands, travels in various strange countries. He fights the enemies and adversaries that stand in his way in the shape of humans, giants, terrific and strange animals and all kinds of obstacles.

K. Kekelidze includes "The Man in the Panther's Skin" and "The Amiran-Darejaniani" in the category of adventure romances. He searches for the trace of these romances in ecclesiastical writings, such as a composition called "The Travels of Three Brothers" included in the life of Macarius of Rome. As indicated by the researcher, this work leads us out of the cycle of ecclesiastical narration and introduces us into the sphere of fantastic-fabulous works where the entire physical nature, with its phenomena, its fauna and flora, is animated and sympathetic towards humans [3].

The issues of the romance are realized in the adventure and they are integrated in subsequent heroic tasks. Care for and protection of the weak, loyalty to the beloved, magnanimity – give justification to the knights' world.

There are certain steps of distinction in the world of knights. An adventure has a special quality - the knight himself determines his own life. He himself should go through the steps of distinction. Ultimately the adventure becomes the principal means of reaching perfection.

It may be said that the supernatural creatures described in a chivalrous romance represent connecting links of the conflict described in the romance, often playing an important role in its resolution. In certain cases, miraculous creatures put obstacles on the path of adventure, while in others, they assist the knights. Miraculous objects, however, have a different function. They help the knights in attaining the unattainable, in doing the unfeasible. Hence, such objects have magic powers.

In the Middle Ages miracles suffered some transformation, reflecting the change in people's attitude to the world and to God. In one episode of "The Life of Grigol Khantzdeli", Mikel, a pupil of Grigol, is thrown from a high cliff by a demon. But he manages to rise from the ground unharmed, as God comes to his aid. In "Tristan

and Iseult", the two lovers, while in the palace of King Mark, hear voices of the guard and Tristan decides to jump from the tower in order to avoid shameful punishment. He runs into the priory and jumps from the tower. The author describes him being flown up by the wind and gently returned to the ground, as God showed him mercy.

Even though the enamored Tristan is breaking certain moral norms, he is still assisted by God. Thus, the miracle of a character is sometimes due to divine miracle.

In the Christian writings the main purpose of miracles is to benefit people. This includes healing the sick, restoring vision to the blind, bringing humans to the path of truth, and so on. In a medieval romance the main purpose of miracles is to help the character, to give him certain advantage in the fight with evil (wondrous armor, slaves, magic sword, magician's balm, etc.).

Miracle does not constitute a breach of the laws of nature. In the Christian world everything is marked by the sign of miracles; subjugation of animals by saints is linked to the harmony of the paradise. The characters of a medieval romance also strive for harmony. In the realm of Rustaveli's characters "the goat and the wolf are feeding together" A saint acts on behalf of the Lord and with the help of God he defeats evil forces. A character of a secular romance hopes for the Lord's protection in joining battle, though he attaches no less importance to his own power.

The following differences are noticeable between ecclesiastic and secular characters in the context of miracles.

A saint has a privilege of delivering the will of God, while in a secular novel, a hero does not have this ability. A saint is able to miraculously cure the diseased, while in a secular story, a character occasionally himself needs to be cured.

A saint can perform miracles even after his death, while in a secular story, a hero can act only during his life. In a secular novel miracles are already modified and real justification is found for the action. A saint has the privilege to disclose the divine world, while the character of a secular romance is deprived of this capacity.

Miracles undergo modification and alteration on their path towards reality, involving the following steps:

At the first stage, the basic level of development, most emphasis is placed on fiction, the author's creative language, with the accent on fantasy, the supernatural world and supernatural creatures. The author creates a mysterious world and does not try to account for the actions of the character, such as returning sight to the blind, defeat of more powerful mythic creatures, disappearance with a magic cloak, etc. The fact remains that miracles do not require logic for their interpretation for the audience of this period. They accept miracles as an esthetical fact and this fact is objective reality, an ontological rather than psychological fact [1]. In other words, miracles are created not just for their own sake, but for the society which, in this period, appears in the role of the audience rather than a reader. The society turns into the key customer of miracles. The medieval world orients itself toward miracles. The works of this period include "The Amiran-Darejaniani" by Mose Khoneli, Chrétien de Troyes" that are full of supernatural miracles and some episodes from "The Man in the Panthers Skin" (kajis, devi, the magic cloak, the magic armour left by the devis).

At the second stage, in an intermediate zone, the authors emphasize the heroic actions of their characters. Even though the physical power and their actions are frequently exaggerated, there is already an attempt to introduce and establish elements of reality. In particular, there is an attempt to explain how the hero defeats his enemy. In some romances of Chrétien this is done in rather subtle ways, while Rustaveli's work gives more details. However, this point can be considered as the third stage of development.

At the third stage there is more emphasis on reality and an attempt to explain how the character defeats his enemy. At this stage, countries appear depicted quite realistically. In Rustaveli's poem, this is India and Arabia, in the work of Chrétien this is the court of King Arthur. In other words the writers create an image of a real country, from where all adventurers reach out. At this stage mystical worlds that play the key role at the first stage are replaced

by real countries, emphasizing the fact that its characters are real people. This element is weakly shown in "The Amiran-Darejaniani". However, Rustaveli gives a detailed explanation of how the hero defeats its more powerful enemy when describing the fight of Avtandil with the pirates.

Adventures, often conducted under the token of a miracle, allow the hero to overcome the barrier which exists between the idealized and real lives. As noted by E. Kohler, a well-known researcher of medieval European literature, the chivalrous romance idealizes the adventure, giving it a moral value, takes it out of the concrete and places in an empirical setting [2].

It is not accidental that miracles play such an important role in chivalrous romances. A larger part of the character's adventure is realized in miracle. On the path full of dangers, the knight is accompanied by a number of miracles that either help him (magic objects) or participate in the destruction of dragons, kajis, devis and other anthropomorphic creatures.

I have already noted that, in contrast to European chivalrous romance, where an adventure is inconceivable without miracles, in the adventures of Rustaveli's characters miracles play a minor role.

"The Man in the Panther's Skin" relates to miracles through human reality. For Rustaveli it is not the surreal that is important but the search for those ideals which at the end of his poem bring victory of good over evil.

The characters of Rustaveli, in contrast to the characters of West-European romance are in part free in their action. The characters of Chrétien's novels act only at the dictate of the beloved. Avtandil can fulfill the promise given to his beloved, adding to it a new commitment – dedication for his friend - turning it into a supreme moral principle.

It should be noted that the miracles performed in the context of the adventure, do not involve only physical miracles, since they are elevated to higher ideal and moral values to which humanist thinkers of the Middle Ages, including Rustaveli, strive.

Miracle is represented weakly in the adventure of Rustaveli's characters, unlike Western chivalrous romances, where any type of adventure is absolutely inconceivable without a miracle. In the "Man in the Panther Skin" the attitude to miracles follows the line of human reality. To Rustaveli the principle is striving for an ideal rather than fantastic content.

I came to this important conclusion through studying miracles in Georgian medieval literature in parallel with the French literature of the same period. The transformation of miracle in the process of transition from early medieval to late medieval literature takes place along the line of secularization. It comes close to reality, accentuating man's high, moral, intellectual and physical features. From this point of view, Rustaveli's "The Man in the Panther Skin" stands at the border of a new period – that of the Renaissance.

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