

Robakidze's Works written in the German Language (Prometheus' Offspring)

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Abstract: The society has been interested in Grigol Robakidze's works written in German for a long time. Due to the fact that the writer's new works were tracked down in various countries, new prospects are open for scholars and literary critics for studying his literary heritage.

Robakidze's five articles, under the umbrella title *The Silhouette of the Caucasus* - published in 1942 in different issues of *The Brussels Magazine*, are not known to Georgian readers. The above articles are mentioned by the writer in his letter *My Explanation* addressed to Georgian writers in 1947. As Robakidze notes, he managed to avoid "political emphasis" during the fierce years of World War II.

The main topic in the *Prometheus' Offspring* from *The Silhouette of the Caucasus* (Das Geschlecht von Prometheus, 26.08. 1942) is a free human being and his / her activities. There, Robakidze describes the stories from the history of Georgia, life and customs and rites of the freedom-loving nations living in the Caucasus to the citizens of Belgium, occupied by Germany, and the German-speaking readers. Robakidze deserves credits for re-introducing Prometheus's country to Europe in the 1930-40s through his works.

The ambivalence of Robakidze's Prometheus – fighting for freedom and blasphemer at the same time – can be relevant to the immigrant writer himself, who was between two frontlines. He also belongs to those offsprings of Prometheus whom nobody can help. It's due to this ambivalence that Robakidze's works give rise to different viewpoints both in Georgian and German academic literature. And every finding offers the possibility to make new conclusions.

Key words: *Caucasus, Robakidze, Prometheus, freedom.*

Since the 1990s, when Grigol Robakidze was rediscovered, there have been a number of debates on his works among scholars and literary critics. Special attention should be paid to the writings from his emigration period, created in Germany and Switzerland. Part of these works has been made public only recently, long after the writer's death. The avid readers of Robakidze are still expecting new discoveries. New perspectives of research are awaiting the scholars after his new works are found in different parts of the world.

Antique topics, motives and artistic images play a great role in Robakidze's works. Moreover, he regarded himself a descendent of the Antique civilization. His works represent a good combination of ancient myths, Georgian literary tradition and the writer's contemporary literary-aesthetic and philosophical tendencies, which makes the writer's artistic world unique. Robakidze's essays and articles: *On Friedrich Nietzsche, Dionysus' Cult and Georgia, Nation's Spirit and Creativity and Solar Age of Georgians* enjoy wide popularity, but the readers are not well acquainted with his letter *Prometheus' Offspring*, which was published only once on August 26th 1942, in *Brussels Newspaper* (N 236). Robakidze mentions this work in his letter to Georgian writers, written in 1947. In the autumn of the same year he addressed German writers with the similar letter *My Explanation (Meine Erklärung)*.

Here Robakidze tries to explain why he wrote books about Hitler and Mussolini and makes an attempt to repudiate the claim that he served the ideology of National-Socialism and fulfilled Nazi orders. In particular, he describes it in his letter to Georgian writers *Heartfelt Thoughts*:

War Period 1. I was asked to make a speech on the radio. I avoided it – due to many reasons: the German army was in the Caucasus. One Brussels newspaper, which was published in the German language, asked me to provide them with letters about the Caucasus. I provided them with the following materials – *Georgia and the Crusaders, Ivane Orbeliani, Prometheus' Offspring, Sacred Mountains, Imam Shamil* (the latter was published in Arabic in one

magazine). So, you see, I managed to avoid the political "accents" they should have expected [8].

Surely, the writer who afterwards emigrated from Germany to Switzerland, could not remember exactly the issues of the newspapers, where these articles were published, but we know that the German army approached the Caucasus in 1942. With Margret Schuchard's help we managed to find in Heidelberg University the *Brussels Newspaper*, where Robakidze's articles were published in the following sequence *Georgia and the Crusaders (Kaukasus-Silhouetten*: I. *Georgien und die Kreuzzüge*, *Brüsseler Zeitung*, Nr. 215, 5. August 1942) *Ivane Orbeliani (Iwane, der georgische Hagen: Silhouetten des Kaukasus (II)*, *Brüsseler Zeitung*, Nr. 221, 11. August 1942), *Prometheus' Offspring (Das Geschlecht des Prometheus: Kaukasus Silhouetten (III)*, *Brüsseler Zeitung*, Nr. 236, 26. August 1942) *Imam Schamil (Freiheitskämpfer Imam Schamil Kaukasus Silhouetten (IV)*, Nr. 259, 18. September 1942), *Sacred Mountains (Berge sind die Heime der Götter Kaukasus Silhouetten (V)*, *Brüsseler Zeitung*, Nr. 274, 3. Oktober 1942). Two of these articles, *Ivane Orbeliani (Iwane, der georgische Hagen Silhouetten des Kaukasus (II)* and *Imam Schamil, a Warrior for Freedom (Freiheitskämpfer Imam Schamil: Kaukasus Silhouetten (IV)* were published a second time in a book Grigol Robakidze (1880-1962), *A Georgian Writer between Two Languages and Cultures* [3, pp. 241-249].

Robakidze points out in his *Heartfelt Thoughts* that the above-mentioned works are not political articles, they do not convey war propaganda, or carry the impulses of National-Socialism. The author refers to historical and mythological topics and introduces to the readers his motherland, Georgia. Still, it must be mentioned that the essays would not have been published, if they had not been in accordance with National-Socialist ideology.

The third work of Robakidze *Prometheus' Offspring (Das Geschlecht von Prometheus)* was published in the *Brussels' Magazine* on August 26th 1942. The main idea of the article is a free human being and his actions. Prometheus is one of the most favourite characters for Georgians and Robakidze is not the only

author to refer to this topic. We can trace Prometheus' Georgian prototype Amiran in many Georgian writers' works since the Antique period. Special emphasis should be made to Rustaveli's *Knight in a Panther Skin*, where Amiran's motif sounds rather strong. This figure became even more popular in the 19th-20th centuries. Amiran, a hero, fighting for freedom can be found in the creative writings of Alexandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, Ilia Chavchavadze, Vazha Pshavela, Akaki Tsereteli, Galaktion and Shota Nishnianidze. Grigol Robakidze provides us with a novel interpretation of the topic and tries to explain who the offsprings of Prometheus are. The Georgian writer follows a national tradition of depicting Prometheus (Amiran), as a warrior-hero, who will set himself free one day and bring happiness and peace to his people.

It is not the first time that we can trace Prometheus in Grigol Robakidze's works. Even in his novel *Graal Keepers*, published in 1937, one chapter is named as *Madness of Prometheus (Prometheischer Rausch)*. This title enables the Georgian author to enliven the interest of European readers, who know the character of Prometheus well enough from the Greek mythology and other literary sources and interpretations. Prometheus and his Georgian counterpart Amiran of Georgian mythology have much in common. Written texts about Amiran have been found since the 18th century [1]. It is noteworthy that Robakidze talks mostly about Prometheus, and not Amiran. It is also essential, that both Prometheus and Amiran are tied to the Caucasus Mountain, as they provided mankind with the forbidden gift of fire. Zeus punishes Prometheus by sending an eagle which pecks his liver on daily basis until Hercules sets him free whereas Amiran is tortured by crows. One day Amiran will set himself free and this will mark the beginning of Golden Era for Georgians.

In the very first chapter of the novel *The Grail Keepers*, its protagonist Levan Orbeliani is depicted as a warrior for freedom and the reader can recognize his Promethean features. Prometheus is a symbolic image of the Georgian nation. Robakidze claims that "The eagle pecks Prometheus' liver even nowadays" [10].

The novel *The Grail Keepers* depicts both the Golden era of Georgia and the Soviet reality. Georgian people look for role-models in the ancient past and hope that one day they will be released from Socialist dictatorship. Robakidze regards St. Nino's miracle as a new Grail and, as for the Grail keepers, they defend and cherish the heart of Georgia. These knights are the offsprings of Prometheus. Their names are fictional in the novel, but they all have real prototypes - writers, artists, representatives of theatre and cinema. The protagonist can easily be recognized as Robakidze himself. The Knights of Round Table - Paolo Iashvili, Titsian Tabidze, Kote Marjanishvili, Ushangi Chkhaidze and others are the eminent representatives of Georgian culture of that period, who were markedly anti-Soviet in their spirit and tried to fight against the Socialist reality with "Promethean madness."

This topic is covered from a slightly different angle in Robakidze's essay *Prometheus' Offspring*. Using his characteristic pathetic manner of writing and poetic description he tells us in a lengthy mode about historical events and people, before Prometheus appears in the text. A critically-minded reader is kept waiting with impatience for Robakidze to start discussing his main topic. So, what is the necessity of such a lengthy narration? The author makes the European reader acquainted with the Georgians and other Caucasian nations.

At the beginning of his essay Robakidze mentions that in Sanskrit the word *Svekhkhahari* ("Swechchhachari") means an independent, autonomous person, a man, who acts according to his "own free will". The followers of the esoteric approach believe that everybody acts according to their own "law". To characterize a free, independent Georgian person, he uses the word *tavistavadi* (man belonging to himself) [5]. Robakidze tries to explain the etymology of the words that try to depict the general state of a free person. The word *tavistavadi* serves as a model for him. He believes that this feature is typical of the Caucasian people, as "they are perfectly aware of their inner autonomous status" (BZ 26.8.1942).

Grigol Robakidze explains the meaning of this word to the German reader and reminiscences of his childhood, spent in

Georgia. He remembers one Georgian nobleman, who impressed him greatly. His attire and manners showed the extreme self-awareness and confidence of the owner. His attire might have been a bit worn out and shabby, but this played a minor role compared to his refined manners and behavior. Hereby Robakidze mentions that other Caucasian nations are characterized with similar attire - their modest clothing points out that these people set their service towards their nation and country as a main priority. They give away all their possessions, apart from their horse and weapons, which they cherish. They usually have three companions, who stay with them until their death. Robakidze sees the chief reason for the noblemen's self-confidence is their generosity, nobility of spirit and the readiness to serve their country (BZ 26.8.1942). Here the author seems to be rather subjective, exaggerating in his evaluation of events and historical data. The destitute state of Caucasian nobility in a previous century was caused not only by their generosity and noble nature, but also by many problems and calamities of small Caucasian countries: wars against enemies and local feudal rulers. The endless fights for independence led to the destruction of some countries and a grave social and demographic state of the population. Humanistic ideas were not usually set as a total priority and naturally, Caucasian noblemen were not a particular exception to this rule, not always thinking about the welfare of their country.

The ideal image of noblemen and the Georgian feast are inseparable. Robakidze frequently mentions this fact in his writings. In Prometheus' Offspring he mentions the celebrations and feasts in the palace of the Gurian noblemen Gurieli. The day after New Year seems particularly interesting. "That day the noblemen served as the serfs and the serfs pretended to be the noblemen" (BZ 26.8.1942).

This period showed well the relationship of Gurian noblemen towards the commoners and vice versa. Moreover, Robakidze mentions that observing the lifestyle of Cherkez noblemen, we will be able to understand the race psychology ("Rassenpsyche") of Caucasian people. The word Rassenpsyche causes unpleasant associations and fear in German readers, reminds them of their uneasy historical past and of National-Socialism, still, Robakidze

uses the words in a different context – for him the term means the key characteristics of Caucasians – their love for freedom and independence, their inborn tolerance and humanism. Still, I think that in the period of war the Georgian writer should have been more cautious to avoid the usage of the words and ideas, so popular among the National-Socialist circles.

Robakidze mentions, that Georgian noblemen cherish their ancient traditions of hospitality and friendship. Caucasians regard hospitality even more sacred than friendship, higher than love between a man and a woman.

Caucasians are not scared of what they dislike, what puts them in a “dangerous Promethean zone”. Their “individual self” creates a maximum to achieve the aim. Discussing these issues, Robakidze gradually approaches the topic of Prometheus and repeats the words in *Grail Keepers*: “It is not an accidental fact, that Prometheus, according to the myth, is chained to the Caucasus” [7]. Robakidze thinks that this hero is a mythical embodiment of the Caucasian spirit. He is not an egotist; he wants to share divine fire with people. In the moment, when he wants to share the fire with people, he does not yet leave the divine frame, but when he steals the fire, he becomes an outcast, an independent-minded hero, a revolutionary who makes his own decision. He is not a victim, like the *Masters of Fire* depicts it in *Rig – Veda*s (BZ 26.8.1942).

Prometheus of Robakidze combines in himself the general features of Caucasians, the divine and the human characteristics merge in this figure, his free will cannot be crushed down. Caucasian, like Prometheus, possesses an ambivalent image – he is an uncompromising fighter on the one hand, and a blasphemous character on the other.

According to the myth, Zeus sends an eagle to peck Prometheus' liver *-gvidzli*. Robakidze points out in his novel *The Grail Keepers* that in the Georgian language the word *gvidzli* is associated with the word *gvidzili*, which means “been awoken”, whereas the word *nagveli*, meaning “bile”, simultaneously denotes sadness and despair. So, these concepts stand side by side. “In Georgian *gvidzili* and *gvidzli* have the same root, at the same time

the word *nagveli* denotes body substance, as well as spiritual state. According to the preliminary knowledge about the world, these two concepts are associated - "being awakened, alert" leads to "sadness" and "sadness" keeps you alert. The feeling of "missing something" is born somewhere between them. This is the area of *gvidzli* (liver) [10].

Robakidze introduces this issue in Prometheus' Offspring as well. He writes that as soon as the liver is endangered, a semi-god is awakened. Gods punish Titan because of their overwhelming individuality - for being alert: Titan cannot get back to sleep (BZ 26.8.1942). Here the author brings Ahura-Mazda and Mithras as examples. They are termed as never-sleeping Gods in mythological stories. They completely overcame their "individual me" and the personal freedom is omnipotent for general, overall freedom. Love of freedom is the essential feeling for Caucasians, as the small countries of the region oppose versatile aggressors and fight to maintain their independence since the Antique period and unfortunately, the issue remains acute still.

In his work *Prometheus' Offspring* Robakidze writes about the "danger to a Caucasian" which might originate from the unbound character of Prometheus, his self-will. Among Caucasian people, according to Robakidze, the danger, ascribed to Promethean self-will, is still alive. It was one of the determining factors for the historical development of Georgia. I would like to mention, that Robakidze's ideas about "Promethean danger" are a bit vague. We can associate them with Nietzsche's concept of danger, coming from extraordinary people, who have to live in an ordinary society [4, pp. 352]. Nietzsche names Hölderlin and Kleist as an example of the people, who found it hard to tolerate the German environment and climate. In his work about Schopenhauer the writer points out that the existence of strong governmental, state or religious structures, over importance of public attitudes led to the animosity towards solitary philosophers, as the latter opened the door to the world without tyranny. Their boundless will of freedom is caused by their extraordinary talents. They can overlook and change priorities and systems of values. Nietzsche names such solitary semi-Gods, whose

deep philosophical approaches were able to change society and somehow present a source of danger. These people are Schopenhauer, Goethe, Russo, Wagner, Kleist and Beethoven [4, pp. 353-354].

The fact that Robakidze's ideas resemble those of Nietzsche's in the perspective of a free-willed Semi-God is not a mere coincidence. The respect and high esteem the Georgian writer held towards the German philosopher is well-known. We can argue that Robakidze interprets Nietzsche's ideas here, though he never mentions his name in *Prometheus' Offspring*.

Talking about Caucasian "danger" and their boundless bravery, Robakidze draws Haji-Murat, a famous "naib" of Shamil, who was the leader of the Avar area during 7 years and fought against Russia with all his might (BZ 26.8.1942). Robakidze first describes the way Haji-Murat fought on the Russian side, and then he depicts him as Shamil's comrade-in-arms. Shamil could not trust him completely as Haji-Murat was still tied to Russia though finally the hero ended his life tragically in this uneven fight. In his essay *Prometheus' Offspring* Robakidze represents Haji-Murat as a victim of Promethean self-will. Caucasians remember Haji-Murat and Shamil as heroes, because the Caucasians' heroes are the people, who act according to their own free will, aimed at obtaining freedom and fighting for their own motherland. According to the writer, people understand their heroes, appreciate them and immortalize their heroic deeds and free-will in their songs. While characterizing Georgians, Robakidze remembers the words of David the Chronicler, that "Georgians are innately rebellious towards their masters". This is not just the "characteristic feature" of Georgians, but the "danger". He repeats the same in his 1952 essay, written in Geneva *What should Georgians Remember*.

"Here lies the "danger" of all "features". Take fire, for example: if you do not give it some material to devour, it will "feed on itself," as the Arabs say and turn into ashes. Of course, ashes are not a "feature" of fire they are its "danger", the peril that awaits if proper care is not taken." [9, pp. 42-47].

For Robakidze, Georgia's historical development is associated not with its features, but dangers. He thinks that this is the "inner cause" of the fall of Georgian Empire. He does not mention the exact epoch, but naturally, he implies the Golden Era of Georgian history. One more marker - he quotes a historian of David the Builder's period. He thinks that the Georgian "in der verborgenen Schicht des völkischen Seins sich ihrer Gefahr bewußt sind" (BZ26.8.1942). "Völkisches Sein", morale of a hero, his deeds and a number of other words or terms, from the pathetic vocabulary of National-Socialism are really noticeable in *Prometheus' Offspring* and generally, in overall works by Robakidze. Still, he uses this wording for the different purpose - to highlight the identity of Caucasians and introduce the European reader to the values of Caucasian small nations.

Robakidze mentions the Georgian counterpart of Prometheus, Amiran, only at the end of his article. He recites the legend of Amiran and tells the reader about black and white dogs, constantly licking the chain that keeps the hero bound to the mountain. At the very moment, when the chain is thin enough for the hero to break it, by some wonder it regains its thickness. Amiran remains captured; the blacksmiths forge a new chain for him. The Georgians associate this with Maundy Thursday, the legend acquires the features of a cult and the sound of the blacksmiths' hammers turns into a symbol. (BZ 26.8.1942).

Robakidze concludes his essay with the words that the legend of Prometheus can serve as a certain warning for the Georgians, whose Promethean self-will is truly boundless. ("Mahnend und zugleich wegweisend leuchtend dieser tiefsinnige Brauch in der prometheischen Gefahrenzone des georgischen Seins.: BZ 26.8.1942).

While reading Robakidze's *Prometheus' Offspring* a question arises, how dare the author write and publish such article in war-time, occupied Belgium? An article, which deals with the issues of independence and freedom? As we have clearly seen, he did not write a political essay, which would have been suitable for the National-Socialist propaganda. He chose a famous Promethean topic

and worked on mythological materials. This material is closely connected with the history of Georgia, totally unfamiliar to German readers. After reading the essay, the positive awareness takes place. Moreover, the text carries the message of freedom and independence, the spirit, which was of a vital importance for all occupied countries during WW II. There still is the other side of the coin, Robakidze sounds sympathetic towards the German army, which approached the Caucasus. He must have seen it as a chance of releasing his country from the socialist regime.

The ambivalent nature of Robakidze's Prometheus - a fighter for freedom and an iconoclast, can be ascribed to Robakidze himself. We see the fate of a doomed emigrant writer, an offspring of Prometheus. This ambivalent nature leads to the ambiguous evaluation and interpretation of Robakidze's creative works in both Georgian and German literary criticism. And every new discovery provides the chance for new approaches and novel conclusions.

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