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LITERARY FICTION AND REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY: GEORGIAN CASE STUDY

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century the process of history professionalization took place. It was characterized by exclusive development of the discipline. The “founding fathers” tried to bold the borderlines between the history and other disciplines and sharpen the focus of historical researches. Just this view was reflected in fact of choosing archival data and official documents as only reliable type of sources and also the established view about the honest academic enabling to represent “what actually happened” – formula proposed by L.Ranke. In the twentieth century subject of history was conceptualized in a new way. This was an epoch of so-called “New History” which had introduced interdisciplinary approach in historical research. The new generation of historians developed interest to the topics which in recent past might be treated as not relevant for the academic occupation. In this very context appeared necessity of literary sources’ use. This search for new sources was favoured by the coincidence in time with dispute about historicity of literature. The part of practitioners of history ignored it and preferred to make history in a traditional way, i.e. in spirit of Rankean historiography. This was case at least in Georgia and it continued to be the same in nowadays. The paper aims to fill (of course only partially) this gap in Georgian scholarship. It uses one monument of nineteenth century

Georgian literary fiction for reconstructing of reality and elaborates on more general topic concerning the realistic prose as important source for history representation.

Keywords

History Representation, Historical Sources, Georgian Literary Fiction, Georgian History, Nineteenth Century

1. Introduction

In history research alongside with relevant study methods special role belongs to sources. The adequate reconstruction of past depends on representative number of authentic sources. In its turn the set of sources chosen for a certain academic purpose depends on a way of understanding history subject-matter. In pre-modern era historians were obliged to provide the facts of divine interventions in life of human society and also activities of political elites, depict the royal families. Compatibly with this approach the historians draw the limits of their “territory” (the term used by eminent representative of the Annales School Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie for the title of his well-known monograph *Le Territoire de l'historien*), however, history was not strictly separated from the other fields of humanitarian knowledge. Hence, for the practitioners of history the selection of sources was not among the most topical tasks at all.

In the nineteenth century this situation was changed: in this very time the process of history professionalization took place. This process was characterized by exclusive development of the discipline. The “founding fathers” tried to bold the borderlines between the history and other disciplines and sharpen the focus of historical researches. Still only political facts attracted the attention of historians. Thus, originally the “territory” of history was protected with diligence from neighbouring disciplines. Quite intentionally historians avoided all possible meeting points of interdisciplinary exchanges. This view was reflected in their decision to choose archival data and official documents as only reliable type of sources. The honest academic enabling to represent “what *actually happened*” (“wie es eigentlich gewesen” – the formula proposed by the founder of empiricist paradigm L.Ranke) was established image of historians.

But from the twentieth century subject of history was conceptualized in a new way. This was an epoch of so-called “New History” which had introduced interdisciplinary approach in historical research. In result, the “territory” of historians broadened. The new generation of historians developed interest to the topics which in recent past might be treated as not relevant for the academic occupation. Now historians studied not only events (event-centred history of

empiricist historians was not “fashionable” any more), but motivations of the actors as well; not only individuals occupying high social positions, but collectives; representatives of lower social classes, marginal groups of the society, culturally marked communities.

The content of notion of “culture” was changed. It comprehended not only unique artefacts, but all facets of societal life. This approach provoked search for the new sources. It became clear that the sources which were neglected by empiricist historians were relevant and even more: of principal importance.

In this very context appeared necessity of use of literary sources. Rankean historiography was sceptical regarding the texts of this genre as far as they were treated as subjective narratives. Meanwhile in some cases to the questions arisen by “New History” was possible to give answers only based on this type of texts. This process for the new sources’ searching was favoured by the coincidence in time with very important for humanitarian studies dispute about historicity of literature (new historicism). This very dispute helped to understanding importance of literary sources for history representations, revealing informative value of these texts. For the brief and essential account on the development of history discipline in time of its professionalization see (Lambert& Schofield, 2004).

This process actually commenced already in pre modern era with the well-known discourse by Aristotle concerning the fiction (poetry) non-fiction (history) interrelations, however, it assumed completely new sense in modernity thanks to academics like Hayden White, Michael Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt and others.

This was very important tendency for historians; however, part of practitioners of history ignored it and continued to make history in a traditional way, i.e. in spirit of Rankean historiography. This was case at least in Georgia and it continued to be the same in nowadays. The researches in field of history that base their investigations on literary fictions as the sources are very rare. Meanwhile it is undisputable that “...literary phenomenon is a living subject to transformation by history, showing many-sided affinities, with the surrounding historical and social reality, with the artist’s cultural background and society with the preceding literary traditions linked to varied branches of art”(Oamil, 2019:1145).

In this paper I aim to fill (of course, it is possible only partially) this gap in Georgian scholarship. For the investigation I use one monument of nineteenth century Georgian literary fiction and with help of it try to show its connection to reality.

The nature of the reality's representation in fiction and history is often visited thoroughly theorized topic of humanitarian studies. The academic literature on this topic widely accessible. I list here only three of them (Segal, 2002); (Nimis, 2004); (Lindblad, 2018).

I do hope that Georgian case will add to the problem's study some supplementary insights. In particular the novella *Solomon Isakich Mejghanuashvili* by Lavreti Ardaziani (1815-1870) will be analyzed in detail. Originally, the novella was published in 1861. This is main work of this writer who is considered in history of Georgian literature as one of the founders of critical realism (Rayfield, 2012). In pre-modern Georgia, intellectual work was the prerogative of the nobility. In the nineteenth century, the social mix of writers had changed. Ardaziani was a poor deacon's son; he earned his daily bread by serving in different state bodies. The novella is recounted in the first person by the main character Mejghanuashvili (Mejghanuashvili is an aptonym; it means "the child of a cobbler"). For the main character's father's name used Russian form: in Russian "Isakich" means "son of Isak". Using Russian forms for referring to father's name was very common in those days Georgia.

Elsewhere this very novella (with some others) was investigated by me as a source for representation of Georgian nationalist ideology (Chkhartishvili, 2018: 25-33). This contribution was focused solely on *us /other* dichotomy and reflection of social prejudices in Georgian realistic prose. In the present work the same text is approached from many points and used for viewing of entire Georgian society of the first half of the nineteenth century.

This very period has already been studied closely by many historians; however, this novella was never concerned as an important source for the investigation.

2. Social Context

In pre-industrial period Georgian community was constituted of two main classes: nobility and peasantry. The political and cultural leadership belonged to the nobility; peasants in their majority were serfs. The social roles of the estates were clearly defined: eminent Georgian poet of the twelve century Shota Rustaveli (Khintibidze, 2011) in his poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, represented this fact aphoristically: according to him "the labourer should ever work, while worrier should be brave". Undoubtedly, under the "labourers" are implied peasants, under the "worriers" – knights.

Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907) – Georgian writer and public figure "the Father of Georgian Nation" (Chkhartishvili, 2013: 189-206; Chkhartishvili, 2012:188-211; Chkhartishvili,

2014: 202-213) thought that the strict division of social functions between above-mentioned principal classes in pre-modern Georgia was main reason of the country's steadily successful economical development.

In the nineteenth century this well-established feudal order was shaken and the leading role of nobility gradually became questionable: nobility weakened economically; its cultural role also did not remain undisputable. Many landlords had very poor education. The moral image of the feudal estate was not positive as well: possession and exploitation of other humans did not match with the spirit of modernity. For general overview of Georgian past see (Muskhelishvili 2012, 2014, 2015) and (Suny, 1994). For some concrete data see (Heydarli, 2019, 177-193).

The Georgian nation evolved from the well-developed ethnic community which had been formed in pre-Christian era and before transforming into national community in the nineteenth century underwent long-term uninterrupted developments. In the eleventh-twelve centuries Georgian identity became so salient (Chkhartishvili, 2009:50-53; Chkhartishvili, 2016), that it could be referred as pre-modern Georgian nation (Chkhartishvili, 2013).

The shaping of modern Georgian nation was predated by the emergence of national identity narrative –the multifaceted discourse which provided answers to the fundamental for Georgians questions like “who were we”, “who are we”, “who will be we in future”. To answer these questions Georgian nationalist intellectuals needed clear vision of social strata consisting Georgian entity (Chkhartishvili & Mania, 2011).

It was necessary to identify the principal class of the process of the nation building. In case of paradigmatic European nations the leading role belonged to the bourgeoisie who had ambition to control all material and spiritual wealth of the native communities. The situation in nineteenth century Georgia was quite different. Capitalist development was on an embryonic level: only trade and money lending capital was circulated. It was almost impossible to detect the agrarian or industrial capitalism. Thus, the estate of bourgeois was presented by the petit merchants and money lenders who in general were not ethnic Georgians. None of these minorities had relevant potency to become Georgian bourgeoisie and lead Georgian nation. It is why Georgian nationalist intellectuals keenly wanted to identify the class which in the new circumstances (in the epoch national consolidation) could provide the hero of Georgian community.

This issue was discussed in many publicist papers and masterpieces of literary fiction. One of them is above mentioned novella by Lavrenti Ardaziani.

3. Political and Cultural Background

The novella has a form of memorial notes. In several times the author fixes the exact dates. Thus, we know for sure that this fictional narrative reflects the period from 1800 (this is a date of birth of the main character Solomon) to the 1850s: there is mentioned opera house which was opened in Tbilisi in 1952.

The first half of the nineteenth century is marked completely new political circumstances for Georgia. It became part of Russian empire.

In 1783 was negotiated Georgievsk Treaty – an agreement between Georgia and Russia goaled on mutual support and collaboration; however, in 1801 the abolishment of Georgian royal dynasty of Bagratians by Russian Emperor's decree was extraordinary event for Georgians. Bagratians were in power at least during ten centuries. In pre- modern era Georgian identity was built on loyalty to the kings of this dynasty. Georgian statehood was identified with their rule.

The respond to this challenge was expressed in unsuccessful anti- tsarist uprisings of 1802, 1804, 1812-1813 in eastern Georgia, in 1819-1820, 1841 in western Georgia and aristocratic conspiracy of 1832. In the middle of the century the situation was settled. On political, social, cultural situation in Georgia in the first half of the century see (Bendianishvili,1980); (Kakabadze, 2003), (Shvelidze, 2013: 247-259).

The new policy promoted by Tsar's viceroy in Caucasus Mikhail Vorontsov contributed to this greatly. His initiatives for developing economic and cultural life, his soft power pleased Georgian aristocracy and tended to the loyalty to the imperial throne. In Caucasus tsar's viceroy's residence was in Georgian capital Tbilisi. In result of his efforts this Asiatic city was very quickly transformed into European (on the level of dominant social stratum) one (Jones, 2005:6).

4. Data and Discussion

Ardaziani colourfully describes his hero Solomon: he is ethnic Armenian, though well naturalized. He communicates with others in Georgian, he often tries to prove his assertions by referring to Georgian proverbs, and for him Georgian culture is “our culture”.

Solomon starts off as a small tradesman, continues as money lender and accumulates great wealth. Firstly he still lives as poor man; however, one accident drastically changes his mind. He begins to live as it is supposed to live to the rich bourgeois.

Despite this Solomon is not satisfied with his new social position. He worried as sees that lacks features which he values in people: these are noble origin, education, and state rank. He aims to be accepted in Georgian “*beau monde*” and wants to marry his daughter to a Georgian aristocrat, Alexander Raindisdze (an aptonym, means “the son of a knight”) who is an enlightened person with liberal views. Solomon treats him with special sympathy. The author actually invites the readers to compare Georgian aristocracy’s lifestyle and virtues with the new-born bourgeoisie. The nobility and the bourgeoisie were continually living in opposition with one another, but they had a great mutual attraction as well. In this story, the reader can easily discern this situation: Raindisdze and Solomon are somewhat close, they permanently affirm mutual respect and behave properly towards one another, yet it is also evident that Raindisdze masks his real attitudes with politeness and does not count Solomon as his peer. He refuses to marry Tamar, Solomon's daughter, despite her vast dowry. The author's point is that money has little impact on this nobleman, despite the fact that his own financial affairs are very far from perfection. Finally, Raindisdze leaves the capital city and settles with his beautiful wife in his paternal estates in the countryside, and tries to establish a well-organized farm and modern household. Instead of the Italian operas that he attended with pleasure in Tbilisi, now he enjoys the songs of the birds in the forest. Raindisdze finds happiness, while Solomon remains unhappy. The two characters represent not only different classes, but also different ethnicities. According to Solomon, different attitudes to money represent the factor which underlies the differences between Georgians and Armenians; he sees the Georgians as wasteful, while the Armenians as a people capable of saving money and using it rationally. Raindisdze does not agree with Solomon: he says that there are many wasteful Armenians as well as many Georgians accumulating money. The impression is that Solomon provokes Raindisdze to the answer like this because actually his aim was not bold differences, but to be integrated in the estate of Georgian aristocracy.

Meanwhile the general message of the masterpiece in question is clear: according to the author the new generation of Georgian nobility, educated landowners can provide heroes of new Georgia, while new born class of capitalist – cannot.

It is worthy to be mentioned in this regard that two years later after publication of the novella came out Iliia Chavchavadze’s masterpiece “Is every Human a Man?”(Chavchavadze, 1987) in which Georgian nobility was depicted grotesquely. Maybe it is not accident at all that the main characters – representatives of nobility – in both novellas wore one and same names –

Luarsab and Daredjan. In Ardaziani's work these are names of the mother and son who harbored Solomon's helpless mother. These characters are full of all virtues; in Chavchavadze's work these are names of totally ignorant couple whose lifestyle is used by the author to show full degradation of the estate of the nobility and its social impotency. However, later on Chavchavadze himself in his famous novella "The Otar's Family Widow" (Chavchavadze, 1985) defined the educated new generation of Georgian nobility as a leading class of Georgian nation: Chavchavadze tried to convince his readers that western-educated young aristocrats and smart Georgian peasantry (peasants also should receive relevant education) jointly would be able to lead the nation. Thus, in this point the views of Chavchavadze and Ardaziani coincide. Iliia Chavchavadze was a main designer of Georgian national identity narrative. Hence, the coincidence of his position with of Ardaziani's is important.

However, let us return to the masterpiece under the question. In the novella classes of feudal aristocracy and peasantry are represented exclusively eloquently. Many of aristocrats have very attractive personalities, however, they are depicted as careless; for example, despite the fact that Solomon's well-wisher Luarsab had sufficient income and relevant funds, he did not pay to Solomon a small debt in time; because his carelessness his son Alexander was forced to pay incomparably greater amount of the money many years later.

Georgian noble women gather all day round at the parties to play cards and gossip. They are not embarrassed by the news that young men – their friends and relatives – have lost in games a lot of money.

Georgian servant is depicted with empathy.

As for peasants: Ardaziani presents this social class by one personage: his name is not provided; the reader sees him with his chickens. He comes to town to sell them. He is naive and will-less and Solomon buys very cheaply from him chickens.

The merchants and money lenders are presented by Armenians. Petit craftsmen (cobbler, hairdresser) also are ethnic Armenians. These were like hereditary professions in nineteenth century Georgian urban centres. The hairdresser who becomes Solomon's father-in-law is depicted as very tricky even trickier than Solomon.

Representatives of Armenian clergymen are depicted differently: positively, negatively and neutrally. In general, for representation of local Armenians are used all possible colours. For example, Solomon is greedy, revengeful, however, at the same time he is compassionate and prone to repentance, self-critical.

The main distinguishing marker of Georgian and Armenian identities was religion. The two neighbouring peoples professed different branches of Christianity. However, this makes no obstacle for the Solomon's mother to go to the temple of the Orthodox Church in Tbilisi and ask God for mercy just here.

The author touches Jews and Ossetians only in passing way, both in negative context. According to him Jews are serfs, however, very rich and not loyal to their patron i.e. Luarsab Raindisdze. Ossetians represented by an unnamed killer.

Negative conceptualization of these peoples was common place of Georgian literature of the nineteenth century: Jews and Armenians for their cupidity, Ossetians for collaboration with Russian officials. The Jews and Ossetians are depicted not as deeply as Armenians, however, with exclusive features and due eloquence.

Solely representatives of Georgian Orthodox Church are totally ignored in this kaleidoscope of social strata. Georgian Orthodox clerics of this period eagerly collaborated with Russian authorities. Russian authority was identified as enemy in the public's perception. Evidently, this was a reason: Lavrenti Ardaziani belonged to the family of clergyman and for him was embarrassing to criticize this social stratum.

Russians are represented by low rank officials. They are depicted totally negatively as bribe takers and unmerciful to population of Georgia regardless ethnic origin. Though Russian officials are treated so negatively, Russia as a country is viewed as a cradle of civilization: according to Solomon only fact of visiting Russia can positively influence a person's worldview.

Europe also is treated positively. According to Alexander Raindisdze the reason of Europe's advancement lies in Christianity. This accent makes us to conclude that the author saw the main danger for Georgians in neighbouring Muslim countries. The merchants who merchandize silk in Georgia and sell goods via Georgia in Russia are referred without mentioning countries of their origin, but simply as merchants of the south countries.

As was already stated above nineteenth century is a time of consolidation of Georgian modern nation. Georgian intellectuals were occupied with conceptualization of others so that to make lines of Georgian identity salient. Ardaziani contradicted ethnic Armenian money lender to Georgian noble's family and gave his preference to the latter.

4. Conclusion

Thus, on the one hand, we see that the novella under the consideration reflects reality of the first half nineteenth century Georgia very closely. Almost all social strata, ethnic groups, their perceptions, values, and lifestyles are depicted vividly and eloquently. On the other hand, it completely ignores political events: the above mentioned popular anti-Russia uprisings, punishment of its participants by Russian authorities and also aristocratic conspiracy.

The presented discourse might be summed up in the following way: the novella can be successfully used for the representation of public perceptions (for this segment of reality it seems indeed a very important and reliable source, even more: the only authentic one) and capturing spirit of the epoch; and with caution for the representation of concrete facts. For making of more general assertions it would be necessary to investigate sufficient number of nineteenth century Georgian literary masterpieces and show with more credibility that Georgian realistic prose can be widely used in anthropologically orientated history representations.

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