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To the study of Georgian-Polish literary relations

Despite its painful historical past Georgia has never been isolated from other countries. It had always cultural and literary relations with other civilized countries. Georgian people always took interest in the world of literature and its ongoing processes and tried to stay abreast with the latest developments of their era.

It is common knowledge that during the first period of Georgian literature (V – 980s) Georgia developed the relations with eastern Christian countries. In the second literary period (980s – mid XIII c.) the relations were mainly developed with western countries, Byzantium in particular. After the fall of Constantinople (1453) the Ottoman Empire closed the gateway to Asia. The Ottoman Empire stretched to the southwest of Georgia while Iran lied at the southeast. These circumstances weakened the relations with Europe. Despite a Mohammedan environment “low flow of heavy stream of western culture” reached Georgia (1, 9).

The interest in European literature became more obvious in XVII-XVIII centuries. Georgian writers started translating from French, English and German languages.

At the end of XVIII century and beginning of XIX century Georgia changed its area of focus from the eastern world to western countries.

In their creative work Georgian writers, as true artists, were guided not only by their talent. Together with the oldest and richest national literature they referred to the cultural heritage of other countries as well.

In the present article we will discuss the relation of Giorgi Eristavi to Polish literature.

Georgian-Polish relations number centuries. These relations strengthened in the XIX century. Georgian and Polish people amongst others conquered by the Russian Empire rised in rebellion fighting for their independence. As it is known, the uprising against czarism began in Poland in 1830. “After suppressing the uprising about 3000 Polish patriots were expelled to Caucasus. They lived in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Guria and Kakheti in Georgia. The immigrant population was attached to the military subdivisions. Georgians and Polish people developed friendly relations very fast. Georgians were aware of the immigration reason of the Polish people and sympathized with them. The Polish learnt the Georgian language quite fast and they often visited Georgian families. Georgia became their second motherland” (2, 19-20). It is worthy of note that many Georgians were moved to Poland after their actions against Russian Empire. Giorgi Eristavi was among them.

Giorgi Eristavi was a multi-faceted and copious writer. He entered the writers’ circle in the 1830s. In the history of Georgian literature and culture he was known as a playwright, a poet, the founder of Georgian professional theatre, the founder and the editor of the literary journal “Tsiskari”. His name is associated with the first steps

towards literary realism in Georgia. He established an entire school of playwrights and made great contribution into the development of Georgian literary language.

From his very young age G. Eristavi was interested in foreign literature and its rich, outstanding heritage. G. Eristavi reveals the deep knowledge of life and works of world-known writers: Torquato Tasso, Petrarch, Dante, Shakespeare, Mickiewicz, Hugo, Beranger, Schiller, Byron, Pushkin, Lermontov, Griboedov – that is the list of the word masters who inspired Eristavi.

G. Eristavi thoroughly familiarized himself with Polish culture and literature during his immigration to Poland.

Why was Giorgi Eristavi exiled?

XIX century appeared to be fateful for Georgia. In accordance with the manifest of 1801, the Russian Empire incorporated the territories of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom and, later, other remaining parts of Georgia. The country lost its independence – something that Georgian people never accepted. Georgian people always fought for the reclamation of their independence and preservation of their ethnic identity.

As the representative of the feudalists, G. Eristavi worried about his motherland. Young Giorgi actively participated in the political activity (plot of 1832) which was aimed at banishing the conquerors. He was trying to promulgate the ideas of the secret community with his activity as well as his creative work.

The plot of 1832 collapsed and its participants were arrested. The investigation of the case began. Giorgi Eristavi was sent into exile.

“Being in exile G. Eristavi had to live in different places: Vilnius, Belostok, Kovno, Riga, Warsaw and other places following the deployment of the military base he served in.

But his stay in foreign countries was not in vain. Not only did he master the Polish language, but he also familiarized himself with Polish literature...

The fact that Giorgi Eristavi was welcomed and esteemed by many Polish families is proven by many of his poems and other corresponding materials” (3, 152).

Despite the fact that the Georgian poet was welcomed warmly in Poland, he suffered from nostalgia. The poetry of Adam Mickiewicz was the only thing he found relief in.

During his exile Giorgi Eristavi wrote a great deal of poems. He started his translating activity in Poland. He translated into Georgian such poems by Adam Mickiewicz as “Bakhchisaray”, “The Pilgrim”, “The Grave of the Countess Potocki”, “Ayu Dag”, “Graves of the Harem” and “The Akkerman Steppe”.

The materials for his translations were not chosen randomly by Giorgi Eristavi. The poet’s attitude and his emotional state is felt in each one of them.

Giorgi Eristavi who actively struggled against autocracy until the revelation of the plot of 1832 decided to change his way of struggling. When it became apparent to him that it was impossible to reach his desirable objective in his fight against the Russian Empire, Eristavi changed his tactics. While the Georgian independence was postponed and the country was awaiting for a suitable moment to come, Georgian public figures (Giorgi Eristavi among them) under the disguise of obedience tried to carry out national activities, maintain and strengthen the patriotic spirit of their people.

The 40-50s of the XIX century is Giorgi Eristavi's active literary period. He established Georgian professional theatre and national dramaturgy, he founded the first Georgian literary journal "Tsiskari". Giorgi Eristavi efforts were driven by his desire to contribute to the preservation of the national, mental and moral benefits of the Georgian people. He was an intellectual who was in love with his country and its people whose future was of primal importance to him. Whilst Georgia was the colony of the Russian Empire, whilst the conquerors tried to eradicate Georgian genes, the Georgian language and kill the Georgian soul (and owing to its imperialistic politics it achieved some results), the foundation of Georgian theatre and the journal was of vital importance. The theatre gave people the space for their mental and spiritual growth. It took care of people's moral improvement. In addition to that, the Georgian language reinstated its rights, which can be rated as a national achievement. Journal "Tsiskari" played a very significant role. It contributed to the development of writers whilst Georgian writers were always ready to defend their nation.

Giorgi Eristavi perceived the importance of literary relations that would assist the enrichment of national literature and popularization of Georgian writers abroad. G. Eristavi had close ties with the Polish living in Georgia. One of them was Kazimierz Lapczyński, a Polish translator with whom he had friendly relations.

Kazimierz Lapczyński came to Georgia in 1844. He worked as an engineer and was interested in Georgian folklore. Together with Giorgi Eristavi they translated "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" which was published in "Biblioteka Warszaska" in 1863. The Georgian society became familiar with this translation in 1870, when the article "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" by Ivane Kereselidze (the editor of the literary journal "Tsiskari") was published. Doctor Ioseb Talko who lived in Tbilisi informed I. Kereselidze about the Polish translation of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin".

When did G. Eristavi and K. Lapczyński translate "The Knight in Panther's Skin"?

According to I. Talko the translation was made roughly between 1825 and 1830s (4). This date was considered to be incorrect. In S. Iordanishvili's opinion the translation was made between 1841-1860 (5), according to A. Baramidze the translation was done in the 1840s (6). G. Gamezardashvili named the years between 1841-1844 (7), but later he suggested 1850-1854 (3). L. Menabde considers these last dates to be the closest to the true date of translation. In his opinion the translation of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" was made in between 1850-1854 (8).

I. Kereselidze published the introduction to the Polish translation of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" in the journal "Tsiskari". K. Lapczyński wanted to familiarize the readers with Georgia and that is the reason why he talks about Georgian people, their history, religion, culture and traditions.

It is worthy of note that the Polish society first heard about Shota Rustaveli and his poem in the works of Aleksander Chodźko. "The polish patriot Aleksander Chodźkoo resettled in Georgia in 1830s and spent two years in Tbilisi. He got acquainted with Georgian history and literature, mastered Georgian language... He published the book in the Polish language in 1833 in London. One of the extracts is entitled "Shota Rustaveli – the Georgian poet". The Russian translator Dubrovski

translated it into Russian. The abstract tells the reader not only about Shota Rustaveli but it also narrates the brief history of Georgia” (2, 18).

Among the foreign connoisseurs and admirers of Georgian literature a special role is given to Arthur Leist – a true adorer of Georgia, Georgian people and writers.

He was a German writer and public figure who contributed enormously to the study and popularization of Georgian history, language and literature abroad. He had devoted numerous interesting researches to Georgian people and literature. Part of his researches was published in Germany and Poland before Leist’s arrival to Georgia (June 1, 1884) and was instantly translated into Georgian and published in Georgian journals and newspapers.

Along with other writers Arthur Leist gave special consideration to the literary work and public activities of G. Eristavi. A. Leist highlighted the outstanding service of Giorgi Eristavi for the development of professional theatre and dramaturgy.

In the present article we would like to speak about Leist’s article “Who does Giorgi Eristavi imitate” which is kept in the Girogi Leonidze State Museum of Georgian Literature (manuscript N 25165-Kh). The author underlines that there were many debates on the values of Georgian theatre lately. It was said that Georgian theatre was lacking originality and its founder, Giorgi Eristavi was imitating the Russian dramatist Ostrovski. The German researcher does not share this view and states the following: “During his exile Giorgi Eristavi was eagerly learning Polish language and worked in Polish society. He got familiarized with the Polish theatre too. G. Eristavi was fascinated by the social comedies by Aleksander Fredro. The life of the Polish people was somehow similar to the life of the Georgians. In Fredro’s social comedies Eristavi discovered characters similar to his countrymen. When it came to the foundation of Georgian theatre, the impressions gained in Poland became apparent. Being impressed with Polish plays G. Eristavi created several social comedies. He was not copying Fredro. However, Polish dramatist showed him the way to the creation of Georgian domestic social comedies. Ostrovski who mainly created the characters of merchants could not attract Eristavi as much as Fredro, since the plays of the Polish dramatist corresponded to Georgian reality.

Thus, it was A. Fredro who led G. Eristavi to write social comedies.

What can we say in this respect?

During his stay in Poland Giorgi Eristavi worked profusely. As we have already mentioned he was learning the language, familiarized himself with the culture and literature and watched the social comedies by A. Fredro. The fact that the years spent in Poland had a positive effect on Giorgi Eristavi has been stated in a number of scientific literary articles, although claiming that A. Fredro inspired G. Eristavi to write social comedies since G. Eristavi and A. Fredro wrote social comedies and G. Eristavi found Fredro’s characters to be similar to his countrymen will not be right.

G. Eristavi wrote social comedies before his exile. Moreover, as the result of the emergence of bourgeois relations many countries suffered the fall off patriarchal-feudal economy. Social changes had their effect on literature too. It is a well known fact that the development of similar literary tendencies is also caused by the similar public and historical-cultural state. Hence, Georgian, Polish and Russian writers in whose countries the emergence of trading capital changed the patriarchal world, could describe those processes, write social comedies, show the lives of merchants

and their servants without any kind of influence. We can say with certainty that Giorgi Eristavi is a true Georgian writer.

The above unquestionably proves the existence of Georgian-Polish literary relations. Giorgi Eristavi contributed to the development of these relations.

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