

The Concept of a Bull in Georgian Lifestyle and Literature

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Abstract

Georgian culture is an important part of the world culture, which had created its own pagan religion and pantheon of gods, however, Georgian mythical realm is relatively smaller and modest than the Greco-Roman one. The Georgian man has easily acquired all those pagan deities that were associated with good deeds and agriculture. High yield and fertility was the basis of well-being for a farmer and therefore, they used to worship deities which were considered to be the protectors of productivity.

„For Georgians, Ox was a sacred creature which was worshiped by them as it was considered to be the symbol of the Sun, together with Eagle and Lion“ (Kiknadze, 2016, p. 30).

Keywords: „Bullfight“, „Kuruli“, N. Dumbadze, S. Nishnianidze, the Bull (Khari)

Introduction

An Ox is a creature which is a manifestation of wisdom – a mission which even the Wise Man has difficulty to fulfill. The best examples of this are myths related with churches and sanctuaries throughout the world and specifically, in the different regions of Georgia.

An Ox left on its own to walk freely will eventually reach the place where people will build a sanctuary (by this method, Lagurka's Place in Svaneti region was discovered) or a church named after some saint (Saint Maxime sanctuary in Lechkumi). An unconscious behavior of an animal – walk – used to determine actions of individuals, for in the walk or stop of those animals they saw the manifestation of wills of different saints (Kiknadze, 2016, p. 32).

In the same manner, the course intervals of an animal has a big importance for people as well. Myths of stolen icons and their returning back to their original places of Lomisi, Khevi Sparsangelozhi, Dzartsemi Saint George and other sanctuaries are built on this very motive.

Stolen icons will find their way back through foreign places eventually returning back to their initial sanctuaries.

Not a single man out of seven thousand who were to bring the stolen icon back to its original place showed up, so that lost people could find the right direction to their places. In myths, Ox is an animal which carries an icon put between its horns. An Ox follows not its own instinct while finding the way, but by the will of an icon. An icon brings with itself an Ox and seven thousand captured Georgians.

Same is the myth of the icon of Dzartsma Saint George sanctuary. The icon is captured in Leketi and it gives harm to people. Mullah sees the icon in his dream. The icon says to Mullah to be put between the horns of an Ox and let them walk freely. „They put the icon between the horns of an Ox and let it go. The Ox started to walk as the icon showed him the way. Eventually, the Ox came reached Dzartsemi to the place where the icon was originally put and had a rest under the sweetbrier bush. A priest from Dzartsma saw in his dream the icon that told him: „find me and build a church on that very place“. As the priest took the icon, an Ox died immediately. They built a church on that place where the icon of Saint George was put“ (Folk Wisdom, 1964, p. 77).

The Cult of Ox in Georgian Folklore

The cult of the Ox is quite interesting and diverse one in the Georgian Folklore. Sister (ballad of „Shiola and Mtrekheli“) was in a deep grievance. It sounded like if she was talking to her brother in her thoughts: „feels like I am buried alive. Your killer appeared in front of me and he also was killed“. Kereti's daughter-in-law went through hard times because of the crime. Firstly, she buried Mtrekheli with a great honor – the one who was assassinated in her house. Besarion Gaburi tells us: „Shiola's sister... brought an ox in front of a dead Mtrekheli and she conducted the ritual of the dead, promising to the deceased to take revenge for his death“ (Nartebi, 1988, p. 337).

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There is one interesting symbolic aspect in the extract given above: Shiola's sister conducted the ritual of the dead by incorporating an ox into it. It was a white ox. A white ox is a cult animal. White ox is sacrificed by the mountain people for washing of their sins. Blood enemies reconcile with each other after sacrificing a white ox. Tushetian Tiliszde brought a white ox for sacrifice ritual to the Lasharis Javri sanctuary in order to reconcile with Pshavi people.

Let me conduct my ritual, Pshavi people,
Let me pray to your icon,
I brought a milk white ox for a sacrifice.

Kings of Babylon and high priests used to sacrifice a white ox to the god Marduk. One character of the Narti epos – deceased son of a Hero Uruzmagi, who was temporarily sent by the king of the abyss Barastir to the outer world, asks his father to conduct his ceremony by sacrificing a white ox which they brought from the Tekturk's country (Nartebi, 1988, p.85).

We will limit our research with the examples given above as our researchers have provided us with a rich material regarding the Ox thematic. This very thematic was elaborated on by our writers as well.

ShotaNishnianidze's poetry opened a new page in the Georgian life and become a loyal friend of each of us, just like a mythological character of an ox. As professor ApolonTsaava writes: The poet identifies his poetry with a divine realm of a Tsikara (mythological ox character) (Tsanava, 1986, p. 15).

GrigolAbashidze, a Georgian poet notes, that ShotaNishnianidze was one of the pioneers in the Georgian poetry who brought a new insight and joy to the Georgian poetry lovers. It is also mentioned, that one of the main aspects of his poetry is Georgian mythology.

In his poems mythological creature like gremlins, forest trolls, gnomes, giants and witches acts as freely as in Georgian tales. The poet has an extraordinary vision and his power of imagination surprises us with suddenness. A poet says:

Thank you giants, forest trolls and gnomes,
Witches and wizards, wherever you may dwell!
My childhood has already gone, why don't you leave me?
And why did you follow me into my adulthood?

Metaphor of an Ox in Shota Nishnianidze's Poetry

No other poet has incorporated a metaphor of an Ox in his/her poetry as intensely as did Shota Nishnianidze. Nishnianidze sees a poetic justice in ox's divine origin, its dili-

gence, loyalty to a master and even self-sacrifice like Georgian mythological character Tsikara:

I am a mystical creature Tsikara,
That, which is your servant, my fatherland!
I have escaped from a fairy tale,
In order to be loyal to you...
How many times have I stood behind the pearly gates,
Beaten and broken like a homeless dog...
My only crime is my ability to talk to God.
And when I am buried in a cold soil,
I will be still gazing at you, my land.

In other lyrics an Ox is a divine creature which God gives a mission of protecting a mankind - „My destiny is to protect all men“. For Shota Nishnianidze bull is a perfect example: „He, who was hardy and patient like a bull, let me be that much devoted to my fatherland! “ For Georgians, a bull represents the divine manifestation which should be worshiped:

I walked down the Rioni river banks and saw a bull lying on
the ground,
That, which is worshiped by Georgians like an ancient deity,
Tears came to my eyes as I was standing full of pride,
My ancestors were just like that creature – strong and still!

The loyalty and Dionysian kindness of a bull forms a system of metamorphisms in Nishnianidze's poetry and represents a certain literary principle:

Hey you, big bull! Don't be ungrateful to your destiny!
You have an Urartian moon on your forehead,
I will put my arms around your neck,
Take me Alazani valley, to Rioni river banks,
You bring Dionysus with you,
Deity of light and joy,
Let happiness be the fate of Georgia,

Such kind of Dionysian – earthly goodness, as an alive creature, is brought to different parts of Georgia by the bulls that are marked with an Urartian moon on their foreheads (a divine sign).

A great Georgian writer Nodar Dumbadze resurrects the whole mythical realm in his novel entitled „Korida“.

The main character – Dato tells us his impressions about what he saw on the arena. He was deeply shocked by it. A white bull which he saw struggling to survive during a bullfight was an example of a divine creature which was so precious to Georgians.

Bullfighting is a part of a Spanish culture. This bloody tradition may not be attractive for foreign guests, however traditions of a nation should be respected.

In his novel, Nodar Dumbadze incorporates several lines from Shota Nishnianidze's poem called „The Bull“, making it more dramatic.

In Samegrelo region a game called „Kuruli“ was wide spread. The game was arranged on Sundays near villages. A bull trained for an occasion was tied in the middle of a playground where two men were trying to provoke him. At the same time, men were strictly following the rules of behavior with a bull. Afterwards, a bull was released and one of the two men was engaging with him. A man was to repulse the bull's attacks and eventually tie him down. According to G. Chitaia, „Kuruli“ game was an imitation of taming a bull – like Sumerian heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu had tamed wild bulls (Chitaia, 1959, p. 160).

According to I. Djavakhishvili, White or Saint George was a deity of ancient Georgian's agriculture and also an inventor of a plough (Djavakhishvili, Vol. IV).

Ancient Georgian tradition of bullfighting is preserved and still practiced in Tao-Klarjeti region, Artvin district, Turkey (within the local Georgian population).

“On the central street of Artvin a crowd of people has surrounded a bull. That particular bull is a hero of the day, the whole city came to see him. The bull himself was walking calmly, with a clever look in his eyes, a real wrestler – like he too shared the joy of the surroundings... People greet him with ovations and drum play. Soon Artvinians starts dancing Khorumi around the bull.

Conclusion

This is an ancient Georgian tradition which is preserved and still practiced only in Artvin region (Turkey) while in the actual Georgian regions the tradition has been lost. This tradition is called Bullfighting, according to locals. Bayar Shahin, a well-known musician of a Georgian origin tells the following about the tradition: “The tradition still preserved in Artvin district must be a very old one which is lost within the borders of the actual Georgian soil. However, this does not mean that we (Artvin Georgians) have copied this very tradition from other nations. Certainly, no! Bullfighting is a part of our native ways of living and we are very proud of it” (Kalandia, 2016, p. 22).

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