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On the Representation of the Terek River in Russian and Georgian Literary Works of the 19th Century

This study provides a comparative analysis of the representation of the Terek River in Russian and Georgian literary works of the 19th century, focusing on the parable of water flow depicted as a beast, particularly a lion. The analysis reveals that the lion symbolizes the power of anti-Russian emperor. The study suggests that this symbolic meaning, representing rebellion, may have originated from Georgian cultural and political contexts of the 19th century, and later spread among Russian and Georgian poets and writers.

Key words: Nineteenth century, Georgian Literature, Representation, Russian Literature, Terek River

In this study I compare and analyze the representation of the Terek River in Russian and Georgian literary works of the 19th century, wherein the raging torrent of the Terek River is associated with the figure of a beast, particularly a lion. I would like to establish that the representation of the wild Terek River embodies the spirit of rebellion against Russian domination. Furthermore, the lion is used as a symbol of the anti-Russian emperor. This study seeks to explain the internal ideological relationship between the metaphorical use of the figure of a lion for the Terek River in Georgian and Russian literature. The study is based on my preceding research papers that have clarified the secret meaning and function of the statue of a lion, depicted in Pushkin's epic poem "The Bronze Horseman" (1833).¹

First, I demonstrate that the metaphor of a beast plays an important role in "The Bronze Horseman," where the central incident is the flood striking St. Petersburg in November 1824. In the poem, not only the raging flood, but also Eugene, is expressed metaphorically as a beast. After losing his sanity, the beggar, Eugene, lives a miserable life akin to that of an animal. I have already demonstrated that the world of "The Bronze Horseman" is multi-layered, with historical and autobiographical events as its roots.² Based on an analysis of Pushkin's works and letters after 1829, it becomes clear that the image of a beast is linked to images of rebellions, epidemics and wars in the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, the image of a beast is associated with madness. Using this associative link as the key to understand the text of "The Bronze Horseman" reveals that the peasant rebellions of the 1770s and 1830s are linked to the figure of the flood, and that Pushkin's real-life experience is reflected in the story of Eugene's life.

¹ This paper is based on the following papers published in Russian journals: *Сугино Ю.* Отзвуки декабристской поэзии в поэме «Медный всадник» // *Болдинские чтения* 2005. Нижний Новгород: Вектор-Тис, 2005. С. 214-224; Еще раз о сопоставлении образов льва и тигра в статье А. С. Пушкина «Александр Радищев» // *Болдинские чтения* 2022. Нижний Новгород: ННГУ им. Н.И. Лобачевского, 2022. С. 82-91.

² *Сугино Ю.* О наводнении в поэме «Медный всадник» (On the Flood in "The Bronze Horseman") // *JSEES (Japanese Slavic and East European Studies)* 11 (1990), 59-78. К вопросу о соотношении образов Медного Всадника и Николая I (On the Relation of the Bronze Horseman to Nicolas I) // *JSEES* 12 (1991), 61-79.

The beginning of the 1830s was marked by cholera rebellions in various parts of Russia. In the autumn of 1830, a cholera rebellion confined Pushkin to his estate in Boldino and prevented him from meeting his fiancée, Natalia Goncharova. In a letter written to Natalia Goncharova on the 11th of October, Pushkin compared Boldino, enclosed by quarantine stations, to a lonely island. He was intensely worried about his fiancée living in cholera-infected Moscow. The accident which happened to Pushkin in the autumn of 1830 in Boldino is projected in the scene of “The Bronze Horseman,” wherein Eugene straddles a marble lion in the middle of a raging flood with great anxiety about his fiancée Parasha living across the Neva River. I quote this scene as follows:

“С подъятой лапой, как живые / Стоят два льва сторожевые, / На звере мраморном верхом, / Без шляпы, руки сжав крестом, / Сидел недвижимый, страшно бледный / Евгений. Он страшился, бедный, / Не за себя. Он не слышал, / Как подымался жадный вал, / Ему подошвы подмывая, / Как дождь ему в лицо хлестал, / Как ветер, буйно завывая, / С него и шляпу вдруг сорвал. [...] / Там буря выла, там носились / Обломки... Боже, боже! Там – / Увы! близехонько к волнам, / Почти у самого залива – / Забор некрашенный, да ива / И ветхий домик: там оне, / Вдова и дочь, его Параша, / Его мечта...”¹

As in the scene quoted above, Eugene is fixed to the marble lion amid the stormy rain and raging flood, expressed metaphorically as a beast. If we replace the raging flood (i.e., =beast) with cholera rebellions (i.e., =beast), we can understand that the accident encountered by Pushkin in Boldino in 1830 is reflected in the scene where Eugene straddles a marble lion in stormy weather. Therefore, Eugene partly represents the author’s personality.

In the scene, the lion statue is a significant factor representing Eugene’s ideological position. Based on the Russian literary tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries, the lion symbolizes the Swedish Empire that fought the Russian Empire in the Northern War. Derzhavin describes the lion as the symbol of Sweden, in contrast to the eagle, which is a symbol of the Russian emperor. Similarly, Pushkin compares the Swedish Empire to a lion and the Russian Empire to an eagle in his poem “the Remembrance of Tsarskoe Selo / Воспоминания в Царском Селе” (1814). Moreover, the figure of the lion, which implies the power of the anti-Russian emperor, is sometimes used to represent a rebel. For example, in “History of the Russian State / История государства Российского” (1818), Karamzin compares Boris Godunov’s ambition for the throne to “a lion.”² Pushkin allegorizes Pugachev as the lion in the epigraph of the 11th chapter of “The Captain’s Daughter / Капитанская дочка” (1836).³

Notably, Decembrist A. Bestuzhev, who was transferred from Siberia to Caucasus in 1829 just after Pushkin’s visit to Caucasus, describes himself as a rebel using the metaphor of “a lion” in his poem, “Shebutui / Шебутуй (The Waterfall in the Stanovoy Range)” (1829). I quote a paragraph from this poem:

“Но, пробужденный, ты (Шебутуй – *Sugino Y.*), затворы / Ледяных пелен преодолев, / Играя, скачешь с гор на горы, / Как на ловитке юный лев. / [...] / Когда громам твоим внимаю / И в кудри льется брызгов пыль, – / Свою таинственную быль... / Тебе подобно, гордый, шумный, / От высоты родимых скал, / Влекомой страстью безумной, / Я в бездну гибели упал!”⁴

¹ Пушкин А. С. Полн. соб. соч.: В 16 т. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР. 1937-1949. Т. 5. С. 141-142.

² Карамзин Н. М. Полн. соб. соч. в 18 т. М.: Терра Книжный клуб, 1998. Т. 10. С. 68.

³ Сугино Ю. Евгений из «Медного Всадника» и Пугачев из «Капитанской дочки» – К толкованию образов бунтовщиков (Evgeny in “The Bronze Horseman” and Pugachev in “The Captain’s Daughter” – Interpretation as a Rebel Image of Both Heroes), Bulletin of the Japanese Association of Russian Scholars 34 (2002), Tokyo, 101-108.

⁴ А. А. Бестужев-Марлинский. Сочинения в двух томах. М.: Художественная литература, 1981. Т. 2. С. 370.

As in the paragraph quoted above, the stream of the waterfall is reminiscent of the figure of lion playing, and the scene depicted is recalled from the Decembrist revolt. Bestuzhev's "Shebutui" was published anonymously in the magazine "Moskovsky telegraph" № 12 in 1831.

Considering all the aforementioned instances, there is little doubt that the marble lion in "The Bronze Horseman" is the secret signal of the anti-Russian Emperor. In the poem, Eugene, straddling the lion statue amid a flood, unwittingly confronts the statue of Peter the Great Bronze Horseman. Eugene, who is connected to a lion, the symbol of the rebel, and inspired by beastly wild weather, seems to be possessed by a fighting spirit against the Russian Emperor.

The composition of the scene where Eugene, sitting astride a marble lion, confronts the Bronze Horseman, originates from Pushkin's poem "The Caucasus / Кавказ." The poem is about the impression of the Terek River, which Pushkin observed with his own eyes during his travel to the Caucasus in 1829. I quote the fourth and fifth stanzas in "The Caucasus" as follows:

[the fourth stanza] "Играет и воет, как зверь молодой, / Завидевший пищу из клетки
железной; /И бьется о берег в вражде бесполезной, / И лижет утесы голодной волной... /
Вотще! Нет ни пищи ему, ни отрады: / Теснят его грозно немые громады"

[the fifth stanza of the draft] "Так буйную вольность законы теснят / Так дикое племя под
властью тоскует / Так ныне безмолвный Кавказ негодует / Так чуждые силы его тяготят ..."¹

In the fourth stanza, the raging torrent of the Terek River crashing against massive rocks represents "a beast / зверь." From the fifth stanza of the draft, which was deleted from the final manuscript, we can understand that the Terek River likened to "the beast" represents "rebels" fighting against the ruler. Notably, the associative link between these three figures, that is, "raging torrent," "a beast" and "a rebel," appears for the first time in "The Caucasus" among all the poems of Pushkin. Furthermore, the contrasting motif of "water stream" and "large rocks," that is a characteristic feature of "The Bronze Horseman," is also seen in "The Caucasus." It is possible that the contrasting motif of natural elements of "water" and "rock," and the associative link between the three figures – "raging torrent," "a beast," and "a rebel," – resulted from Pushkin's travel to Caucasus in 1829. Four years later, these motifs developed into the fundamental motifs of "The Bronze Horseman."

Moreover, in Lermontov's poems "Julio / Джюлио" (1830) and "The Gifts of the Terek / Дары Терека" (1839), the Terek River is depicted as a rebellious spirit fighting against those who oppress its freedom. In the latter poem, the Terek River says: "С чужой властью человека / Вечно спорить был готов."²

In Lermontov's poem "The Demon / Демон" the Terek River is likened to a lion. I quote a scene of "The Demon" (1841):

"Как трещина, жилище змея, / Вился излучистый Дарьял, / И Терек, прыгая как львица / С
косматой гривой на хребте, /Ревел, – и горный зверь, и птица, / Кружась в лазурной высоте,
/ Глаголу вод его внимали;"³

As demonstrated in Lermontov's poem, "The Demon," the Terek River flowing through the canyon is likened to a wild beast, particularly a lion. Possibly, the reflection of a beast and lion in the Terek River was prevalent in the Caucasus and was a well-known motif among Russian poets and writers in the first half of the 19th century.

¹ Пушкин А. С. Там же. Т. 3. С. 196, 792

² Лермонтов М. Ю. Полн. соб. соч. М.: Воскресенье, 2000. Т. 2. С.96

³ Лермонтов М. Ю. Там же. Т. 4. С. 220.

Georgian literary scholar, Vano Shaduri, has pointed that, in the Russian and Georgian literary works of the 19th century, the Terek's raging torrent metaphorically represents the resistance of the Caucasian Mountain tribes to the intimidating "great silent rock," symbolizing the domination of the Russian Empire, as follows:

“Тема Терека у Пушкина везде звучит как гимн свободе, как прославление борьбы против темных и тупых сил. Везде мятежный Терек противопоставляется тесницам Дарьяла, черным скалам и грозным обвалам. [...] Характерно, что буйное течение Терека противопоставляется мрачным скалам Дарьяла и в произведениях декабристов, Лермонтова, Александра Казбеги, Илья Чавчавадзе и других прогрессивных писателей”.¹

As stated by Shaduri, the contrasting motifs of natural elements such as “water” and “rock,” and the representations of a rebel by the water current of the Terek River, can be found not only in the works of Russian poets, but also in the works of Iliia Chavchavadze and Alexandre Kazbegi. Furthermore, some instances comparing the Terek River to a lion can be found in Georgian writers' works.

For the first example, in the “Notes of a Journey from Vladikavkaz to Tiflis” (1861) by Chavchavadze, the narrator states that the Terek River has been two-faced: flows so silently near Vladikavkaz as if it were “a slain lion,” but then thunderously streams down in the north side of the Caucasian mountains.² Observing this violent face of the Terek River, Pushkin wrote “The Caucasus.”

Second, I quote a paragraph from Kazbegi's “Patricide / Отцеубийца” (1882), wherein the Terek River embodies a rebellious spirit against the oppressors:

“Но неугомонные, упрямые Куро и Терек все еще боролись друг с другом, не помышляя об отдыхе, словно этим двум силам невозможно было жить в мирном соседстве. [...] Наши друзья (Иаго и Коба – *Sugino Y.*) двинулись в путь, поднялись на самую вершину Куро, откуда в последний раз взглянули на свою родину, в последний раз прислушались к шуму своей реки (река Терека – *Sugino Y.*), как бы призывающей их: «Боритесь, неустомимо боритесь за правду и честь!»³

As demonstrated in the paragraph quoted above, Iago and Koba, who are wrongfully arrested by the chief of the Russian Imperial Police, hear, in the cries of the Terek River, a call to “Fight tirelessly for truth and honor!”. Georgians, who suffered under the rule of Imperial Russia, could, at one time, hear in the cries of the Terek River, strong anger against Russian domination, and, at another time, compatriots' encouragement. The sounds of the Terek River seem to sympathize with the heroes' feelings.

Finally, I quote a paragraph from Kazbegi's “Tsitsia” (1886):

В Дарьяльском ущелье «Терек воеет, надрывая грудь, и скалы вторят Тереку в тревоге», бурные волны бесстрашно ударяются о скалы <.....> В этом месте (в Джариахе – *Sugino Y.*) Терек все еще продолжает реветь, как раненый лев, хотя он уже миновал скалы и чувствует себя победителем.⁴

Here, such motifs, including the combination of “water” and “rock” and the associative link of the Terek River and “a lion,” can be noted.

¹ Шадури В. «Пушкин и грузинская общественность». Тбилиси: Изд. «Литература да хеловнеба», 1967. С. 125, 130.

² Iliia Chavchavadze Works. Translated by Marjory and Oliver Wardrops. Ganatleba Publishers. Tbilibi-1987. P. 9.

³ Казбеги А. Избранные произведения. Тбилиси: Заря Востока, 1957. Т. 1. С. 202-203.

⁴ Казбеги А. Там же. Т. 2. С. 162.

As demonstrated in the instances and paragraphs from various texts of Georgian writers, it is possible that the contrasting compositions of “water stream” and “the massive rocks,” as well as the metaphor of a lion for the Terek River, were popular in Georgia in the second half of the 19th century. At the same time, the custom of likening the Terek River to wild animals has folkloric origins and may have existed in Georgia since ancient times. For example, in Kazbegi’s “Khevisberi Gocha” (1884), a story with the background of the 18th century, the Terek River is likened to a tiger, or a snake.¹

In conclusion, the composition of natural elements of immovable “rock” and “water stream,” and the representations of the raging torrent as a beast, particularly a lion, originated in the Georgian cultural and political environment. The metaphorical use of a lion for the Terek River by Russian poets in the first half of the 19th century was influenced by Georgian culture. The torrent of the Terek River, which is reminiscent of the “beast” and the “rebel,” inspired Pushkin to create the fundamental motifs in the conception of “The Bronze Horseman.” In this poem, Pushkin combines Russian literary tradition with Georgian cultural tradition in the figure of the lion, which symbolizes the enemy of the Russian emperor. Possibly, the associative link between the “Terek River,” “beast,” particularly the lion, and “rebel,” was subsequently transmitted to Georgian writers and became common among the Georgian literary works in the second half of the 19th century.

Further research is required on the representation of the Terek River from various perspectives: from that of literary works of both countries in the 20th century, as well as that of folkloric phenomena.

¹ “Arekusandore-Kazubegi-sakuhinsen” (“The Selected Works of Alexander Kazbegi”). Translated by Chieko Miwa into Japanese. A Commentary by David Goginashvili. Publication Company of Seibunsha, Tokyo, 2017. P. 190, 199.