

## A LITTLE KNOWN POEM BY GEORGE THE AETOLIAN ABOUT LADY CHIAJNA

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In the Greece of the sixteenth century, stagnating under the harsh Ottoman domination, the literary activity came to a comprehensible decline. That is why we have to appreciate even more the efforts of those few authors who took up to the noble mission of enlightening their fellow countrymen, by trying to continue, as far as they could, the glorious tradition of their forerunners. Among these „scholars of the nation” a notable figure is that of George the Aetolian (1525–1580). About his activity we are informed merely due to the German scholar Martin Crusius, a contemporary of our poet. In his work written in Latin, *D. Solomoni Schweigkero Sultzensi Gratulatio* (Strasbourg, 1582) he has this observation about Gheorghios „*Fuit hic vir laicus, rerum antiquarum indagator, multas habens priscas monetas: [...] Habitavit Constantinopoli in Patriarcheio, mortuusque est 1580, mense septembri, annos circiter 55 natus.*” In another work, Crusius assigns to Gheorghios the flattering epithet of *ἀριστος ποιητής*, pointing out that this one has directed the arrows of his satires against many notaries of Constantinople. Seemingly, the copyist Andreas Darmarius speaks in high esteem about Gheorghios, considering our author the sole cultivated person in the whole Corinth, *τούτων ἦν εἰς πεπαιδευμένος*.

The scarcity of firm data about him, added to their irrelevance, when they do exist, invited the scholars studying his life and work to complete the panel of certainties by making assumptions and suppositions. For example, the information according to which the Aetolian lived in the enclosure of the Ecumenical Patriarchy correlated to his contemporaries’ praise of his intellectual capacities, determined Manuel Gedeon<sup>1</sup> to presume that Gheorghios was the director of the Patriarchal School. As for us, we shall avoid venturing into such risky deductions and we shall try to complete the scanty picture of Gheorghios’ life only by resorting to his own words. At the end of his poem about Lady Chiajna, he introduces himself as „a servant ready to carry out and to accomplish in good order everything that lord Cantacuzenos commands” (*Οπόναι δούλος ἔτοιμος εἰς ὅσα τον προστάξη / ἄρχων ο Καντακουζηνός και κάμνει τα με τάξι, vs. 400–401*). He

<sup>1</sup> *Χρονικά της πατριαρχικής ακαδημίας* (CP. 1883), pp. 63–64.

means, of course, Michael Cantacuzenos nicknamed Şeitanoglu, an extremely influent public figure at the Ottoman Court, during the seventies and the eighties of the sixteenth century. According to contemporary evidence, he had obtained the position of great provider of the Court, due to his friendship to vizier Mahomed Socoli, having in charge, among other tasks, that of supplying with the precious furs imported from Russia, as well as the position of undertaker of the imperial salt works. Also, in exchange for large amounts of money Cantacuzenos was appointing and removing according to his will patriarchs and bishops and even the rulers of Walachia.<sup>2</sup> Besides his own statement, the place occupied by the poems dedicated to Cantacuzenos among the Aetolian's work speaks undoubtedly about our author's enrolment in the almighty Ottoman dignitary's service.

All George's works are preserved in the manuscript no. 4272 (152) at the Athonite monastery Iviron and include a versified adaptation in popular language of Aesop's fables, an encomium of Michael Cantacuzenos, another one of his son Andronicus and a poem dedicated to the conflict between Lady Chiajna and Peter the Young and Ioasaf, the patriarch of Constantinople<sup>3</sup> on the one side and between Lady Chiajna and Michael Cantacuzenos on the other. If the first three works have been published either in the West or in Greece, being thus placed into the international scientific context, the poem about Lady Chiajna has been edited only in Romania<sup>4</sup> and has passed almost unnoticed by the Greek and foreign scholars. On the contrary, in Romania it aroused an interest merely due to the scarce historical information about the quarrel between Chiajna and Cantacuzenos, which the poem contains, and not its intrinsic value. Based on this information Nicolae Iorga managed to distinguish between Peter the Lamé, prince of Moldavia, and Peter the Young, the son of Mircea Ciobanul and Lady Chiajna, whom the previous historians were confounding<sup>5</sup>.

Even though it may offer to us useful historical information, Gheorghios' work does not represent a chronicle, but a poem, a literary piece, whose ignorance would fatally render incomplete the Aetolian's profile. We think it is the researcher's duty, instead of expressing summary considerations, such as those formulated by Demostene Russo („*The rough insults against Chiajna and Patriarch Ioasaf, the bondless flatteries dedicated to Cantacuzenos, transform this poem into a bad taste pamphlet, which dishonours both his author and Michael*

<sup>2</sup> Stephan Gerlachs desz Aeltern, *Tage-buch der von zween Glorwürdigsten Römischen Käysern Maximiliano und Rodolpho u.s.w.*, Franckfurth am Mayn, 1674.

<sup>3</sup> Ioasaf was the patriarch of Constantinople between 1555 (1556) and the 15th of January 1565 (Niculae M. Popescu, *Patriarhii Țarigradului prin Țările Românești, veacul XVI*, București, 1914, p. 37–39, Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. I, p. 628).

<sup>4</sup> *Un poème grec vulgaire relatif à Pierre le Boiteux de la Valachie*, publié par N. Bănescu, Bucarest, 1912.

<sup>5</sup> N. Iorga, *Un poem grec privitor la istoria noastră*, in *Neamul românesc literar*, 5 (1912) p. 577–579.

*Cantacuzenos, if he is really its inspirer*<sup>6</sup>) to undertake a detailed analysis of the poem, so that the final judgement of its value may be, as far as possible, complex and subtle.

In its variant of the Athonite manuscript, the poem contains 401 verses. Its metrical structure is based on the alternation between political verses (fifteen syllable iambs) and eight syllables trochees. Less numerous, the latter occupy the following sections, vs. 96–99, 130–138, 165–174, 225–233, 270–280, 326–367. The distribution of the two types of verses does not seem accidental, as far as the short trochaic sequences are mainly dedicated to the gnomic passages that wind up different parts of the poem. More seldom (vs. 96–99, vs. 270–281), those break for a short time a compositional unit. The poet's option for eight syllable trochees may be explained by their popular, lively character which renders them suitable for expressing aphorisms tinted with a striking folk shade. All along the poem we come across aphorisms expressed in iambs, but their length never exceeds two verses (vs. 40–41, 46–47, 86–87, 215–216), being thus unable to create an independent compositional unit. Besides these gnomic sections, the final part of the poem is written also in trochaic rhythm, although it represents an encomium of Mihail Cantacuzenos and his deeds, within which the gnomic element plays but a small role. It is probable that Gheorghios intended to respect this self-imposed compositional scheme, but his option for trochees is not at all inspired in this context, because these short, sprightly verses do not suit the solemnity required by the eulogy of a great political personality.

The four hundred and one verses of the poem do not form an epical or lyrical work as was believed until now, but, as per our strong conviction, a work belonging to the dramatic genre, made out of one prologue, five scenes and one epilogue. As far as he is concerned, Gheorghios prefers to define his work as *ρίμα* (vs. 1, 398) not after the literary genre to which it belongs, but after a feature of the verses in which it is written. The occurrence of prince Peter's name in the first quoted verse (Σ' τούτην την ρίμα βρίσκεται ο Βοιβόνδας Πέτρος) may be an evidence as to discovering the title of the dramatic poem which is missing in the Athonite manuscript. Otherwise, the rest of the prologue emphasises particularly the figure of Peter the Young. Its only ten verses<sup>7</sup> offer an incomplete *υπόθεσις του έργου*, which mentions only the scenes with two characters, that have as protagonist the Walachian ruler (the disputes between Peter the Young and Lady Chiajna, or between the Romanian ruler and Ioasaf, the patriarch of Constantinople), but not the monologues of the ambitious Lady Chiajna (scene 2, vs. 70–138, scene 4,

<sup>6</sup> *Gheorghe Etolianul in Studii istorice greco-române, Opere postume*, Tomul I, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă, București, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> The editor Nicolae Bănescu adds to the prologue the verses 11–12 „Εδώ ο Πέτρος ομιλεί της μάνας του `ς τον ύπνον / όπ' από την πικρία της κοιμάται χωρίς δείπνον,” that represent together with line 13 Εδώ φαίνεται το είδωλον του Βοιβόνδα Πέτρου the stage directives of the first scene.

vs. 234–289). Although we may ever fail to know whether the prologue belongs or not to George, it however offers indispensable clarifications for the reader who does not see the actual stage performance of George's work.

According to us, a similar function may have the other verses which precede each of the scenes of the dramatic poem, in the absence of which the reader can hardly understand what the other scenes of the poem are referring to<sup>8</sup> (Εδώ ο Πέτρος ομιλεί της μάνας του `ς τον ύπνον / όπ` από την πικρία της κοιμάται χωρίς δείπνον, / Εδώ φαίνεται το είδωλον του Βοϊβόνδα Πέτρου, vs. 11–13, Εδώ η Μύρτζαινα ξυπνεί με φόβον και με τρόμον / και μοιρολόγιν άρχισε κ` είναι πολλά με δρόμον, vs. 70–71, Εδώ ο Πέτρος ομιλεί μ` αυτόν τον πατριάρχη / τον Ιωασάφ και πολλήν φαίνεται έχθρα νάχη, 139–140, Εδώ ο Ιωάσαφος λέγει το ήμαρτόν του / κ` εις όλα δείχνει τι `τονε πταιστής τον εαυτόν του, 175–176, Πάλιν η Μύρτζαινα ξυπνεί και τα μαλλιά της πιάνει / και οχ τα δάκρυα τα πολλά κοντεύει να κρυνή, 234–235, Εδώ ο Πέτρος φαίνεται πολλά να ονειδίζει / την μάνα του την Μύρτζαινα και να την ασχημίζει, 290–291).

The five scenes of the drama contain successively a diatribe directed by Peter the Young against his mother (vs. 14–69), a monologue of Lady Chiajna who regrets her foolish behaviour (vs. 72–138), a confrontation which takes place in the yonder world between the Walachian ruler and Ioasaf, the patriarch of Constantinople (vs. 142–233), a new monologue of Chiajna who laments over her fate (vs. 236–289) and a new invective addressed by Peter the Young against his mother (vs. 292–325). The compositional structure of the poem is concentric. The first scene starts by Peter's statement that he has asked the permission of Hades in order to speak to his mother, (Τον άδην εξεξήτησα ολίγον να μ` αφήση / να ομιλήσω μετά σεν ώραν να μου χαρίση, 14–15), while the last scenes concludes with the ruler saying that he is called back into the implacable yonder world (ο άδης κάτω κράζει με, παγαίνω, 316). Moreover, the motifs present in the first and last scenes mostly coincide. In both instances we come across an evocation of the loss of power and richness by Peter and Chiajna (vs. 22–23, 26–27, 319) and of the premature death of the ruler (vs. 59–63, 296–297), insults (vs. 20–21, 29, 310–311) and curses (vs. 64–67, 292–295, 301–303, 313, 320) directed against the ambitious lady and an eulogy of Michael Cantacuzenos (vs. 34–37, 306–309, 322–325). An undeniable parallelism is to be found also between the second and the fourth scenes, which both constitute monologues of lady Chiajna, who is awoken by the dream in which her deceased son was throwing bitter reproaches to her and overwhelming her with insults.

Coming back to the first scene, we ought to underline the fact that it contains the essential part of the information offered to the reader with regard to the conflict between Michael Cantacuzenos and Lady Chiajna. From the very beginning of the poem, we find out that Maria, Chiajna's daughter, has been promised to Cantacuzenos (vs. 30–33, 42–45), but the marriage between the two has been

<sup>8</sup> A different opinion is supported by the French scholar E. Legrand, who considers that those verses would represent the caption of some images disappeared from the manuscript.

cancelled (50–53) because of the princess' recklessness (vs. 20–21, 29), that provoked the loss of the reign and of the fortune, the exile, the imprisonment and even Peter's death (vs. 26–27, 59–63). All this information is not construed in a clear and systematic way, as for a reader who ignores the conflict between Cantacuzenos and Chiajna, but takes the form of sporadic references and allusions, which are often difficult to decipher. This situation is due to the character of George's work, which is not narrative, but polemic. Moreover, the clues about the conflict between Cantacuzenos and Chiajna from the first scene are repeated almost in an obsessive manner along the other scenes. The monotony is only partially avoided by the change of the perspective over the events (which are regarded from the point of view of Peter, Chiajna and, respectively, Ioasaf) or by adding a bigger or smaller quantity of information.

For example, from the second scene we find out in addition that the patriarch Ioasaf was the one who impelled lady Chiajna to break off the agreement with Cantacuzenos and to send armed men in order to bring Maria back home (vs. 90–91, 100–109). Simultaneously, we are informed about Chiajna's plan to go to Constantinople in order to obtain support for her struggle with Cantacuzenos (vs. 80–81) or about the fact that Walachia's throne was bestowed on Alexander (vs. 125). Although longer, the third scene offers as a new piece of information only the fact that Ioasaf has been exiled and ended his days somewhere in the countryside (vs. 143–146), while the patriarchal throne of Constantinople was assigned to Mitrophanes (vs. 161). Instead, the fourth and the fifth scenes, that reiterate Chiajna's and, respectively, Peter's points of view upon the conflict, do not bring almost any fresh piece of information. Merely in the last act of the poem one may find about Chiajna being obedient to one Ghiolma<sup>9</sup> (Διατί σου εμφανέτονε να ομοιάζουν όλοι / του Γκίολμα που σε δούλευε κ' ήσουν δική του όλη, 304–305).

Much more numerous are the pieces of information repeated throughout several scenes. For instance, the lament for the loss of the reign and of the fortune, for the exile and the premature death of Peter represent leitmotifs that are found at every step in George's poem.

We may conclude that the conflict between Chiajna and Cantacuzenos, that would have been suited for an epical adaptation, constitutes only the starting point for the poem's plot, if we are to assume that a plot or even a dramatic progression does exist in the poem. The force that could stir this drama may be only the reproaches thrown by Peter's spectre to his mother and on patriarch Ioasaf, respectively, with the only difference that the former are met with in the first scenes and the latter in the third scene. The plot may thus consist in the reaction of the two accused of the charges formulated against them. Both of them confess their

<sup>9</sup> This Ghiolma, which the poem is referring to, should be identified with Ghiorma the ban, a boyar of Greek origin, who founded in Bucharest the church known as of Ghiorma the ban or of the Greeks. He also officiated as a great postelnic between the 31-st of March 1564 and the 8-th of June 1568. (Nicolae Stoicescu, *Dicționar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova, sec. XIV–XVII*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1971, p. 60).

faults committed against Cantacuzenos (vs. vs. 201–202, the patriarch) and repent in sackcloth and ashes. Moreover, Chiajna considers that she received the deserved punishment, which shall be a lesson for her throughout her life (Και λέγω όσα έπαθα μετά δικαιοσύνην / να είναι εις σωφρονισμόν, πολλήν μου καλωσύνην, vs. 88–89). In his turn, the patriarch Ioasaf does not hesitate to praise the alleged descendent of the Byzantine emperors, that has once ordered his removal from the patriarchal throne, stating about Cantacuzenos that he is a man “without perfidiousness, untainted like gold, lord acknowledged for his scholarship, never-failing in his actions” (οπόναι χωρίς δόλωσιν και ωσάν χρυσάφι φίνος. / Οπόναι με την γνώσιν του άρχοντασ τιμημένος / κ' εις όλα τα καμώματα δεν είναι γελασμένος)” (vs. 192–194). There is however a difference between the patriarch’s standpoint and that of Chiajna, because the hierarch indulges in self-accusation for not having stopped Lady Chiajna from the reckless action of sending men in order to bring Maria back home (vs. 203–212), while Chiajna asserts that Ioasaf is the inspirer of this act. (vs. 90–91, 100–109). Which of the two was right, we are not able to find out, not even from George, who prefers but once to keep the secret. But, after having both Chiajna and Ioasaf assume the responsibility for their faults, the poem could have very well end with the third scene, because the last two acts do not bring any new advance.

George does not seem to be fully content with having insulted enough Lady Chiajna, wanting to cover her with more and more blames. It may be worth studying and discovering whether there are other reasons for the composition of the last two acts, or the existence of certain elements which could link sturdily the various parts of the poem.

The first act, that of Lady Chiajna’s dream, is rightly followed by her reaction to the disturbing shades of the night, ushering in her waking up frightened in the second act. The open conflict between Petru and Ioasaf in the yonder world, takes place also in the dethroned queen’s dream. (Και απόψε πάλε βλέπω τον πως με τον πατριάρχη, / τον Ιωάσαφ ομιλεί κ' έχει μεγάλη μάχη, vs. 241–242). It seemed but natural, following the same scheme, to have Chiajna replay the second vision. Furthermore, the last act is construed in the lines of Chianja’s order to her maids to put her lying on the bed, awaiting a new spectre of her son. (vs. 283–289). One can read between the lines of the queen’s pitiful words the hope that her deceased son Peter will dawn upon her smooth words of conciliation. Affectionate epithets are addressed by Chiajna to Peter, “my dear most son, my beautiful hero”(τον ακριβόν μου τον υιόν, τόμορφον παλληκάρι, vs. 285), despite the curses thrown by him in the first dream. But the Lady’s hope will be excruciatingly shattered by the terrible blames, insults and curses which Peter heaves upon her again. This accumulation of abuses is the uttermost punishment for the sins committed by Chiajna. The reader who could have sensed a possible reconciliation between mother and son, sees his expectations baffled. Perhaps this is the sole element of surprise offered by the end of the poem. Coming back to the wholesomeness of the various parts of the

poem, we may conclude that an element conferring unity to the five acts is the regular swing between dream and reality.

A similar role have the leitmotifs which were partially mentioned and their constant interferences in the conflict between Chiajna and Cantacuzenos, the regrets for losing the dominion and the wealth, for the Lady of Walachia's relegation in the Orient and for her son's death, but also the accusation and curses targeting Chiajna, the exaggerated eulogies for Cantacuzenos or even the aphorisms of folkloric inspiration.

Taking these into consideration, we may rightly question ourselves whether the distribution of the mentioned elements along the poem is at random or whether we rather may see a progression in the climax or an anticlimax, by the end of George's work. As we could already see, an anticlimax is met with in regard with the historical accounts about the conflict between Chiajna and Cantacuzenos, which are in full development in the first act and decrease gradually.

As regards the insults and the curses targeting Chiajna, these are well represented all along the poem and are mouthed not only by Peter, but even by the patriarch Ioasaf and even by Chiajna herself, who indulges in self-critique in her turn. In the first act Peter uses harsh words to describe his mother and her actions, such as fool (ωσάν μωρή, vs. 21), insane and miserable (δια τα σένα την λωλήν και την παραδαρμένην, vs. 29), wrenched (ταλαιπωρη, vs. 38), rude (ως χοντροί που είμαστε<sup>10</sup>, vs. 53), abuses culminating with the curse from the verses 64–67: “May God give you back time and again, for what you have done to me, good mother! May the Earth of Anatoly consume your body and may your soul not find mercy not even in the yonder world.” (Αμή ως έκαμες σε με, μάνα, να σ` το πληρώση / Θεός ο επουράνιος και να σου το ανταμείψη. Το χώμα της Ανατολής να φάγη το κορμή σου / και εις τον άδην έλεος να μην ευρή η ψυχή σου). Instead of trying to set back, she repents in sackcloth and ashes, using the same kind of words. Firstly she quotes the blames said by Mihail Cantacuzenos about her, as per the patriarch Ioasaf's rendering. “Hear that he calls you a peasant woman and (says) that you are simpleton” (Ιδέ πως βλάχα σε καλεί και δεν έχεις κεφάλι, vs. 104); later on she will self portrait as a countrywoman (βλάχα, 114) and she will regret that she should have had her nose cut off at the time of the extreme thought of turning Maria back home (που τότε να εκόβητον ή εδική μου μύτη, 115). But these words seem rather kind in comparison with those following, when Chiajna self-portraits in the verse 117 as insane and hoarse (Δεν έκαμα ως φρόνιμη, μηδέ ως κάμνει μάνα / άμ` έκαμα ωσάν λωλή και ως μία πουτάνα, 117–118). The ultimate ferocity of the language witnesses for the undeniable hate nurtured against Chiajna by Cantacuzenos, the patron of our poet. Perhaps nothing more severe could be surpassed by the curse thrown by Ioasaf to Chiajna, since it comes from a clerical face, who was at that time in the realm of the shadows: “May The Almighty God punish her for my sake, for what she did and let her take notice of that at that time. She did not act as a Christian, nor as required by the law, but she

<sup>10</sup> This insult is addressed by Peter to himself, as well.

acted as a criminal and now the people laugh at us.” (Ἄμ' ὁ θεός ὁ ἅγιος νὰ μου τὴν τιμωρήσῃ / ἀκόμη σ' ὅσα μόκαμε καὶ τότε νὰ γνωρίσῃ / Δεν ἔκαμε ὡς χριστιανή, μηδέ σαν θέλει ὁ νόμος. / ἄμ' ἔκαμεν ὡς ἀνομὴ καὶ μας γελά ὁ κόσμος, vs. 221–225). Considering that these are not enough, George makes Chiajna curse herself in the fourth act (vs. 244–245) and wish death for herself.

It is hard to imagine for the reader that other abuses or curses more terrible than these up to now, may be inflicted upon the dethroned queen. Even though, George makes its best by showering in the last scene upon Chiajna a gush of imprecations, through the mouth of her son. If in the first scene the filial curse merely ended the series of abuses, the fifth scene is simply overwhelmed by imprecations. The first of them “May you recall time and again my words and may they cause pain in your heart. May the tears and the sighs never cease to go with you. May the worries and annoyances turmoil your mind.” (Πολλές φορές νὰ θυμηθεῖς τοὺς ἐδικούς μου λόγους / καὶ μέσα ἔς τὴν καρδίαν σου νὰ προξενούσι πόνους. / Τα δάκρυα κ' οἱ αναστεναγμοὶ ποσῶς νὰ μὴ σου λείπουν, οἱ ἔννοιες καὶ οἱ μέριμνες τὸν νουν σου νὰ τὸν γλείφουν. vs. 292–295) is followed at a short distance by two other verses seemingly harsh: May you die in prison, may you be abused and let your heart be very sorrowful: „Εἰς φυλακὴν νὰ αποκλεισθῆς, νὰ εἰσὼνιδισμένη / καὶ μέσα ἡ καρδία σου νάναί πολλά θλιμμένη, vs. 302–303). Moreover, after inflicting upon his mother other harsh words, such as εντραλισμένη (vs.310), ξεμυαλισμένη (vs. 311), Peter curses her twice, in addition: “May you die fast and let the heal swallow you” (νὰ ποθάνης γλήγορι καὶ Χάρος νὰ σε πάρῃ, vs. 314) and “May you not have tranquillity, nor freedom” (Μηδέ νὰ εὐρῆς ἀνεσιν, μηδέ ἐλευθερία, vs. 320).

From all these said above, we can see the display in climax of the insults and curses inflicted upon Chiajna, along George's poem. A similar position enjoy the words praising Cantacuzenos, scattered all throughout the scenes of the poem<sup>11</sup>, culminating with a grand eulogy of the potentate which concludes the fifth act.

In turn, the passages with a gnomic character are gathered with measure in Georgē's poem. Some of these are written, as was already seen, in trochaic verses and are placed at the end of the acts or, more rarely, in their texture.

There exist aphorisms expressed more succinctly in iambs, scattered all through the five acts and the epilogue, because George intends to confer a philosophical and anthropological gist to the peculiar episode of the conflict between Chiajna and Cantacuzenos. By all means, thoughts of such kind could not have distinguish by originality, nor prove a special wisdom. They develop a few traditional motifs, such as the fickleness of the human nature (vs. 150, 225–229, 370–375), the impossibility of fighting against the powerful ones (vs. 40–41, 130–138, 213–216) and the necessity of obeying them (vs. 378–379), the observance of obeisance (vs. 165–174), the conduct of not listening to women (vs. 230–233), of not being shrewd to others, in order to bereave punishment (vs. 86–87), to give

<sup>11</sup> Vs. 34–37, 45, 191–194, 306–309.



good advice (vs. 96–99); finally, the old idea of the inherited sins (vs. 270–281). Certainly, the last mentioned principle has a biblical foundation, as George shows it (λέγει ο προφήτης πάλιν / πούχε κεφαλήν μεγάλην, vs. 272–273). Interesting is its application by the poet in explaining all the miseries which dawned upon Lady Chiajna. These seemed to be caused by baffling sins done by her husband, the Walachian ruler Mircea Ciobanul (Φαίνεται ο Μύρτζας άνδρας μου να είχε κατωμένα / `ς τον κόσμον αμαρτήματα, κακά ορδνιασμένα. / Νάκαμε φόνους περισσούς, πολλές παρανομίες, / και κείνα στο κεφάλι του κάθονται σαν αι μύες, vs. 266–269).

Coming back to the aphorisms, what makes them peculiar and gives them force and expressivity is the vivid, coloured language, taken from the most authentic Hellenic lore. It seems thus clear that George's preference for the rendering in demotic verses of Aesop's fables was not a matter of choice, but in full concordance with his vision and his affinities.<sup>12</sup> At times the folk quotation is rather prosaic and tern, such as “The one digging someone else's ditch, has fallen wholly into it with his body” (Άμ' οπού λάκκον έσκαψε διά να χώση άλλον, / εκείνος μέσα έπεσε με το κορμί του όλον, 86–87), but at times is remarkable through an undeniable freshness, such as, “For, the one who seeds garlic, the rose of the peasants, along with his master, loses his pride and his head” (Ότ' οπού φυτεύει σκόρδα, / πούναι των χωριάτων ρόδα / με τον μεγαλυτερόν του / πέφτει και οχ την τιμή του / χάνει και την κεφαλή του, vs. 134–138), or “Is not to bit up angrily, like the egg against the rock, when one arrives at odds with the folks of the powerful one,” (Να μην κτυπήσης με θυμόν, όταν έλθης εις έχθραν / με γένος το ευγενικόν, ωσάν τα' αυγόν `ς την πέτραν, vs. 213–214) or “The one who listens to a woman strikes against a large steak.” (Όπού γυναικός ακούει / εις χοντρόν παλούκι κρούει, vs. 230–231). George seeks help in the folkloric stage props not only as regards the aphorisms, but even in the case of the most exquisite comparisons and curses. “As like the cloth makes beautiful any country girl.” (Όσάν την βλάχα καμπουχάς όλην την ευμορφίζει, vs. 48), “because the patriarch had the head hollow like a pot” (ότι είχε το κεφάλι / εύκαιρον, ωσάν τζουκάλι, 340–341), “May the sky have fallen and the hour have wished to have me crushed by dogs and bears (Νάθελε πέσ' ο ουρανός κ' η ώρα να βουλήση/ σκυλία ή αρκούδια νάθελαν με ξεσχίσει, vs. 244–245). Moreover, the prophet Jeremiah's words<sup>13</sup>, in popular gist, οι πατέρες έφαγον όμφακα και οι οδόντες των τέκνων ημωδίασαν, add another flavour, Ότι οι πατέρες τρώσιν / αγουρίδα διά βρώσιν / Οι οδόντες των παιδιών τους / μουδιάζουσι στανιό τους. If George had had the inspiration to insist more upon this unveiled folkloric gist, he could have offered us many more authentic verses. Unfortunately, he preferred an epic style, sometimes colourless and monotonous.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nicolae Bănescu, *op. cit.* p. 12, “*Le versificateur des fables ésopiques devait se sentir porté pour le genre des proverbes.*”

<sup>13</sup> XXXVIII, 29.

Which was then George's motivation and objectives, when he decided to write a poem about the conflict between Cantacuzenos and Chiajna? The key to the answer lies in the last two verses of the composition, where the Aetolian proclaims himself „a slave ready to accomplish and to act accordingly, as the lord Cantacuzenos orders” (Οπόναι δούλος έτοιμος εις όσα τον προστάξη / άρχων ο Καντακουζηνός και κάμνει τα με τάξι, vs. 400–401). We thus find ourselves in front of a work written on command by a genuine court poet. Remarkable is the fact that George takes upon himself this task with honesty, without trying to mesmerise the reader, creating the appearance of a false objectivity as regards the conflict between Cantacuzenos and Lady Chiajna. The poem is thus a thematic one, of *parti pris*, destined to justify his patron's actions, to blame and abuse his rivals. Speaking from the ethical point of view, George's enterprise is by no means praiseworthy, once the poet takes upon himself the shrewd task of hitting some rivals who are already down, finding themselves in the impossibility of self-defence. Terrible must have been the hate and the bad feelings nurtured by Mihail Cantacuzenos for Chiajna and the patriarch Ioasaf, if, after having decided their dethroning and exile, he feels the need to order such bellowing attacks against them.

The ability with which George replies to this order befits all the merits of attention. The poet does not construe the accusation against Chiajna and the patriarch Ioasaf in his own name, but puts it in her son's mouth, Peter the Young, which is thus described as the guiltless victim of the Lady's contrivances. In this way the accusations against Chiajna become more credible and the imprecations gain some force. At the same time the reader is convinced of the veracity of the poet's assertions by means of the assumption of the whole guilt by Chiajna, who repents in sackcloth and ashes time and again. As an ultimate humiliation of the patriarch, George praises Cantacuzenos, the one who made him be dethroned from the patriarchal chair and lastly gave him to death.

On the other hand, the eulogy made by Ioasaf and Peter would not have been enough to get Cantacuzenos satisfied. This makes the Greek poet conclude the fifth act of his poem with an extreme eulogy addressed to Cantacuzenos. This encomium is not organically related with the rest of the work, but gives the impression of an artificial addition and the trochaic verses of eight syllables in which it is construed do not fit well into the solemnity required by such a literary species. Apart from these shortcomings, the final eulogy succeeds to start again and complete the praises addressed to Cantacuzenos scattered all along the poem and to synthesize the essence of his actions against Chiajna and Ioasaf.<sup>14</sup> According to an old pattern of Greek encomium, George praises Cantacuzenos for the nobility of the folk and his parent (vs. 35–36, 327, 356–359), for physical beauty (εύμορφον παλληκάρι, vs. 45) and his personal charm (έχει [...] χάρι, vs. 330), for his wealth

<sup>14</sup> Έβγαλε τον πατριάρχη / δεν τον άφησε να άρχη, 338–339, Έβγαλε και σεν, την Δόμνα, / από το μεγάλο δώμα / και από την τιμήν μεγάλη / εδυνήθη να σε βγάλη / Σαν γομάρα να σε φέρη / 'ς της ανατολής τα μέρη, vs. 344–349.

(έναι ο βίος του πολύς, 322), for wisdom (έχει και γνώσιν θαυμαστήν και φρόνιμον κεφάλι, 323, φρόνιμος, 329, 355, έχει φρόνησιν και νουν, 333), for his just spirit (όλα δίκαια τα κάμνει, 337), his honesty (χωρίς δόλωσιν, 192), for his power (έχει δύναμιν, 330), for his merciful actions (δίδει και ελεημοσύνην, 360), for his fame and esteem in which he was held (αυθέντες τον θαυμάζουν, 309, θαυμαστός, 329, δοξασμένος, 355). All these qualities attract inevitably obeisance (άρχοντες τον προσκηγούν, 332) and fear even from the ones in power (όλοι τον τρομάζουν, 308). Although he is good in general, Cantacuzeno proves to be harsh with the undeserving, among whom Chiajna and Ioasaf, and he gets implacable as is the case with the death sentences (σαν η ώρα του θανάτου, 367).

George the Aetolian's principal merit is that of not being content with only fulfilling his patron's orders, but for having tried to confer a paradigmatic value, a deep human significance to the conflict between Chiajna and Cantacuzeno. He proves himself always preoccupied to get moral teachings from the accounts he narrates. This tendency culminates in the epilogue of the poem, where he resumes again and completes the motifs met with along the poem, starting from Chiajna and Ioasaf's concrete case: that of raise and fall, that of the wheel of destiny which makes some go up, some go down, that of the unavoidable death, or that of the importance of Christian humbleness, motifs which come one after another in a free and fast order.

The fundamental teaching of the poem which, according to George, the readers should learn, is that of keeping in high esteem his master and not to try to challenge him. The failure to fulfil this principle would bring destruction, an idea exemplified by three concrete episodes (vs. 382–385), that of the fall of the devil, that of the throwing out of man from paradise (vs. 386–389) and that of patriarch Ioasaf's destitution and death (vs. 392–397). To those "words of wisdom" one could make the reproach that they are simple, elementary, formulated in prosaic terms. One should not forget that the public of the fifteenth century Greece fallen into slavery, and to whom the poet was addressing his work, was endowed with a rather modest erudition.

This should be kept in mind when trying to construe a judgement of value on the Aetolian's work. An out of context judgement of the same, which would not take into account the level of the Greek literature of the epoch, risks to be excessively severe. One should not forget that during the whole century elapsed since the fall of the Byzantine Empire, on the Greek soil, conquered by the Turks, nothing was written except for laments complaining the fall of Constantinople, or the cries for Occidental help. After this long while, George the Aetolian is among the first authors to look from the past towards the future, to contemplate with realism the contemporaneous situation. He praises the new values of the Hellenic people, undoubtedly, more modest than the ones of the by-gone days, but in any case preferable to those shadows which had no other function than keeping the Greeks in a paralyzing captivity of some myths gone forever.

Having adopted a language simple, popular and inspired from folklore and the Bible, George writes for anyone's power of understanding, rendering again the literature in a value for all the schooled people. Also, he enters again in Greece a paradigm of dramatic genre, almost completely vanished in the Byzantine epoch in the very country where the theatre had been born. George's poem is not only a drama, imperfect, like any writing marking a beginning or a fresh beginning, but an invective, an eulogy and a didactic poem, in a word, a complex work, which befits the strict standards of the classification of the literary theory. A court poet, George writes on command, but believes in the cause for which he militates. An honest hate against Chiajna comes out of his verses and, seemingly, a genuine admiration for his patron. He received his education in a quite unfriendly environment and being endowed with a mediocre poetic talent, George could not have created but modest verses, from the artistic point of view. They make, though, a moment of take-over of the broken tread of tradition and a fresh beginning...