

SOME ISSUES OF NATIONAL MENTALITY AND MEMORY IN TAO-KLARJETI

Elza PUTKARADZE

Department of Folklore, Dialectology and Emigrant Literature Research,
Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi
35/32 Ninoshvili/Rustaveli str., Batumi 6010, Georgia
elza.putkaradze@bsu.edu.ge

Naile MIKELADZE

Department of Folklore, Dialectology and Emigrant Literature Research,
Niko Berdzenishvili Institute, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi
35/32 Ninoshvili/Rustaveli str., Batumi 6010, Georgia
naile.mikeladze@bsu.edu.ge

Abstract: In the presented study, we will focus on several aspects of national mentality and memory in Tao-Klarjeti. In particular, what kind of picture the state of the national gene code – the Georgian language shows in the consciousness of the historical Tao-Klarjeti people, because the most powerful factor of national identity, a solid marker, is the language. Also, it is interesting how much knowledge of the historical past is preserved in the memory of the Tao-Klarjetians, in their national consciousness. Ethnographic-folkloric realities of the Tao-Klarjetians will also be discussed here.

The analysis of the toponymic material should be taken into account when researching the mentioned issue. Moreover, they may have forgotten the Georgian language, but their memory has preserved the historical Georgian names of the place.

When discussing the research issue, we will be guided by the empirical material recorded by us during the expeditions over the years. Naturally, we will use the scientific views of other researchers, or the empirical material available in scientific circulation to make comparisons.

We believe that national memory implies not only the preservation of the past, but also the possibility of its existence and use in the future. This is an important problem which has been revealed in Tao-Klarjeti.

We consider that the issues presented for analysis will give us a more or less idea about some aspects of national mentality and memory in Tao-Klarjeti.

Keywords: Georgia, national memory, Tao-Klarjeti, language, folklore.

INTRODUCTION

It is known that historically Georgia has lost important territories. Since 1550, Ottoman conquerors have tried to settle here. From the 17th century they managed to dominate for three centuries. After the end of the Russian-Turkish war in 1877-1878, this area was returned to Georgia. However, it was lost again with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 and later, in 1921, after the Treaty of Kars. Today, historical Tao-Klarjeti is included within the borders of the Republic of Turkey.

Tao-Klarjeti is a silent, painful witness of the glorious cultural past of Georgia. The twelve monasteries of Tao-Klarjeti were the most important centres of erudition. Original works were created in the literary and educational centres there, and translation activities were in full swing. There was also a school of goldsmith's work here. It is precisely the monks in these sanctuaries of Opiza, Khakhuli, Shatberdi, Khandzta, and Tskarostavi who established and strengthened the Georgian cultural centres outside the country on Mount Athos, in Constantinople, Shavi Mta, on Mount Sinai, in Sabatsminda and other places.

Unfortunately, due to the historical fate, an important part of south-western Georgia, Tao-Klarjeti, was lost. It was a special part of the culturally and politically united Georgian space. This part represents many brilliant pages in the history of our country. Naturally, the population which remained in an area with a foreign language environment and different morals and customs suffers from the gradually strengthening

process of assimilation, in which the national features might be forgotten or completely lost. Fortunately for us, the Georgian language is still heard in many parts of historical Georgia, Georgian customs are preserved - rules, habits, and many living details have been retained. The mentioned issue is an interesting and relevant research topic, especially today when there is a dialogue between cultures or pseudo-cultures.

Literature review: After the loss of Tao-Klarjeti – the historical part of Georgia, the life of the local people was unexplored for a long time. Very little was known about the area until the notes made by Nico Marr during his travels in 1904. Since the 90s of the last century, the scientific study of the area began. It was Shushana Putkaradze who was the first scientist, who started studying the lost part of Georgia after Niko Mari. Currently, the research is actively ongoing. Since 2000, the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of the Shota Rustaveli University of Batumi, the Kartevological Department of the same university, and the Kartevological Department of the Kutaisi State Institute have been conducting scientific expeditions in this region every year.

Methodology: Empirical material processing, analysis, synthesis, historical-comparative and descriptive research methods are used in the article.

Results / Discussion: To understand the issue of national mentality or memory, it is important to study the state of the Georgian language in the lost territory. In Tao-Klarjeti, the Georgian language is not equally preserved. The situation in Tao is more difficult in this respect. The Georgian language is preserved here in the valley of the Quabag, in several highland villages. The Georgian language is relatively well preserved in the Klarjeti area. "The Georgian language is only known in thirty-five villages of Imerkhevi (17 Samukhtro), forty villages of Livani and Murghuli, sixteen villages of Upper Machakheli and three villages of Tao. Thus, Georgian is known in about ninety villages throughout Tao-Klarjeti".¹

At the same time, villages are being emptied, young people are moving to cities to live. The historical places are looked after only by the elderly people. Due to the harsh living conditions, those who stay in the village during the winter also come to the lowland areas. A few families stay in highland villages. Consequently, this contributes to the gradual forgetting of the Georgian language. However, their speech is peculiar. Naturally, their dialectal speech somehow represents preserved Georgian. The Georgian language was separated from the Georgian literary language; it continued to exist in a foreign language environment. The speech of the local people shows a lexically interesting linguistic picture. Their speech is indeed lexically impoverished, but the lexical units, which are characteristic of the archaic Georgian language, are preserved. In their daily speech, words and sayings that belong only to the old Georgian language and are not found in modern Georgian or dialects are actively used. We will name some of them: Abli (modern Georgian "tsota" – a few), Gargani (modern Georgian "jokhi" - stick), Daburva (modern Georgian chatsma - dressing), Sama (modern Georgian "tsekva" - dancing), Tarosi (modern Georgian "amindi" - weather), namskhmani (modern Georgian "skheuli" - body).

In the consciousness of Georgians living in historical Tao-Klarjeti, the Georgian language is the most powerful factor determining national identity, an essential sign of national belonging. It is a noteworthy and important fact that they do not consider as a Georgian, "Gurji", a person who has forgotten his native language – "annadili", the Georgian language: "God gave us a language, your "dili", we have forgotten it, what's the matter, you have forgotten "annadili", you are nothing anymore, what kind of man you are, you are empty, you are no longer a Georgian"²; "Those who don't know "Gurdjije", we don't consider them Georgian people. Let the Georgian know his "annadilina".³

They understand very well that forgetting one's native language is severing the connection between a person and his native roots. The Georgian language is the chain by which they are connected to their native roots, because the expression of the national spirit is in each case the language. Language is the key to the national gene. They have mastered this well and that is why they have a special, reserved attitude towards the language. For people in Tao-Klarjeti, the Georgian language and nationality are the most important value, a very special value. They are proud of their nationality, proud of being Georgian: "Everything good and delicious is in my nation, my "memleketi" (homeland) is fine" – said an inhabitant from Jvariskhevi;

¹ Chokharadze 2015, 142.

² Putkaradze 2013, 51.

³ Putkaradze 1993, 155.

"Georgian speech is very nice speech".⁴ Many times you will hear from them: "We shouldn't forget the Georgian nation and language, we are the real Georgians".⁵ Yes, so it is. They consider themselves true or real Georgians, and that is why they consider forgetting the language as a loss of being a Georgian. A person who has forgotten his language and does not know Georgian is referred to as a "washed-out", "turned-out", "emptied", or "turned-Turkish" person. They rightly believe that if you are a Georgian, you should know the Georgian language: "if you don't speak in "Gurjije (Georgian) anymore, you are a changed man. Don't forget the Georgian language, don't completely switch to Turkish".⁶

On one hand, they are proud of their Georgian origin, they are proud of being Georgians, and on the other hand, they see the sad reality well, they worry about the loss of the Georgian language: "When we die, the posterity don't know the language, so Gurjija will die"⁷. Especially the elderly people were saddened that "Georgian speech is being orphaned, only elderly people use it, young people don't speak anymore"⁸.

The Georgian language is preserved in the speech of the elderly in Tao-Klarjeti, but not among young people anymore. Some understand a conversation, but cannot speak. The sad thing is that some people are not interested at all and show an indifferent attitude towards the Georgian language. They also ask the question - what should it be used for?! Yes, the elderly try not to let their descendants forget the language: "If I'm not Georgian, I can't stay anywhere else, I can't marry and move to other places; my children should know Georgian"⁹. They do not like that their descendants are not taught the language: "It's bad that the Toruns (young generation) were not taught their origin"¹⁰, but a mixed family, marriage to a non-Georgian, leaving places of residence, emptying villages of residents, a powerful process of urbanization, naturally are complex factors contributing to forgetting the language of the ancestors. In such a situation, it is difficult to determine to what extent the Georgian language will survive on the historically indigenous Georgian land, that land, about which Ilia Chavchavadze wrote: "Our past life started on that land, our life flourished there, the strength of our spirit raised its famous flag there ... studies, education, excessive love for the homeland was poured from there to our country at one time".¹¹

National memory does not only mean the preservation of the past, but also the possibility of its existence or use in the future. This is an important problem in Tao-Klarjeti. The problem is that the still-surviving Georgian speech is gradually facing the danger of being forgotten. As we mentioned, old people speak Georgian, the problem is precisely the attitude of young people towards the Georgian language. Some people know, most people do not try to protect their native language. Some of them understand Georgian, although they cannot speak it themselves. They are born there and the Turkish language takes the place of their mother tongue. Even at the level of the family speech, they are no longer interested in the knowledge and protection of the Georgian language. This in itself is a great pain and danger. The future existence and use of the language is unfavourable. Unfortunately, in Tao-Klarjeti, the strongest sign of national identity - the Georgian language - has weakened, and in many areas Georgian is no longer heard at all. Yes, it is a sad circumstance that the necessity of practical knowledge of the Georgian language is not needed there.

As for the various traditions preserved by life, they are in a better condition compared to the language. Traditions or lifestyle nuances are actions that have turned into habits and became more or less powerful.

The knowledge of the historical past is still preserved in the memory and in the national consciousness of the natives of Tao-Klarjeti. It should be noted that they are well aware of their historical roots. They frankly, openly say: "We were Christians in the old days, later we became Muslims. However, we secretly used to go and pray on Virgin Mary's holy day".¹²

⁴ Putkaradze 2014, 60.

⁵ Putkaradze 2014, 65.

⁶ Paghava 2013, 140.

⁷ Putkaradze 2013, 22.

⁸ Paghava 2013, 279.

⁹ Putkaradze 2013, 57.

¹⁰ Paghava 2013, 168.

¹¹ Chavchavadze 1987, 102.

¹² Putkaradze 2013, 17.

In Tao-Klarjeti, the name and merits of King Tamar (King Tamar was one of the outstanding rulers among the Bagratians in the 12th-13th centuries. Education and culture of a united and economically strong feudal Georgia reached a high level. Georgian culture made a significant contribution to the political unification of feudal Georgia. This political strength of Georgia was reflected in the title of Tamar herself, and she called herself as follows: "In the name of God, I Tamar Bagratunian, by the will of God, the king and queen of Apkhaz and Georgians, Rann, Kakheti and Armenians, Sharvansha and Shahansha, and all self-conquerors of the East and West" and others)¹³ are especially alive. Many beautiful stories or legends are protected and preserved by their folklore. They love and remember "Glorious Anna (Mother), Glorious Queen" Tamar with the greatest respect. Tamar is the only king whose memory is preserved in the memory of the inhabitants of historical Georgia. Moreover, sometimes the historical reality is not followed and everything is linked to Tamar. Temples and bridges are considered to have been built by Tamar. So, the name of King Tamar has remained the most firmly in their historical memory. There is a widespread legend related to the building of the drinking water canal in Savriati: "While Queen Tamar was building the canal, she ran out of money; for this reason, she sold her gold hairpins".¹⁴ The queen had great difficulty in digging a channel in a rocky place. "King Tamar noticed that the building of Parkhali church was far easier compared with the making of this canal. She also pointed out that the completion of Savriati canal tormented her a lot."¹⁵ There is one interesting detail about this. In 2014, during the expedition to Yeti village, Pempey Ulutagh (Ilmaz) told us: "While crossing the Savriati Canal King Tamar was singing the song that became very popular. I remember my ancestors used to sing that song".¹⁶ Unfortunately, the speaker could not reproduce the song. It is possible that what was said was not a figment of the speaker's imagination and they really knew the song related to it.

It is known from historical sources that Tamar was a religious, God-fearing, believer, benevolent, and sympathetic king. The chronicler writes: "The lover of churches and nuns, the judge of the poor and those who complain".¹⁷ King Tamar is also known in Tao-Klarjeti in the same way. The Georgians here tell stories related to the construction of the Parkhali church with great respect: "King Tamar spent so much on the constructing the Parkhali church that she soon ran out of money and gold. There was no food left – neither barley nor rye to bake some bread – in the village. Fortunately, one respected man suggested providing the builders and soldiers with dairy products, but there was a problem of delivery. King Tamar was glad and said that she would manage to deliver. She let the soldiers make a pipe from thin planks, which were stuck to each other and stretched from the mountain to the building field. People milked in the mountainous village and milk ran towards the place where Parkhali church was being built. "Milky spring let me built the Parkhali church", Tamar used to say.¹⁸

There are other stories related to the construction of the Parkhali church: "It was a difficult place to reach, the soldiers were lined up, Tamara was there, stones were carried from the bottom up, they were passed from hand to hand by the soldiers, who were lined up. That's how the church of Parkhali was built".¹⁹

As we mentioned, people from Tao-Klarjeti tell many stories related to King Tamar with great love. According to one version, even the piled stone slabs of the pious king are considered a holy place and are attributed miraculous powers. The parents from Kuabi, Balkha, Khevi and other villages would make their children's feet touch these stones. They believed that they would not get tired while walking: "Tamari left Kuabi with her nanny. The nanny was old; Tamari was holding a little boy baby. When they got tired on the way, she gave the baby to the nanny. She started arranging these stones on top of each other. She made it like a stone niche and laid the boy on it... When they were about to leave, she made the child stand on the stones. It was summer. The stone was warm. The stone was softened like dough. Tamari was surprised – when the child raised his leg, the footprint remained on the stone. The stone cooled again. The traces of the little boy's tiny feet are clearly visible even today!".²⁰ Even today, the local people tell

¹³ Makalatia 1990, 23

¹⁴ Putkaradze 2014, 17; Mikeladze 2014, 12.

¹⁵ Putkaradze 1993, 178.

¹⁶ Putkaradze 2014, 64.

¹⁷ Life of Kartli, 1995, 368.

¹⁸ Putkaradze 1993, 176.

¹⁹ Putkaradze 2014, 32.

²⁰ Putkaradze 1993, 173.

how they used to step on those stones when they were little. Even today, they believe that they are gracious stones, "they were laid by Queen Tamar, the footprints were made by the will of God and they give strength to the children of Adam".²¹

In historical Georgia, the names of many sources are related to the name of King Tamar: "Chikhoruli is a mountain there, there is the queen's spring. They say that King Tamar drank water during her rest, and that is why it is called the Queen's spring".²²

In legends, Tamar is mentioned as a god-loving, holy, benevolent king. Also, they talk about his insightful intelligence, savvy and dexterity. One interesting narration related to this is preserved in Amiertao. According to 76-year-old Pempey Ulutaghi, a resident of Yeti village, "someone started flirting with Queen Tamari". Tamar offered to go for a walk on the bridge; while walking there Tamar pushed the man and threw him over. Yes, Tamari was also an actor of this kind".²³ With the same content, but with a slightly different version, the legend is preserved in remote Kobai: "The head of soldiers liked Tamari. She was very smart. There were so many soldiers that Tamar decided to ask the commander to walk on the bridge. While walking there Tamar pushed the man and threw him over".²⁴

It is known from historical sources that before the battle, Tamar blessed the warriors, begged God for the army, and she prayed day and night in the church, asking God to save her homeland. The image of the praying, supplicating king has remained in the historical memory of the Tao-Klarjetians to this day. One of the legends preserved in the Tao tells about this. Tao was often the land of enemy's invasion. Once, King Tamar saved the local noble family of the Cavcasidzes... The army found very difficult to walk through the Quabag ravine. The steep slopes were rocky and the stones were falling. It turned out that Tamar led the army. As they were going to the village of Pariskhevi, the stones fell while going downhill. All of a sudden, the entire rock fell apart and two enormous stones rolled down. "Queen Tamar was afraid as the stones might crush the army, and she turned to God, and began to pray: - God, our great creator, have mercy on us, let these stones stop, and let us pass in peace, great creator, I am begging you. God listened to Queen Tamar, the stones stopped rolling down. They still stand there today. No one knows what is holding them back. They are hanging in the air, nothing is holding them except God. You will see them under the Konchokhi rock hanging like a ladder, and you will see what power the prayer of Queen Tamar had".²⁵

One of the tales of King Tamar's cycle recorded in Tsitlekari has amazing content. Tamari camped in Tsitlekari with the army. "The child had no more milk, he was crying and crying. Tamar was upset and begged God: God, help me, don't let my son die. Half an hour later they saw that a deer with twisted horns was coming out of the forest and running towards Tamar's stall. The udder was full of milk. The babysitter milked a deer, and entered the tent to feed the baby. Soon she came out, the deer was not seen anymore, it was gone. It was like every evening, during King Tamar's presence there. When the deer was milked, drops of milk would fall. The ground is still white in that place. The place is called "Irmis Rdzieti", which means deer milk.

Many realities of national memory are preserved in Georgian spells and fairy tales. Georgian songs, dances, and many customs are preserved. The kitchen is interesting. Georgian dishes are still being prepared. We cannot talk about these issues in the report format. However, we will touch on at least one important issue. In particular, the local Georgians were well aware and still know that their ancestors were Christians. The information of G. Kazbegi is particularly interesting. During his trip there in 1874, he found 80 families of Georgian hidden Christians in the area of Parkhali in Imiertao: "Currently, the area of Parkhali is important because several Georgian families of the Orthodox faith have survived here... The number of families of the Christian faith is equal to five, but they say there are still 80 here, hidden Christians. The Christian community here has its priest...".²⁶ Kazbegi names Armenkhevi and Kobak as the residence of hidden Christians. E. Takaishvili also talks about hidden Christians and he names the

²¹ Putkaradze, Malakmadze 2014, 112.

²² Putkaradze 2013, 42.

²³ Putkaradze 2014, 65.

²⁴ Mikeladze 2014, 27.

²⁵ Putkaradze Malakmadze 2014, 113.

²⁶ Kazbegi 1995, 147.

villages of Khevek and Armenkhevi.²⁷ Apparently, Christianity was preserved for a long time: "During the last world war, when the Russian army occupied Chorokhi Basin, the entire population of this village openly confessed their Christian faith and experienced great joy. D. Shevardnadze and G. Zdanevich, the members of our archaeological expedition visited them in 1917".²⁸

The natives from village of Khakhuli told E. Takaishvili: "We were told that on the day of Kurbanbairam, women bring painted eggs to "Mary" (we are talking about the Khakhuli Cathedral, where the niche of the Virgin Mary is kept) and they also light a candle for her".²⁹

There are still many data about hidden Christianity: "My wife comes from Zubienti family from Bazgireti. One of her family members was a priest before. In summer he pretends to be a Muslim fearing not to be punished, in winter he continues to be a Christian priest... Some years later he was captured, thrown into the mill canal and drowned".³⁰ Some other sayings: "eggs that used to be dyed in the onion, would be coloured beautifully, would turn red". "The women dyed the eggs, then they hit the eggs to break each other's".³¹

Historical memory is still preserved in one way or another, although the process of generational change is accompanied by a different worldview. The main thing is that the Georgian toponyms are preserved in the memory of generations: Bareteli, Mere, Eliaskhevi, Andriatsminda... the names of the village, river, valley, church and fortresses are preserved.

Thus, several interesting aspects of national mentality and memory can be seen in Tao-Klarjeti. Studying the issue from this point of view creates an important idea and paints a characteristic portrait of the land of Tao-Klarjeti.

REFERENCES

- Chavchavadze, I. 1987, *Ottoman Georgia IV*, Tbilisi.
- Chokharadze, M. 2015, *Khandzta and old temples of the land of Twelve Monasteries*, Batumi.
- Kazbegi, G. 1995, *Three months in the Turkish Georgia*, Batumi.
- Life of Kartli* 1995, Tbilisi.
- Makalatia, S. 1990, *King Tamar*, Batumi.
- Mikeladze, N. 2014, *Expedition Materials, Amier Tao, Personal Archive*, Batumi.
- Paghava, M. 2013, *Notes from Shavsheti*, Tbilisi.
- Putkaradze, E. 2013, *Expedition Materials, Imerkhevi, Personal Archive*, Batumi.
- Putkaradze, E. 2014, *Expedition Materials, Amiertao, Personal Archive*, Batumi.
- Putkaradze, E. 2017, *Expedition Materials, Devskeli, Personal Archive*, Batumi.
- Putkaradze, Sh. 1993, *Georgian of ours I*, Batumi.
- Putkaradze, Sh., Malakmadze, R. 2014, *Tamar, brought to life in the legends of the ethnic Georgians in Turkey, Gamonatlevi, I*, Batumi.
- Takaishvili, E. 1991, *Islamic Georgia, Collections "Returning" (Emigrant works)*, Tbilisi.
- Takaishvili, E., 1960, *Archeologic Expeditions in South Georgia in 1917*, Tbilisi.

²⁷ Takaishvili 1991, 218.

²⁸ Takaishvili 1991, 217.

²⁹ Takaishvili 1960, 63.

³⁰ Chokharadze 2015, 280.

³¹ Putkaradze 2017, 42, 29.