

## Research Article

## The Myth of the City in the French and the Georgian Symbolist Aesthetics

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“Modern Art is a genuine offspring of the city... the city created new images, here the foundation was laid for the literary school, known as Symbolism... The poet’s consciousness was burdened by the gray iron city and it poured out into a new unknown song” (Tabidze 2011: 121-122), - writes Georgian Symbolist Titsian Tabidze in his program article *Tsisperi Qantsebit (With Blue Horns)*. Indeed, in the Symbolist aesthetics the city-megalopolis, as a micro model of the material world, is formed as one of the basic concepts.

Within the topic under study we discuss the work of Charles Baudelaire and the poets of the Georgian Symbolist school *Tsisperqantselebi (The Blue Horns)*, as, on the one hand, in the French and, on the other one, in the Georgian literary area the conceptualization of the city - Paris, Tbilisi - as an aesthetic phenomenon, its poetization was for the first time associated exactly with their names.

In our view, in order to study the given issue, it is significant to compare the French and the Georgian contexts, the more so as Georgian Symbolism was not a contemporary phenomenon of French Symbolism; in addition, the socio-political as well as the cultural backgrounds of the two countries were also totally different.

The French Revolution of 1789 became a starting point of a new age and a model of subsequent revolutions not only in France but also in the entire Western area. The utopian idea of social “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” was met with great enthusiasm in the society, although the interpretation of political turbulence, revolutions and the “Great Terror” was not and could not have been homogeneous. The hopes soon changed to disappointment. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. to the foundation of the Third Republic (1870) the government system of France changed a number of times. Industrialization and scientific progress facilitated extension of the city. The ambitious project of Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann concerning the renovation of Paris - “construction” of a new city - was implemented.

The political situation was totally different in Georgia from that in France. The country, which from 1802 found itself within the Russian Empire, in the 1910s (1918-1921) obtained independence for a few years, but from 1921 was forced to become one of the members of the Soviet Republic.

The cultural contexts of the two countries were also different. If in the 19<sup>th</sup>-c. French literature the tendencies of Romanticism and Realism (with certain variations) co-existed and it was distinguished by paradoxes, striving towards continuous formal novelties, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. was the period of stagnation of Georgian culture. Although in the work of individual authors (A. Abasheli, S. Shanshiashvili, G. Tabidze, and others) aesthetic features of modernism, tendencies of new art were observable, on the whole, literature was predominated by epigonism<sup>1</sup>. Against this background, in 1916, the first Symbolist literary group *Tsisperi Qantsebi (The Blue Horns)* came into being in the Georgian literary area. The order uniting young poets set as the primary objective to restore the artificially broken connection of Georgian literature with the Western area. Desiring to re-conceptualize the national identity and to modernize Georgian literature, *Tsisperqantselebi* rested on the worldview and aesthetic principles of French Symbolism.

In these two different socio-political and cultural environments, the cultural atmosphere and scale of influence of the city (Paris, Tbilisi), naturally, was not homogeneous either. Unlike Paris of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., which was perceived as the world capital, “A beacon of artistic freedom, a particularly fertile climate for artistic experimentation” (Samuels 2011: 13), Tbilisi of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. had the status of a cultural periphery. Georgian Symbolists undertook the task of rejecting this idea and declared Tbilisi as a Mecca of art. “After Georgia the most sacred country is Paris. People, glorify this wrathful city of ours, where buffooned with self-forgetful inspiration our drunkard brethren – Verlaine and Baudelaire, Mallarmé, confidant of words, and Arthur Rimbaud, damned poet, drunk with pride”, - wrote Paolo Iashvili in the *Foreword (Pirveltqma)* (Iashvili 2011: 108).

For French Symbolists the national worldview, civil responsibility was alien (Balakian 1977: 10). They watched the renovation of Paris from the position of observers, whereas *Tsisperqantselebi* themselves were co-participants of the creation of new reality, cultural atmosphere. “We wish Georgia to turn into an infinite, dreaming city, in which the noise of animated streets will replace the emerald of flowering

<sup>1</sup> The main source of epigonism was the work of great Georgian Realist poet, writer and public figure Akaki Tsereteli.

valleys” (Iashvili, 2011: 108). Georgian Symbolists established close contacts with representatives of various spheres of culture, immigrated from the Russian Empire (Zigmund Valishevski, Sergey Sudeikin, Vasili Kamenski, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Igor Terentiev, and others) and facilitated their activities in Tbilisi (arranging literary evenings, establishing their own publications).<sup>2</sup> It was an outcome of the civil and creative efforts of *Tsisperqantselebi* that “Tbilisi in fact turned into a new cultural centre – on the one hand, it overcame the status of a cultural periphery and provided shelter to Russian artists who had fled from the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War; on the other one, generally, in the context of the Western culture, it created an extremely interesting precedent of an active, multicultural, multiethnic Modernist and Avant-garde cultural area” (Tsipuria 2012: 178).

American literary critic Pamela Genova singles out three main characteristics of the Modernist city life: a) cafes, which replaced salons of the Romantic period; b) linguistic masks – boom of pseudonyms; c) provoking of scandals and mystifications (Genova 20002: 76). Indeed, artistic cafes are associated with the Modernist city and they are an inalienable part of the urban cultural life. “Montmartre with its cafes and the Latin Quarter represented the stage on which bohemia creates a legend... The theory of Symbolism came into being in Paris cafes” (Gaprindashvili 1990: 509-510), - writes V.Gaprindashvili in his essay *Bohemia*. Like in Paris, artistic cafes also appeared in Tbilisi of the 1910s,<sup>3</sup> which played a tremendous role in the socio-cultural life of the city. Artists of different nationalities, different branches of art and different aesthetic positions gathered in Tbilisi artistic cafes.

The city-megalopolis, area of everyday life - accelerated by the industrialization process and rhythm of life, “city diseases” (cholera, syphilis), bohemia, neurotic society – acquires in the Symbolist poetry an aesthetic value and is formed as one of the main concepts. The aestheticization of the urban theme was considerably determined by the socio-political, cultural and worldview crisis – alienation of an individual from reality, the city, as a micromodel of the material world. The city is interpreted as the “artificial” area in which the emotional relations between human beings are broken. It created the illusory idea of the society as a unit with an integral social structure. In fact, in the unified and depersonalized society an individual is lonely, estranged and split. As Burton Pike observes, in the Modernist literature individual and crowd are completely differentiated, “The figure of the alienated and isolated middle-class individual, frequently an artist, has its roots in the literature of the late eighteenth century and the Romantic period. And a crowd of people as an

<sup>2</sup> See Ir.Kenchoshvili, *Tbilisi (1918-1920) – Multicultural City*. Typology of Georgian Modernism. Tbilisi: Meridiani, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Brotherly Consolation, Tail of Pheasants, Fantastic Tavern, Boat of the Argonauts, Kimerioni*, see G.Lomidze, *Tiflis Avant-garde*. Typology of Georgian Modernism. Tbilisi: Meridiani, 2016.

undifferentiated mass, acting as a depersonalized collective character. These two types are directly opposed: a withdrawn, sensitive, but devitalized individual confronts a passionate mob which has power but no insight” (Pike 1981:100). In this “artificial” area a paradoxical attitude emerges – the people around and the city are simultaneously familiar and strange. A lonely person is trying to determine oneself and establish the relationship with others and the city. “An individual is helpless before the outer world, because he is unable to know it, and also before his inner world, as he cannot control it. Both the microcosmos and the macrocosmos are threatening him with flooding” (Tsipuria 1990: 182).

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The second edition (1861) of the volume of lyric poems *Les Fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil)* by Charles Baudelaire included in addition a new cycle *Tableaux Parisiens (Parisian Scenes)*, exactly this event may be regarded as the starting point of appearance of the urbanist theme in French poetry. Similar to German philosopher, critic and essayist Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 2005: 31), Thum Reinhard in his work *The City (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verhaeren)* considers Baudelaire as the first urbanist poet (Reinhard 1994: 1).

Although the megalopolis – Paris is often reflected in the work of Charles Baudelaire’s contemporaries – Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and others, it is conceptualized as objective reality, area of everyday life. The city in their texts to a certain extent participates in the process of formation of an individual, but mostly it represents the objective background. Along with Charles Baudelaire, Thum Reinhard names as the “city poets” Arthur Rimbaud and Emil Verhaeren. “Although they were deeply indebted to the Romantic tradition, these three poets were able to discover and explore a previously neglected lyric dimension, and thus bring to light a new view of reality and of aesthetics” (Reinhard 1994: 2-3). The “city poets” by means of introducing into their work the urbanist stream, on the one hand, rejected the aesthetic canon of their immediate precursors – Romanticists and Parnassians, who regarded urbanist reality as an unsuitable theme for lyric poetry and who separated poetry from the current context, and, on the other one, detached themselves from the Realistic tradition of conceptualization of the city. For the “city poets” the city-Paris represents not a neutral, objective dimension, but a living, autonomous organism. The above-mentioned authors in their work describe the city from an untraditional viewpoint, as their attitude towards reality is determined by a different, Symbolist aesthetics. Of the French “city poets”, the work of Charles Baudelaire is especially interesting for us, as urbanist perception emerges and the city acquires an aesthetic value for the first time exactly in his poetry.

Charles Baudelaire, referred to as the father of urbanist poetry, witnessed himself the process of “political violence” (end of “July Monarchy” and foundation of the Second Republic), transformation of Paris into an industrial, capitalistic city. Baudelaire interpreted modernization of the city in a negative context, did not share the idea of inevitable progress, as during

the renovation Paris lost the spiritual heritage. “Renovation of Paris causes the splitting of the poet from the environment” (Gasarian 1995: 59).

*Le Cygne (The Swan)*, a poem from *Tableaux Parisiens*, is notable for the acute feeling caused by absence of the homeland in the homeland (Paris). The image of the swan appears as a symbol of the poet, as the ideal of beauty in the defective world. Its shelter is conceptualized in “The landscape of the former city, repository for symbols and source of associations, was the mirror, the “allegorie” of the poet’s consciousness” (Reinhard 1994: 44). Old Paris is physically “destroyed” and its perception is possible only metaphysically. Baudelaire overcomes the temporal distance and summons from the mythological world Andromache<sup>4</sup>, as only she is capable of feeling empathy in the poet’s tragedy, caused by the loss of the spiritual shelter.

“Andromache, I think of you! — That little stream,  
That mirror, poor and sad, which glittered long ago  
With the vast majesty of your widow's grieving,  
That false Simois swollen by your tears,  
Suddenly made fruitful my teeming memory,  
As I walked across the new Carrousel.

— Old Paris is no more (the form of a city  
Changes more quickly, alas! Than the human heart)”.

(Baudelaire, *Le Cygne (The Swan)*, Trans. James McGowan)

In the poem *Les Petites Vieilles (The Little Old Women)*, former actresses should be interpreted as symbolic images. They represent the image of the contemporary society, rejecting the valuable and the glorious past.

“Thus you trudge along, stoical, uncomplaining,  
Amid the confusion of cities full of life,  
Mothers with bleeding hearts, courtesans, saints,  
Whose names in years gone by were on everyone's lips.”

(Baudelaire, *Les Petites Vieilles (Little Old Women)*, Trans. James McGowan)

For Baudelaire Paris turned into the proscenium of collision of the old and the new, the tradition and the modern period. “He saw two times, or things at once... He sees, in other words, both worlds simultaneously – the Paris before Haussmann, and the Paris during and after its redevelopment; France before the revolution of 1848, and France in the increasingly triumphant capitalist culture that followed; ... He also sees his life as doubled... Moreover, his double vision is not limited to time: he also sees two realms at once (the ideal and the concrete)” (Meltzer 2011:1).

Paris for Baudelaire was associated with ugliness, accelerated rhythm of life, death, disease and decay; with the area where values are lost; with noise, which is “an allegory of the city”

<sup>4</sup> In Greek mythology, the wife of Hector, hero of the Trojan War. The symbol of a faithful and ideal wife.

(Chambers 2015:9). Despite such an interpretation of the city phenomenon, despite the poet’s constant attempt to escape from the urban nightmare in the artificially created world, he is suffering from the feeling of his attachment to the city. His attitude towards Paris is ambivalent. On the one hand, it attracts him as the source of creative inspiration, and, on the other one, he hates it as the unacceptable form of existence.

In the first poem of *Tableaux Parisiens – Paysage (Landscape)* Baudelaire juxtaposes eternal spring – transformed reality, transcendental world to eternal winter – objective reality, whereas he himself appears as the creator of an alternative area, mythical Paris. The poem “describes, on the one hand, Paris, which exists, and, on the other one, Paris, which has never existed and will never exist” (Laforgue 1995:84).

“I shall see the springtimes, the summers, the autumns;  
And when winter comes with its monotonous snow,  
I shall close all the shutters and draw all the drapes  
So I can build at night my fairy palaces.”

(Baudelaire, *Paysage (Landscape)*, Trans. James McGowan)

If in the poem *Paysage (Landscape)* the opposed pair is winter-summer, in the poems *Le Crépuscule du soir (Twilight)* and *Le Crépuscule du matin (Dawn)*, the binary opposition is created by the opposition of night and day. Night symbolizes the irrational principle, and day – the rational one. At night human beings get free from the tyranny of objective reality, this is an opportunity of transition into the world of dreams, but at daybreak, suffering with all its horrors awakes and human beings return to the captivity of reality. “The demons, who move through the dark streets, symbolize the timeless drives and instincts which flout personal volition informed by reason. They embody the irrational forces within all human beings, forces whose existence the complacent, rationalistic consciousness of daylight wishes to deny” (Reinhard 1994:57).

“It was the hour when amid poverty and cold  
The pains of women in labor grow more cruel;  
The cock's crow in the distance tore the foggy air  
Like a sob stifled by a bloody froth”.

(Baudelaire, *Le Crépuscule du matin (Dawn)*, Trans. James McGowan)

Baudelaire sees a way out from painful reality - urban chaos - in creation of an alternative world by means of art (*Le Soleil (The Sun)*), as well as in indulging in reminiscence (*La Cloche fêlée (The Flawed Bell)*), alcoholic intoxication and love. However, it proves impossible for him to get rid of the clutches of reality completely and for a long time.

The poems of the *Tableaux Parisiens* cycle focus attention on the existence of a marginal person and his relation towards “others”. Baudelaire’s work is imbued with sympathy to the oppressed strata of the society. Courtesans, criminals, cripples, beggars, etc. are sublimed in his poetry. As Ross Chambers observes, Baudelaire’s sympathy towards outsiders is caused by two factors: “On the one hand they form part of the city’s

atmosphere, personifying its noisy life in their fringe existence, while on the other they appear to have acquired a wisdom from their exposed existence that indoor dwellers – a metaphor for the bourgeoisie – are unaware of” (Chambers 2015:9). Although Baudelaire’s sympathy and empathy to the marginal strata of the society is clear, he perceives himself in isolation from everyone. The acute feeling of solitude never leaves the poet.

“I go alone to try my fanciful fencing”

(Baudelaire, *Le Soleil (The Sun)* Trans. James McGowan)

Or:

“- O city!

While about us you sing, laugh, and bellow,

In love with pleasure to the point of cruelty,

See! I drag along also! but, more dazed than they,

I say: "What do they seek in Heaven, all those blind?"

(Baudelaire, *Les Aveugles (The Blind)*, Trans. James McGowan)

Russian linguist and philologist V.N. Toporov singles out two antagonistic forms of the idea of the city: the city - damned, depraved, fallen, being on the brink of a precipice, awaiting the divine punishment, and the new city, a counterpart of the heavenly city on earth. The image of the former is Babylon, and that of the latter – Heavenly Jerusalem. In the context of Babylon and Jerusalem, these two different cities, the concepts of the city-maiden and the city-whore are singled out (Toporov 1987). It is interesting that Gr. Robakidze, the maestro of *Tsisperqantselebi*, whom they regarded as their leader and introducer of Modernism into Georgia, in his novel *The Snake’s Skin* compares Tbilisi to a maiden: “Is she the cherished queen? She has had many suitors. The Byzantines, the Romans, the Turks... the Arabs, the Kipchaks, the Mongols, the Russians. She has surrendered to nobody. Has she remained unmarried?!.. Her womanhood has remained unblossomed... Who is she waiting for?! She remembers numerous false suitors (Robakidze 1988: 219). As regards Baudelaire, in his work Paris can be conceptualized as the city-whore. As Walter Benjamin notes: “His poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city... The Paris of his poems is a sunken city, and more submarine than subterranean” (Benjamin 2006: 40-41).

Thus, for the first time the megalopolis - Paris acquires the conceptual meaning in Baudelaire’s poetry and is interpreted as the area which is related with an individual’s chaotic, disharmonious existence, disrupted relations and lost ideals. The poet is distanced from objective reality and forms an alternative, indefinite temporal-spatial world.

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Introducing of the concept of the city into the Georgian literary area became associated with the name of *Tsisperqantselebi*, group of young poets, having moved from

Kutaisi.<sup>5</sup> *Tsisperqantselebi* played a significant role in the process of transformation of Tbilisi into a multicultural centre, “Mecca of art”, however, when conceptualizing the city as an aesthetic phenomenon, they shared the position of the French Symbolist school. As in Charles Baudelaire’s work, in the work of *Tsisperqantselebi* too - implying their Symbolist period texts - the city is associated with the fall, depravity and, in general, disharmony.

In K. Nadiradze’s poem “Malicious city” Tbilisi is viewed as a topos, settled by sinful and ugly images. In this case too, like Baudelaire’s *Le Crépuscule du soir (Twilight)*, night is related with transformation of human beings, manifestation of their instincts and overcoming of reality.

Paolo Iashvili’s poem *Pheasants in the City* is regarded as one of the first urbanist texts in Georgian poetry.<sup>6</sup> In the poem an apocalyptic vision of the city is represented with tragic acuteness. According to G. Asatiani, the city, being afire with hallucinations, appears to the poet “as a mystic fire in which, together with the helpless beautiful birds, the holy of holies of the poet’s illusions were burned forever, and this bloody slaughter attracted the poet’s inspiration, like drunken people” (Asatiani 2004: 392).

The feeling of loneliness in chaos is familiar for the poetry of *Tsisperqantselebi* as well (“I know, I have lots of friends, but who is really with me?” (Tabidze *To mother from Tbilisi*), however, the feeling of spiritual orphanage is not revealed in their texts as acutely as in the work of Galaktion Tabidze, the poet standing separately from the *Tsisperqantselebi* order, as well as in the texts of French Symbolists.

In *Tsisperqantselebi*’s work, the village appears as the antithesis of the city horror, i.e. a micromodel of the material world. The city chaos, noise, dirt are opposed by the village order, quiet, purity. “In fact, *Tsisperqantselebi* were exactly those tender-hearted children, brought up on the idylls of the past century, who were thrown by the new age to the streets of the great city, and who were vainly attempting to hide in motley paper masks their fear and dread of this unknown reality” (Asatiani 2004: 392). In their texts a nostalgic feeling for the village idyll is observable. The village is not a separate topos, but a symbolic image-idea, associated with the hearth, childhood, traditions and values, which are devaluated in the modern city.

The village is conceptualized as an alternative area of the urban space in the poem by Paolo Iashvili *Letter to the Mother*. The contrastive juxtaposition of the binary opposed pair village/city outlines the horrible image of the city more acutely.<sup>7</sup> In the poem the personality of the lyric character is split, opposition of the city and the village clearly expresses

<sup>5</sup> See L. Avaliani, *The Blue Order* - Innovation, Tradition. In the collection: *Versification V* (Sixth Scientific Session on Versification Devoted to *Tsisperqantselebi*) Tbilisi: Publishing House of Institute of Literature, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix #1

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix #2

deconstruction of his inner world, he is no longer able to identify himself with the village, but is also estranged from the new environment. The poem clearly reveals the worldview crisis of the Modernist period – when man lost the spiritual support and also failed to replace it with new values. “Choosing of the urban form of life by a human being is a quite conscious step. This fatal decision is one more example of the opposition of man’s inner vocation and outward action. In *Tsisperqantsebi*’s work the symbolic act of deserting the village is tantamount to leaving the Paradise, disrupting of harmony. Once he had mutually agreed inner and outward world, but now he deserted the idyllic abode, and together with it, no longer has peace of mind” (Tsipuria 1990: 181).

The same mood imbues the poem *To the Village* by V.Gaprindashvili<sup>8</sup>. Tbilisi is conceptualized as the prison, iron city, and the village as the longed-for hearth, real homeland. The striving towards the village is explained by the desire to return to the origin and it appears to the poet as the only possible way to restore lost integrity, to regain peace of mind.

From the viewpoint of the homesickness, nostalgia for childhood, an interesting parallel can be drawn with a poem from Charles Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens– Je n’ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville (I Have Not Forgotten Our White Cottage)*: “I have not forgotten our white cottage, Small but peaceful, near the city”. The poet recalls his house, in which he spent a short period with his mother and which was forever imprinted on his memory as a sad memory.

The striving of Symbolists to escape from the European civilization-the city did not imply rejection of only the material world. They wished to create an alternative reality, “the other world”. The idea of the city originates when man is exiled from the Paradise and he attempts to search for and to create a “new paradise”. The process of searching for a “new paradise” is associated with the fall, suffering and, in a certain sense, God-forsakenness. With the emergence of the city, man moves to a new form of existence” (Toporov 1987). If for Charles Baudelaire the antithesis of the material world – Paris – is the other world, for Arthur Rimbaud morass is associated with the Western civilization (*Le Bateau ivre (The Drunken Boat)*), whereas he conceptualizes the lost paradise in the East. In the work of Georgian Symbolists the city is opposed, on the one hand, by the village, and on the other one, – by the mythos city – Chaldea.<sup>9</sup>

“As in reality man failed to find consolation, as in the material world he could not discover a place to rest, he overstepped the limits of this world and created a new country, new world, new life” (Jorjadze 1911: 26). As a new world, an alternative for objective reality in the work of Titsian Tabidze, one of the main theoreticians and poets of *Tsisperqantsebi*, is viewed the mythic city – Chaldea. “Today begins the fundamental change of Georgian thought, the past, shadowed by centuries,

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix #3

<sup>9</sup> Chaldea land in souther Babylonia (modern southern Iraq) frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. Chaldean became synonymous with Babilonian (www. Britannica.com)

returns to life and traditions of the state of Georgia revive, the enslaved spirit returns to its old nest. To the extent that the national awareness has raised, we are approaching the past and the Georgian idea is assuming shape...Renaissance above all implies restoration of the past” (Tabidze 2011: 150-152), - writes T.Tabidze in the article *With Blue Horns*. The desire to modernize Georgian culture led the poet to the idea of searching for its own roots – Chaldea, sources of civilization. The Chaldeans, who were known as wizards, magi, astrologers, created one of the ancient civilizations. There is a version concerning the kinship of the Chaldeans and the Old Kartvelian tribes. In this regard, especially interesting is the viewpoint of Grigol Robakidze, maestro of *Tsisperqantsebi*. “Historians name as the initial homeland of the Georgians Ancient Chaldea...2700-3000 years ago on the coast of Vani Lake a powerful Chaldean kingdom was established. One of its kings, Argishti, carved on the rocky sides of the lake inscriptions resembling cuneiform inscriptions, which to date have proved impossible to be deciphered by anyone. It is assumed that they can be deciphered by means of Svan. In the tribal consciousness of the Svans the ancient word “Chalde” has survived to the present day. At one side of River Enguri, on a slope, there is a rocky bay, a small village, having the same name” (Robakidze 2012a: 7-8).

Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade interprets the city – the World Centre – as the area where the Heaven, Earth and Underworld are merged. “The Centre is the place that is sacred above all...the path leading to the Centre is a “difficult path” ... these difficulties are for those who are on their way to self-knowledge, who are moving to the “Centre” of their essence” (Eliade 2017: 38). In this viewpoint, Chaldea is the Centre, and the poet is moving to the “Centre” of his own essence. Chaldea corresponds to Biblical Jerusalem; it is the city-maiden. Creation of the myth of Chaldea was a cosmogonic act, which repeats the ritual of creation of the universe and aims to transform chaos into cosmos. Chaldea is the “primary source” of mythic Georgia. Grigol Robakidze in his essay *Demon and Mythos* writes: “Eastern man is in fact entirely engrossed in himself, Western – is only striving somewhere...In the East they ask “Where from?” and turn torpid in unhurried waiting. In the West they ask: “Where?” and restlessly grumble with impatience” (Robakidze 2012b: 49-51). Under the Western civilization, the city life with rationalism and progressive ideas should be conceptualized, whereas the East implies mythos existence. Georgia, as “a fragment of the East” (Robakidze), is attempting to determine its essence by means of returning to mythos – by means of creating the mythos city Chaldea.

In Titsian Tabidze’s poetry Chaldea does not represented as a real place of everyday life, defined by a specific chronotope. Chaldea, “praised in former times” and “ashes at present”, appears as an image-symbol of Georgia, where only the presence of the magi ancestors is felt. The poet “interprets it not historically, but metaphysically” (Robakidze 2014: 399). By returning to mythos, he tries to restore the disrupted relations with the past and can see that “the path leading to

Sidon will shine, / in the white desert the altar will open". In the "damned and poisonous garden" – the real world, where the poet is suffering from solitude, the mythic city – Chaldea – appears as the only dimension of creative freedom and harmonious existence.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in Georgian Symbolist poetry the concept of the city is inevitably related to "the Georgian idea" (Titsian Tabidze) – re-conceptualization of the Georgian identity. The city, which is associated with disharmony, chaos, devaluation of eternal values, in the work of *Tsisperqantselebi* is opposed, one of one hand, by the village (home, system of values, related with the tradition and religion), and, on the other one, by Chaldea – the mythic city – the form of metaphysical existence of Georgia. Unlike French Symbolists, who considered the theme of the homeland only in the ironic aspect, in the work of *Tsisperqantselebi* the homeland, tradition and religion are shaped into a valuable triad model.

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