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Poetics and Politics of the Georgian Modernism

In Kutaisi, a city in the Western part of Georgia, the publication of the Blue Horns magazine made a lot of noise. This was the first magazine of the Georgian symbolist group "Tsiferkantselebi" (Blue Horns). Young poets were criticized in the press for their pessimism, suicidality and erotic themes.

After Georgia gained independence, creative people moved to Tbilisi. Tbilisi is becoming a city of poets.

The motive of closeness to traditions can be seen in the manifesto which Paolo Iashvili, one of the representatives of Georgian symbolist movement, wrote for the *Blue Horns* magazine ("Paris is the holiest country after Georgia" – this phrase makes a clear reference to Georgia's place on the world's cultural map, which is definitely due to its ancient traditions), which is further developed in Titsian Tabidze's (another representative of Georgian symbolism) demand of making Georgian art and literature European and "adjusting" Georgian poetry "to the European radius" ("I put the rose of Hafez in Prudhomme's vase / I plant Baudelaire's flowers of evil in Besiki's garden" – *Chaldean Cities*; and what Titsian Tabidze described as "Georgia's national resurrection" in his essay published in the

second issue of the *Blue Horns* magazine, implying the prominent positions Georgia occupied in the past).

Georgian modernists found support in the remote past that could justify their allegations that it is Tbilisi that is the world capital, not Paris. To prove this, they tried to reach the origins of the civilisation. "Georgia - Phoenix" - the title proper of this manifesto of Georgian futurists emphasises a vision of the future and the importance of the vision as a renovator. The aspiration towards renovation was expressed also in a search for roots: Titsian Tabidze wanted to discover links to Chaldea and Grigol Robakidze was searching for Urphänomen.

Symbolism in Georgia was replaced by expressionism - themes of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, despair, sadness, disappointment and pathetic mood. Return to myths is a sign of renovation for expressionists. The Nietzschean conception of eternal return proved to be appropriate for Georgian modernists' desire of and aspiration towards renovation, which becomes obvious in Titsian Tabidze's essay *With Blue Horns*, although he does not mention Nietzsche in it. The same is true of a short essay titled *Declaration of Blue Horns* published in the *Barrikady* newspaper. "Adam Mickiewicz said: Those who lost their Motherland are able to understand love of the Motherland. Thus, love of Georgian poets is understandable, because Georgia has been lost for dozens of centuries. This is why Georgian messianism will always be justified. This may be a curse for the nation. This may be a twist of fate. However, nation that fails to create today a culture that will be universal in nature and that will not be justified at the level of humankind is going to disappear".

Georgian avant-garde is often called Tbilisi avant-garde, because avant-garde and modernism in general emerged in the bosom of urban culture. Artists and writers from various regions of the world gathered in Tbilisi and it is easy to say

that Tbilisi was one of the centres of avant-garde in South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Russia.

The first futurist soiree was held in the building of the Conservatoire in 1922 and a manifesto called *Georgia-Phoenix* was published. The manifesto bore traces of Italian and Russian futurism. The signatories threatened to destroy the art of the past. The name of the manifesto proper makes clear what T. Tabidze called "national revival" in his essay *With Blue Horns*. It was the desire to achieve such revival and make Georgian culture compatible with the "European radius", which did exist in Georgia despite the international nature of avant-garde. Phoenix symbolised the revival of the legacy of the past on the one hand and on the other, was oriented on the future, which is absolutely natural for futurist aesthetics. Due to the loss of Georgia's independence in 1921, situation has been changing. The Blue Horns group has been disbanded and everyone will continue to work separately. This is no longer Tbilisi with its artistic cafes, where creative evenings took place until the morning. The cultural life of free Georgia lasted four years. By the 1930s, the people who laid the foundations of the Tiflis avant-garde found themselves in exile and concentration camps.

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