

Linguistics and Literature

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Georgian Historical Realities in Julier Chevalier's Noah's Grandchildren

The novel Noah's Grandchildren by Julier Chevalier, an American writer of the first part of 20th century, has made an outstanding contribution not only in the field of literature, but in history as well. The novel, however, by far, surpasses many well-known facts taken from the history of Georgia and brings attention to the legends of important historical value. On account of the novel not being translated, it has hardly ever been accessible to people who have deep interest in it. Noah's Grandchildren has remained inaccessible not only to the masses of Georgian readers but it has missed the attention of specialists too.

In the novel, the action takes place at the beginning of 20th century. The novel depicts the major economic-political events and the reality of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. To a certain extent Georgia fights its way against Soviet Russia, which ends in annexation of the country by Russian invaders. Furthermore, it leads to the emigration of the government of Democratic Republic of Georgia.

The American writer narrates impressive episodes from the history of our country (the Christianization of Georgians by St. Nino, the origination of the Georgian alphabet, etc). The descriptions of the living conditions of Georgians and their ethnographic traditions are given specific significance here.

Keywords: novel, literature, Julier Chevalier, Noah's Grandchildren, American writer, Georgia

Introduction

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In the introduction of the novel, much is said about the way the book was written. One of the main characters describes the story the author had while living in Georgia in the form of a traveler's story. Peculiarly according to the author's outline, "The boy was born and lived on the great rolling plains of Texas. He had never seen a mountain; nor had he ever seen the sea. Because of this, perhaps, there was one story of which he never tired." This was a legend about Noah and his grandchildren.

"The boy became a man and the man traveled... After years of travel it so happened that the man stood on the mountains of Ararat... Up the grassy hills...

he saw a little house... As the traveler watched an aged man came from the house and approached his resting place.

The old man held in one hand a horn of wine which he offered to the traveler, saying at the same time with a low bow "Victory be with thee. Refresh thyself and long life to thee!" And then he added proudly, that "I'm of those who are called in this land Karthli, for we are the descendents of Karthlos, the son of Togarmah, who was the great-grandson of Noah" (Chevalier, 1929, pp. 1-4).

"Best of all the land" and people "of the Karthli, which is called Georgia, the traveler loved that part which is called Guria" and Gurians because of their hospitality and patriotism. From the American writer's point of view, despite "all the hardships of foreign invasion and cruel oppression they have never lost their deep love for their native land and their proud inheritance of liberty and wonderful tradition." As J. Chevalier said, he so quickly became accustomed to the living conditions of Gurians that he stayed to live in Guria for some time and "the traveler became one with the Gurians" (Chevalier, 1929; 7-8).

However, we can conclude from the novel, that the writer traveled to other parts of Georgia as well, for example, to Samegrelo, Ajaria and Tbilisi.

Apart from the story of "The sons of Togarmah", the first chapter of the novel contains other turning points in history. For instance, during one of their conversations, "the priest told him (The traveler – O. N.) of St. Nina, who, fleeing from Tiradates, the cruel King of Armenia, came to them bringing the Word of Christ out of Capadocia in the third century after his crucifixion" (Chevalier, 1929; 6).

The novel pays particular attention to the increasingly important role of the Christian religion in the history of Georgia. The writer's keen interest in the past events, his depiction of the various parts of Georgia's history make enrich

the story and show not only the author's deep knowledge of Georgia's history and culture but also his respect and admiration for them.

The novel is marked by the writer's idealized way of characterizing Noah Jhordania. The writer puts emphasis on N. Jhordania's characterization, as he was considered to be the person who could bring independence back to Georgia in the 1920s.

From my point of view, the novel is distinguished by the accurate portrayal of political reality. Particularly, turning Armenia and Azerbaijan into Soviet countries that didn't support the sovereignty of Georgia. The novel gives objective reflections of the attitude of people towards the destabilization of the country.

Julier Chevalier gives an accurate description of the forceful emigration of N. Jhordania and the members of his government. To support this claim, I'll examine one episode from the book as an illuminating example:

“A car with the image of White Georgi reached the harbor. The rumor spread among the people “there is “Our Noah” sitting in the car”, turned to be true. N. Jhordania, having heard the news about the current situation from the governor of Batumi announced sadly, that “it would be foolish to fight when we have no hope of winning. Enough of our brave Karthli have been killed as it is.”

“No one answered the president. There was nothing to say. He had merely spoken aloud what they had all felt in their hearts for the last two days. Georgia had again fallen to foreign invaders” (Chevalier, 1929; 281-284).

After this, an atmosphere of tension fills the novel which is felt by every Georgian after the tragedy. The following episode supports this. In this scene the main character - little Gogi meets the head of the country - N. Jhordania once again and has a talk with him:

“It is my little Gurian neighbor who sat with me in the castle gardens! See, said the president, who had not forgotten their talk, the wall was not made so strong by me after all. I have been a poor Surabo (The main character from “The Castle of Surami” by Daniel Chonkadze, is meant - O. N.). And in a few hours, perhaps, I shall be as dead as Surabo has been these hundreds of years. One must be young to be a hero like Surabo. I’m too old. You young people must become the Surabos who will bring strength to the tribes of the Karthli: you who are fighting.

I’m not fighting, Gogi managed to murmur. They say that I am too young to fight. That is what they told Surabo. He was younger even than I am... No man is too young to die for his country, that is what Surabo said, and I, too, say the same.

You are right, said he (Noe Jhordania – O. N.), as Surabo was right. You can serve your country equally as well... I am going to give into your keeping the honor of all the nation of the Karthli.

Here the president paused for a moment and pulled from beneath the cot a small leather bag... The president lifted from the velvet and held it in the light of the window. To the small end of the pear was affixed a round disk. The surface of the disk had been carved with letters and an image... The letters were the letters of the “soldier’s writing” of the Karthli and the image was that of White Georgi the patron saint of the Caucasus and all Georgia.

This, said the president solemnly, is the great seal of our country which is placed upon all our papers. If it should fall into evil hands, such as the hands of these invaders, it would cause great harm. Evil people might write wrongful things on paper, and when they sealed them with image of St. Georgi no one would be able to know that it had not been done by me or some other of our true Karthli.

He paused again... He reached into the leather bag again and pulled out a red bundle. When he had unfolded this bundle Gogi saw that it was the flag of the Karthli – a red flag with a square of black and white in the corner. The president wrapped the box in the flag (Where the National Emblem was - O. N.) and continued:

... The enemy may overtake us, or I may fall by the road, for I am a very old man. For this reason I am about to give our great seal of the Karthli into your hands. You are young and you wish to serve your country. Some day I may come for it. If I do not come and the time should arise you will know what is to be done. Your heart will tell you what is best for the tribes of Karthli and whom you may trust... Farewell, son of Guria” (Chevalier, 1929; 286-290).

The extract is marked by a deep allegorical style based on depicting the hardship in a historically accurate way. It also illustrates the great fondness of the American writer towards Georgia.

Patriotism in little Gogi, readiness for serving his country and idealization of national heroes (In this case Surabo, the main character of “The Castle of Surami”) reveal more than the specificities of the example and allude to more general phenomena. Similar kinds of enthusiasm always existed and still exist among the reasonable part of the Georgian population.

As for little Gogi being rewarded with State symbols by N. Jhordania, this is not historically accurate. (It’s a well-known fact that Georgian symbols (flag, emblem) of those times were being kept in a Georgian estate of Levil, Paris), but it bears allegoric significance. The rewarding of a young Georgian boy with these sacred things, I think indicates that he is charged with restoring independence to Georgia, something that would occur decades later.

In brief, these are the historical references in the novel *Noah’s Grandchildren* by Julier Chevalier. For all its factual information, the events described by the author coincide with historical realities, but in some cases, the narration is full

of variety of artistic interpretations and imagery. In all of its forms, the most essential thing about the American writer's novel is, without exaggeration, his deep and sincere love for Georgia.

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