



A Depiction of the City Life of Georgia in Julier Chevalier's Novel "Noah's Grandchildren"

Otar Nikoleishvili

Doctor of History Akaki Tsereteli State University Kutaisi, Georgia

Abstract: *Noah's Grandchildren* by Julier Chevalier represents one of the most outstanding and significant works, giving a vivid description Georgian history and its Customs. The author, being American, arouses great interest as well.

The story includes lots of interesting points of exceptional importance but in the above-mentioned paper I'll focus on depicting the city life in Georgia.

As it is obvious and easily noticed from the novel, the population of Batumi at that time was multinational. Russians, Greeks, Turkish, Armenians, Kurds, Persians lived there including Georgians of course. Chevalier provides us with some information of particular significance not only about working lives of aliens in Batumi, but about their everyday ones and customs as well.

The novel draws our attention to the description of Tbilisi as the most important city in our country. According to the author, Tbilisi, like Batumi is the typical city characteristic to Asia. The American author's interest while describing or presenting the city's specific sides, makes the story the focus of attention and interest.

Despite the fact, that the information given by Julier Chevalier is not always free from errors, it can still be considered as a very interesting and considerable work for the researchers interested in Georgian history and its customs.

Introduction

Julier Chevalier's "Noah's Grandchildren" (first published in Garden City, New York, USA, in 1929) is a very interesting and important work depicting the history of Georgia, Georgian traditions, and being. The fact that the author of this work is an American increases interest in it even more. We find important information about his personality in the second volume of "The History of the Georgian Emigrant Journalism" by Guram Sharadze. I will quote an excerpt from the book:

"In the 1920s and 30s, Georgian emigrant magazines and newspapers were published mainly in Western Europe, and that is why there are few materials depicting Georgia's relations with the American states, in particular the USA..., National-Democratic, Socialist-Federalist, Socialist-Revolutionary) United Front organ. It was published in Paris in 1926–1939. The editors also felt the mentioned shortcoming and tried to fill it by inviting Pavle Kvaratskhelia, a Georgian immigrant living in the USA, to become a staff member of the newspaper and for him a special series "Letters From America" by order" [4, p. 319]. The story of his meeting and interview with the author of the said book is told in one of them.

"When I read the book, we took measures to find its author. We found him living with his wife and children in a beautiful small house in a village near the city of New York.

It is impossible to describe his story and his adventure in Georgia because it is a tragedy for the Georgian nation, together with his private life. In one of his public lectures, which we also attended, among others, Mr. Chevalier said: "My story would be easier to tell and listen to; I know less about Georgia and its tragedy; I have to subtract a lot from reality to make it believable."

Mr. Chevalier was an "impatient young man" when he left America, which had not yet entered the war (we are talking about World War I at the UN) and volunteered to join the British army in Canada. In 1918, he surrendered to the British army in Batumi. Very sober, democratic, and completely detached with the conquering spirit of England, he soon made many friends among Georgians. Here he married the daughter of Aliyev, from Ossetia, who came from Georgia. He made every effort to get out of the army, and for that, he had to go to London. When he freed himself, he returned to Georgia in 1924. During the speech, Chevalier was arrested along with his Georgian friends. They accused him of being an assistant-advisor of the "Parity Committee," capitalist England, the agency of America, and others. He spent three years in the hell of the Bolsheviks, from the prison of Batumi to "Solovka." They were repeatedly taken out at night to be shot with others.

Mr. Chevalier was released from Solovka with the help of the Americans. During his imprisonment, his wife and two children were exiled to Constantinople, where his wife died. He now has a second wife.

Mr. Chevalier is engaged in literary work. He is known as well-versed in the Russian situation and is invited as a lecturer by various organizations" [4, p. 322-323].

Goals and Objectives

I spoke so extensively about the author of the book because I wanted to give the reader a clear idea of the relationship and great love with which this person, completely unknown to Georgian society, was connected to Georgia.

The novelty of the study

Noah's Grandchildren by Julier Chevalier represents one of the most outstanding and significant works, giving a vivid description Georgian history and its Customs. The author, being American, arouses great interest as well.

The story includes lots of interesting points of exceptional importance but in the above-mentioned paper I'll focus on depicting the city life in Georgia.

Research methods

In our present work, we rely on the methodological principles of objectivity, historicism and comparativism developed in the theoretical studies.

Sources:

Primary sources of the present research are:

1. Noah's Grandchildren by Julier C. Chevalier.
2. The history of the Georgian emigrant journalism, Vol. II, by Guram Sharadze.
3. First Republic of Georgia, by Aleksandre Bendianishvili.
4. History of Georgia by Collective of authors.

Bibliography

Scientific research regarding the book of Julier C. Chevalier was performed by "The history of the Georgian emigrant journalism", Vol. II, by Guram Sharadze, "First Republic of Georgia", by Aleksandre Bendianishvili and "History of Georgia" by Collective of authors.

Research Results

Situation in Tbilisi and Batumi is depicted in the book because of the stories related to the lives of the main characters of the work, brothers and sisters Keto and Gogi. To clarify what has been said, I will check specific examples from the novel.

Keto, who dreams of going to Batumi from the village, is described by his brother Gogi as follows:

“You are a lucky girl,” said Gogi, as he handed her the last of the parcels. “You are going to see the sea and the iron road with its puffing engines. If you watch from the window as you come into Batum on the iron road you will see the big ships that come from Ferenzi and from Ameriki, Perhaps, if you are fortunate, you will even hear them blow on their whistles, or dropping their great iron hooks that hold them to the bottom of the sea when they stop at Batum. I saw all these things and more when I visited with the natlia on the feast of St. Mary” [2, p. 88].

The certified passage is important in that it gives us a certain idea of the relations that the Democratic Republic of Georgia had with foreign countries, including the United States of America.

The novel interestingly describes the impressions of Little Keto's trip to Batumi. In particular, he was most surprised by the “great round buildings” (that's how the author refers to the oil tankers seen by Keto). In this regard, the explanation that Keto's father Vaso gives to his son is also interesting:

“Those,” said Vasso, “are the reservoirs that store the nafti which we burn in our oil lamps. It is brought to Batum all the way through our Caucasus Mountains by great iron pipes, and here it is pumped into the ocean ships that carry it to far places where it is not found...

It is found in many places in our land,” said Vasso proudly. “Most of it comes from Baku on the Caspian Sea” [2, p. 94].

The quoted fragment once again points to the significant importance that Batumi had and still has for Georgia from a trade and economic point of view. According to the American writer, this city was not only the sea gate of our country but also one of the most powerful trade and economic centers.

As can be clearly seen from the novel, the current population of Batumi is quite multi-ethnic. In addition to Georgians, Russians, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Kurds, and Persians lived there in considerable numbers. Chevalier gives us a certain idea not only about the labor activities of foreigners living in Batumi but also about their daily lives and customs. For example, according to the author,

“Greek women in woolen dresses with aprons belted about them; with their hair in two plaits down their backs, a knitted shawl knotted about their hips, and black kerchiefs about their heads. Turkish women were there, shrouded from head to feet in flowing, dark blue tchadars dotted with white.

The most noticeable of all were the Kurdish women in their embroidered wool dresses and silk vests and bright kerchiefs bound to their black heads by wire circlets with dozens of little tinkling gold coins. Some carried babies in big three-cornered scarfs slung at their backs, and each was belted with a broad leather band from which hung long streamers twisted from many-colored yarn, tipped with tassels that swung to and fro as the wearer padded from table to table seeking alms in the way of rejected pieces of fish.

Along the waterfront came a Persian merchant in heelless slippers, long black satin coat, and tall, brimless black hat. He was followed by a porter carrying the goods which he had, perhaps, bought for his shop somewhere back in the dizzy puzzle of narrow dark streets.

Occasionally a wagon clattered by loaded with crates from one of the ocean boats or piled high with bales of wool or licorice root for some faraway port. All the shops that faced the sea seemed to Keto to be coffeeshops. Groups of men sat at low tables drinking tiny thimble cups of black, sweet Turkish coffee or swallowing huge lumps of gummy ragat luhum, Turkish delight. Some played at dominoes or backgammon, slapping the hard palmwood disks down with sharp cracks on the pearl-

inlaid boards... in this town (Batumi – O. N.) of many peoples and many languages Turkish is the language which everyone understands. It is the language of the bazaar [2, p. 105-107].

Although a significant part of Batumi's population really knew the Turkish language at that time, the information provided by the American writer is clearly exaggerated, and the Georgian language had a priority role.

In the novel, even more space is devoted to the description of Tbilisi and its presentation as the most important city in our country. For example, according to the information of an American writer, after dominating Georgia and the Caucasus, the Russian colonizers did not do anything to improve education but even prevented its development. In the schools here, they were principally forbidden to study in their native Georgian language.

As it was already said above, this and similar information provided by the author of the work is extremely interesting for understanding the real situation in Georgia during the period of Russian domination and for revealing once again the policy that the Russian authorities pursued to subjugate our country.

Gogi hoped that during his stay in Tbilisi he would have the opportunity to meet Noah Jordan, who is considered a national hero by the American writer. For more clarity, I will quote a relevant passage from the book:

"In a moment all his dreams of school had been shifted to Tiflis - Tiflis which the natlia and others who had traveled called the Paris of the East. Tiflis, where the iron road, driven by electricity, rattled up and down the very streets of the city! "Perhaps," thought Gogi happily, "I shall see Tchuenni Noah!" He meant Noah Jordani, the president of the Georgian Republic - that kindly old man who had delivered his countrymen from Russian tyranny and was known to them only as Tchuenni Noah - Our Noah" [2, p. 206].

I think the passage quoted above, which talks about the personality of Noah Jordan, realistically reflects the attitude that a large part of society had towards this political figure at that time.

The book interestingly describes the great impression that visiting Tbilisi made on Gogi. At first, it was very difficult for him to adjust from the quiet, monotonous life of the village to the radically different life of the big city.

According to the author's story, Tbilisi, like Batumi, was mostly an Asian-type city. The American writer pays special attention to describing and presenting the specific aspects of being in Tbilisi. For example, I will recall the information provided by the author regarding the old baths of Tbilisi.

According to the writer, one of the most important traditions characteristics of being in Tbilisi was going to the bathhouse. Even though one of the main characters of the work had a comfortable bathroom at home, he visited the city bath at least once a week, which was known as "Orbelian bath". The book often draws attention to the fact that the population of Tbilisi was multi-ethnic and religiously diverse. To clarify what I said, I will quote a relevant fragment from the book:

Coming out of the bath, Gogi heard the voice of the mullah from the mosque standing next to the bath. "He was calling the Moslems to noon prayers. "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet," he cried in a weird singsong tenor. As he sang he held his hand to the sides of his mouth to carry the sounds afar to the most distant Moslems.

Below in the yard of the worshipping place all was bustle and noise. The worshippers who lived near by were congregated about a fountain of flowing water and were washing their feet and hands and mouth, for every good Moslem washes before he prays... Moslems pray so often that if they were to come from some distance to pray at the church they would have only time enough to reach home before the muezzin called them for the next prayer" [2, p. 257-258].

Going home in a phaeton with his godfather, Gogi's attention was drawn to one of the colorful faces of old Tbilisi - Kinto. To Gogi's question, "What is their tribe?", the answer was the following:

"They are not a tribe," replied the natlia, "They are called kintos. Their business is selling on the streets. Sometimes they steal, also. They come from all the nations of the Caucasus, but most of them are Georgians and Armenians...

All a Kinto's wealth is in his silver belt," explained the natlia, "The profits in money from his trade in fish and fruit and greens he spends on wine, of which they are all too fond. Now and then when there is a little extra money the kinto buys a new silver bangle for his belt. When the weather grows so cool that it is no longer comfortable to walk about the streets and sell things the kinto does something bad - steals or fights; for this the police send him to the jail for a few months...

They are so lazy that they had rather go to jail than work in winter. By the time spring comes, with the warm weather, their time in jail is finished and they come out into the sunshine again...

They never marry and never save any money or buy a house. When one of them dies the others who know him best sell his silver belt and with the money which they get for it they buy a coffin for the dead kinto and bury him. With any money that is left over they buy wine and hire musicians and dance and drink at the grave side as long as it lasts" [2, p. 262-263].

I think that many things are correct in this characterization of the life of the Kintos, although we also see clearly exaggerated estimates.

In the end, I would like to draw attention to one more episode of the work: on the way home, Gogi became interested in a small church; according to the author of the book, this church "was built to protect the cross that converted Georgians to Christianity". As it is clear from the author's comments, the church named after St. Nino is meant.

The writer also tells us that the cross in the mentioned church was stolen by the Russian soldiers who entered Tbilisi. People attached so much importance to this fact that they confidently said, "People used to say that the Karthli would never be free again until the Cross of St. Nina was returned to the place where it had hung for so many years" [2, p. 260].

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is the urban life of Georgia seen through the eyes of an American writer. Although the information provided by Chevalier is not always completely accurate and infallible, it should still be considered very interesting and reportable material for researchers interested in the mentioned issue.

References:

1. Bendianishvili A. (2001), First Republic of Georgia, Tbilisi.
2. Chevalier J. C. (1929), Noah's Grandchildren, Garden City, N. Y. S, USA.
3. History of Georgia (2003), XX Century, Tbilisi.
4. Sharadze G. (2001), The history of the Georgian emigrant journalism, Vol. II, Tbilisi.