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An Analysis of Titsian Tabidze's Poetic System in the Context of 19th Century Georgian Poetry

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Abstract

The article discusses the study of Titsian Tabidze's poetic world in the context of the 19th-century Georgian literary tradition and aims to reveal the multifaceted literary connections that determine the poet's creative nature. Special attention is devoted to the stage-by-stage character of Titsian Tabidze's creative development, which clearly demonstrates his attitude toward Georgian classical heritage. The research methodology is based on literary analysis, comparative-historical study, and critical examination of poetic texts, which allows for the identification of the main artistic and ideological influences shaping Tabidze's literary evolution. As a result of the research, it was revealed that the initial stage of Titsian Tabidze's творческие work is closely connected with the traditions of 19th-century Georgian poetry. During this period, his poetic thinking is significantly formed under the creative influence of Nikoloz Baratashvili, Grigol Orbeliani, Alexandre Chavchavadze, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, and Vazha-Pshavela. Their poetic experience is reflected in Tabidze's early works both in thematic content, as well as in artistic images and emotional moods, which distinguishes the first stage of his creative work by its special closeness to classical Georgian literature. Within the framework of Symbolist aesthetics and the literary movement of the "Blue Horns," a clear tendency toward the reevaluation of classical heritage and the search for new artistic forms is distinctly outlined in Titsian Tabidze's work. At this stage, the poet partially opposes the 19th-century literary model, especially its social-realist orientation; however, this opposition does not imply the rejection of tradition. On the contrary, classical heritage remains a solid foundation for him, the critical reconsideration and transformation of which becomes a necessary condition for the formation of a new poetic vision. At the later stage of Titsian Tabidze's creative work, a clear return to national poetic traditions is distinctly observed. This process is expressed in the renewed understanding of classical heritage, where the experience of ancestral poets appears not only as a historical foundation but also as an organic part of modern aesthetic synthesis. Thus, Titsian Tabidze's poetry is presented as a continuous creative movement in the direction of tradition, its critical reconsideration, and reintegration. His poetic system represents an important cultural space connecting 19th-century Georgian literature and 20th-century modernist explorations, which presents Tabidze as one of the most significant and multilayered figures in the history of Georgian literature.

Keywords: Titsian Tabidze, 19th-century Georgian poetry, Georgian Symbolism, Blue Horns, literary tradition, Modernism, poetic heritage, aesthetic transformation, Georgian literary process, cultural memory.

Introduction

In spite of the fact that T. Tabidze died at an early age, he left an unrepeatable trace in the development of Georgian poetry. First of all, T. Tabidze was a great poet and a distinguished leader of the literary group "Blue Horns", together with Paolo Iashvili and Valerian Gaprindashvili, as well as a prominent theorist of this group.

In order to fully consider Tabidze's creative works, his contribution to literature, and to determine his place in the history of Georgian literature, it is very important to take into account the influence that 19th-century Georgian poetry had on T. Tabidze, as well as his attitude as a poet, literary critic, and historian towards the literature of this period.

The thematic closeness of T. Tabidze's poetry to the traditions of Georgian literature, as well as the poet's respectful attitude (especially in the later period of his work) towards his predecessor poets, directly indicates the connection T. Tabidze, as a poet, had with 19th-century Georgian literature, and in particular with Georgian poetry.

T. Tabidze was not only an excellent poet but also a prominent literary figure by profession, an aesthete with refined taste. His reliable intuition was supported by his great erudition. T. Tabidze was a distinguished essayist-critic and literary historian. One issue is the influence that 19th-century Georgian poetry had on T. Tabidze, and another is how T. Tabidze analysed and assessed certain representatives of 19th-century Georgian literature.

Main Part

T. Tabidze underwent an interesting creative development. Researchers divide his literary work into three stages: the years 1910–1915 are considered the formative period of the poet. The next stage corresponds to the activity of the “Blue Horns” and lasted from 1926 to 1928. The final stage represents the poet’s return to the traditions of classical poetry, the so-called “return to the earth”. „They represent a single unified poetic chain and once again clearly emphasize his artistic wholeness as a creative artist” [1].

The formative period of T. Tabidze is marked by the influence of Georgian classical poetry. This influence is clearly reflected in his early verses, prose works, and miniatures. T. Tabidze’s early poetry and prose show the impact of Grigol Orbeliani, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, and Vazha-Pshavela. This influence is not only thematic but is also evident in characters, imagery, and phraseology.

The works of this period demonstrate that the young poet, still a gymnasium student, was well acquainted with Georgian literature. During his formative years, he relied on this tradition and was nurtured by it while searching for his own poetic voice. He grounded his artistic expression in the thoughts and emotions of great Georgian writers [2].

From T. Tabidze’s writings of this period, it is evident that he was a highly gifted young poet, already striving to leave his own mark and emphasize the originality of his creation; however, his poetic thinking remained firmly rooted in the classical tradition. His creative development began along this path.

Although T. Tabidze’s early poetry and prose contain epigonic elements and require artistic refinement, they are nevertheless essential for understanding the origins of his poetic development, his literary “teachers”, his relationship with tradition, and the evolution of his artistic individuality.

The early stage of his work shows that, before adopting the principles of Symbolism, T. Tabidze underwent an important process of creative formation, which may be described as a period of literary apprenticeship.

His literary horizon expanded rapidly within a short time. His artistic sensibility was enriched by literary innovations that had a profound influence on his later development. A strong desire for novelty led Titsian and his fellow poets of the “Blue Horns” to clearly distinguish classical poetry from realist traditions [2].

As is known, in 1915 T. Tabidze, then a student of the Faculty of Philology at Moscow University, together with his friends founded the literary group “Blue Horns” (Tsisperqantselebi), which sought to establish a new poetic school. This group attempted to strengthen its position in literature by opposing classical poetry, particularly that of the 1860s generation.

According to the members of the “Blue Horns”, the connection with “true poetry” in the 1860s of the 19th century had “broken forever, giving rise to a new ideology”. In T. Tabidze’s view, the poets of the sixties began to “replace Georgian poetic flowers with Russian wheat,” transforming literature into a “meeting room” and poetry into a newspaper. He also believed that Russian artistic influence, which intensified from the 1860s onward, was far removed from genuine art and had little in common with Georgian tradition. “The soul of the nation, with its cultural atavism, survives only in Vazha-Pshavela’s works. Ilia and Akaki had the advantage that they sometimes found genuine poetry in civic themes; later, however, their school became caricatural”.

As a mature poet, T. Tabidze, together with other members of the “Blue Horns”, opposed non-national literary traditions and did not recognize any predecessor before Vazha-Pshavela.

It should be noted, however, that in comparison with Russian and French literary realities, such contradictions in Georgia were more subtle. The factor of a small nation played an important role, and the contributions of Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli were always duly respected.

The disagreements were mainly expressed at the level of ideas and theory, articulated in essays and manifestos. In artistic practice and creative development, however, the situation was different. T. Tabidze never openly expressed these contradictions in his poetry. His work grew from national roots, and he remained far from national nihilism [3].

T. Tabidze preserved originality during the Symbolist period and never denied reality; his poetry was deeply grounded in real-life experience. At the same time, the influence of 1860s Georgian poetry on him was so strong that he sought to move beyond it, which partly explains his role as a leading figure of the “Blue Horns”.

„By the end of the 1920s, the period of “returning to the earth” begins. This transition was natural for T. Tabidze, as it corresponded to his poetic temperament. His creative development can be metaphorically described as the movement of a fairy-tale hero who departs from home and ultimately returns“ [2].

In his poetry, one can observe not only emotional intensity but also deep literary erudition, particularly a profound knowledge of 19th-century Georgian classical literature. His late poems are characterized by reminiscences of Georgian poets of that century.

Thus, T. Tabidze’s poetic world reveals a continuous dialogue with 19th-century Georgian poetry, combining emotional depth, intellectual richness, and artistic evolution.

T. Tabidze is considered a major continuer of the finest traditions of Georgian poetry. His influence is not limited to thematic parallels alone.

T. Tabidze repeatedly demonstrates his careful attention to the expressive means employed by 19th-century Georgian poets. However, as in the case of a true artist, the experience of his predecessors and their stylistic features are naturally assimilated and adapted to T. Tabidze’s own manner of writing.

He does not attempt to conceal the traces of influence he received from earlier poets; nor does he need to, since his poetic individuality is strong enough not to be overshadowed by others. He has much to express in his own voice.

In cases of genuine artistic influence, it is often difficult to trace its exact manifestations, as such research requires penetrating into the deeper layers of poetic creation and, in many cases, even into its invisible dimensions. Therefore, researchers, when dealing with such issues, must often rely on cautious assumptions. This does not mean that such studies should be abandoned, as that would imply a denial of literary criticism as a scholarly discipline.

Unlike mysticism, death, ugliness, and the apologetics of a gloomy mood, T. Tabidze’s poetry strives toward bright poetic thinking and the expression of real facts. A return to the traditions of classical poetry becomes increasingly evident and is expressed in his work through longing and reminiscences.

Patriotism and the fate of Kartli became the central axis of T. Tabidze’s poetry. The main theme of 19th-century Georgian poetry was also the destiny of the homeland.

The poetic heritage of Gr. Orbeliani, N. Baratashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, and Vazha-Pshavela became the creative world of T. Tabidze, representing an attempt to unify old and new modes of thinking [4].

A deep knowledge of the poetry of the first Georgian Romanticist, Alexandre Chavchavadze, and a respectful attitude toward him are consistently felt in T. Tabidze’s writings. The work “Georgian Writers in Armenia” is of special importance in this regard. The memory of Alexandre Chavchavadze accompanies the poet in Armenia, as if leading him toward the shores of Lake Gogcha.

Gr. Orbeliani’s eloquent poetry had a strong influence on T. Tabidze. Having experienced a bohemian lifestyle in his youth, T. Tabidze felt a particular closeness to Grigol Orbeliani, the “king of feasts” and frequent guest of the Ortachala gardens. Orbeliani’s poetry is reinterpreted in T. Tabidze’s verse “Let There Be Victory” (“Mash Gamarjveba”). Orbeliani’s poem “The Toast” lives on in T. Tabidze’s poem “Armenia”.

T. Tabidze’s creative work was deeply nurtured by the poetry of N. Baratashvili. His attitude toward Baratashvili is never in doubt, as the poet, with his inspiration, pain, and melancholy, remained constantly close to him. Before the influence of French Symbolism, both T. Tabidze’s poetry and prose bear the imprint of Baratashvili. His attitude toward N. Baratashvili develops gradually, becoming more layered over time. He transforms Baratashvili’s images and metaphors into symbols such as the wanderer, the raven, and the desert. Baratashvili’s rhythm accompanied T. Tabidze’s musical tone for a long time, while his intimacy and lyricism remained a lasting source of inspiration.

Ilia Chavchavadze consistently accompanies T. Tabidze’s poetic thinking. In his early poetry, after the influence of Baratashvili, Ilia’s poetic vision dominates his imagination. The images of Mkinvari (“the Glacier”) and Tergi are prominent in both Ilia’s and T. Tabidze’s poetry. Tergi awakens the spirit of both poets, embodying life and renewal, while Mkinvari is associated with mourning. The opposition between Mkinvari and Aragvi is particularly significant. T. Tabidze’s interpretation implies a pairing of Ilia’s Mkinvari with Baratashvili’s Aragvi [2].

Inspired by Ilia, Tabidze sought to confront a new epoch. This attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. However, it is evident that he turned to Ilia as a source of spiritual renewal, rather than to anyone else. Even more difficult was the attempt to revive the characters of "The Widow of Otaraant" ("Otaraant Kvrivi"). If during the Symbolist period T. Tabidze's attitude toward Ilia was somewhat condescending, it later changed: the poet returned to his roots and expressed deep respect for Ilia Chavchavadze.

T. Tabidze recalls Akaki's verse as a melody and revives this voice with youthful emotion; "Suliko" as an enduring, unforgettable feeling is replaced by the "twinkling of a firefly" ("Tsitsinatela"). Akaki's characters - Bashi-Achuki, Abdushahil, and Natela - constantly accompany Tabidze. His poem "To Tamunia Tsereteli" is written with reminiscences of "Natela" [2].

T. Tabidze is especially close to Vazha-Pshavela. Here one must mention the simplicity of poetic expression and the sincerity that distinguishes both Vazha and Titsian [2]. Vazha's characters live within T. Tabidze's poetry. Vazha's Caucasian rhododendron and juniper acquire symbolic meaning in Tabidze's work and become associated with the homeland. The poem "The Moving of Vazha-Pshavela to Mtatsminda" is one of T. Tabidze's most significant works. The transfer of Vazha to the Mtatsminda Pantheon, initiated by the poet himself, is perceived as a meeting of the souls of great Georgian poets in a celestial Georgia.

Tabidze's poetic intuition sees the source of Vazha-Pshavela's authenticity in national roots.

We can also observe the influence of Vazha-Pshavela's prose on T. Tabidze's own prose. Vazha's characters and rhythm come to life in Tabidze's stories and miniatures. In his works, mountain mist transforms into thought and becomes prayer, as it did in Vazha's writing. Vazha's name occupies a special place in T. Tabidze's worldview; he largely determined the character of Titsian's creative formation.

Circle of interest of T. Tabidze is quite wide. He dedicated a very important letter-essay to the writers of the 19th century. There are many observations and opinions scattered in almost all his letters about literature. Of special importance is the letter "Ilia Chavchavadze (extract)". There are two wonderful letters on Vazha-Pshavela. One letter is dedicated to the younger brother of Vazha-Pshavela – Bachana – and reviews his life and creative work. T. Tabidze also dedicated a very interesting and long letter to the great Georgian realist David Kldiashvili. He also dedicated a letter to Shio Aragvispireli. It should be mentioned that these letters are written not only by a prominent poet and critic but also by a literary historian, as all of them represent an analysis of what each writer inherited, what novelty he brought to Georgian literature, and what place he occupied in its history. This kind of attitude represents the fundamental position of the author, which is expressed in his short essay "New Georgian Literature". A great critic and researcher often use literary parallels, referring to similarities and differences, as well as influences of European and Russian authors, etc.

T. Tabidze's works are characterized by brevity. His texts are structured in a thesis-like form; almost every phrase is ready for concretization and further development. By 1915, T. Tabidze was ready to "move Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil into Besiki's garden". His aesthetic vision, however, was contradictory, which is clearly revealed in his attitude toward representatives of the sixties. On the one hand, he and his friends opposed Ilia's and Akaki's aesthetic vision; however, during this period T. Tabidze was not strictly consistent, and alongside the letters in which he denies the poetic contribution of the writers of the sixties, he also writes articles in which he justly praises Ilia and Akaki.

The article "Ilia Chavchavadze (extract)", written in 1922, is of special importance. Here, T. Tabidze is among the first to speak about Ilia's immense contribution to the development of Georgian literature as a prose writer. He was also one of the first poets to pay attention to the great artistic power of Chavchavadze's publicism. Traditionally, when comparing Ilia and Akaki as lyric poets, preference was given to Ilia; however, T. Tabidze underlines that the reason for giving preference to Akaki was the lack of cultural awareness among contemporaries. The name of Akaki Tsereteli was precious to T. Tabidze; as a student, he paid tribute to Akaki by publishing an obituary article in a Russian magazine.

T. Tabidze also expressed his positive attitude towards Akaki on many occasions. He compared Akaki's "Rostom, the Head of Racha" with Stendhal's chronicles. He considers Akaki not only a poet of dawn but also of afternoon, together with Gr. Orbeliani and Ilia Chavchavadze.

T. Tabidze's letter "Vazha-Pshavela", published in 1927, is one of the important milestones in the recognition of Vazha-Pshavela. The second letter, "David Guramishvili and Vazha-Pshavela", written in 1930, is dedicated to identifying Vazha's literary predecessor. For a certain period, it was difficult for Georgian readers to understand Vazha. The merit of Ilia Chavchavadze, Grigol Robakidze, and the members of the "Blue Horns", especially T. Tabidze, is great in the process of Vazha's recognition [2].

T. Tabidze explains why Ilia and Akaki were recognized during their lifetime, while Vazha did not receive such recognition. According to him, the reason for Ilia's and Akaki's popularity was their public contribution and leadership, whereas during Vazha's creative peak, poetry and politics were separated, and poetry could not play the same social role as it did in Ilia's and Akaki's time. If earlier T. Tabidze thought that Vazha stood isolated in Georgian literature, he later revised this opinion in the article "David Guramishvili and Vazha-Pshavela", considering Guramishvili as Vazha's poetic predecessor. This important idea was later developed in Professor Gr. Kiknadze's monograph *The Creation of Vazha-Pshavela* [4].

T. Tabidze was the first to criticize the view that Vazha was a Symbolist. According to his well-argued opinion, the use of symbols is a general artistic phenomenon and should not be confused with Symbolism as a literary movement. His observations on Vazha-Pshavela's style had a significant impact on later research.

T. Tabidze also expressed interesting views on Vazha-Pshavela's versification. He believed that Vazha relied heavily on folk versification. Vazha's rhythm is simple, but it is structured in such a way that this simplicity is not perceived as weakness. This idea was later scientifically developed in Gr. Kiknadze's work "Rhythm in Vazha-Pshavela's poem 'Bakhtioni'".

T. Tabidze's opinion on Vazha's epic poetry is very important. According to him, Vazha created a true epic closely connected to the "collective soul of the people". He was also one of the first to pay attention to Vazha's prose, which led him to define Vazha as a true realist. It should be mentioned that T. Tabidze not only contributed to the popularity of Vazha-Pshavela but also identified key problems and ideas that later became subjects of scholarly research. His letters are extremely important.

T. Tabidze's letter on Bachana is also significant. According to him, Bachana was interested in epic poetry but was less successful in this genre, while he was a stronger lyric poet. His poems "Oak", "Song of a Captive", "Forget-me-not", and "Who Said About Georgia" are considered his masterpieces. T. Tabidze pays special attention to Bachana's poem on the death of Vazha-Pshavela, which he considers outstanding in its emotional intensity and intimacy.

T. Tabidze also dedicated an interesting letter to D. Kldiashvili. According to him, Kldiashvili depicted the tragedy of the petty nobility. Tabidze pays special attention to Kldiashvili's humor and his talent for expressing detail. He clearly states that Kldiashvili's artistic vision is later defined as "Gogolian in Georgian literature" (Gr. Kiknadze).

Thus, we can clearly see the creative portraits of prominent 19th-century Georgian writers. Many of T. Tabidze's observations go beyond the boundaries of strict research and originate from feeling and intuition, which later became highly important for scholarly interpretation. Some aspects of T. Tabidze's thinking may be outdated or debatable, but overall his letters have not lost their significance.

Conclusion

T. Tabidze's poetic formation and literary development are deeply rooted in the tradition of 19th-century Georgian classical poetry, which served as the primary foundation of his early creative consciousness. Gradually, his literary interests expanded under the influence of modernist innovations, leading him toward Symbolism and the activities of the "Blue Horns" group. Although this movement was characterized by a critical stance toward the literary heritage of the 1860s generation, Tabidze's artistic practice never fully abandoned national tradition and remained firmly connected to Georgian cultural roots.

At the same time, Tabidze's Symbolist period reflects a continuous dialogue with the poetic legacy of Georgian classics, particularly Orbeliani, Baratashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, and Vazha-Pshavela. His

later creative phase demonstrates a clear return to these traditions, marked by literary reminiscences, renewed appreciation of national themes, and a synthesis of classical and modernist aesthetics.

Beyond his poetry, Tabidze's literary-critical writings reveal a systematic and analytical approach to Georgian literary history. His essays and letters construct interpretative portraits of major 19th-century writers and emphasize continuity in the national literary process. In his 1929 essay *New Georgian Literature*, he presents Georgian literature as an organic and evolving system, continuing the methodological tradition established by Ilia Chavchavadze.

Overall, T. Tabidze emerges not only as a leading representative of Georgian Symbolism but also as an important mediator between 19th-century classical heritage and 20th-century modernist thought. His work demonstrates a continuous process of reinterpretation, transformation, and reintegration of tradition, positioning him as a central figure in the development of modern Georgian literary consciousness.

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ტიციან ტაბიძის პოეტური სისტემის ანალიზი XIX საუკუნის ქართული პოეზიის კონტექსტში

ხატია შევარდნაძე

რეზიუმე

სტატიაში განხილულია ტიციან ტაბიძის პოეტური სამყაროს კვლევა XIX საუკუნის ქართული ლიტერატურული ტრადიციის კონტექსტში და მიზნად ისახავს იმ მრავალმხრივი ლიტერატურული კავშირების გამოვლენას, რომლებიც განსაზღვრავს პოეტის შემოქმედებით ბუნებას. კვლევაში განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა ტიციან ტაბიძის შემოქმედებითი განვითარების ეტაპობრივ ხასიათს, რაც ნათლად წარმოაჩენს მის დამოკიდებულებას ქართული კლასიკური მემკვიდრეობისადმი. კვლევის შედეგად გამოიკვეთა, რომ ტიციან ტაბიძის შემოქმედების საწყისი ეტაპი მჭიდროდ არის დაკავშირებული XIX საუკუნის ქართული პოეზიის ტრადიციებთან. ამ პერიოდში მისი პოეტური აზროვნება მნიშვნელოვნად ყალიბდება ნიკოლოზ ბარათაშვილის, გრიგოლ ორბელიანის, ალექსანდრე ჭავჭავაძის, ილია ჭავჭავაძის, აკაკი წერეთლისა და ვაჟა-ფშაველას შემოქმედებით გავლენით. მათი პოეტური გამოცდილება ტაბიძის ადრეულ ნაწარმოებებში აისახება როგორც თემატიკაში, ასევე მხატვრულ სახეებსა და ემოციურ განწყობებში, რაც მისი შემოქმედების პირველ ეტაპს კლასიკურ ქართულ ლიტერატურასთან განსაკუთრებული სიახლოვით გამოარჩევს. სიმბოლისტური ესთეტიკისა და „ცისფერყანწელთა“ ლიტერატურული მოძრაობის ფარგლებში, ტიციან ტაბიძის შემოქმედებაში აშკარად იკვეთება კლასიკური მემკვიდრეობის გადაფასებისა და ახალი მხატვრული ფორმების ძიების ტენდენცია.

ამ ეტაპზე პოეტი ნაწილობრივ უპირისპირდება XIX საუკუნის ლიტერატურულ მოდელს, განსაკუთრებით მის საზოგადოებრივ-რეალისტურ მიმართულებას, თუმცა ეს დაპირისპირება არ გულისხმობს ტრადიციის უარყოფას, პირიქით, კლასიკური მემკვიდრეობა მისთვის რჩება მყარ საფუძვლად, რომლის კრიტიკული გადააზრება და გარდაქმნა ახალი პოეტური ხედვის ჩამოყალიბების აუცილებელ პირობად იქცევა. ტიციან ტაბიძის შემოქმედების გვიანდელ ეტაპზე აშკარად შეინიშნება დაბრუნება ეროვნულ პოეტურ ტრადიციებთან. ეს პროცესი გამოიხატება კლასიკური მემკვიდრეობის ახლებურ გააზრებაში, სადაც წინაპარ პოეტთა გამოცდილება უკვე არა მხოლოდ ისტორიულ საფუძვლად, არამედ თანამედროვე ესთეტიკური სინთეზის ორგანულ ნაწილად გვევლინება. ამრიგად, ტიციან ტაბიძის პოეზია წარმოიჩინდება როგორც უწყვეტი შემოქმედებითი მოძრაობა ტრადიციის, მისი კრიტიკული გადააზრებისა და ხელახალი ინტეგრაციის მიმართულებით. მისი პოეტური სისტემა წარმოადგენს XIX საუკუნის ქართული ლიტერატურისა და XX საუკუნის მოდერნისტული მიმართულების დამაკავშირებელ მნიშვნელოვან კულტურულ სივრცეს, რაც ტაბიძეს ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორიაში ერთ-ერთ უმნიშვნელოვანეს და მრავალმხრივ ფიგურად წარმოაჩენს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ტიციან ტაბიძე, ქართული სიმბოლიზმი, XIX საუკუნის ქართული პოეზია, ცისფერყანწელები, მოდერნიზმი, ლიტერატურული ტრადიცია.