

GEORGIAN-GREEK "MYTHOLOGICAL RELATIONS" ON THE EXAMPLE OF
ONE WEST GEORGIAN FOLK FESTIVAL

ქართულ-ბერძნული „მითოლოგიური ურთიერთობები“ ერთი
დასავლურქართული ხალხური დღესასწაულის მაგალითზე

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Abstract

Studying one of the West Georgian folk holidays - Tedoroba, we came to a certain point of view that its "strangeness" can be explained by the influence of Greek culture.

Tedoroba was a famous West Georgian fertility festival. On this holiday, people especially prayed for the abundance of domestic animals. According to materials that have come down to us, this festival took place in a special form in Guria (one of the regions of western Georgia). This "strange" ritual was used to reproduce horses. Judging by the scientific literature available to us, this so-called "strange" ritual has not been studied before.

The participants of this ritual were only mail. This folk festival in Svaneti, Guria, and Samegrelo was dedicated to the vigor and propagation of horses. The study of this so-called "strange" festival brought us to the colonization of the Black Sea by Greeks, and Greek mythology. In my opinion, this holiday may be connected with Poseidon who is believed to give birth to horses from water.

Based on Georgian and foreign historical, archaeological, ethnological, religious, and mythological literature, we have come to a certain point of view that in the mentioned holiday there are traces of pagan Greek religious and mythological thinking associated with the sea, Poseidon, and related religious beliefs.

Keywords: Georgian-Greek relations; mythology; sea; horses; Poseidon.

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აბსტრაქტი

თედორობა სიმრავლე-ნაყოფიერებასთან დაკავშირებული ცნობილი დასავლურ ქართული ხალხური დღესასწაული იყო. ამ დღეს ხალხი ღმერთისგან განსაკუთრებით შინაური ცხოველების სიმრავლეს და უვნებლობას ითხოვდა. ეს დღე, ჩვენამდე მოღწეული მასალების მიხედვით, გამორჩეული სახით იმართებოდა გურიასა და სამეგრელოში, სადაც ცხენების გამრავლებისთვის თავისებური რიტუალი სრულდებოდა. ჩვენს ხელთ არსებული სამეცნიერო ლიტერატურის მიხედვით ეს „უცნაური“ რიტუალი არ შესწავლილა.

რიტუალში მონაწილეოდნენ მხოლოდ მამაკაცები. ეს ხალხური დღესასწაული სვანეთში, გურიასა და სამეგრელოში ცხენების ნაყოფიერება-გამრავლებას ეძღვნებოდა. ამ, ასე ვთქვათ, „უცნაური“ რიტუალის შესწავლამ მიგვიყვანა ბერძნულ მითოლოგიამდე და ბერძნების მიერ შავი ზღვის კოლონიზაციის საკითხამდე.

კვლევის შედეგად, რომელიც ეყრდნობა, როგორც სამამულო, ასევე, უცხოურ ისტორიულ, არქეოლოგიურ, ეთნოლოგიურ, რელიგიათმცოდნეობით, მითოლოგიასთან დაკავშირებულ სამეცნიერო ლიტერატურას, გაგვიჩნდა მოსაზრება, რომ დღესასწაული წინაქრისტიანული ბერძნული რელიგიური და მითოლოგიური შეხედულებების რელიქტის შემცველი უნდა იყოს, რაც ზღვას, წყალს, მასთან დაკავშირებულ რელიგიურ შეხედულებებს და შესაძლოა პოსეიდონის თაყვანისცემას უკავშირდება.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ქართულ - ბერძნული ურთიერთობები; მითოლოგია; ზღვა; ცხენები; პოსეიდონი;

Introduction

Georgian scientists have dedicated many-sided studies to the history of Georgian-Greek relations. Also, Georgian, as well as foreign researchers (O. Lortkipanidze, N. Lomouri, M. Inadze, N. Kakhidze, A. Greaves, A. Braund, etc.), had written significant works on the colonization of the Black Sea issues. Their works able me to investigate one of the West Georgian festivals –Tedoroba and at one site, its strange ritual, which had not been studied before. The participants of this ritual were only men. Ritual breads – having the form of horses, were put into wine. Mail participants of the ritual used to take these bread figurines with their

mouths, eat them, neigh, and act like horses. This folk festival in Svaneti, Guria, and Samegrelo was dedicated to the vigor and propagation of horses. The study of this so-called “strange” festival brought us to the colonization of the Black Sea by Greeks, and Greek mythology. In my opinion, this holiday may be connected with Poseidon who is believed to give birth to horses from water.

Methods

The given issue is based on interdisciplinary (history, archeology, history of religion, mythology, ethnology) research, and a comparative method is used for the study. Archival materials were the primary sources for investigation.

Results

The study of the Georgian-Greek relations from the historical, archeological, as well as mythological and ethnological standpoint, brought us to the following results:

- Megrelian and Gurian versions of the festival ritual in fact perform the birth of horses from water.
- Despite the lacking parts of the ritual “scenario”, it obviously tells us how horses are coming out from the water, showing their wild, untamed nature, which means that they are newly born and untamed. This is performed by the participants of the ritual. Thus, I think that the ritual is a narrative of the myth, and participants of the ritual tell us this myth via performance.
- As both mentioned regions are the Black Sea regions and were under the Greek influence, the sea had had a significant role in their lives, and supposedly the god of seas and waters, Poseidon should have been diety of special importance in these regions. Although historical, archeological data we own today can not prove it today.
- On its side, Poseidon was known as the birth giver of horses from water and the tamer of wild horses.
- Thus, in my opinion, this ritual of Tedoroba should have been connected with the birth of horses from water, and sea, the master of which was Poseidon. Moreover, the motive for the birth of horses from the water was not alien to acharians (residents of Achara region, another Georgian Black Sea region).

It is well known that Georgian-Greek relations boast a long history. It is also known that the traces of these relations are obvious in Georgian culture. In this respect, to what extent could these relations have also been reflected in mythology and folk beliefs? Giovanni Boffa and Barbara Leone see one aspect of the issue in relation to the Mediterranean region as

follows: “Cults and myths have often been read as markers of Greek presence abroad, in many regions of the ancient Mediterranean. A particular version of a mythical tale, a peculiar epithet of a god, or a specific feature of a hero can, indeed, provide potential clues about the presence of Greeks outside Greece and, at the same time, elements that help us identify the provenance of said Greeks, especially in light of two key concepts: 1) myths, obviously, do not travel on their own but with people or, to some extent, with decorated pottery; 2) deities and heroes are always related to the local culture of different Greek communities, and they are also usually a result of the complex work of defining and elaborating their mythical universe, a basic element of the construction of their identity (Boffa, G.Leone, B., 2017, p. 381). Otar Lortkipanidze notes that “myth as a source of historical reality is complex and specific,” because it is the fruit of collective creativity and is transmitted orally through generations. “And it has come down to us mainly with late additions and poetically thought-out versions.” Thus, it is difficult for scientists to determine which historical fact is reflected in a myth or an epic work. The respected scholar adds that there are different views on myth as a text containing reality, “however, even extreme skeptics cannot deny that ... it keeps the memory of something very big, actually happened. Usually, these are historical events that played a great role in the history of a particular people. Experts in the history of folk poetry almost unanimously assert that in the history of every nation there are moments that excite common folk imagination and are therefore reflected in lyric-epic songs.” O. Lortkipanidze quotes A. Veselovsky’s words that “folk poetry is a kind of historical judgment” and concludes that this is why it is necessary to determine the historical fact which formed the basis of the great epic work, namely the Argonautics (Lortkipanidze, 2002, p. 145).

In Georgian reality, the issue of the relation between myth and historical fact is even closer in the case of Andrezi. As it is known, Andrezi served to not forget the history of the community, its territorial integrity, and functioned as normative laws in folk justice. Andrezi, as it is called in the East Georgian mountains is, on the one hand, an artistic work of this society, and on the other hand, it regulates the life of this society. According to A. Chincharauli, “Andrezi is an old oral information about this or that rule, custom, story” (Ch’inch’arauli, 2005, p. 46). Andrezi is a statement of a real fact. Historical Andrezes reflect the facts that actually happened, historical events of a specific region or country in general (Ochiauri, 2000, pp. 274-282). The fact that the legend called Andrezi is related to a real fact is evident from the expression: ...it is not told even in Andrezi i.e. it is an unbelievable, unprecedented story (Chincharauli, 2005, p. 46). As T. Ochiauri notes, Andrezi may turn into an epic work. Z. Kiknadze has special merit in the study of Andrezi. He notes that Andrezi, which is based on reality, aims to strengthen the society’s memory of its past, history, and law (Ochiauri, 2000, pp. 274-281). Much can be said about the historical fact reflected in a myth, tradition, faith, and imagination, which is clearly beyond the scope of this article. So, I will confine myself to just a few of the above considerations and note in the form of a summary

that when researching myth, narration, or an epic poem, one does encounter a reflection of history, though it is not easy to separate historical fact from imagination and reality. But, in my opinion, imagination, and assessment of a historical fact by the public is precisely determined by the significance of this fact. Religious beliefs, rituals, and cults also have a stigma, mark of history, which is also difficult to identify, although possible.

O. Lortkipanidze believes that literary processing of the legend of the Argonauts and its written documentation should have started already in the seventh –sixth centuries BC. However, as oral epos, it should have already existed in the second half of the eighth century. Basing on various studies, O. Lortkipanidze notes that these legends should have been created in the Mycenaean period, and the Argonauts must have sailed in the Black Sea in the Mycenaean period, i.e. fourteenth -thirteenth centuries BC. (Lortkipanidze, p. 151). The respected scholar asks the question: what historical fact should have been reflected in the Argonauts and suggests the following: The Greeks had long wanted to get by sea to the shores of the Pontic sea, but in modern Bosphorus, they could not pass through the so-called “wandering rocks” or planktons, as they are called in *The Odyssey*; where ships and sailors perished, which made this place a dangerous one. It was the peaceful passing of this place that must have been great heroism attributed to the Argonauts and made them so popular; the first successful voyage by the sea and the discovery of a new country (Lortkipanidze, pp. 145–146, 149, 150, 151). The heroes gathered from almost all corners of Greece, in fact, Greece itself, under Jason's leadership, headed, as O. Lortkipanidze mentions, to Colchis by Argo and with this heroic journey cut the road to the Black Sea coast. However, the historical colonization of the Black Sea by the Greeks started much later. According to O. Lortkipanidze, sailing in the Black Sea was of great importance for the Greeks. “As early as in the Achaean period (in the II half of the second millennium B.C.), they campaigned against Troy, which was located in the vicinity of the Black Sea... This became especially evident in the VIII-VII centuries B.C., with the onset of the great colonization movement of the ancient Greeks i.e. Greek settlement and establishment of new agrarian and commercial cities on the Black Sea coast. The first explorers of this difficult route were the Argonauts, who also spread the first information about the Black Sea in the Greek world, especially about Colchis - rich and full of all good. This is why, from the very beginning, the Greek people considered the Argonauts their idols, almost equated them with heroes ... and for centuries paid due respect to their heroism in exploring new sea routes and discovering new lands.” (Lortkipanidze, pp. 150–151) It should be noted that “archaeological excavations have once again confirmed that the Trojan War was a struggle for access to the Black Sea.” (Lortkipanidze, p. 150)

Probably, the first, so to say, Greek-Georgian mythological relations should have started with the events that unfolded around the Golden Fleece. Here we will not dwell on how developed the history of the Argonauts who arrived in Aia, since this is well known. We will

only mention, that from Colchis Jason with the fleece and Medea arrived in Iolcus, handed over the fleece to Pelias and together with his Companions, for the last time, he sailed on Argo to the Isthmus of Corinth, where he sacrificed the ship to Poseidon (Hard, 2004, p. 397). Thus, mythologically Poseidon was one of the deities who helped the Greeks in the colonization of the Black Sea. Naturally, in mythological reality, no one would be able to cross such a dangerous sea route without the help of the great and powerful god of the sea. The kinship of the royal family of Colchis is closely connected with one of the most famous mythological stories in the world. So to say, as a result of a mythological dynastic marriage, Pasiphae, the sister of Aeëtes and Circe, became the wife of Minos and the queen of Crete (T'onia, n. K'ik'nadze, z., 2019, pp. 17, 131, 200). Minos is known to have been a powerful legendary king, famous legislator, and creator of a maritime empire. He was the first to extend his power by sea to almost all the islands in the Aegean. His name is associated with the distinguished Minoan culture of Crete.

Once, in order to prove to the Cretans that his reign was supported by the gods (T'onia, N. K'ik'nadze, Z., 2019, p. 338), Minos appeared before Poseidon in prayer. The king asked the god of water and earthquakes to send him a suitable offering, as he himself did not have a sacrificial animal worthy of the great god. Poseidon sent a beautiful white bull from the sea to Minos. The king was so fascinated by the beauty of the bull that he changed his mind about sacrificing him and let him into his herd, in exchange he sacrificed another bull to the god. According to another version, the King sacrificed the best bull from his herd to Poseidon, but one day a special, distinctive bull appeared. The king felt sorry to offer the bull as a sacrifice to God (Tonia, N. Kiknadze, Z., 2019, p. 338). Poseidon became enraged, turned the bull into a beast, and asked Aphrodite for help, who aroused Pasiphae's unbridled passion for the bull. Daedalus made a wooden cow for the queen, covered it with bull skin, and placed it in the field. Pasiphae and the bull had a secret connection here, resulting in the birth of the monstrous Minotaur (or the bull of Minos), a horrible creature with the head and tail of a bull and a human body. Minos locked him in a maze. As a tribute, the king gave boys and girls to Minos, whom the Minotaur swallowed (Hansen, 2004, p. 131;) (T'onia, N. K'ik'nadze, Z., 2019, pp. 160–161) (Robin, 2004, pp. 261, 336-338).

In the Bronze Age after constructing the first i.e. “old palaces” (2000 B.C.) Crete started intensive distant trade by sea and the spread of Minoan expansion to the South-East of the Aegean. Due to the Minoan colonization of this region, Anatolian material culture was replaced by Minoan. Among the colonies of Minos, Miletos is the most interesting to us. This place, as a Minoan colony, was founded around the construction time of ancient palaces in Crete (1800-1750 BC), which is a very early period compared to other parts of the Aegean. The myths on founding Miletos show a strong connection of Miletos with Crete. According to Alan Greaves, there is no place on the coast of Asia Minor where the traces of Minoan culture are

so convincingly manifested as in Miletos. Archaeological excavations and research have revealed that Minoan culture had a strong influence on Miletos, which in turn suggests traces of colonization. Miletos was both geographically and culturally close to Crete. This is confirmed by the following: one of about 30 A-linear Cretan inscriptions was discovered in Miletos in 1995. According to Greaves, the Cretan A-linear script should have been used for religious purposes. The Minoan administrative system was used in Miletos. There were Minoan burial rules, settlement and architecture, ceramics, knitting supplies, wall paintings, and Minoan iconography, there are traces of Minoan-type cult service, Minoan A-linear script and its use; assimilation of economic livelihood and methods associated with Mycenaean Crete (Greaves, 2002, pp. 47, 48,49,66, 52, 65, 53).

Ephorus (Strabo 14.1.6), Apollodorus, Pausanias, Ovid tell about the mythical foundation of Miletos by the Minoans. Everyone associates Miletos with the mythical city of Milatos in Crete which Homer mentions in the Iliad (2. 647). Miletos was located on the edge of the Minoan world Along with the worship of other Greek gods, the great altar of Poseidon was erected near Miletos As for Miletos, it is thought to have been inhabited since the Neolithic period. The settlement mainly occupied the territory of the Temple of Athena (Greaves, 2002, pp. 67,68,86,96,42). The Bronze Age was the earliest period when Miletos became the gateway connecting the Aegean and Anatolian worlds.

Colonization of the Black Sea coast of Georgia is believed to be associated with Miletos. It was for this reason that we distinguished it from other regions of Mycenaean colonization. It is considered that the Greeks appeared on the Black Sea coastline in the 730s; the process of colonization became quite intense at the turn of the eighth – seventh centuries. It is also believed that mainly Ionian cities took part in the colonization process and as it has been said Miletos was distinguished among them (Lomouri, 1962, p. 10); (Pipia, 2013, p. 36). In scientific literature, it is believed that the main reason for the colonization of the Black Sea region and Colchis, in particular, was the search for high-quality metals: iron, copper, and gold. In the early stages, the Greeks were also interested in flax, flax products, and slaves (Inadze M. , 1982, p. 92); (Greaves, 2002, p. 37). Later they also exported timber, the materials needed for textiles, etc. (Pipia, 2013, pp. 38, 58).

It is thought that the religious ties between the colony and the metropolis were particularly close and that these ties, regardless of political and economic relations between the two sides, still remained strong. The oracle defined the general territory of the colony, indicating to the “parish” which side to assimilate and which deity to appoint as the main object of worship (Malkin, 1987, p. 74). Accordingly, in the metropolis of the colonies, the objects of worship were the deities that were worshiped by the colonists. For example, in the fifth century BC, the cult of Apollo from Miletos was introduced in Phasis (Lomouri, 1962, pp.

64-65), as well as that of Artemis (Lortkipanidze O. , Phasis, the River and the City in Colchis, 2000, p. 77). However, we can assume that in the colonies they were modified, and syncretized with local deities, and beliefs (Boffa, G.Leone, B., 2017, pp. 386-387). Probably the locals did not forget about their own deities either. For example, the Phasians worshiped the goddess Phasiane, who must have been a local deity before Apollo (Lomouri, 1962, pp. 65, 67). The fact that religion played an important role in the process of colonization is evidenced by the fact that at the beginning of the Black Sea region, the Greeks had erected a statue of Zeus on the shore, and the rest further on. In doing so, the Greeks emphasized their presence in the region. As well as the fact that they introduced in the region various practices and values related to civilization (Braund, 2018 , p. 52). As Herodotus notes the Scythians worshiped Greek deities in tandem with their own deities: chiefly Hestia, then Zeus and the Earth (considered the wife of Zeus), then Apollo and Aphrodite Urania and Heracles and Ares. All Scythians worship them, and the Scythians of the royal layer also make sacrifices to them (Braund, *Scythian Laughter: Conversations in the Northern Black Sea Region, Meetings of cultures in the Black Sea region between conflict and coexistence* , 2008, p. 353).

I cannot but mention that in Miletos there were temples of Athena, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis and Poseidon (Greaves, *Miletos A History*, 2002, pp. 82, 83, 84, 96). Panionion is a sacred ground on Mount Micala, selected for Poseidon Helikonios by the Ionians (Greaves, *Miletos A History*, 2002, p. 124). Poseidon was the patron deity of the Ionian League; therefore, it can be assumed that he was also worshiped in Miletos. One of its most common epithets in the - Hellenic world is Taureos, after one of the months – Taureon, had existed since ancient times in Miletos and many colonies of Pontus. Strabo confirms this earlier existence and notes that from the Ionian migration onwards, Neleus erected an altar in the name of Poseidon on the cape. Archaeologists have discovered this site at Cape Monodendri, in the South-Western part of Milesian Peninsula, 7 miles (7 km) South-West of Didima. The altar dates back to the first half of the sixth century. To the north of the temple of Athena, archaeologists have found an inscription containing the text of the cult regulations of Poseidon Heliconius and another god, which reads that Poseidon had a cult servant and had a shrine and not a temple. It also indicates what is to be done in the month of Taureon (Gorman, V. Arbor, A., 2001, pp. 208–209; 217; 234).

In Georgia, through archeological excavations and Greek inscriptions, we learn that Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athena were worshiped here, but Poseidon is absent, which is very surprising. However, on the Black Sea coast, in Crimea, observed are the traces of Poseidon worship along with Aphrodite in Pantikapeum, founded by the Miletians. Also, in connection with mythological giant Goliaths of the Taman Peninsula, associated with earthquakes on the island, Poseidon appears on the artifacts (Braund, *Greek Religion and Cults in the Black Sea Region. Goddesses in the Bosphoran Kingdom from the Archaic Period to the Byzantine Era* , 2018 , pp. 174, 259).

Poseidon is believed to be an autochthonous, Greek deity. He is known to be the god of the sea, horses, and earthquakes in Greek mythology. A tamer of wild horses, a savior of ships, and a ferocious ruler of terrible forces of nature. All kinds of violent storms were associated with his actions at sea. He was the protector of sailors and fishermen and could destroy them in case of rage. He stirred the seas and shook the earth and their depths. In a way, as chthonic deity, he gave rise to brooks and springs from the heart of the earth (Hard, 2004, p. 99). He was probably the most destructive god among the ancient gods, but he did not always have negative power. As the deity of sailors and a tamer of horses, was also a patron deity of animals and horse-breeding (Cartwright, 2021). It was believed that he could also change the quality of the water. His birthplace is considered to be Genesion or Genethlion, which means birth, near the submarine Dini springs in the Argolic Gulf. Here the ancient inhabitants of Argon sacrificed horses to Poseidon. A small temple dedicated to Poseidon Hippios has been discovered by archaeologists in the village of Milia, near the municipality of Nestani in Arcadia.

According to the legend in Arcadia, Rhea saved him from Kronos, who wanted to swallow him at birth, by wrapping him in a sheepskin and letting her husband eat an egg or a foal, in the sense that their son Poseidon was born a horse. (Hard, 2004, pp. 99, 102); (Jordan, 2004, p. 250); (Mariolakos, I., & Mariolakos, D., 2004, pp. 1156, 1147, 1146, 1151).

It is noteworthy that Poseidon was associated with horses in myth, cult, and ritual. Robin Hardy believes that Poseidon was the god of horses before he became the ruler of the sea. He also notes that Poseidon's association with horses may have been determined by the fact that horse is an expression of natural phenomena that man cannot control. Or, because horse is associated with the chthonic world, and perhaps because in Greek folklore, horses give rise to springs and streams. Some myths tell that Poseidon, one of the greatest gods, appeared in the form of a horse and that he gave birth to a horse. He generated waters with his trident (Hard, 2004, pp. 99-101); (Nilsson, 1998, pp. 11, 12, 18, 112, 116) The Thessalian myth even mentions that Sisyphus, the father of the first horse, was god. According to a popular myth, during his sleep Poseidon once spilled semen on the rocky soil, fertilized the earth, and gave birth to the first horse. According to another version, Poseidon knocked his trident against the ground and thus gave birth to the first horse. Or, in the battle for Attica with Athena, he swung the trident, which gave birth to a horse (ibid, p. 102). Since in Greek mythology the birth of horses is attributed to Poseidon, horses were sacrificed to him, kept in his temples, and in some places, at the feast dedicated to Poseidon, chariot races were held in his honor. And like sailors before going to sea, before the race, coachmen also asked him for assistance. As the stories of Diomedes' human-eating horses show, the Greeks were particularly amazed by the wild, nervous, and strong nature of horses. Poseidon is particularly associated with horses in this

aspect; in Olympia he was worshiped under the epithet Taraxippos or “horse scarer” (Bremmer, 2022).

Two holidays dedicated to Poseidon were celebrated during a year. The cult of Poseidon dates back to the Bronze Age and the Mycenaean civilization (fifth-twelfth centuries BC, ca 1600–400 BC), which is confirmed by the B-linear inscription found on Crete, Peloponnese and Knossos. This god seems to have been one of the most important Mycenaean deities, which is not surprising, given the great maritime skills in the country’s culture. It is a well-known fact that he was chief god of Pylos, whose cult was led by a priestess. In Greek belief, Poseidon was especially protective of the Isthmus of Corinth; maybe because it was an important sea route. Poseidon was especially revered here and focused on horse racing and other types of pan-Hellenistic games of Isthmia, held in his honor near Corinth. They were held once every two years, in the spring. Like the Olympics, here, athletes, chariots and horsemen (horse racing) competed for the prize. As in Olympic Games, athletes, chariots and horsemen (horse-race) competed for the prize. Initially, the winner was awarded a crown of pine, and in the classical period, that of dried celery.

The second festival, dedicated to Poseidon, was held during the winter solstice. Even though the Greek folk calendar varied from region to region, in some of them the month of winter solstice was named after Poseidon. In Athens and some parts of ancient Greece, the month that coincided with December-January was called Posidea, to celebrate Poseidon. The holiday of Haloea in Eleusis was dedicated to Demeter, the goddess of grain, plants, Dionysus, the god of grapes and wine, and Poseidon, the god of vegetation on the seashore.

The name of the mentioned holiday implies a threshing floor, a garden. The holiday was basically a celebration of the first harvest. When it was held in Eleusis, in honor of Demeter and Dionysus, part of the celebration was a procession in honor of Poseidon (Robertson, 2021); (Robertson, Poseidon's Festival at the Winter Solstice, 2021).

The Athenians endowed Poseidon with an annual holiday - Posideai, which had more to do with farming than with the sea. The mid-winter month was also called Posideon (Cartwright, Poseidon , 2021); (Isthmian Games ancient Greek festival, 2021); (Jordan, 2004, p. 250)

Onchestus in Boeotia is associated with a strange ritual in which horse-drawn carriages (probably combat), horses without rider were dragged. If the chariot broke, then it was sacrificed to Poseidon.

On the first Saturday of Lent, the Orthodox Church commemorates St. Martyr Theodore Tiron (306). Martyr Theodore Tiron, together with other Christians, was tortured in the city of Amasea in the Pontus district (the North-East of Asia Minor on the Black Sea coast) for

ardently defending Christianity and refusing to sacrifice to an idol. Martyr Theodore was a warrior. Sadly, his biography is unknown to us. We only know about his martyrdom. Great martyr Theodore was thrown into a dungeon after being brutally tortured. Here Lord Jesus Christ himself appeared to him in prayer and comforted him. A short time passed, St. Theodore was taken out of the dungeon, again severely tortured, and again asked to renounce Christ. When they could not persuade him, the ruler ordered to burn him at the stake.

The martyr fearlessly, in prayer and in the glory of God, went to the punishment and himself went into the fire. The saint was executed around 306 during the reign of Emperor Galerius (305-311). The Saint was interred in Euchaita near the city of Amasea. The holy relics of Martyr Theodore were later buried in the church named after him in Constantinople. His skull is in Italy.

In Georgia, the period from the first Monday of Lent to Saturday is known as Tedoroba, the week of Tevdoroba. Tevdoroba / Terdoba (Samegrelo), Lithodri (Svaneti), Tedoroba (Guria) was a holiday dedicated to horses and the ritual of this day was performed only by horse owners. It can be said that in Racha and Lechkhumi Tevdoroba was a day for crops and vineyards. On this day, ritual breads of different shapes and types were baked all over western Georgia.

In Svaneti, all families from wheat flour for boys under 12 years old baked ritual breads called *batsikas* in the shape of birds, domestic and wild animals. These were baked by men.

In Kvemo Svaneti they prepared *tabla* for horses. With this *tabla*, which had a beans inside, a man from each family went to the shrine, prayed to St. Tevdore and asked for a multitude of horses. Lemzir (ritual bread) for horses was eaten there.

In Samegrelo, Terdoba was a day for horse blessing. Horse-shaped ritual breads with legs and saddles were baked on this day. Bread, called *moedani* (play-ground, platform), was baked separately on a clay pan. It was given a certain look with a glass, which was called a horse footprint. These flatbreads were put on a wooden platter, which they took with their teeth, neighing like horses and kicking heels against the wall as if they were horses. Each member of the family also did the same, after which St. Tevdore was asked for a lot of horses. In the end, everyone ate the flatbreads. In addition, the head of the family performed a sowing ritual on this day. "That evening, Lukaya held a prayer service for Terdoba. From bread dough, he ordered to make tiny figurines of: horse, saddle, rein, decoration, and whip; sorted all this on a wooden platter. Then he poured wine over it, put the wooden platter to the East of the hearth, attached honey candles to the edges and lit them, covered his face with a coif, rolled up the sleeves, went down on the knees, several times walked round the wooden platter with neighing, took the horse figurine with his mouth, went towards the door and kicked it, like

King Nebuchadnezzar kicked his legs and drank wine from the platter (Gamsakhurdia, 2013 , pp. 88-89).

Tamaz Jolokhava, while describing the Megrelian customs, notes that since horse held an important place in the economic and military life of Megrelians, its protection and reproduction was of vital importance. On the evening of the first Sunday of Lent, with wooden tray and baked horse statues, St. Theodore was entreated to multiply horses and protect them from thieves and beasts (Jolokhava, 2022, გვ. 197-198).

“In the nineteenth century, all who went through Guria would mention the abundance of horse skulls and hooves on display at the gates, which the locals did in order to protect horses and domestic animals from evil eye and disease, this should have been connected with the cult of Theodore” – Kakha Chavleishvili writes in his internet article.

Tedoroba was a horse day in Guria as well. Folk narrations have it that horses once lived in the seas and St. Tevdore was first to bring horse ashore. He promised the horse he would never walk without horseshoes and with a cut on the ear. In Guria, it was considered a sin to make a cut on a horse's ear. Since St. Tedore was considered the patron deity of horses, people associated his holiday with horses. On this day candles were lit, incense was burned, St. Teodore was prayed to and entreated multiplication and health for horses. Large ritual cakes were baked from wheat flour, symbolizing the field. Figurines of saddled horses made of dough were placed on them. They sculpted as many horses from the dough as they have in the family. Baked cakes and horses were placed in the flat wooden bowl and the wine was poured in such a way that the loaves and figurines were covered. After this, boys, with their hands tied on their backs, went in turn to the wooden platter, took the horse bread with their mouths ate it, and symbolizing the horses: hit their feet against the wall and neighed. Some would open the door with foot and go out.

As said above, Tedoroba – the spring holiday typical for the regions of the West Georgia was considered to be a holiday of livestock and harvest. In Svaneti, Guria and Samegrelo, this was especially associated with multiplication of horses. Of these three regions, Gurian and Megrelian Tedoroba are distinguished in sharp features and similarities. The ritual performed here on this day is, at first glance, strange and incomprehensible. It was the study of this strange ritual that led me to the Greek-Georgian mythological connections. The ritual in which horse figurines, made of dough, placed on the ritual bread, were covered with wine or liquid and then the men participants of the ritual (women never participated) would, with mouth, take the ritual horses out of the liquid and eat, and behaved like horses, may have been one of the rituals, which are somehow a mirror image of the myth behind them. At this point it is difficult for me to say which particular myth underlies this ritual, but it obviously symbolizes the ritual birth of a horse from the water, the sea. The birth of a horse from water led me to Greek mythology and Poseidon, the parent god of the sea and horses. As we have

attempted to show above, historically and mythologically in the conquest of the Black Sea coastline and Colchis, in particular, Poseidon is given one of the central places in Greek-Georgian mythological relations, however, in connection with the Georgian reality, this is observed neither through archeology nor through beliefs. Yet, it is hard to imagine a coastline, navigable country avoiding the worship of this mighty god, which from a pragmatic standpoint, was so desperately necessary for the population near the sea – famous for its sudden storms. The God, who through mythology, is closely connected with Colchis and the process of its assimilation.

Thus, we would like to express the opinion that the pre-Christian roots of the Svan and especially Gurian-Megrelian Tedoroba should be associated with the worship of Poseidon, as the parent and patron deity of horses from the sea, from the water. In addition, one of the two festivals of Poseidon was held in spring, and this deity was also considered the patron of the harvest.

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