



THE HISTORICAL, MYHTOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH CRIMEA IN THE POEMS OF MAXIMILIAN VOLOSHIN¹

Maksimilian Voloşin'in Şiirlerinde Tarihsel, Mitolojik Ve Kültürel Özellikleriyle Güney Kırım

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ABSTRACT

Maximilian Alexandrovich Voloshin, one of the most important poets of the Silver Age Russian literature, assumes Koktebel, a small settlement of South Crimea, as his homeland. The poet elaborately researches the history of this region. Koktebel's ancient history and rich culture deeply influences the poet. Voloshin supposes that Koktebel is a junction at which all the cultures cross. The different nations had lived in this region since prehistoric ages form the specific and multilayered identity of Koktebel. Voloshin thinks that Koktebel is a paradigm of the history, the art, the knowledge, the culture and the existence. Voloshin emphasises the privileged geological situation of the region. The poet remarks not only the historical and the cultural aspects of the region, but also mythological. According to him the historical, cultural and mytological features of Koktebel penetrate into the nature of the region. In this respect, Koktebel has a metaphysical power and Voloshin feels this mystic dimension. The poet portrays the Koktebel's nature with vivid colour epithets. Voloshin highlightes that the nature of Koktebel is alloyed with the ancient history and the rich culture of the region. In this work the views of Voloshin about the South Crimea and Koktebel will be conveyed and his poems related to the historical, cultural and mythological aspects of South Crimea and Koktebel will be analyzed.

Key words: Voloshin, Koktebel, history, mythology, culture

ÖZET

Gümüş Çağ Rus Edebiyatının en önemli şairlerinden biri olan Maksimilian Aleksandroviç Voloşin Güney Kırım'ın küçük bir yerleşim birimi olan Koktebel'i ruhunun ana vatanı olarak addeder. Şair bölgenin tarihini özenle araştırır. Koktebel'in kadim tarihi ve zengin kültürü şairi derinden etkiler. Voloşin Koktebel'in tüm kültürlerin keşiştiği bir kavşak olduğunu varsayar. Tarih öncesi çağlardan bu yana bölgede yaşayan farklı milletler Koktebel'in kendine has ve çok katmanlı kültürünü oluşturur. Şair Koktebel'in tarihin, sanatın, bilginin, kültürün ve varlığın bir paradigması olduğunu düşünür. Voloşin bölgenin ayrıcalıklı konumunu vurgular. Şair bölgenin yalnızca tarihsel ve kültürel değil aynı zamanda mitolojik yönüne de dikkat çeker. Ona göre Koktebel'in tarihsel, kültürel ve mitolojik nitelikleri bölgenin doğasına işler. Bu bakımdan Koktebel metafiziksel bir güce sahiptir ve Voloşin bu mistik boyutu duyumsar. Şair şiirlerinde Koktebel'in doğasını canlı renk epithetleri kullanarak betimler. Voloşin şiirlerinde Koktebel doğasının bölgenin kadim tarihi ve zengin kültürüyle harmanlandığını öne çıkarır. Bu çalışmada Voloşin'in Güney Kırım ve Koktebel'e dair görüşleri aktarılacak ve Güney Kırım ve Koktebel'in tarihsel, kültürel ve mitolojik yönlerine değinen şiirleri incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Voloşin, Koktebel, tarih, mitoloji, kültür

1. INTRODUCTION

The Silver Age Russian poet Maximilian Alexandrovich Kirienko-Voloshin (1877-1932) came to Koktebel, an urban-type settlement situated on the shore of the Black Sea in South-Eastern Crimea between Feodosia and Sudak, for the first time at the age of sixteen. The poet completed his gymnasium education in South Crimea, and in the years ahead he lived in Moscow and St.Petersburg. Soon after that he got traumatically divorced from his first wife Margarita Vasilevna Sabashnikova (1882- 1973), a Russian poet and painter, in 1907 Voloshin nestled in Koktebel to get out of mental depression. From then on he led a life mostly in Koktebel and occasionally in various countries of Europe. Along with the October Revolution after 1917 he never left Koktebel until he passed away in 1932. Koktebel meant something very special and important for Voloshin. In other words Koktebel was not an ordinary town for the poet (Лавров, 1995: 28).

Koktebel was the most valuable place for Voloshin. The poet identified there as: "Koktebel, it's me!" (Koktebel, c'est moi!). The word Koktebel is Turkish originated and means "blue hill" (*Kok-kök-gök* as *blue* or *sky* and *töbe-tebe-tepe* as *mountain* or *hill*). In later 19th century, Koktebel was a deserted, desolated and forgotten small village. A doctor whose name was Edward Andreyevich Jung purchased nearly the whole district in the hope of reviving and making habitable there. However he could not afford to do it so. He began to sell out his land. In those days Voloshin and his mother Elena Ottobaldovna Voloshina lived in hard conditions in Moscow. They had financial difficulties. They could not keep up with Moscow's overcosting living conditions. The idea of moving to Koktebel where the economic conditions were much more

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convenient than Moscow tempted Elena. After all Elena purchased a small holding located one verst distance from sea at a low price. They moved to Koktebel in March of 1893. It was exciting for Voloshin that he had always dreamed to see the South since his childhood. Unfortunately Koktebel did not meet and satisfy young Voloshin's expectations. Afterwards he admitted and said these words: "The air was covered with the smell of acacia. I was extremely nervous. Unluckily, the first summer that I spent in Koktebel, I could only see the stinginess and scarcity of nature and colours. I was not able to notice Koktebel's true beauty in the first flush of youth (Прашкевич, 2000: 38-40).

Voloshin described Koktebel in his diary dated on 4 April 1893 as: "Koktebel is a Bulgarian village. It lies in a valley. It is perfectly protected from northern and southern winds. From one side Karadag is seen. Swimming in the sea is impossible." (Ложко, 2015: 139).

As the time passed by, especially from 1907 Voloshin began to adopt Koktebel. The poet wrote these explanations in his autobiography: "Koktebel did not touch me deeply at once. In time I began to regard it as the homeland of my soul." (Ложко, 2015: 140). Voloshin described Koktebel with these words on the letter dated on 18 August 1907 that was sent to his friend Russian poet Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov: "Koktebel is the place where the real sun, the real earth and the real sea is." (Лавров, 1995: 32).

Despite the fact that Voloshin traveled numerous cities since his youth, not any other cities influenced and penetrated him as much as Koktebel. The poet qualified Koktebel as "the miracle of the world". He counted it as his own motherland and home. His friends that came to visit him in Koktebel, gave him an interesting nickname as "Koktebel's Maks" (Maks de Koktebel). Voloshin trod his own path as: "Have education in Paris, produce in Koktebel." (Ложко, 2015: 141)

Koktebel, Crimea and Cimmeria are privileged regions according to Voloshin. The poet wrote these statements in his autobiographical work *About Myself (О самом себе)*: "I was not born in Cimmeria, yet Koktebel adopted me. I was born in Ukraine. My childhood years passed in Sevastopol and Taganrog. The fate got me in Koktebel at the age of sixteen. I got connected with Koktebel. Just like the other Crimean artists I am a product of the mixture of German, Russian, Italian and Greek blood." (Шевчук, 2005).

Voloshin so profoundly communed with Koktebel that in a questionnaire he said: "I am not in Koktebel, yet Koktebel is inside me." (Не я в Коктебеле, а Коктебель во мне) (Купченко, 2008: 298).

The poet approaches Koktebel entirely with its cultural, mythological and historic values. In his poems Voloshin depicts the South Crimea with vibrant colours, visual images and mythological legends.

2. THE HISTORICAL, MYTOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE SOUTH CRIMEA IN VOLOSHIN'S POEMS

Voloshin termed the South Crimea region as Cimmeria. The poet made this interpretation in his work *The Faces of Creativity (Луку творчества)*: "I call Cimmeria from Sudak to Kerch." (Таймазова, 2015). The poet came to these etymological inferences about the toponyms of South Crimea in his work *K. F. Bogaevsky- The Artist of Cimmeria (К.Ф. Богаевский- Художник Киммерии)* dated 1 November 1926: "Crimea, Cimmeria, Kermen, Kremlin... The same KMR letters root. This root meant darkness in Jewish. In addition to this, the root meant a dark castle and dimness." (Купченко and Лавров, 2008: 66).

Voloshin stated in his article dated 1925 *Crimea's Culture, Art, Monuments (Культура, искусство, памятники Крыма)* that since time immemorial this region has hosted Cimmerians, Taurians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Pechenegs, Khazars, Tatars, Slavs, Kumans, Greeks, Armenians, Venetians, Genoese, Turks and Goths. He highlighted South Crimea's multiculturalism. Notably Koktebel has a rich history since it is located on the very junction point of trade routes. Voloshin drew attention this region's historic and cultural wealth with these words: "I feel and sense the vibrances of the races, generations and the wars of all times here in Koktebel." (Ложко, 2015: 143).

Literally, the cultural and the historical richness of South Crimea is obviously seen in the region's toponyms. As an illustration, Tavrida demonstrates the existence of Taurians. As Cimmeria proves the existence of Cimmerians. Neopol Skifsky shows the beingness of Scythians. Feodosia is a Greek originated word and means "God's gift." The Armenian rooted toponym Surb Hach means "Holy cross". Besides all these Eski Kirim, Bahchesaray and Koktebel are Turkish originated toponyms (Громов and Куценко, 2017).

Voloshin took pleasure in observing and monitoring stars' and planets' motions and movements from his roof in Koktebel. He wrote in his notes these statements: "From this place, I can not only observe Karadag

and Eski Kirim, but also Scythians, Hellens, Byzantines, Genoese, Goths and Slavs. That is to say, I can observe the whole world history and everyone who touched these coasts before.” (Щербакова, 2012).

Voloshin thought that Koktebel was a crossroad at which all the cultures united. He speculated that all the faces of the world got together in Koktebel. In another saying, according to Voloshin Koktebel was a paradigm of the history, the art, the knowledge, the culture and the existence. In time Voloshin’s modest house with sea view turned into a summer resort for his poet, writer, artist and philosopher friends. The Russian intelligentsia of this period found an opportunity to meet up in Voloshin’s liberal settlement. His friend Russian writer Evgeny Ivanovich Zamyatin wittily entitled the house as “Voloshin’s Free Household” (Волхоз- Волошинское Вольное Волшебное Хозяйство). The poet was a hospitable person. He complimentarily opened his house for his friends. He sent a letter dated on 13 September 1925 to his friend Alexandr Abramovich Kipen and explained his aim: “I transformed my house into a free colony for the writers, the poets, the artists, the painters, the philosophers and the scholars. In this way, I did not have to go to Moscow and St.Petersburg to keep up with the latest developments in Russian literature.” (Лавров, 1995: 40).

In Voloshin’s house the bookshelves were full of a vast number of books related to different science and art disciplines. Within years lots of intellectual visited Voloshin in Koktebel. Among them we can see Russian poet Aleksey Nikolaevich Tolstoy, poet Nikolay Stepanovich Gumilyov, poet Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva, writer Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamyatin, poet Osip Emilyevich Mandelshtam, poet Valery Yakovlevich Bryusov, poet Andrey Bely, poet Vladislav Felitsianovich Hodasevich, writer Mihail Afanasevich Bulgakov, historian Sergey Mihaylovich Solovyov, writer Korney Ivanovich Chukovsky, poet Maria Mihailovna Shkapskaya, writer Andrey Sobol’, writer Sofia Zaharovna Fedorchenko, Vsevolod Aleksandrovich Rojdestvensky, pianist Genrih Gustavovich Neygauz and theolog Sergey Nikolayevich Durylin (Коровин, 2014: 1943).

The visitors experienced spiritual catharsis in Voloshin’s house. They composed poetry, painted and made philosophical discussions. The poet emphasised the hospitality of his house in the poem written on 26 December 1926 *The Poet’s House* (Дом поэта):

“The door is open. Step over the threshold.

My house is open to meet all roads.

Beyond the windows there is a molten sea

The land of tombs, prayers and meditations

Enter, my guest: and at my threshold shake

Off the worldly dust, the mouldering mind...

My shelter is poor. And time is severe.

Here at night commune with me

Historians, poet, divines.”

(Дверь отперта. Переступи порог.

Мой дом раскрыт навстречу всех дорог.

А за окном расплавленное море

Земля могил, молитв и медитаций

Войди, мой гость: стряхни житейский прах

И плесень дум у моего порога...

Мой кров – убог. И времена – суровы.

Тут по ночам беседуют со мной

Историки, поэты, богословы.)(Купченко and Лавров, 2004: 78-81).

Since time immemorial Koktebel has witnessed numerous historical events. Koktebel embodies architectural and archaeological remains of different nations and cultures. In *The Poet's House (Дом поэта)* Voloshin wrote:

“Here meets Caucasus and Balkan’s junction of ranges.
Sarmatian sword and Scythian arrow,
Tatarian tawny glaze
Among the boulders numbed
A decorated Arab plaque
And part of a Byzantine capital
From Roman clasp and Hellenic coin
To a button from a Russian soldier's tunic.
Here, among these lands of folded rock and sea
The mold of the culture of the humanity did not get dried out.”

(Здесь стык хребтов Кавказа и Балкан.

Сарматский меч и скифская стрела,

Татарский глёт зеленовато-бусый.

Среди булыжников оцепенели

Узорная арабская плита

И угол византийской капители.

От римских блях и эллинских монет

До пуговицы русского солдата.

Здесь, в этих складках моря и земли,

Людских культур не просыхала плесень.) (Купченко and Лавров, 2004: 79-82).

For Voloshin South Crimea and especially Koktebel are sacred and archaic. He thought that Koktebel’s geography is privileged with its geologic location. He said: “In the lines of these ancient gulfs, seems like, there is a solar knit that manages the Black Sea’s nervous system.” (Ложко, 2015: 144).

While Voloshin was living in Koktebel, he studiously researched the history of South Crimea. He did archival research and read a great number of books about Koktebel’s history. In his article *Crimea’s Culture, Art, Monuments (Культура, искусство, памятники Крыма)* he wrote these: “As the earth and the sea coexist in Koktebel, since prehistoric ages people had preferred to settle here. Crimea is not a museum. Various cultures turned into an organic compound here within the centuries.” (Купченко and Лавров, 2008: 68).

In Voloshin’s view, Koktebel is situated in a very special position in the universe. As to him in Koktebel the concept of time passes from earthly dimension to a metaphysical stratum. Such that he strongly felt the existence of the mythological gods here. In the poem written in 1907 *Here Was A Sacred Forest (Здесь был священный лес)* we meet Persephone’s myth. The mythological character Persephone is the daughter of Zeus and Demeter the goddess of moon. Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, the god of death, and later became the queen of the underworld. Desperate mother Demeter searched for her all over the earth. As a result of Demeter’s insistence, Persephone was allowed to get out from the underworld to the earth except for winter. Zeus charged Hermes as a messenger to hear from his daughter while she was in underworld (Erhat, 2004: 229). Every year Persephone gets out on the earth from a sacred forest. When she steps on the

earth, the spring comes. Persephone is the embodiment of spring. This mythological cycle continuously repeats. Voloshin thought that this legendary forest is located in Koktebel. “The messenger of gods” is used as a metonymy for Hermes:

“Here was a sacred forest. The messenger of gods
 With his winged foot touched these glades.
 On the site of cities neither stones, nor ruins.
 Upon the bronze slopes sheep herd browses.
 ...
 Whose ancient anguish stung my prophesying spirit?
 Who knows the path divine — where it starts and ends?
 ...
 The starlit nights pass one by one in tears.
 The gloomy faces of the cast-off gods command
 And beckon, stare and call me forth... Resistless.”

*(Здесь был священный лес. Божественный гонец
 Ногой крылатою касался сих прогалин.
 На месте городов ни камней, ни развалин.
 По склонам бронзовым ползут стада овец.*

*...
 Чьей древнею тоской мой вещей дух ужален?
 Кто знает путь богов - начало и конец?*

*...
 И ночи звездные в слезах проходят мимо,
 И лики темные отвергнутых богов*

Глядят и требуют, зовут... неотвратимо.) (Купченко and Лавров, 2003: 90).

Voloshin thought that as the centuries passed Koktebel not only got mentally exhausted in consequence of the historical events that it witnessed, but also these events such as wars, famines and slaughters strengthened it. As to him Karadag, a extinct volcano situated on the shore of the Black Sea, has a mystic and mythological power. This power was transferred to Karadag by the preexisting civilizations lived here. 14 June 1918 dated *Karadag (Karadağ)* poem's I part demonstrates the mysterious and metaphysical strength of the volcano:

“The barrier for waves and winds
 Eroded volcano's wall,
 Like a rising temple,
 Arises from a navy blue fume
 Above alive mirrors
 A dark mountain appears,
 Like a scattered flame
 Of a petrified fire.

With tragic and proud impulses,
Broken out from the bowels,
The swirls of the ancient powers erupts.”

*(Предградой волнам и ветрам -
Стена размытого вулкана,
Как воздымающийся храм,
Встает из сизого тумана.
И над живыми зеркалами
Возникнет темная гора,
Как разметавшееся пламя
Окаменелого костра.
Из недр изверженным порывом,
Трагическим и горделивым,
Взметнулись вихри древних сил.)* (Купченко and Лавров, 2003: 168).

The poet said that Karadag developed a particular identity with the occasion of various cultural, political and historical events. The poet could hear the metaphysical voices of the mythological and mystic creatures from the basalt rocks of this volcano. He thought that a hollow of Karadag transformed into a gate to the underworld of Hades. In other words as to him, Karadag is the midpoint opening to the ethereal life. He said that Karadag is protected by the cherubim. According to Orthodox belief the cherubim are the angels closest to god. In the II. part of the poem *Karadag (Καράδαγ)* dated 17 June 1918, the volcano's supernatural power is underlined:

“And let your soul understand
The hopelessness of blind efforts
Of titans, enchained in coffin,
And the delusion
Of the petrified crucified Six-winged Cherubim.
Come down to the basalt caves,
Gaze into the collapses and the gaps,
Resembling the entrance of Hades...
Listen carefully, the voice of the sea
Rustles more desperately than
The cries of the shadows... And bend
Over the stern in front of the gods of hell...
Then swim away faster.
Tomorrow you will only remember the night,
Pillars of the basalt giants,
The monotonous voice of water,
And with the rainbows of the brilliants
Twinkling vault.”

(И пусть душа твоя поймет
 Безвыходность слепых усилий
 Титанов, скованных в гробу,
 И бред распятых Шестикрылий
 Окаменелых Керубу.
 Спустишь в базальтовые гроты,
 Вглядишь в провалы и в пустоты,
 Похожие на вход в Аид ...
 Прислушайся, как шелестит
 В них голос моря - безысходней,
 Чем плач теней ... И над кормой
 Перед богами преисподней ...
 Потом плыви скорее прочь.
 Ты завтра вспомнишь только ночь,
 Столбы базальтовых гигантов,
 Однообразный голос вод
 И радугами бриллиантов
 Переливающийся свод.) (Купченко and Лавров, 2003: 169).

Voloshin supposed that a good poet and artist should deeply feel the pain and grief of the land where he lived. The poet walked around barefootedly on the hillsides and in valley of Koktebel for long hours. He endeavoured to absorb all the features of this region. He thought that this region is the mother-earth where all the cults, myths and gods emerged. Voloshin called here as "the land of Homer". In the poem dated 17 October 1907 *Odysseus in Cimmeria (Одиссей в Киммерии)* Voloshin made a reference to *Odysseia* written by Homer:

"For many days by the river by the Ocean
 Towards the day, setting the sail,
 We run in a hurry to the inescapable countries.
 Getting more muffled voices of the tired waves.
 ...
 And the day goes blind, glimmering with a scarlet eye.
 And there in the distance a strip gets blue
 With the night of the earth and, fused with fume,
 Mountains and scarce forests.
 ...
 Our way leads to the Persephone's altar,
 To silent sources, under the shadows of the mournful groves
 Poplar and willow, where fern, horsetail

...

And black taxus covers the slopes of the forest...
 There we are going, to the sunset of the dark days,
 To the meeting of yearning shadows.”

*(Уж много дней рекою Океаном
 Навстречу дню, расправив паруса,
 Мы бег стремим к неотвратимым странам.
 Усталых волн всё глуше голоса,*

...

*И слепнет день, мерцая оком рдяным.
 И вот вдали синее полоса
 Ночной земли и, слитые с туманом,
 Излоги гор и скудные леса.*

...

*Наш путь ведет к божницам Персефоны,
 К глухим ключам, под сени скорбных роц
 Раин и ив, где папоротник, хвоиц*

...

*И черный тисс одели леса склоны...
 Туда идем, к закатам темных дней,
 Во сретенье тоскующих теней.)* (Купченко and Лавров, 2003: 95-96).

3. CONCLUSION

The Silver Age Russian poet Maximilian Voloshin curiously researched the history of Koktebel. The poet admired the natural beauty of the region. He wrote a series of poems and articles revealing the historical, the cultural, the aesthetic and the mythological aspects of South Crimea. In his poems he demonstrates that South Crimea's special nature is integrated with its ancient history, rich culture and legendary myths.

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