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## **The Myths of Prometheus and the Black Sea Region. Conflicting Versions, Shifting Paradigms**

### **Abstract**

The topic of the paper is the interrelation between two ideological constructs: the figure of Prometheus and the so-called Black Sea region. Both of them represent, in specifically transformed versions, primary ideas and realities that lack the additionally attributed coherence of the later concepts currently in use. It aims to explore the key ancient myth of Prometheus in comparative perspective juxtaposing the stable presence it retains in the Western cultural imagination with its life in the Black Sea region, where this myth initially emerged. It focuses specifically on the underestimated political mobilization of the Prometheus myth in the construction of national identities and in the manufacturing of various ideologies. The different, often conflicting versions are analysed in diachronic perspective that provides observability of the potential paradigm shifts in the conceptualizations of the Prometheus figure.

**Keywords:** Prometheus; Black Sea region; national identities; political mobilization

### **Резюме**

#### **Митовете за Прометей и Черноморският регион. Конфликтующи версии и смяна на парадигмите**

Предмет на изследването, представено в този текст, е взаимоотношението между два идеологически конструкта – митичната фигура на Прометей и т. нар. Черноморски регион. Всеки един от тях изразява в специфично видоизменена версия определени първични идеи и реалности, на които несъмнено е липсвала вторично придадената смислова кохерентност, присъща на по-късно оформените концепти, валидни за настоящия момент. Основната цел е проучването на централния древен мит за Прометей в съпоставителна перспектива с противопоставяне на стабилната позиция, която той заема във въображението на Западната културна традиция, и живота му в Черноморския регион, където митът първоначално възниква. Фокусът е по-специално върху недоглежданите политически употреби на мита при конструирането на национални идентичности, както и при производството на различни идеологии. Отделните, често конфликтующи версии са анализирани в диахрония, което осигурява възможност за установяване на парадигмални измествания в концептуализациите на Прометеевата фигура.

**Ключови думи:** Прометей; Черноморски регион; национална идентичност; политически употреби

The topic of this paper, as suggested by the title, is the interrelation between two ideological constructs – the figure of Prometheus and the so-called Black Sea region. Both of them represent in

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specifically transformed versions primary ideas and realities that lack the additionally attributed coherence of the later concepts, currently in use.

The Black Sea region — defined, in Charles King’s words, as “the land- and seascape from the Balkans to the Caucasus and from the Ukrainian and Russian steppe to Anatolia”, or, more concisely, as “a distinct region defined by the Black Sea and its hinterlands” (King 2008:1-2), has been and still is a notion, disputable to a great extent. As Charles King has reasonably stated, “Searching for a set of timeless, objective traits for establishing what sets off a real region from an imagined one is futile. There are no clear criteria for distinguishing a “genuine” region” (King 2008:2).

With this undeniable assertion at hand, I will try to verify the hypothesis that certain Greek myths have the potential to function as a major unifying factor for an “imagined” Black Sea region focussing on one specific, particularly representative case – the figure of Prometheus. The grounding presumption is that the very idea of Prometheus present in the national cultures of the peoples neighbouring the Black Sea, is capable of generating a process of their consolidation in a regime of non-exclusion that reinforces connections to other national, political and cultural communities as well. My task will be to explore the grounds for the shared means by which the figure of Prometheus happens to provide such a highly potent identification mark for all of them.

The most impressive evidence for the supposed consolidating effectivity of the Prometheus myth is the so-called Prometheus project, initiated in Paris in 1926 by a group of Eurasian émigrés and exiles who tried to oppose the processes of sovietisation of the Black Sea region. The name of the circle came from the journal *Prométhée*, qualified in the subtitle as the “organ of the national defence of the peoples of the Caucasus and Ukraine”. The political program was announced in the first issue of the project’s flagship edition of November 15<sup>th</sup> 1926, in which one could read articles discussing “the problem of Caucasus”, “the crisis of Bolshevism”, the situation in Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the interrelations between Georgia and France. In its height, the movement also involved a number of prominent politicians and journalists from West Europe, who sympathized with the project. (*Prométhée* 1926: 3-9; 11-13; 22-25; 25-31; 31-37)<sup>2</sup>

In the 1930s, the main concern of the Prometheans was the creation of a political and economic alliance of Black Sea states, including Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as the peoples of Ukraine and Georgia. It was articulated in no. 73 of the journal of December 1932 in this specific way: “With its left wing touching on Poland, passing by the friendly lands of Cossacks of the Don, Kuban, and Urals, and with its right wing reaching out to the oppressed peoples of Asia, Turkestan, and other areas,

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<sup>2</sup> The project is presented in King 2004: 224-227.

this block of states will stop once and for all the imperialist tendencies of Russia, whether of the Red or White variety” (*Prométhée* 1932:22).

In the decades preceding the Second World War, the Prometheans engaged into intense lobbying to direct the attention of European governments to the situation of the oppressed peoples in the Black Sea region. They organized public seminars and culture festivals, whose main goal was to draw attention to the destiny of nations deprived of political independence. The main objective of the project was to establish a political and economic alliance between Black Sea states such as Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria as well as Ukraine and Georgia, once the latter had regained independence. During the interwar years, the project received active financial support by the Polish government. Later on, the engagement escalated to the initiation of an autonomous division of the Promethean project in Poland.

For all its political zest, the Promethean project addressed the issues of cultural identity as well. Along with articles that articulated the ideological program of the movement, the journal *Prométhée* included materials concerned with a wide range of cultural facts representative of the national traditions of the countries involved in the project. In the volume published in January 1938, for example, most of the materials included were dedicated to Shota Rustaveli, the great Georgian poet of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (*Prométhée* 1938).

The belief underlying and furnishing those activities was that, taking into account all the diversities, the Black Sea countries still had a lot in common, in terms of shared historical and cultural particularities.

The Prometheus project itself brings forth an interesting and challenging material for systematic and exhaustive research, but I will choose just one single aspect of its inherent problems – the name chosen for the project. Unlike Shakespeare’s Juliet, disregarding her resentful “What’s in a name?”, overflowing with outrage and bewilderment, I will invite you to focus precisely on the implications involved in this act of name giving.

The fact that the name of Prometheus was attributed to this political project might seem arbitrary, but it is actually justified in more ways than one. Since the project was initiated in Paris, the choice of Prometheus as a symbol was undoubtedly indebted to the traditional European rendering of the myth and its Humanistic, Enlightenment and Romantic concretizations. Therefore, the figure of the Titan appeared suitable, providing an adequate label for the advocating of revolt, resistance and enlightenment, which constituted the main objectives of the program.

It should be made clear, that the ideas of Prometheus present in the Black Sea countries at the time were not alien to those meanings. The Bulgarian response to Prometheus, for example, generally

followed the European paradigm. Ever since its initial reception during the Revival period his figure was rationalized in terms of heroic endeavours and therefore in the modes of enlightenment and rebellion.

During that same period when *Prométhée* was being edited and published in Paris, in 1937, in Bulgaria appeared a periodical named *Prometei* (the Bulgarian equivalent of Prometheus). Symptomatically, in the editorial article for the first issue of the journal the interpretation of the ancient symbol of Prometheus' fire was posited as a sign for the revival of European humanities that culminated in a radical, metaphorically charged conclusion, "Asia was *A Thousand and one nights*, Europe is *Prometheus...*" (Balabanov 1937: 5). The periodical was initiated by the prominent professor of Classical studies and the most industrious and professionally reliable translator from ancient Greek Alexander Balabanov. Ironically, Balabanov was firmly convinced that his initiative was unprecedented and in the editorial note, he boasted about its uniqueness (Balabanov 1937: 2).

Similarly echoing the Enlightenment rationalization of the myth, there also appears the well-known case of its literary reception in Turkey – Tevfik Fikret's poem *Prometheus* (1909), in which the fire that the Titan brought to the people symbolizes enlightenment, science and modernity. Prometheus himself is represented as a paragon for young people, who should follow his steps with bravery although their sacrifice might remain unrecognized. A specific moment in Fikret's interpretation of the myth hero is the call for a secular, Universalist and humanistic identity of his fellow citizens, expressed aphoristically in the lines: "I am I, and you are you. No God, no slave are we". (See Hassan 2011).

The interpretation of Prometheus as a component of Western civilization was specific for the reception of the myth in pre-Soviet Russian culture as well. The famous Symbolist poet, playwright and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov, was one of those for whom the figure of Prometheus held a powerful allure. Inspired by Hölderlin, Wagner and Nietzsche, he wrote his own dramatic version of the legend of Prometheus (1919), following the principles of Aeschylean tragedy. Similarly, Aleksandr Scriabin in his symphonic poem *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1910) saw art as a holiday, the antithesis of everyday life. He had created, especially for the performance of Prometheus, a keyboard with lights, that, when played, would project colours on a screen behind the orchestra and he intended, by means of this *clavier à lumières*, to help the audience envision the cosmos.<sup>3</sup>

The motivation of the Prometheans to appropriate the Greek myth so as to legitimize their project went beyond the European context. It also drew upon the conviction that the myth of

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<sup>3</sup> Scriabin's interpretation is presented in James Von Geldern's book *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*. See Geldern 1993:166.

Prometheus is primordially connected to the Black Sea region – moreover, not just because of the traditional belief that the Titan had been chained to a Caucasian rock, but also because of the deep roots the legend had in regional and local mythologies and folklore. Georgia is certainly a most impressive case in this respect since according to the myth the location of the Titan’s imprisonment is supposed to be somewhere within the territory of the country. Accordingly, the biggest cave in Georgia geographically identified as Kumistavi cave after the name of the nearest village, is by default dubbed “the home of Prometheus”.

The identification of Georgians with Prometheus also has another, most impressive manifestation. The protagonist of the Georgian epic poem *Amirani* called Amirani resembles closely the Promethean figure. In a stunning accord with the Promethean myth, Amirani is conceived as demiurge who defies gods, brings the fire to humans, introduces them to the use of metal and is punished by being chained on Caucasus where an eagle eats his liver eternally. The process of identification of Georgians with Amirani/Prometheus is so strong that in certain parts of the country this account is commemorated by the destruction of eagles’ nests as a kind of ritual revenge. Although the literary version of the legend dates to the 12th century, archaeological data suggest that the story was disseminated among Georgian tribes prior to the 8th century BC.<sup>4</sup>

According to *Legends of the Caucasus* by David Hunt, over 44 different Prometheus stories have been identified in the Caucasus region. Further testimony to this prolific tradition can be found in a Georgian book called *Amirani Enchained*, written by the Soviet scholar Mikhail Chikovani, which contains 68 versions of the legend, recorded during the period from 1848 to 1945. Some scholars believe that several Greek myths, among them the myth of Prometheus as well, are derived from Caucasian cultures. The oldest Greek source for the story of Prometheus is in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, composed in the 8th-7th century B.C., which perhaps suggests that both the Greek and Georgian myths have a common Caucasian ancestor (See Hunt 2012).

In different places, Georgians honour their native hero by statues. Well known is the statue of Amirani in the capital of Tbilisi. There is also an older statue, which is located in the vicinity of Signaghi, near the border with Azerbaijan. By the way, this earlier statue of Amirani was dedicated to the Promethean project as homage to its principal strategy to support ethnic identity movements in the Black Sea region.

Prometheus provided inspiration for liberation and revolutionary movements in different Black Sea countries. Therefore, allusions to his fate are recurrently found in texts promoting their nationalist struggles. The Promethean myth plays a fundamental role in the national consciousness of Ukrainians,

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<sup>4</sup> The Caucasian versions of the Prometheus myth are presented and analyzed in Lossev 1989: 302-306.

for example. The tradition is distinctly manifested in Taras Shevchenko, the most prominent among Ukrainian poets, considered the father of Ukrainian literature and a national bard. His poem *The Caucasus* (1845) glorifies the Circassian struggle for independence from Russian tyranny. Actually, the poem is written in memory of a close friend - Yakiv de Balman,<sup>5</sup> who had been killed while in Russian service in the Caucasus that same year. Nevertheless, the bias is directed not against the Chechens, who had killed his friend, but against the injustices of the Russian empire in denying oppressed peoples their freedom. The poem begins with a Biblical quote (*Jeremiah ix. 1*).

And right away the theme of Prometheus is introduced, thus validating the universality of the story narrated:

Mighty mountains, row on row, blanketed with cloud,  
 Planted thick with human woe, laved with human blood.  
 Chained to a rock, age after age  
 Prometheus there bears  
 Eternal punishment—each day  
 His breast the eagle tears.  
 It rends the heart but cannot drain  
 The life-blood from his veins—  
 Each day the heart revives again  
 And once again is gay.  
 Our spirit never can be down end,  
 Our striving to be free. (Translated by John Weir)<sup>6</sup>

Another pertinent example for the kinship between the Prometheus myth and certain local traditional legends provides the short story *Danko's Burning Heart* by the eminent Russian and Soviet writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). As a matter of fact, Gorky's work was a retelling of a Bessarabian folk tale, included as a part of his three-piece narrative *The Old Woman Izegril*, published in 1895. It is an account about a group of people, who were lost in an entrapping forest at night and their leader Danko who tried to guide them out to safety. The men followed him for some time, but then they lost faith that they would make it alive and turned on Danko wishing to kill him. Danko was so eager to help his people that his heart started burning and he ripped it out of his chest to use it as a torch so that he could light the way. It is easy to discern in the story, along with the Biblical allusions to Moses, the presence of the theme of Prometheus rationalized in the modus of ultimate self-sacrifice in the name of humans. And it was in such a universalistic, romantically idealized interpretative perspective that

<sup>5</sup> The dedication reads: To My True Friend, Yakiv De Balmen.

<sup>6</sup> The English translation of the poem is published at <https://taras-shevchenko.storinka.org/the-%D1%81aucasus-poem-of-taras-shevchenko-ukrainian-to-english-translation-by-vera-rich.html> (26. 04.2020).

the story was read for at least two decades before being subjected to the ideological redefinition that we will have the opportunity to discuss later.

The fact that the activists of the Prometheus project appropriated the mythical hero for designating their venture and even themselves (they were referred to as “Prometheans”) implied also another, probably a most significant intention. Here is the place to remind ourselves that making a claim for the name of Prometheus they were contesting against another – contemporaneous, politically rivalrous appropriation of the myth, the one conducted by the Bolshevik propaganda. In the years following the October revolution of 1917 Prometheus was redefined as a powerful symbol of the Bolshevik cause to deliver man from tyranny and barbarism by seizing material power. Prometheus was imagined to symbolize the possibilities of labour, social justice and workers’ rights. The Bolsheviks adopted their fascination for the Titan from Karl Marx, who referred to him in his doctoral dissertation as “the first saint and martyr in philosophers’ calendar”.<sup>7</sup> During his editorship of the *Rhineland Gazette* he was depicted in cartoons as Prometheus. In one of them, published in March 1843, Marx is bound to a printing press with the Prussian eagle gnawing at his liver. At his feet, an Aeschylean chorus of Oceanides represented the cities of Rhineland pleading for freedom. (See the enclosed copy of this cartoon).



A political cartoon representing Karl Marx as Prometheus, published in March 1843.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> About Marx’s fascination with the figure of Prometheus, see Jessop and Wheatley 1999: 42, 67, 91.

<sup>8</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marx\\_as\\_Prometheus,\\_1843.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marx_as_Prometheus,_1843.jpg) (19.03.2020)

It is no wonder that the Bolsheviks felt so intimately connected to the Prometheus myth. The mythogens of Great Russian spirituality came to be expressed by Marxist terminology, while Marxism itself acquired an aura of mythological consciousness.<sup>9</sup> The appropriation of the myth was undertaken in Soviet Russia through complicated procedures including a wide range of activities in which aesthetics and politics went hand in hand. At the time of the October Revolution Prometheus had already undergone a considerable evolution in Russian social thought. Pre-revolutionary artefacts in which the interpretation of the myth followed the European paradigm were subjected to radical revision. Such was the case with Aleksandr Scriabin's symphonic poem *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1910) which was performed in the Bolshoi as a part of a performance, elaborating - as indicated in the program - "the theme of rebellion, of the people rising up in the name of reason, light, and liberty". Although Scriabin had died in 1915 and was never associated with the Bolsheviks, after the October revolution his work was enjoying great popularity.

The theme of Prometheus was especially favoured by the so-called "new proletarian art". An initiative representative of this ideological vogue is a tragedy written by Nikolai Vinogradov-Mamont and entitled *The Russian Prometheus* (1919) that depicted a historically authentic conflict between Peter the Great and Crown Prince Aleksei. The central figures, along with Peter and Aleksei, are two choruses: the tragic chorus of *raskol'niki* (members of religious sects) and the comic chorus of Peter's Most Drunken Council of Fools and Jesters. The play was never performed, partly due to the unfavourable criticism of Lunacharsky who giving it credit for its correspondence to "the theatre of the future", nevertheless registered the discrediting presence in the text of a "strong and perhaps unintentional influence of decadent symbolism".

Another example along similar lines is the plan for May Day 1920 in which Valentin Smyshliaev, the leader of the Moscow Proletkult theatre, proposed using the myth of Prometheus. In Smyshliaev's version, Prometheus is supposed to symbolize the "proletariat, bound to the rock of capitalism" who is unchained in a revolutionary act performed by the Red Army. The protagonist is a man in a blue workers' shirt, bound with a steel chain to a monstrous black figure of a deity. A Red Army detachment emerges from the thick of the crowd surrounding the pedestal of the idol, unchains the man in the blue shirt, and knocks down the idol. The liberated man raises a red banner,

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Primal source Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*. Edward Fitzgerald, trans. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936, pg. 34.

<sup>9</sup> About the mythogenic potential of Marxism and the Bolshevik propaganda, see Berry and Miller-Pogacar 1995: 69.



simultaneously, a tremendous choir, dispersed among the crowd of the audience, begins to sing a *Prometheus* hymn, composed especially for the occasion.<sup>10</sup>

A fascinating case of the political redefinition of the Prometheus myth provides Maxim Gorky's story about Danko's Burning Heart. By the early 1920s' this work had already gained enormous popularity due to the promotion of the romantically idealized hero as a paragon of ultimate self-sacrifice in the name of people. This rendering though was radically reformed and another reading, better tuned to the political situation was suggested, with Danko as a revolutionary leader surrendering himself for the sake of his people's liberation. Such interpretation made possible the incorporation of the story into the communist literary canon and later in the course curriculum of schools in the Soviet Union as well as in other "socialist" countries.

Another fitting illustration of how the myth was appropriated in favour of communist propaganda is the Monument *The Unchained Prometheus* in Dneprodzerzhinsk (known also as Kamianske), which it considered the symbol of the city. The opening of the monument took place in 1922, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution and as a memorial to a mass grave of revolutionaries of Kamianske, whose names are engraved in the lower part of the monument. Situated near the entrance of the local metallurgical works, the structure is entirely in conformity with the clichés of the revolutionary and progressivist rationalizations of the mythic hero. The statue figure holds a torch in his left hand and there is an eagle under his feet. The flame Prometheus has brought for people symbolizes the victory of workers and peasants over their oppressors.

The redefinition of the myth, undertaken by the Soviet authorities was blunt and unyielding. Not a single work that did not fit into the imposed paradigm would be tolerated. A telling case provides the film *Prometei* (Prometheus, 1936), directed by Ivan Kavaleridze, a renowned Ukrainian sculptor, film director, dramatist, and screenwriter of Georgian descent. Based on Taras Snevchenko's biography and works, innovative for the time being and marked by stylization and monumentalism, the film was subjected to a scathing critique in a *Pravda* editorial immediately after its release. Kavaleridze himself was accused of nationalist deviation and formalism and since the film was banned, he found himself forced to follow the demands of the institutions in his later works, especially when modelling the sculpture *Prometheus* (1962), stylized in the mainstream representational manner, defined as "socialist realism".<sup>11</sup>

The appropriation of the myth by Bolshevik propaganda was legitimized abroad as well. A highly provocative case presents John Leman's book on the Caucasus *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*

<sup>10</sup> Mamont's and Smyshliaev's productions are presented in detail in Geldern 1993: 144-145.

<sup>11</sup> Comprehensive information about Kavaleridze's film is provided in Miller 2009:40-41, 60, 66 и Michelakis 2013: 201-204.

published in 1937, in which the narrator recounts a dream he had while sleeping aboard a Soviet steamer crossing the Black Sea with Prometheus confiding to him: “I find myself passionately on the side of the Bolsheviks when I hear accounts of the Civil War struggles. It reminds me of my own struggles with Jove over the fire business.” (Lehman 1937: 254)

The matrix constructed in the Soviet Union had significant impact in other countries as well. In Bulgaria, for example, the presence of Prometheus in national literature between the two World Wars was strongly influenced by the Soviet model. This tendency has a specifically explicit expression in the poetry of Khristo Smirnenski (1898-1923) where the figure of Prometheus is presented as an embodiment of social revolt and revolutionary optimism. The Titan is associated with Russia. In *The Russian Prometheus* (1922), a poem in which Prometheus is the lyrical interlocutor, he declares his will to spread fire around the world. Yet it also represents the collective image of working classes in the poem *The Worker* (1922) where “the new Prometheus” stands for the class-conscious *Homo faber*.

The Prometheus myth continued to serve as a catalyst for aesthetic and political debates further intensified during the decades after WWII. The figure of the Titan would persistently appeal to endeavours aiming at its rigid political appropriation and the following indoctrination of large masses of people with the newly constructed mythology. Sometime in the mid-1940s in the Soviet Union, as well as in the other countries of the Eastern bloc, Aeschylus’ tragedy *Prometheus Bound* was stabilized as a mandatory text in the National curriculum for high schools. Consequently, its plot was subordinated to one-sided Marxist interpretations, overemphasizing the issues of struggle and revolt, in agreement with the already mentioned lionized, even if not indisputable qualification of Aeschylus’ character as a “noblest saint and martyr”.

A striking misappropriation of the Prometheus myth during this period is observed in Ukraine, where in direct juxtaposition with traditional romantic and nationalist interpretative strategies the figure was promoted as a symbol of nuclear power. There, a huge statue of Prometheus was placed in the city of Pripjat, the place where workers of the Chernobyl Nuclear plant lived, facing a fancy cinema building also named “Prometheus”. After the disaster when the city was abandoned, the cinema hall turned into a Mahnmal overgrown with grass and trees and the statue of Prometheus was relocated to the grounds of the power plant. The symbolism of the monument acquired macabre overtones, especially in the context of the symbolic value attributed to nuclear power in the Soviet Union, considered the quintessence of technological progress and modernity that was at the core of communist utopia. The conquest of nature by the new Soviet man as a substantial part of this mythology, articulated by means of the figure of Prometheus, was implanted even in the minds of school children – a telling example are two books with nearly identical titles: *Prometheus Unbound. A Novel about*

*the Inventors of Nuclear Power* and *Prometheus Unbound. A Novel about Igor Kurchatov* (a Soviet physicist, founder of the first nuclear reactor and leader in the construction of the first European Atomic bomb), both written by Sergei Snegov and issued by the “Children’s Literature” Publishing House, in 1972 and 1980 respectively. (Snegov 1972; Snegov 1980) This surrogate mythology was adopted in other countries of the Eastern bloc as well. A regrettable illustration is the poem *Chernobyl* by the Bulgarian poet Venko Markovski, in which the equation runs as follows, *Chernobyl is a judge and crier // Chernobyl is a Prometheus* (See Markovski 1987).

For the people of Ukraine though, the statue of Prometheus in Chernobyl became a symbol of apocalypse. Reconsidering the Book of Revelation, they would decipher the deadly star named Wormwood falling from the skies and poisoning rivers and springs, translating it into Ukrainian as “**Chornobyl**”. Later, Svetlana Alexievich wrote that two disasters coincided: “a social one as the Soviet Union collapsed before our eyes... and the cosmic one — Chernobyl.”

Symptomatically analogous is the Romanian appropriation of Prometheus in favour of the communist propaganda. An imposing monument of Prometheus, holding a flash of lightning in his hand, is erected atop Pleșa Mountain, seemingly watching over the huge Vidraru arch dam on the Argeș River. Built in 1966, this dam was the fifth largest in Europe at the time, which required 42 kilometres of tunnels, over a million hard rocks extracted from underground and nearly a million cubic meters of concrete to build, plus the loss of about 80 builders’ lives. Very much like other megalomaniac endeavours of totalitarian regimes at that time, it was designed to manifest the might of the socialist country. Resembling a Hollywood superhero, the statue obviously symbolizes electricity as the modern equivalent of fire, but the possibility that the figure is interpreted in the code of triumphing revolt is also suggested.

At the same time, however, the Romanian reception of Prometheus also shows a drastic disproportion between the institutionalized and underground reception of the mythical figure. Ultimately, incompatible with the institutionally favoured interpretation of Prometheus and overtly polemic toward its premises is the rendering of the myth by the poet Marin Sorescu (1936-1996). In his poem *Inhabited Liver* we read:

I feel the wings of the eagle  
 Stretch wide the lips of my liver;  
 I feel its talons, I feel its iron beak,  
 I feel the enormity of its hunger for life,  
 Its thirst for flight  
 With me in its talons.  
 And I fly.  
 Whoever said I was chained

Transl. Adam J. Sorkin и Lidia Vianu (Kossman 2001:7).

Sorescu suffered from liver cancer and died three weeks after this poem was published in Dec 1996 (Nov. 1996). Although it appeared years after the communist regime in Romania had succumbed, the poem allows to be read as an expression of dissent, with Prometheus as a substitute for the poet and the eagle an extended metaphor for the Communist regime in Romania. Sorescu himself elucidated the enigmatic content of his work: “Censorship stimulated me. I am used to facing huge obstacles when I work. The greater the obstacle, the more active my stubbornness becomes. ... We created codes in our struggle against censorship. ... These codes came quite close to transfiguration, which also implies that they came closer to the essence of art.” (See Sorkin 2002:886)

Similar juxtaposition between institutionalized and anti-establishment response to the myth to the one manifested in Romania, is to be observed in Bulgaria as well. Along with the extremely dogmatic interpretations Prometheus inspired there were most unconventional forms of reception. Two musical versions of Aeschylus’ tragic plot were written, both by well-known composers. The first one is Alexander Raichev’s Second symphony entitled *The New Prometheus* (1954) which was written by a composer who used to be much more well accepted by the authorities, since he was the author of some of the most popular mass songs propagating the regime. Although his Second symphony was composed in a relatively conformist manner, it was nevertheless officially neglected because it would not fit into the mainstream apologetic tone. The other one, Lazar Nikolov’s oratorical opera *Prometheus Bound* is considered one of the most significant facts of the Bulgarian musical vanguard. Composed in a dodecaphonic key, it was already a strong gesture of dissent in its very musical nature, since at the moment of its creation dodecaphonism was considered by the functionaries of the totalitarian regime as ideologically unacceptable, along with different other versions of formalism. Therefore, this work was persistently ignored by the official critics but nevertheless gained significant popularity among professionals. Moreover, even if unofficially, because the fact was shared only inside a small confidential circle, the opera was dedicated to the casualties of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. (Nikolova and Tsenov 2017)

These two musical opuses display an interesting act of subversion towards the appropriation of the Prometheus myth by the official ideological conventions, producing gestures of artistic dissent. A possible further contextualization of these artefacts would offer an opportunity for promising comparative procedures that might reveal how during the period from the 1950’s to the 1980s’ the classical heritage came to be identified as an opportunity for dissent – in one case in terms of unconventional musical compositions, in others, in terms of focusing academic research on classical literature and culture as a form of intellectual escapism.

And now, to bring the story to an end, let us focus on the Post-Soviet period and find out how the idea of Prometheus is doing in more recent times and how it affects the nowadays mentality of peoples neighbouring the Black Sea. A short overview of the facts will suffice.

In the former Soviet republics, a significant shift in the usages of the Prometheus myth is observed. Georgia is still believed to be “the land of Prometheus”. The persistent identification of the mythical figure with the country stabilized over centuries has developed secondary semantic associations with explicit commercial and touristic connotations. The biggest cave in Georgia, by default dubbed “the home of Prometheus” is advertised as a “must” destination along with a well-known hotel “Prometheus” in Tsalkubo and a spa resort with the selling brand of “Prometheus gate”.

In Ukraine, along with the traditional interpretations of the myth, a wide spectrum of new symbolizations is at work. There is a Ukrainian educational platform Prometheus; an internationally acclaimed male chorus has the same name. Stefan Onyszczuk and Stefania Szwed decided to identify with the name of the Titan their foundation in Canada, which was initiated to provide financial support for Ukrainian education, research, publications, and music programs. But “Prometheus” is also the name of a mighty grain trading company. In Ukraine, one can still find in circulation a pin, on which the eminent monument in Dneprodzerzhinsk *The Unchained Prometheus* is reproduced. Since the monument used to be a main attraction of the city during the decades of the Soviet period, a pin was designed and because of its considerable popularity, serially produced. Also, commercials inform about the availability of “East Prometheus candies with Raisin”. Even Maxim Gorky’s tale *Danko’s Burning Heart* has been utilized to great dramatic effect in the Ukrainian video game *Cryostasis: Sleep of Reason*.

There is also a clearly outlined tendency for the subversion of the earlier dogmatic interpretations of the myth. Somewhat extreme in his revisionism is Les Podervianskyi, a Ukrainian painter, poet, playwright and performer, whose play *Danko* parodies the idyllic rendering of Communist ideology in the story of Maxim Gorky. Cast as a markedly unheroic and pathetic figure, Podervianskyi’s Danko appears also as a leader, but he does not seem to know the way and being afraid of the people’s anger for his inadequacies, he burns his heart, but then also his liver and finally his kidneys. So Danko’s death is absolutely preposterous and he is instantly forgotten by everyone.

The figure of Prometheus is utilized in various contexts in Turkey, as well. “Prometheus” is the name of a major publishing house in Izmir, it is the name of a well-known, internationally acknowledged consultants group founded in 1995 and headquartered in Istanbul, as well as an internet site for book selling. A company for monitoring and alerting infrastructures is called “Prometheus

Engineering”. With the single exception of a travel agency of the same name, the name of the mythological hero is used mainly to designate a wide range of intellectual endeavours.

Even though such a brief overview might seem unsystematic and give the impression of chaos, it brings forth certain regularities in the reception of the Prometheus myth in the Black Sea countries. First of all, we observe a spectacular wealth of diverse interpretations, which in its turn the very nature of the myth presupposes. That is on the one hand the ambivalence of the mythical figure – simultaneously a trickster and a cultural hero, not to mention a tragic hero as well; and, on the other, the semantic flexibility of the corresponding narratives.

Despite this registered malleability of the myth, the range of diverse concretizations that occur nonetheless reveal certain patterns.

It is obvious that all those approaches were deeply conscious of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Romantic association between Prometheus and the ideas of theomachy and revolt and followed the three major versions of the European paradigm – Prometheus the Firebringer and/or Creator, Prometheus Bound (or Chained) and Prometheus Unbound (Unchained). The concretizations of the figure in the different countries share a common utilization of the myth in the perspective of national liberation movements.

Considerable, distinctly outlined paradigm shifts in the rationalization of the myth are observed coinciding with major social and political reversals – the October Revolution of 1917, WWII, and the end of the Cold War. Also, obvious is the tension between contesting ideological interpretations serving rivalrous political doctrines. The relatively tidy design into which all those commensurable and incommensurable appropriations and misappropriations, uses and abuses of the myth preceding 1989 fit into has apparently collapsed. The situation allows to be defined as – with a cunning reference to Milton – Paradigm Lost.

The wider context has changed as well. “Prometheans” in the current usage is more likely to mean “the faction of enemies present in the 4th and 5th instalment of the Halo videogame franchise” than the activists of the Parisian project of the interwar period. In Ihab Hassan’s article called *Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture* the figure of Prometheus is used to signal the emergence of a posthumanist culture (See Hassan 1977: 830-850). Such a context is rather discouraging for whatever attempts to anchor the design for a consolidated Black Sea region on an idea already devoid of foundation and integrity. It might be wiser to reconsider the possibilities for carrying into effect such an inspiring cause still remaining hidden in another Greek myth, that of the Argonauts. At least because instead of suggestions of eternal suffering and uncompromising life and death struggle implied in the Prometheus myth the tale of the Golden fleece promises a dream of brave

marine initiatives, heroic adventure, magic assistance, success and wealth, and last but not least – a happy home-coming.

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