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“Natela” An epic poem by Akaki Tsereteli: Translated to, and exposited in Japanese

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This paper examines the epic poem “Natela” (1897), one of the Georgian poet Akaki Tsereteli's significant works.

Tsereteli (1840-1915), was a cultural revivalist who engaged in national liberation activities in 19th-century Georgia. He wrote the lyric poem “Suliko” (1895), which was set to music by his wife Barbare and later became the most popular Georgian folk-song in the world.

Tsereteli was born of nobility in the Imereti region of western Georgia. During early adulthood, he studied at Saint Petersburg University's faculty of Oriental Languages. The poet became conscious of his Georgian national identity while under the Russian Empire's dominion. “Natela” represents his exploration of nationalist romanticism.

“Natela” is set in medieval Georgia, at that time under occupation by the Mongol Empire. The fictional heroine, Natela, is married to Prince Tsotne Dadiani, an authentic historical figure in 13th-century Georgia, and together they confront the Noyan, the ruler of Mongolian empire. As a trial for suitors wishing to marry her, Natela requires that they wear the Chokha, a traditional Georgian costume she herself has made, besides presenting the severed heads of one hundred and twenty Mongol warriors. Dadiani alone completes the challenge. Subsequently, after enemy troops capture Dadiani, along with his fellows, and while he is being held prisoner by the Noyan, Natela, armed only with a dagger, goes to the rescue of her husband.

In modern terms, Natela's character reflects female independence and demonstrates the idea of romantic love based on shared emotions connecting man and woman. By celebrating Dadiani, who had defied the Mongols, the conquerors even of mighty Russia, Tsereteli sought to revive the historical greatness of Georgia.

In this paper, I reference a selection of Tsereteli's work and compare it with that of another non-Russian 19th-century poet also living under Russian Imperial rule, the Ukrainian, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861). I will also undertake a Japanese translation and exposition of “Natela.”