



## NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS AND GEORGIA

**Tinatin Darakhvelidze<sup>i</sup>**

PhD. Candidate,

The Saint Andrew The First Called Georgian University,

Tbilisi, Georgia

### **Abstract:**

Exactly a hundred years has passed since Nikos Kazantzakis, a Greek writer, humanist and philosopher travelled in Georgia for the first time, but his impressions and emotions about travelling in Georgia three times, which are described in his creation, still remain as interesting things for the Greek researchers and historians. The journey of the writer coincided with the advent of the bold and historical hardship when Georgia gained three years of independence from the Russian Empire and subsequently became the victim of the annexation of Bolshevik Russia again. This is also the period when the history of Georgia and Greece coincided, because of historical cataclysms happened at that time in the region. This is the period when ethnic people of the Ponto origin who were expelled from Turkey gathered in Georgia, particularly in Batumi in anticipation of returning to their historical homeland, Greece. Exactly Nikos Kazantzakis was turned out the first and the last, as a civil servant, head of the repatriation program of the Ponto Greeks and he was sent to Georgia by this mission. It was his first touch with Georgia and in spite of the two-week's business trip which was full of responsibilities, the writer got fascinated by Georgia and had traveled twice for a long time in this country. His impressions and experiences from travels are described in his works and personal letters.

**Keywords:** Georgia, Kazantzakis, Greece, writer

### **1. Introduction**

Sixty two years passed since Nikos Kazantzakis's death. Although his biography and creative works are still under the interests of researching and studying in many countries all over the world. One of such countries among them is Georgia. More importantly, Nikos Kazantzakis is connected with Georgia through a lot of interesting travelling. His first trip was made in Georgia in a very interesting time of this country. This was the period of three years of independence of Georgia, this was the period when Georgia felt the constant danger of losing independence, and he had already had the other two journeys in Soviet Georgia. It can be said that his interest in traveling to Georgia was the fact that Kazantzakis was the first Greek writer who was translated into Georgian in the 90s of the 20th century. Nowadays, some of his famous creations are translated into Georgian: "Ascesis: The Saviors of God", "Report to

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [tinadarakhvelidze@gmail.com](mailto:tinadarakhvelidze@gmail.com)

Greco", "Christ Recrucified", "The Last Temptation of Christ", "Zorba the Greek". Nikos Kazantzakis's "Toba Raba" is also translated where his attitude towards Georgia and Georgians is described. The occasion of Nikos Kazantzakis's first trip to Georgia is also interesting and important for Georgia as well as for the Greek history because it deals with the hard times of Greeks from Ponto which they had in the 20s of the 20th century. The main goal of our paper is to introduce readers not only Kazantzakis's attitude towards Georgia and Georgians, but also to refer to the great writer's contribution to the Pontian Greeks' repatriation.

## 2. Nikos Kazantzakis's trip in Georgia

Kazantzakis and Georgia intersected in those years of history when Georgia gained independence for a short period of time and also after losing the independence (1919, 1927, 1928). The writer travelled in almost every part of Georgia, looked round Tbilisi, Kartli, Kakheti, Borjomi, Vardzia, Adjara, Abkhazia. Nikos Kazantzakis saw well the mode of life of the victims at that hard time. *"I am living with disturbing news here: every woman, every man can tell you the tragic things she has suffered, terribly dark and the most insignificant among them is the brightest flame of the fires"* -wrote Nikos Kazantzakis to his closest friend Eli Lampridi from Batumi in November, 1927. He wrote about the trips in Georgia in his books: "Russia", "Toda Raba", "Report to Greco".

Before discussing the interesting facts of Nikos Kazantzakis's trip in Georgia, we would better remember the writer's biography once more which starts from the island of Crete, where he was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1883. The island of Crete was occupied by the Turks that time. That's why the Kazantzakis' family migrated twice from the island, first in 1889 in Piraeus and again in 1897-98 on the island of Naxos. While on the island of Naxos, he continued his studies at the Roman-Catholic School where he acquired French and Italian languages. Precisely the knowledge of these languages played an important role in his future life. After graduating of the Faculty of Law at Athens University, he went on studying in Paris, at the Faculty of Philosophy at Sorbonne University. He attended a French Philosopher Henri Bergson's lectures during his studying in Paris and he fell under the influence of Henri Bergson. Apart from Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche also had a significant impact on Kazantzakis's creation. His PhD thesis was dedicated to Friedrich Nietzsche in Athens and Paris, -„Friedrich Nietzsche dans la philosophie du droit et de la cité“ („Friedrich Nietzsche about Law and State Philosophy“). Perhaps these influences were one of the reasons that the writer who returned to Greece intensively began to translate philosophical literature. Trips are the leitmotif of Nikos Kazantzakis's biography. As if he took his spiritual subsistence from the trips, collected impressions like a valuable treasure and then wrote everything what he had seen and felt on a sheet of paper. The impressions of his journeys, which are published throughout the series, are read as interesting as his novels. The writer, along with his friend Angelos Sikkelas, traveled for two years in places where Greek Orthodox Christian culture flourished. Nikos Kazantzakis first travelled in Georgia in 1919 when he was appointed to the position of the General Director of the Pontian Greeks' Repatriation Service by the Ministry of Social Affairs in order to help the Greeks from Ponto exile in Greece. In Italy, the writer gladly

accepted the post of head of the repatriation department offered by the Greek government, as he wrote himself, he had been given an opportunity for the first time to act. The man, who constantly fought with ideas and theories, *“now had to support a living creature, flesh and bone, a human being.”* As it seems, the main reason was different: *“I agreed with one of the other circumstances, that I felt a pain of my forever crucified nation who was still in danger at the Prometheus Mountains of the Caucasus. It was not Prometheus, Hellas was chained at the Mountains of Caucasus by the State and violence-this is its cross-and crying; Crying and calling not the gods, but people, its children in order to save it. Identifying today’s pain with the centuries’ passions of Greece, I ascended today’s tragic event up to symbol and I myself ascended”*.

Nikos Kazantzakis gathered several devoted friends to go to the Caucasus, from Crete: Georgios Angelkis, Jani Constantarakis, Irakli Polemakakis, Georgios Stavarachi, Giovanni Zarvos, Yygos Zorbas, Dimitrios Eleftheridis. The writer and the group of his devoted friends went to Caucasus in order to save the Greeks who were in danger. The Greeks living in Caucasus were truly in bad conditions. As soon as the First World War started, the Turkish greatly oppressed the Greeks living on the Black Sea territory and forced some of them to Caucasus and others go to the South of Russia. The majority of Greek refugees gathered in Batumi and applied to the government of Greece for supporting. However, the Greek government refused to give refugees a massive reception and allowed only 20,000,000 drachma credits to help them where they were and allowed their selective repatriation. Precisely the Greek government sent Nikos Kazantzakis to deal with these cases. A writer in Batumi gave an interview to a local Greek-language newspaper "Eleftheros Pontos": *“My aim of today’s expedition includes only supporting of refugees. With the help of Greek society - whose state is disadvantaged to lend them credits, I will help the refugees here, in Batumi. The expedition is going to study all the issues related to existing conditions of the refugees, those circumstances –if their repatriation must be done or must they be returned to their home country. It is also going to study how it is possible to rehabilitate their houses, to give them tools for agriculture and all other facilities which are needed for agriculture”*. Kazantzakis sent his expedition members to different regions of Georgia, Armenia, South Russia and Kars at the first stage in order to select the Greek population and take them to Batumi for leaving for Greece. According to Kazantzakis, this goal was not easily to be implemented: *“Fighting was difficult, we were exhausted of fatigue, sleeplessness and excitement”*, but when there are *“passionate and honest”* colleagues next to you, you will overcome everything. As we learn from the proceedings of the expedition and newspaper archives, apart from working at the Greek population’s repatriation, the members of the expedition delivered lectures, literary evenings, enlightened the processes happening in Greece. Through these activities they were morally supporting those whose taking to Greece was impossible at that stage, as the Greek government had the only elective principle of Greek resettlement to return them to their historical home land. But Nikos Kazantzakis’s position was different and in his telegrams to the government he substantiated that a massive repatriation was necessary, though the majority of Greece government didn’t support his opinion. Except the members of the government, Chrysanthos,-Metropolitan of Trabzon was against the Greeks’ repatriation as Ponto was in danger of emptying of Greek elements. In one of the long reports which is addressed to the Ministry, Nikos Kazantzakis substantiated the necessity of the Greeks’ repatriation and described the plan of their future integration and expulsion to Greece in future.

The government of Greece took into consideration Kazantzakis's this insistent demand at last and made a decision to give the Greeks from Caucasus shelters. But the plan of returning the Greeks to their home-land lasted only for 11 months. The government of Greece was changed in 1920 and its head became Eleftherios Venizelos, Nikos Kazantzakis left his occupied position and the new government did not care after the Pontian Greeks. The Greeks living on the territory of Ponto, died of catastrophe together with the Small Asian Greeks in 1922. The writer reflected this great tragedy of the Greeks in his creations "Christ Recrucified", "The Fratricides", "Report to Greco". During his first two weeks' trip he lost his closest friend and a member of the expedition Georgios Stavridakis, he died of pneumonia. He wrote about his second trip in Georgia later in 1927: *"We couldn't even guess how we reached Tbilisi,-the capital of Georgia where the nicest people around the world live. I stepped on the ground with excitement where my one of the most favorite friends died some years ago."* Kazantzakis's first trip in Georgia made him stand in front of a great personal choice. As if the destiny wanted to examine him and sent a nice Georgian woman Barbare. *"I have never met before more beautiful woman than she. No, she was not only beautiful, but something different which I can't express in words"*. Barbare offered the writer to escape somewhere far from her husband and boring routine. She said what the writer couldn't dare to do, but Nikos Kazantzakis couldn't made a decisive step, he couldn't accept, as he couldn't betray his duty and responsibility as the faith of thousands of Greeks stood behind him. 74 years old Kazantzakis wrote in his novel "Report to Greco" 'after many years: *"After a thousand years, at my unhappy old age, I close my eyes, Arabic reeds are growing again, the Black Sea is dashing on my temples, Barbara is coming and sitting in front of me, not on the chair but kneeled down on white kneels; I am looking at her and thinking: I wonder if I behaved right that I didn't catch the divine second its hair?"* This is the end of his first trip in Georgia.

Nikos Kazantzakis introduced to many interesting people during his other trip in Georgia in 1927-1928, -Georgian poets Titsian Tabidze, Paolo Iashvili, Mikheil Javakhishvili,-the founder of the first National University in Caucasus -the University of Georgia and as he writes, he loved them with all his heart. His relation with Grigol Robakidze especially impressed him, who was one of the distinguished figures among the Georgian symbolists and spent his last 15 years in political emigration. In his one of the letters to Pandelis Prevelakis Kazantzakis wrote: *"I don't remember if I have already written to you that I met with one person all over the Caucasus: Grigol Robakidze,-a poet-dreamer, too mystic, with a great talent, surprisingly kempt. He is about 45 years old, very elegant, quiet, lonely. His novel "The Snake's Skin" which is translated into German is a surprise". Grigol Robakidze is one of the heroes in his novel "Toda Raba" who is sitting at the table of the Georgian writers and Kazantzakis describes him with a great love and inspiration. Being far from his home-land, Grigol Robakidze writes to a Georgian poet Irakli Abashidze:,, A famous Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis's novel "Toba Raba" has been recently published in Paris, where I am described on two pages. Excellent! I met the author in Tiplisi in 1928... he prized me exaggeratedly ...this discussion must be his genius of his heart"*.

Nikos Kazantzakis's attitude towards Georgia, his regard Georgians with favour can be found in his every entries. *"I used to make a furtive glance towards a nice race of people who have eastern eyes, inexhaustible sweetness, kindly smiling careless souls. They drank, danced, kissed one another and killed with the noblest way, like a variety of insects"*.

### 3. Conclusion

We tried to introduce some interesting details of a great Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis's trips in Georgia to the reader in our present paper. We discussed the reason of his first trip from the point of history, his personal attitude to that great mission which was called an implementation of Pontian Greeks' repatriation. At the same time we tried to introduce to the reader the writers' attitude towards Georgia and Georgians. There is no doubt that the writer's trips include some more other interesting details. E.g. his wife's relation with a Georgian writer Grigol Robakidze, who emigrated after Georgia had become a Soviet republic and this relation continued out of borders of Georgia, his opinions about the political processes taking place that time and etc. Nikos Kazantzakis's trips in Georgia are full of various and interesting things. We also tried to introduce the main details of the writer's trips to the readers. We hope that the present study will promote to increase the interest towards Nikos Kazantzakis's rich creation, his numerous treasure of vocabulary, introducing to the lovely personages who come from wise nation and will make its reader to discover one of the smallest and the most ancient countries,- Georgia once more from the point of the writer's view.

### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (SRNSF) PHDF-18-1253, Project Title: "Translation peculiarities of neologisms and dialectal words according to the Georgian translations of Nikos Kazantzakis's novels".

### References

- Καζαντζάκη Νίκου, "Αναφορά στον Γρέκο", Αθήνα, 1928.  
Καζαντζάκη Νίκου, "Τόντα Ράμπα", Αθήνα, 1969.  
Καζαντζάκη Νίκου, "Τι είδα στη Ρωσία", Αθήνα, 1928.  
Καζαντζάκη Ελένης Ν., "Νίκος Καζαντζάκης ο Ασυμβίβαστος", Αθήνα, 1977.  
Πρεβελάκη Παντελή, "Τετρακόσια γράμματα του Καζαντζάκη στον Πρεβελάκη", Αθήνα, 1965.  
Helen Kazantzakis, Nikos Kazantzakis. A biography based on his letters, translated by Amy Mims, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968.  
Peter Bien (ed. and tr.), The Selected Letters of Nikos Kazantzakis (Princeton, PUP, 2011) (Princeton Modern Greek Studies).  
Peter Bien, Nikos Kazantzakis, 1962; New York: Columbia University Press, 1972.  
თამარ მესხი, დიდი ხანძრის მეჭამული ანარეკლი, თბილისი, 1996.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). and European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).