

# Functions of Exact and Homonymous Internal Rhymes in Georgian Medieval Panegyric Poetry<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The text of the medieval Georgian panegyric poem “Tamariani” has come to us in the form of manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries. “Tamariani” mainly uses a poetic form, which is known in Georgian versification as “*Chakhrukhauri*”. “Chakhrukhauri” is a quatrain with twenty-syllable lines, the pre-caesural parts of which consist of two rhymed (often homonymous) syntagms. The lines also have an end rhyme. In Georgian literary criticism, until now, only evaluative points of view have been expressed regarding this work, and the functional nature of the formal techniques has been ignored. This article is an attempt to substantiate the hypothesis that the use of specific formal techniques – in particular, frequently repeated pre-caesural (including homonymous) rhymes in “Tamariani” – was due to the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy on the author. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that Georgian researchers also noted the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy on “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, the author of which was Chakhrukhadze’s contemporary, the greatest Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli, although, unlike “Tamariani”, the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy was reflected on Rustaveli work’s content and philosophical concept, while in Chakhrukhadze’s poem the influence of Neoplatonism becomes clear upon a careful “reading” of the form of the work.

Keywords: Chakhrukhauri, Neoplatonism, pre-caesural rhymes

The text of the medieval Georgian panegyric poem “Tamariani” reached us in the form of manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries. Regarding the dating of the poem, different points of view were expressed at different times, but, apparently, it is necessary to agree with the opinion of the twentieth-century scholar Ivane Lolashvili who carefully analyzed the historical realities described in the poem and came to the conclusion that “Tamariani” was written in 1205–1206, during the lifetime of Queen Tamar (approx.

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1160–1207/1210/1213) (Lolashvili 1957: 180). In the era of Tamar’s reign, Georgia reached an unprecedented level of flowering of the political power of the country and its culture. “Tamariani” celebrates Tamar and her husband, David Soslan. Chakhrukhadze is traditionally considered the author of the poem. It consists of 111 stanzas (approximately – taking into account the changes made to the text by copyists).

In “Tamariani”, Chakhrukhadze mainly uses a twenty-syllable meter which is known in Georgian versification as “*Chakhrukhauri*”, although other meters are encountered (rarely) in the poem – the sixteen-syllable “high” and “low” *shairi*.

In Chakhrukhauri, twenty-syllable lines are divided in the middle by a caesura. pre-caesural parts consist of two rhyming (a) or homonymous (b) segments<sup>2</sup>:

aa // b  
cc // b  
dd // b  
ee // b

(a)

ვინ ჩნდა ეგმისად, მსგავსად აწ მისად წინასწარ მთქმელი მისთა  
მთქმებულად  
 თუ ვერვინ გნახის, მით ივაგლახის, შეიქმნებოდის განცვიფრებულად;  
 ვერ მრავლებისა გატვერებისა, თამარ, შენ გიცნობ განცხადებულად!  
 ჩვენ ვთქვით: «ეს რად ჰგავ? – ზეციერად ჰგავ შვიდთა მნათობთა  
დაშვენებულად».

Vin chnda egmisad, msgavsad ats' misad ts'inasts'ar mtkmeli mista mtkmebulad.  
 Tu vervin gnakhis, mit ivaglakhis, sheikmnebodis gantsviprebulad;  
 Ver mrvalebisa gatvrebisa, tamar, shen gitsnob gantskhadebulad!  
 Chven vtkvat: “es rad hgav? zetsierad hgav shvidta mnatobta dashvenebulad!”  
 (Stanza 4)

[Thou, who appeared like Egmis<sup>3</sup> announcing in advance the stories of God;  
 Without seeing thee, people get desperate and frustrated!]

<sup>2</sup> Of the one hundred and eleven stanzas of the poem, six stanzas contain constant homonymous pre-caesural rhymes. In addition, homonymous pre-caesural rhymes are often found in separate lines of other stanzas.

<sup>3</sup> “Egmis refers to John the Baptist” (Lolashvili 1957: 245).

They run away into the forests; Tamar, truly I know thee well!  
We say: “What is this? Thine beauty is like the seven celestial bodies!”]

(b)

ვინ არს ებანი? ვინ არსე ბანი, არა არს სათნი სახელოვნებად!  
მან ცათა მარის, მანცა თამარის გან მზე აბნელა მაცისკროვნებად?  
აღამეთ ერთა აღამ ეთერთა დასახა სახებრ მსგავსი პოვნებად.  
არსა ღალადი:რად არს-ღა ღადი მზე შენგან მრთმევად  
უეტლოვნებად?!

Vin ars ebani? vin arse bani, ara ars satni sakhelovnebad!  
Man tsata maris, mantsa Tamaris gan mze abnela matsisk'rovnebad?  
Adamet erta, Adam eterta dasakha sakhebr msgavsi p'ovnebad.  
Arsa ghaghadi: rad ar-gha ghadi mze shengan mrtmevad uet'lovnebad!  
(Stanza 25)

[Who is the lyre?<sup>4</sup> Who created the firmament? There is no one like him!  
Hath he eclipsed the sun of heavenly Tamar with his radiance?  
He gave the heavenly Adam a face similar to human faces.  
They say there is only the dark sun that you [Tamar] deprived of his chariot!]

Regarding the excessive number of homonymous rhymes used in “Tamariani”, it was noted in Georgian literary criticism that “the frequent use of homonymous rhymes [...] is a defect in a poetic work since it exaggerates the role of an individual element and is, as it were, an end in itself for the author” (Gats’ereliya 1981: 179). Compare: “Homonymous internal rhymes are sometimes vague and difficult to understand” (Khintibidze 2009: 12); “An ode, in essence, requires special musicality, [...] a wealth of rhymes, which, in turn, further enhances the artificiality of the work” (Marr 1902: 61).

Ilya Chavchavadze, Evgenii Bolkhovitinov and David Chubinashvili assessed the artistic and formal features of “Tamariani” negatively. Other scholars expressed the opposite point of view: “The beauty of the ‘Tamariani’ odes lies in their extraordinary artistic form, in the enchanting musicality of verses, in the wealth of beautiful, incomparable and virtuosic rhymes” (K’ekelidze 1952: 173); “Chakhrukhadze in ‘Tamariani’ achieves the virtuosity of artistic speech. He continues those literary traditions, which were

<sup>4</sup> Metonymically, King David.

characteristic of the brilliant representatives of Georgian spiritual and secular literature of the 11th–12th centuries” (Lolashvili 1964: 9).

Let us note that only an aesthetic and evaluative approach to “Tamariani” is insufficient. Such an approach is valid only when analyzing those poetic texts in which homonymous rhyme serves only the role of artistic decoration. It is incorrect in relation to Chakhrukhadze’s work since, in this case, the function of pre-caesural exact and homonymous rhymes is not only to create the euphony and they have a special purpose (as I will demonstrate below).

Let us observe the specificity of “Tamariani”’s artistic form.

The points of view expressed in scholarly studies devoted to the structural elements of verse and, in particular, homonymous rhymes – such as the pioneering work of M. L. Gasparov (2022 [1983 / 2005]) – are not very suitable for analyzing the unique verse form used in “Tamariani”. In most of these studies *end rhymes* are analyzed, while in “Tamariani” pre-caesural rhymes are used. The semantic interplay of such rhymes can rather be characterized by the words of Juri M. Lotman:

The conjunction of textual segments, the consequent formation of additional meanings according to the principle of internal recoding, and the equation of segments of a text, which transforms them into structural synonyms and forms additional meanings according to the principle of external recoding, together compose the basis of the mechanics of an artistic text. Two points should be made here: 1) equalization here has a different meaning than in natural languages – as a result of the contrast and opposition of textual units, similarity is revealed in diversity, and diversity in similarity of meaning; 2) conjunction and selection are possible in an artistic text where they would be totally impermissible in a non-artistic text. (Lotman 1977: 78)

As has already been said, in Chakhrukhauri the pre-caesural part of each line consists of two rhymed segments. Due to the semantic mutual influence (in Yuri Tynianov’s terminology, “tightness” – “теснота”) of two rhymed expressions placed in the same line, their meaning is deformed: under the influence of rhythm, euphony and other factors, the semantic difference between them “fades”. These meanings come close to each other and therefore the corresponding words or expressions are perceived as “synonyms”.

Here we can recall the equivalence of verse segments, emphasized by Roman Jakobson in his celebrated description of the workings of the poetic function: “*The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence” (Jakobson 1960: 358). Chakhrukhauri is

characterized by formal and semantic equivalence of verse segments, in which the semantics of each (of the two) pre-caesural segments tends to coincide with the semantics of the other segment (since they appear as “synonyms” as a result of the influence of rhythm and acoustic similarity) and, at the same time, do not coincide (since formally they have different meanings). Their meanings tend to be similar and mutually “flow” into each other.<sup>5</sup>

This tendency is even more intensified in poetic lines in which the pre-caesural parts consist of two homonymous expressions, such as in (b) stanza. In special conditions (that is, in poetic lines), the semantics of the homonyms (that is, the meanings expressed by the word or word group that sound the same but have different signifieds) seem to interpenetrate as a result of a kind of semantic diffusion. And if pre-caesural exact rhymed expressions, due to the convergence of their meanings, gravitate *toward synonymy*, homonymous expressions in verse gravitate *toward tautology*, but this is an excessive tautology of a special kind. We can only repeat that such a transformation of their semantics occurs because the interaction of the meanings of words in a poetic line (that is, their tightness) is much more intense than in prose. Apparently, the excessive number of such “synonymous” and “tautological” expressions obscured their semantics, made reading and comprehending the poem difficult, and gave rise to a negative evaluative view of “Tamariani”.

Let us seek analogues of this artistic form in medieval texts. Such analogues can be found not only in artistic but also in philosophical works. For example, the style of the Georgian philosopher of the 11th–12th centuries Ioane Petritsi, a translator and commentator of the outstanding representative of Neoplatonic philosophy Proclus Diadochus, is characterized by an excess of synonyms:

In syntax, one of the characteristic features of Petritsi’s language is the so-called hendiadys, that is, one concept expressed by two related words. [...] One would think that Ioane Petritsi resorts to this technique in order to explain one incomprehensible word by using another. [...] Indeed, there was one example in which one of the two words used is foreign, and the purpose of the other is to explain it [...] but this case must be considered exceptional. It is impossible to explain the use of this technique by the fact that to translate a given Greek word it is not enough to use one Georgian word: each of the same Greek words in other places in the text is translated by one Georgian word. A similar technique

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<sup>5</sup> The meanings of words are usually more or less stable and designate certain denotations. But in Chakhrukhauri the meanings of rhyming words or expressions are not reduced to their “dictionary” meanings. They are indefinable and unspeakable (in the sense that it is impossible to describe their semantics with the help of other dictionary words that have solid semantics).

is characteristic of the style of Petritsi (and his era), which is confirmed by the fact that Petritsi often uses it in the original part of his work. (K'aukhchishvili 1940: LXIII, LXVI)

It would be wrong to think that Petritsi consciously tried to make his style heavier because, in his opinion, philosophical writing requires “pompous” language. For this purpose, as Mose Gogiberidze noted (1961: 153), he used other means.

The abundance of synonyms is also characteristic of the style of the fifth-century CE poet Nonnus of Panopolis (who, apparently, was influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy, or at least knew it quite well). Sergei Averintsev noted:

The vocabulary of Nonnus [...] is more or less traditional epic vocabulary; but Nonnus's way of using this vocabulary is quite special. The poet infuses synonyms in abundance, but not in order to introduce semantic nuances, to choose a word that would hit the mark between all the words. Nonnus's word never hits the mark; this is not his task. Synonyms that are completely equal to each other are lined up, as it were, along the periphery of a circle in order to stand around the “ineffable” center. [...] Of course, such a path leads to unthinkable verbosity, to obsessively hypnotizing tautologies. (Averintsev 1977: 137–138).

According to Averintsev, the language of Nonnus is similar to the linguistic style of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite:

The theologian [i.e., Pseudo-Dionysius] just as little trusts each individual word to carry an adequate meaning as the poet [i.e., Nonnus] is not inclined to design each individual metaphor to express an adequate image. Only [...] metaphors challenging each other create, so to speak, a force field that indirectly generates the desired meaning or the desired image in the reader's mind. [...] Words should reinforce each other intonationally and displace each other both meaningfully and figuratively [*soderzhatel'no i obrazno*]. [...] We are faced with a paradox of verbal “wordlessness” and an extremely verbose “silence” [...]. Words are, as it were, destroyed in the act of fulfilling their function. (Averintsev 1977: 139–140)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A similar style is characteristic not only of the original text by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, but also of the Georgian translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, completed in the 11th century by the Georgian church leader Ephrem Mtsire. Like Petritsi, Ephrem often used synonyms and hendiadyses (Erukashvili 1961: 121–124).

It is obvious that the characterization given by Averintsev fully corresponds to the style of “Tamariani”. Chakhrukhadze’s poem also contains verbosity, synonymies and tautologies; here, too, words (their semantics) are destroyed, due to the use of exact and homonymous rhymes in the pre-caesural segments of the lines. And under the influence of these rhymes, when reading the poem, we constantly hear “an extremely verbose ‘silence.’”

Is it possible to say that the “Tamariani” style is somehow connected with Neoplatonic philosophy? The sound organization of “Tamariani”, that is, the material aspect of the poem, corresponds to the Neoplatonic idea of matter.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the concept of *matter* suggested by the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus (204/205–270 CE), necessarily implies its otherness, without which the endless formation of matter could not take place. Discussing Plotinus’ understanding of matter, A. H. Armstrong also mentions otherness as an unchangeable attribute of matter:

[A]t the end of Ch. 5 [of the treatise *On the Two Kinds of Matter*], [Plotinus] gives an account of the origin of matter in the intelligible world according to which it is eternally generated from the First, produced by “otherness” which is “the first movement”. This “movement” or “otherness”, the outgoing of *Noûs* from the One, is *ἀόριστος* until it returns upon the One and is informed or delimited (*ὀρίζεται*) by it. It is itself dark, but is illuminated by the First, which is other than it. (Armstrong 1940: 67)

The same is observed in Chakhrukhadze’s poem. Every second segment of internal rhymes appears as the otherness of the first, identical or similar. Its specific features appear only when compared with the first segment in its context.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> “Plotinus’s matter, taken as a notion, is a very simple thing. Its main definition [...] is not it is any specific thing or substance in general. It only indicates that every thing presupposes its environment, its background, its otherness, without which the thing would not be different from anything else, that is, would not have any features and properties, i.e., it would simply be nothing” (Losev 1980: 219).

<sup>8</sup> In Chakhrukhauili and in metrical verse in general, the so-called “progressive” and “regressive” factors operate. These terms were introduced by Yuri Tynianov in his book *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924). With their help, Tynianov analyzed mainly the relationship of metric segments as wholes (as well as rhymed words). When perceiving such segments (for example, feet and lines in metrical verse and also metrically equivalent segments in Chakhrukhadze’s text), the reader has an expectation of the next similar unit. According to Tynianov, this is a progressive (“dynamic-successive”) factor. When this expectation is met, the poem appears as a system. Tynianov calls the relationship of a segment (foot, segment,

Let us clarify what semantic processes occur in Chakhrukhauri's poem.

It is obvious that sounds, i.e. sound matter, which is the basis and precondition for the existence of language and speech, are completely meaningless until they acquire a semiotic function, but potentially contain the possibility of their other existence – transformation into a language, a semiotic system. This potency is uniquely manifested in Chakhrukhauri's poem, where, as a result of the “tight” mutual influence of rhyming (often homonymous) syntagms, they are dissolved and destroyed in sound matter. They become ineffable, semantically amorphous, “dark”, and are not characterized by any semantic clarity or definiteness (the only exception are three stanzas, the meter of which is a sixteen-syllable *shairi*). As a result of the frequent repetition of rhyming expressions, we hear mainly the sound of words and almost do not perceive their meaning. This is a state of constant precarious balance: words at the same time carry and do not carry a semiotic function – they carry it when eliminating verse factors and do not carry it when they appear as structural elements of verse. Such features of the material structure of the verse, of course, are not accidental.

Why did Chakhrukhadze use such a poetic form? As a preliminary hypothesis, we can say that, apparently, the specific features of the formal structure of “Tamariani” were determined by the genre of the work (Ode, panegyric poem), as well as the author's (possibly Neoplatonic) worldview and attitude.

Here, in order to substantiate our hypothesis, it is necessary to take a brief excursion into philosophy, namely, to recall the structure of the Neoplatonic metaphysical world. In Neoplatonism, the hierarchy of the metaphysical world is presented in the following way:

**the One**  
**the Intellect**  
**the Soul**

...if we present this system from above, then the one, being absolute indistinguishability, by self-division and self-separation unfolds its content, first of all in the form of the Intellect, that is, in the form of a divided and single-separate

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rhymed word, line) to the previous segment and the influence on it a regressive (or “dynamic-simultaneous”) factor. Accordingly, in Chakhrukhauri the first word (or group of words) is perceived as an indivisible integrity before the perception of the second rhymed word (or group of words). It is with the help of the second rhymed element that rhyming per se occurs, the purpose of which is to highlight similarity and difference between the rhymed words.



form of all being, and then immerses this Intellect in further division, namely into the self-propelled formation of the Soul. (Losev 1974: 472–473)

At the same time, the One is characterized as unknowable, ineffable, and qualityless. Its definition is possible only in an apophatic way. The Intellect and the Soul, that is, the remaining metaphysical hypostases exist as a result of the spontaneous emanation of the One. The indefinability and ineffability of the One decrease in its lower hypostases.

What language should be used when trying to mystically comprehend the One?

Obviously, this should not be the language of the Intellect, or consciousness (after all, Intellect is below the One in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the world). A certain anti-language is needed that does not have the usual (semiotic and communicative) functions. It must be completely untranslatable, unspeakable, and indefinable.

A similar language is a meaningless, “transrational” language (for example, leveling the meaning of words by repeating them many times). It is also possible to completely exclude language and speech – by silence, but not by silence-thinking (which could return the subject to the sphere of Mind), but by silence-ecstasy, as a way to achieve the One. In poetry, based on the Neoplatonic worldview and with the goal of approaching the One, there should be a clearly expressed tendency to destroy the meaning of words, a tendency toward their desemantisation. A similar tendency, as shown above, is very clearly manifested in “Tamariani”.

The fact is that the main “unspeakable” object of the poem is Queen Tamar, i.e., not any ordinary human, but a special person who became a legend during her lifetime. A panegyric aimed at praising her had to be written in a special language. Such a language could be created by repeated homonymous-tautological-synonymous expressions, causing in the listener a special hypnotic state approaching ecstasy (for the comprehension of the One with the help of ecstasy, see Losev 1980: 230, 379 et passim). Apparently, it was precisely this goal that determined the choice of a specific form by the author of “Tamariani” – one that corresponded to a special purpose.

Analogues of the formal semantic structure of “Tamariani” can be found not only in the literature and philosophy of Christian countries, but also in examples of Islamic poetry whose authors were influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy. Namely, at the end of the 8th century, a mystical movement arose in Islamic countries – Sufism, whose doctrine assigned a significant role to the postulates of Neoplatonic philosophy. Similar trends have been noted in medieval Arab-Persian and Georgian literatures.

In particular, academician Giorgi Tsereteli discovered in one of the maqams of the Arab writer, poet and philologist Al-Hariri a two-line poem identical to the Georgian Chakhrukhauri:

The meter, internal rhyme, and arrangement of rhymes are identical. [...] According to the greatest specialists in Arabic poetics, this form is not original Arabic and is found in Persian and Persian-Jewish poetry. Whatever its origin, there is no doubt about its identity with Chakhrukhauri's. (Tsereteli 1947: 26–27).

Homonymous end rhymes (the so-called “*majams*”) became widespread in 17th- and 18th-century Georgian poems under the influence of Persian Sufi philosophy and poetry. However, if formal techniques have a specific functional purpose in Chakhrukhadze's poem, in the works of Georgian poets of the 17th and 18th centuries rhymes serve only as artistic decoration and do not fulfill any additional functions.

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