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Ethnos and Ethnic Self-Consciousness in the Archaic Period

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ABSTRACT. Early ethnogenesis may be characterized as a spontaneous process going on within the area of distribution of a common culture defined by collective, unconscious thinking, which is revealed in the anthropological, linguistic, social, and technical unity of human groups.

Ethnoculture took shape under conditions of co-existence of people on a single territory. Their spoken language, culture of everyday life, dressing style, folk medicine, and customs were formed in this environment.

However, the unity of people must have been determined by the belief in their genetic unity, the existence of a common forefather and self-identification with him. On this basis, the archaic society was aware of its belonging to a certain cultural homogeneous unity.

Ethnic self-consciousness was the determining force of social actions of archaic society, it caused the formation of ethnocultural and ethnopsychological systems. In these systems the community of goals, interests, necessary norms of behaviour were recorded, it was understood that they had a common territory and language, shared a common past, had common ancestors, that they belonged to the same people. *© 2007 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

Key words*: ethnos, ethnoculture, ethnic self-consciousness.*

In the archaic period the process of the formation of culture or unity of culture is complex and ambiguous. It was in this period that more or less large and significant human groups took shape. First of all, they united in order to satisfy common requirements. They were bound to their habitat due to economic interests, rather than political ones.

The co-existence of people under similar conditions resulted in the emergence of large, homogeneous, standardized cultures, comprising smaller local ones. At that time this process cannot have been influenced by a political factor. In a traditional situation a minor culture could not have striven to achieve a privileged position and try to disseminate its own culture.

Social groups living under similar cultural conditions in a small geographical area must have been striving for the formation of an anthropological, linguistic, social and technical union. Such relations resulted in the formation of a homogeneous zone of concentration of technical and cultural traits, i.e. an ethnos, undergoing constant changes. In the archaic society the process of the formation of characteristic ethnic features took a long time. The formation of ethnos required political stability, which, undoubtedly, was hard to achieve in the period under discussion [1:326-327].

Ethnic groups, inhabiting vast territories, which found themselves integrated in a comparatively friendly zone, managed to preserve and maintain their identity. But if the balance was upset and strong, unassimilated currents penetrated into the group, the latter lost its individuality and became extinct. Such a death does not mean physical annihilation, but the loss by the people of their originality [2:452-453].

In the archaic period ethnogenesis was primarily revealed in labour and was manifested in such common activities of people as war campaigns, overcoming internal obstacles, taking part in major construction work, etc. In similar cases the unity of people was conditioned by complementary processes. More active forces were selected and in this choice unconscious liking or an-

tipathy played a decisive role [3:18].

The voluntary union of human groups or their joining others must have also been connected with such factors as fear and compulsion, whereas a voluntary union with others was closely interwoven with external factors – both with fear and hope [1:35].

Thus, early ethnogenesis may be characterized as a spontaneous process, going on within the area of distribution of a common culture, conditioned by collective, unconscious thinking, and revealed in the anthropological, linguistic, social and technical union of human groups. The formation of such unions may have both voluntary and compulsory character [4:190].

Within the boundaries of the dissemination of homogeneous culture, a territory permanently populated by a human community took shape from the very beginning. The uniting of people within local territorial borders facilitated ethnic integration, due to which this territory turned into an ethnic space.

It was here, on this territory, where the life of the social group went on with its everyday traditions and customs being developed, that a human microcosm took form. Here man began to interpret and develop the world culturally, to create conceptual images of the powers and objects active in the universe. The cultural development of the world by man begins when he succeeds in the creation of "a conceptual model" of the universe, to record the surrounding phenomena in his "own conceptual vocabulary", i.e. to connect objects with the language [5:138-147].

The native spoken language was a highly significant factor in the process of development of ethnos and ethnic self-consciousness. The spoken language was common to the whole ethnos, clearly differentiating it from other ethnic groups; the language was a major force, it conditioned relations and mutual understanding among the members of the archaic society, guaranteed the preservation of the ethnocultural information and handing it down to the coming generations, and demonstrated the original features of the ethnos [6:90-91].

Human consciousness or myth, as a way of symbolic thinking, a form of the world perception, a great force acting in society and conditioning the way of life of archaic man developed within this traditional environment [7:21-33]. Myth embraced man's entire mentality; it was revealed in everything, be it a living being or an object, in every activity of people and in their speech [8:227].

The world perception of a social group defined the character of the mental field typical of archaic culture in which its characteristic social and ontological categories were taking shape; so were the social-cultural mechanisms which regulated labour processes and labour division, determined the norms of behaviour, justice, sequence of observation of religious feasts and performance of various rituals; these mechanisms also established prohibitions and a complex system of taboos. Myth also determined the archaic man's mentality, which was an integral part of the personified world and a direct participant of the processes going on in nature.

It may be said that in the archaic period culture emerged as a force of major importance, which united people. Culture was the foundation of this union and the most significant feature expressing this unity. Culture formed definite types of peoples and determined their image [4:185].

Each ethnos, like any individual, has its own history. Ethnos, like any human being, is born, grows up, reaches maturity and eventually dies. It follows therefore that both man and ethnos have biographies of their own, impressed in their memory. M.Mamardashvili writes that the essence of the consciousness of archaic man, i.e. myth, first of all, was the remembrance of the past, of the general, rather than concrete events which took place in the past, whereas memory is "the machine" which regulates the ability of having such remembrance. Man living in the mythos world evolved in such a manner that he always remembered his origin and ancestors [9:58].

And, indeed, myth as a form of symbolic thinking of man, was the only means of comprehending and realizing the universe. It also included the history of a social group because it always furnished information about the past, the sacral period of a tremendous significance, when the world had been created and the laws of human life had been established.

In the cosmogonic epoch the mythos ancestors of man, the heroes possessing the culture, were active. They fought against chaos, at the same time being engaged in cultural activities; they created culture, tilled land, farmed livestock, were competent craftsmen and handed down their skills to the coming generations. They introduced social order, spiritual values, built temples, established religious feasts and rituals.

Therefore, the mythos or sacral period was a treasury of all the spiritual powers of man, as the methods of work, knowledge, customs and traditions, justice were created in the sacral epoch and stemmed from the wisdom of the forefathers. Hence, the life of the archaic society was determined by the traditions established in the past and was based on the belief that their ancestors had behaved in that way.

So, the life of man in the profane time did not have its own value. The reality man lived in - everything he did - was determined by the model created in the mythos world. It was necessary to establish permanent relations with the sacral world and man achieved it by means of various rituals.

Through performing rituals man moved from one system of time and space into another. Rituals breathed

life into the mythos epoch, equated the events that had taken place then to a particular moment of man's profane life, in this way establishing links with the sacral epoch [10:116-117].

A ritual always had a sacral model through which man reactivated the mythical time directly touching his past - the holiness of birth and the way of life established in the past. The ritual put in the foreground man's sacral values, confirming that man had adopted all the socially valuable activities established by his forefathers [11:240-294].

This sacral past belonged only to the members of a definite social group and was important only for them; the realization by the social group of the past that was common to everybody also meant the realization of their unity. An individual perceived himself or herself as a member of a definite community of people, because all the members of this community by their origin were linked with their common ancestor who had lived in the sacral epoch. But it is also clear that here they did not mean the genetic links that existed actually but people's notions of them.

It should also be noted that archaic consciousness ruled out any interest in man as an individual or personality. In the archaic society an individual was unable to separate himself from the social group mentality being collective there. Man's accepting the values common to all meant his fusion with the spiritual unity.

Thus, it may be said that in the process of the formation of ethnos and ethnic consciousness a major role was played by the fact that there existed a common territory, spoken language common to all, and customs, traditions and rituals determined by the common mentality.

Ethnoculture evolved among people living together on a common territory, on the basis of common knowledge, experience and a certain social solidarity. Members of the archaic society had a common economy and fought together against common enemies. Various kinds of social relations were established among the people. The way of their everyday life, dressing style, folk medicine, specific features of their cuisine, various customs and traditions took shape under such conditions.

However, the unity of people must have been determined by the belief in their genetic unity, the existence of a common forefather and self-identification with him. On this basis the social group comprehended its belonging to a definite cultural homogenic community.

Ethnic consciousness was the force that determined the social activities of the archaic society; it conditioned the formation of a people's ethnocultural and ethnopsychological systems and fashioned their characteristic features. These systems included the unity of the goals and interests of the ethnos, the obligatory norms of behaviour and common mental features; they were well aware of the fact that they lived on a common territory, had a common language, shared a common past, they had common ancestors and belonged to one and the same people.

This is precisely the ethnic consciousness which, as is believed, is formed in such spheres of spiritual culture as myth, language as well as customs and traditions. Their joint functioning conditions the unity of the way of life, characteristic of the ethnos and the unity of mental processes [6:13].

The great importance of these factors expressing people's spirituality and unity was realized in the remote past. The evidence of Herodotus is noteworthy: during the Graeco-Persian war the Athenians refused to conclude any agreement with the Persians, because the Athenians were Hellenes and "the Hellenes have the same blood and the same language. Their temples of gods, sacrificing rituals, customs and traditions are also common". Here we deal with the criterion of the ethnic-genetic, linguistic and cultural union. The longer and the stronger the unity of these parameters was revealed, the higher was the level of the people's unity and originality [12:20].

The ethnos, its ethnocultural and ethnopsychological features, took shape in the process of constant relationship with other ethnic groups, each ethnic group always trying to preserve its originality and striving for self-assertion.

In order to realize its originality and defend its own interests, it was necessary for the ethnos that opposition "we – they" become active within the group, as only the awareness that there are "them" evokes the wish for self-determination (13.8). That is why it is assumed that the opposition "we – they" provided the basis of relations between various ethnic groups [14:108].

The ethnos' perception of itself as a community implied becoming aware of its own activities, aspirations and interests; it was the foundation of the originality and the ability of preserving its culture. Through protecting and preserving the ethnic union it was possible to save the territory the ethnos resided on, its spoken language, the customs and traditions established by the forefathers, to keep to the traditional ways of life and to maintain the spiritual values making for the originality of the ethnos.

Here I would like to touch upon such an important problem as the self-designation of an ethnic group. The presence of the ethnarch and the ethnonym attests to the ethnic group's quite conscious awareness of its unity and it is one of the most significant features of the ethnos.

In my opinion, such an understanding of the ethnos emerged at a relatively late stage of development. For ethnic processes to take a more rapid course and, what is more important, to acquire a more conscious, target-

oriented character, society has to achieve a higher stage of its development. A state must be formed as a guarantee of the country's political stability. A definite policy should be carried out, which will intensify the people's self-identification, work out a set policy towards the outer world, inspire the people for consolidation and worshipping their common deities, demand respect for their ancestors and observation of the traditions established by them.

The historic memory of ancient peoples always kept their sacral history, which was viewed as "the Golden Age". The Sumerian mythos reflects the beginning of the construction process of Sumerian society, when the institution of "kingship" (*nam-lugal*) descends from heaven to the town of Eridu, alternately continuing its way to different towns. The Sumerian towns were ruled by half-legendary kings. In Ancient Egypt the memory of the sacral epoch, when the country was ruled by demigods and half-heroes, was preserved [16:47, 101]. Even at the peak of their might, the Romans were proud of the fact that their genealogy began from the Trojan Aeneas. The Greeks considered Mycenaean culture to be the symbol of their genetic and cultural unity.

As the Greek sources indicate, the quite differentiated Colchian world was united by the belief that the Colchians were descendants of legendary king Аелтes [12:29-30]. But in the Hellenistic period, in the Colchian world proper, the myth of the Colchians' genealogy emerged; according to it, the ethnarch of the Colchians', Colchi by name, was a direct descendant of the local deity Phasis.

In *Kartlis Tskhovreba* ("Life of Georgia") *Kartlosiani* is an ethnic term denoting descendants of the eponym *Kartlos*, blood relations, belonging to the same tribe [16:406]. But for Leonti Mroveli blood relationship was no longer of decisive importance. According to the reality of medieval Georgia, anyone who spoke the Georgian language, shared Georgian culture, bore the national Georgian memory and served the welfare of the Georgian people could be considered to be a Georgian. *Kartveli* (Georgian) had a national meaning and first of all referred to the unity of the Kartvelian tribes [17:341-343].

ისტორია და ფილოლოგია

ეთნოსი და ეთნიკური თვითცნობიერება არქაულ ხანაში

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიკოს დ. მუსხელიშვილის მიერ)

ადრეული ეთნოგენეზი შეიძლება დახასიათდეს როგორც კოლექტიური, არაცნობიერი აზროვნებით განსაზღვრული ერთიანი კულტურის გავრცელების არეალში მიმდინარე სპონტანური პროცესი, რომელიც ხალხთა ჯგუფების ანთროპოლოგიურ, ენობრივ, სოციალურ, ტექნიკურ გაერთიანებაში ვლინდება.

ეთნოკულტურა ყალიბდებოდა ერთიან ტერიტორიაზე ხალხის თანაცხოვრების პირობებში. ამ გარემოში იქმნებოდა და ვითარდებოდა მათი სალაპარაკო ენა, ყოფითი კულტურა, ჩაცმულობის სტილი, ხალხური მედიცინა, წეს-ჩვეულებები.

მაგრამ ხალხთა ერთობის განმსაზღვრელი უნდა ყოფილიყო რწმენა მათი გენეტიკური ერთიანობისა, საერთო ზეწინაპრის, საერთო-საკრალური წარსულის არსებობა და თვითიდენტიფიკაცია მასთან. ამის საფუძველზე აცნობიერებდა სოციუმი თავის კუთვნილებას გარკვეულ კულტურულ ჰომოგენურ ერთობასთან.

ეთნიკური თვითცნობიერება წარმოადგენდა სოციუმის სოციალურ მოქმედებათა განმსაზღვრელ ძალას, განაპირობებდა ეთნოკულტურული და ეთნოფსიქოლოგიური სისტემების ჩამოყალიბებას. ამ სისტემებში დადასტურებული იყო ეთნოსის მიზნების, ინტერესების ერთიანობა, ქცევის აუცილებელი ნორმები, გაცნობიერებული იყო ის, რომ მათ ჰქონდათ საერთო საცხოვრებელი ტერიტორია, ენა, საერთო წარსული, ჰყავდათ საერთო წინაპრები, რომ ისინი ეკუთვნოდნენ ერთ ხალხს.

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