

## At the Origin of Caucasian and European Cultural Relations

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The process of cultural exchange between Europe and Caucasus began in the remote past but it can not be restricted by chronological frames because it was a longstanding and multilateral process which lasted for millenniums.

The history attached a special role to the eastern and south-eastern part of the Black Sea region owing to geographic location and rich natural resources. A unified cultural environment was formed in this part and its advancement was promoted by the fact that the ancient centers of agriculture and metallurgy were established here. These are two spheres of economical activity which represent the most significant factors of the development of the mankind. In this period economical activity and world outlook made up a syncretic unity. Therefore, the high level of economical activity on its part promoted the establishment of a developed mythological-religious system which is also an integral part of culture.

In the mentioned region sorts of various grains and wheat are archeologically discovered. The ancient tilling and other agricultural tools, pits for storing grain, corn crusher as well as linguistic analysis of names of cultivated plants prove that Caucasians were one of the first to found agriculture which is certified by the Greek name of Caucasus – Georgia – the Land of Farmers.

It has been scientifically proved that the first metallurgists came to Europe from outside and Caucasians were among them. This is proved both by archeological material and terms denominating metals. Names of iron and copper are borrowed from Khatian and Kartvelian languages. They must have been originated from the names of the tribes which produced them (khalkos>khalubs=Khaliboi; ha-walkina>kinos=Kyani or Chani tribes).

Following the III millennium on a number of Central and Eastern European monuments close relations with cultures of Caucasus is observed. Transcaucasian metallurgic import is carried out in the European areas and the European zone of CircumPontium. At the same time the spectral analysis of some bronze items has shown that the metal is of local origin and it has a Transcaucasian form and appearance. It points to the fact that population and among them those who worked on metal migrated to Europe from Caucasus. They took with them mythological-religious concepts together with professional knowledge.

Culture was diffused to Europe from the Black Sea region via various channels but the main road seems to have passed through the Mediterranean Sea basin and the Balkan peninsula which to a certain point functioned as an extension tube from the point of view of economical-cultural convergence of Europe and the Black Sea region. Later, following the 8-6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. when Greek settlements appeared on the Eastern coast of the Black Sea, the European culture intensely moved to Caucasus.

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In the report we refer to those samples of mythological images the comparative research of which makes the relations of peoples residing in Caucasus and Europe visible yet in the process of establishment of mythological-religious systems. One of such samples is a well-known plot of a hero fighting with a Serpent according to which the Serpent is an evil creature and governs the element of water. The Serpent is slain by the Hero who is often the God of Thunder and he rescues the mankind from destruction. This is a classical model of the myth of Serpent fighting which appeared in the Indo-European culture comparatively later. It was preceded by an older, different archetypal plot fragments of which are saved in the Caucasian folklore and Minor Asian (Hittite-Hattie) rituals. The Serpent was a significant mythos image in them which personified abundance and functioned as a unifier of the universe.

The Serpent is expressed as a syncretic creature which has a body of a whale (a big fish) with a snake's tail and wings. Semantics of these attributes shows the connection of a Serpent to Earth, water and sky which means possession of knowledge related to all these spheres in the mythos language. Such significance is emphasized by the state of the Serpent described in the Caucasian folklore: It is lying on the top of a mountain at the precipice and is perceived as a visible border and unifier of the three universes. Serpent is the creature of earth and is associated with primeval forces. It possesses a special knowledge and thus is closely connected to the sphere of mantic (fortune-telling and oracle).

The Serpent transferred its wisdom and force to the hero grown up by it. This motive later appeared in the legends of the Serpent Eater and magic fairytales of European peoples (the Serpent Eaters comprehend the language of every living creature). The Serpent used to give to the Hero grown up by him a chain shirt – armor which made him invulnerable as a present. Apart from it, sacral signs used to appear on his shoulder: sun, moon and cross. Seemingly, it corresponded to the hierarchic steps of association with mystery.

It is appropriate to mention here a legendary information of Greek historians: “Serpent's teeth are sown in Colchis from which invincible heroes grow up from armored enemy”.

In order to obtain such wisdom and signs ensuing from it the Hero had to go in the depth of the Serpent (or its possessions). One of the firm details of the plot of Serpent Fighting comes from here – the Serpent swallows the Hero which comes reincarnated from its abdomen which is sometimes expressed in his external serpentine signs. This moment was directly reflected in the rituals of initiation in which matured young boys participated so that to become members of the masculine society later. The rituals were held in serpent-shape huts built nearby the settlement. The young men came out of there reincarnated in the sense of the second birth.

In the same context the dialogue between the King and the Serpent included in the Hittite royal ritual is read from where it becomes clear that the Sea Serpent, i.e. the whale (big fish) brings the throne and power to the King.

Based on the abovementioned it is not surprising that there was a strong cult of a Serpent in Caucasus which is proved by the abundance of megalithic figures – whales discovered in this area. On the back of some of these whales a fleece (sheep skin) is expressed which functioned as the patron of the country and the royal power according to the Caucasian and Hittite-Hattie mythology and so the fleece hung on the tree was

specially protected as the symbol of deity. Accordingly, the serpent which protected the fleece in the legend of Argonauts was not invented by Greeks but is based on the Caucasian and Minor Asian tradition.

It seems that the motive of the serpent killing was conceived in the archetypical plot. This could be carried out only by the hero introduced to its strength who was punished for treason. In the course of time change of mythological-religious notions caused inversion of roles and a classical model of Serpent Fighting was established. Due to the fact that the Serpent was attached the status of the enemy of the universe and the mankind, his killer won a heroic glory.

Certain similarity with archetypical plot occurs in the story of conquest of the oracle at Delphi by Apollo in the Greek mythology. Initially Delphi belonged to the Python borne by the Earth – Gea. In some sources it is referred to as Dolphin (Whale) the name of which was given to Delphi. Python means abyss, the bottom of the earth in Greek which is also associated with the primeval knowledge coming from the earth. Apollo killed Python and appropriated the oracle but the infuriated Earth confused the oracles and they were not able to prophet until Apollo expiated the sin. He spent nine years in the underworld for purification and only after that he became the ruler of Delphos. Having spent time in the underworld Apollo associated himself with Pythonian nature and actually he substituted Python which sometimes was reflected in his appearance. One of Homer's hymns says that Cretans were sailing to Pylos and Apollo appeared before them: "he sprang upon their swift ship, like a dolphin in shape, and lay there, a great and awesome monster".

Apollo himself spoke through the Pythia, the name originated from Python. Hypnotized from incense and smoke she used to fall to the earth from the tripod and prophet at the precipice which reminds us of the state of Caucasian serpent lying at the precipice.

Possibly, this plot or its separate motives spread to the Western Europe from Greece. Archetypical plot is not seen there but its rudiments have remained in the attributes and appearance of the hero fighting with the serpent. For instance, in the German epos Siegfried's body is covered with a hard horny skin which makes it invincible. The serpent fighter hero symbolically puts on the serpent's skin which points to the fact of his being in the depth of this creature. Semantically this armor equals to the chain shirt presented to the hero by the serpent.

St. George is the whale fighter as well and in the Christian iconography he is represented in the scaly armor of fish (whale). Metal plates are located in the form of fish or snake scales on it. Ornaments of this type are met on Caucasian bronze items and are called "fish-scale" or "fish-back" ornaments. Such an armor was used by Romans and must have spread in another countries from there but its mythological semantics had already been forgotten by that time.

Another example I want to focus on is about the old Europe custom, namely the knighting ceremony which is semantically close to one Caucasian tradition – the ritualistic function of Colchian-Kobanian sickles. Apart from being used as a weapon they were insignias of power and association with a deity. The location of the sickle was focused on in some tombs. It laid along the right shoulder of the deceased with the blade side and with the handle down. Such a position of the sickle corresponds to their application in the ritual which is also expressed by the cult term in Caucasus –

“shoulder christening”. This term is used to denominate the ordaining of the primary cult servant in the mountainous part of Eastern Georgia – Khevisberi (the community leader of mountaineers) though a sickle is not used in this ritual and his forehead, shoulder and hand are anointed with the blood of the animal to be sacrificed (in the same religious system there were people on whose shoulder or hand the deity used to sit and travel on the earth). The origin of this ritual is much older and its name is associated with the visible revelation of the divine light. A pagan priest or an adherent used to stand facing the east. The sickle on his shoulder reflected the beam of the rising sun and the adherent’s hand and shoulder were illuminated. Unlike ordinary sickles ritualistic ones were made of an alloy which reflected light well. The sickle had such a form that the beam on its handle left an impression of a moving flow of light. It was perceived as the “live light” of deity which may be considered divine benefit mentioned in orphic motets.

The mystical content of the ritual implied the wisdom of the adherent’s consciousness. Putting the sickle on the shoulder meant rejection of the personal, giving one’s own interests up. Following this the person belonged to the deity and was placed at His service.

The old European tradition of knighting was of the same semantic content. The king touched the shoulder of the knight-warrior knelt before him with a sword which equaled to the ritual of “shoulder christening”. From that day the knighted person gave up his interests and had to dedicate his shoulder, i.e. battle-craft and all his capabilities to the loyal service to the king and protection of his power. As the king and reign is blessed by the Lord it meant the service to the Lord. Other examples can be indicated in the relations of mythic-religious systems of Europe and the Black Sea region which have gone beyond the limits of one culture, acquired a universal form and today represent the signs of integration of these cultures.