

Linguistics and Culture

ქართველ მთიელთა რელიგიური აზროვნების სინკრეტიზაციის დინამიკა (ხევსურული რწმენა–წარმოდგენები)

ლუდუშაური თინათინ
საქართველოს უნივერსიტეტი

კვლევის ძირითადი მიზანია რელიგიური აზროვნების ორი ტიპის–
ტრადიციული (არქაული) და თანამედროვე (ქრისტიანული) შერწყ-
მის, გადაკვეთისა და კონტამინაცია/სინკრეტიზაციის ელემენ-
ტების გამოვლენა და განზოგადება, რაც ნათლად იკვეთება XIX
საუკუნის გერმანელი მეცნიერი–მოგზაურების (კ.ჰანი, გ.რადე,
ნ.ზაიდლიცი) მიერ კავკასიაში მოპოვებულ და დაფიქსირებულ
ეთნოგრაფიულ მასალაში. ამ ტიპის მონაცემები გერმანელ მეც-
ნიერთა შრომებში საკმარისი რაოდენობითაა და შესწავლისთვის
საინტერესო ობიექტს წარმოადგენს, რამდენადაც ერთი მხრივ ეს
უშუალოდ გერმანელ ავტორთა მიერ XIX საუკუნის შუა ხანებში
კავკასიაში, კერძოდ საქართველოს მთიანეთში მოპოვებული ორი-
გინალური მასალაა და, მეორე მხრივ საქართველოში ამ მონაცე-
მების უდიდესი ნაწილის მეცნიერული ანალიზი დღემდე არ
გაკეთებულა. მათი შედარება ქართველი ეთნოგრაფების ანალო-
გიურ მასალასთან ნათელყოფს, რომ ამ რეგიონის მოსახლეობის
რელიგიური აზროვნების სფეროში პრინციპული ცვლილებები
პრაქტიკულად არ მომხდარა და სხვაობები თავს იჩენენ იმ დონე-
ზე, როდესაც ისინი არ კარგავენ კავშირს ინვარიანტულ სქემასთან
და შეიძლება განვიხილოთ მხოლოდ ძირითადი ვერსიების ფორ-
მით. სავარაუდოა, რომ რელიგიური სინკრეტიზმი, რომელიც
მუდავნდება ადგილობრივ წარმოდგენებში, რელიგიური აზროვ-
ნების თანდათანობით სახე ცვლილებას უნდა შეესაბამებოდეს და,
ამ თვალსაზრისით, ხევსურული რწმენა–წარმოდგენები ერთ-ერთ
უძველეს ქართულ რელიგიურ არქეტაპად შეიძლება ჩაითვალოს.

Syncretization Dynamics of the Religious Thinking of Georgian Mounteneers (Khevsur Beliefs)

Gudushauri Tinatin
The University of Georgia

The worldview of the Georgian people, its beliefs, views, traditions, and cultural layers reflecting the influence of foreign cultures and universal values are clearly manifested in the ethnic culture of the nation. In this context, the uniqueness of religious beliefs of the Khevsurs - the inhabitants of a mountainous region in Eastern Georgia - is of special interest. It should be mentioned that this region has always had its own original culture, traditions, myths, rituals and ceremonies. A system of syncretic religious beliefs and variants of "popular Christianity" (Kandelaki, 1998, 42) have always been dominant here. This is primarily due to the fact that in the mountainous regions there was a kind of preservation of the remnants of the pre-Christian and the early Christian religions, which is the result of a certain reticence, the traditional character and resistance to the process of historical change.

The main objective of the study is to identify and synthesize the elements of connection, intersection, and syncretization of two types of religious thinking - the traditional (archaic) and the contemporary (Christian) one - which is clearly seen in the Caucasian ethnographic material of German scientists and travelers of XIX century (K. Hahn, R. Erkert, G. Radde, N. Seidlitz).

Materials of this nature are available in large quantities in German ethnographic studies and are an interesting object for study inasmuch as they were collected by the authors themselves in the Caucasus, particularly in the mountainous regions of Georgia in the middle of the XIX century, and for the most part have not been subjected to scientific analysis.

The analysis and juxtaposition of this material with the analogous studies by Georgian authors can lead to several conclusions.

First, it should be noted that Georgian mountaineers have a deep faith in the existence of a close relationship between this and the other worlds. The afterworld is virtually an idealized reflection of the real life, though with some specific features.

The second thing to emphasize is the perception of the universe as a whole, which is represented by the three levels each having a corresponding coloring; the great influence of this view on the funeral ritual as well as the existence of the idea of the eternal life and that of the sacral

center, implemented through the hearth, the heaven tower, a sacred poplar and a banner.

Third, it is assumed that the overall picture of the afterworld, a list of all sorts of crimes and punishments reflects the degree of socialization of the Khevsur society and points to the structurally weak and differentiated patriarchal community with a well-developed system of kinship, in which the remains of pre-Christian and early Christian religions have been mothballed.

And finally, taking into account the existence of pre-Christian religious elements in the Khevsur beliefs, on the one hand, and a certain resistance of the region to historical change, on the other hand, we may assume that religious syncretism, which manifests itself in local beliefs, may correspond to a gradual modification of religious thought, and that Khevsur beliefs are one of the oldest Georgian religious archetypes.

Since ancient times, a human could only live in a defined and a well-ordered universe (Eliade, 1995, 135). Traditional religious beliefs actually represent the view of the world order. The perception of the world order in the Khevsur religious thought takes a significant place in the ethnographic material collected by the German scholars. From this data, we may say that the universe is one whole for the Khevsurs, represented by the three cosmic layers or levels, each having a corresponding color (black, red, white) and is divided into the mortal life and the afterlife. This division and the link between the mortal life and the afterlife are crucial to the Khevsursian outlook. The Khevsurs believe that after death, life continues in the other world. In their view, the transition to the other world happens through a narrow bridge, constructed over a tar river, at the end of which judges sit and make decisions on the destiny of the dead by sending them to heaven or hell. The hell is represented with a dark closed quadrangle.

To the Khevsurs, heaven is a multi-storey white tower reaching the sky. It is brightly illuminated by the sun, next to the tower there grows a poplar that reaches the sky. Our attention was drawn to two things - the source of light and the role of the poplar. We believe that this may be a sign of the existence of a developed solar cult in the past, on the one hand, and the special significance of the sacral tree, on the other hand. The dead in the afterlife are allocated different cells; there is even a system called "mghebrebi," or "greeters" who are responsible for bringing the soul of the deceased to his/her cell called "antabi." The souls are placed on different floors of the tower in accordance with the measure of their guilt and are either in a bright or dim light; the very top of the tower is a place for innocent children, who play there. This corroborates our assumption that sometimes guilty people go to heaven, though they will certainly be punished with a dim light. This picture of heaven is in fact repeated in all ethnographic materials of Georgian authors, although sometimes the cri-

terion for the allocation of souls is the age – the elder are placed on the first floor and so forth; the same happens in case of the lighting. We tend to believe that this picture coincides with the potential of a person to sin - the lowest in childhood and the highest - in elder ages.

Symbolism related to the tree of life is highlighted in the picture of heaven. First, it takes the form of a white tower. It is known that a tower, a mountain, a tree are cosmological structures that have signs of universality. This impression is further enhanced by the poplar growing nearby. It seems that in the Khevsur heaven the tower and the tree are the symbols of the world axis passing through the sacral center and uniting the three levels of the universe, which represents the idea of an eternal life. The three-tier and three-color perception of the universe is a phenomenon characteristic of the Khevsur religious thinking. The special significance of such a view is displayed in the funeral traditions of Khevsurs. Typically, the deceased is dressed in three shirts of different colors - white, blue and red – the colors corresponding to the basic colors of the layers of the universe.

According to the evidence of the German scholars, the attitude towards the deceased occupies an important place. Attention is drawn to the fact that despite the beautiful picture of the heaven of Khevsurs, they are still afraid of death. This fear led to the emergence of a distinctive tradition associated with the deceased. This tradition does not permit a person to die at home - a dying person is taken out into the court. However if death does happen at home, the house is purified with a special ritual, as it is believed that the soul is pure, while the remains are putrid. To take care of the dead, there are the so-called "narevebi" or young people who are responsible for dressing the deceased; for deceased women, there are young ladies who serve as "narevebi." Because of their contact with the dead, "narevebi" become putrid. Therefore, according to the tradition, they stay in the house of the deceased for 6 or 7 days and bathe in the river every day. After the last bath, they are finally cleansed from putridity. The German scholar G. Merzbacher sees in this the influence of the laws of Moses (Merzbacher, 1901, 27). We think that this is most probably associated with pyrolatry, in particular, with the idea of putridity of the dust and cleaning means mentioned in the "Avesta."

A special significance of funeral wakes for the religious thinking of the Khevsurs should be pointed out. This is evidenced by the tradition of funeral repasts given while the deceased is still alive. This was usually done by lonely people who were not sure that after their death someone would arrange a funeral repast for them.

Mediators (mesulete) play a great role in relations with the other world. For the most part, mediators are women and girls. They communicate with the souls of the deceased and pass their wishes and predictions on to their relatives. If a child of a Khevsur falls ill, the cause of the

sickness is determined by mesulete. She tells the family if the cause of the disease comes from the deceased, that is, if the latter wants the child to be given his or her name. In this case, if the child is under 3, his or her name is changed. The mesulete also tells the family of the deceased what dishes the family must serve at the wake. The mediators must keep clean and sacrifice a sheep to a sanctuary 2-3 times a year. They do not charge for their service and are respected by people.

To sum up, the comparison of the German ethnographic data with related materials by Georgian authors shows that despite some changes, the religious beliefs of the Khevsurs always kept in touch with the invariant pattern of "popular Christianity," and can only be considered in terms of its basic versions.

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