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## **Identity Markers in the Georgian Narrative Sources of the Middle Centuries (Historical-Anthropological Analysis)**

*The Article deals with the issue of revealing the identity defining markers in the Georgian narrative sources of the middle centuries (“The Life of Georgians” and hagiographic works). Main characteristics, considered to be important according to the Georgian historical material from the points of view of determining “us” group belonging and identifying distinctness of one ethnicity from the other ones, have been highlighted. The point of view stating that the identified markers are in compliance with the attributive and interactive paradigms of ethnicity, has been expressed.*

*Keywords: Georgia, Middle Centuries, narrative sources, “The life of Georgians“, ethnicity.*

In our modern, global world, as well as in the process of intercultural communication, the problem of cultural and ethnic identity, (i.e. identification of humans with certain a culture) is becoming increasingly significant. Therefore, analysis and clarification of the essence of identity is one of the most important and pressing issues in the social science and humanities. Today the terms ethnicity and ethnic identity are widely used and generally imply human understanding of one's belonging to any group. This allows humans to identify their own place in the socio-cultural sphere and feel confident in the universe, more precisely, the mentioned terms are used to describe human self-consciousness. Due to the complexity of this issue, scholars are divided when defining the identity phenomenon; from the point of view some authors, only significant marker/markers are identifiable, however, we can identify some unity across significant markers that to a large extent conditions the molding of ethnic identity. Hence, the mentioned markers can be considered to be of an ethnic nature. The markers of the mentioned type are:

- A.** Collectively shared idea of the group members about a common language, a common tangible and spiritual culture, common territorial and historical origins;
- B.** Politically determined opinions on the homeland and special institutions such as statehood;
- C.** The sense of difference or deep apprehension of the idea that the fact of one's belonging to a particular group conditions the specificity of the pattern of solidarity and common activities;
- D.** Compatibility of social and cultural borders, "our" and "their" opinions on the existence of the other group represent the issues of paramount importance.

Since ancient times humankind has been striving for the sense of living his life in a well-arranged and organized world and naturally he has been approaching the values of his own ethnos that are tested in time and most reliable and understandable for him. As a result, the sense of intergroup solidarity and unity is becoming more and more potent. Due to this very fact humankind views itself as a part of the unity giving him value orientations needed to orientate in the universe. For this purpose, he is to voluntarily share the elements of consciousness, taste, customs, moral standards, value systems and other means of relations applicable and dominating in the given society. Adopting the standards of the social lifestyle of the group gives an organized and predictable nature to human life.

According to majority of scientists, ethnicity or ethnic identity is a universal phenomenon implying the universal form of expression of loyalty with respect to the culture of one's own people. However, characteristics of ethnic groups cannot be reduced to

the sum of cultural characteristics only. In other words, ethnicity is a form of social organization of cultural differences identified by fundamental links to other cultures, social and political unities, including state unities.

Three paradigms for the identification of ethnicity are considered more or less recognized in modern scholarship:

- attributive (as the quality of group);
- subjective-symbolic (ethnicity as ethnic identity);
- interactive (ethnicity as intergroup relations)

According to the first paradigm, ethnicity is viewed as an aspect of the demonstration of the cultural qualities that create the basis of formation of unity (language, ethnonym, historic memory, peculiarities of tangible culture, rituals, behavioral patterns etc.).

The Subjective-symbolic form of demonstration of ethnicity is viewed by an individual as an aspect of the sense of belonging to a certain (reference) group. Such identity is molded on the basis of understanding of origin, tradition, values, intergeneration inheritance of cultures.

The Interactive paradigm views ethnicity at the level of dichotomic scheme – “we”-“they”, i.e. ethnicity is a group characteristic demonstrated by comparison of the “ours” with the “not-ours.” In such a case cultural differences are thought to be significant constituents of what is perceived to be important, valuable and socially relevant.

In this very context we would like to view the opinions about Georgians as an ethnic unity depicted in the Georgian medieval historic sources and define to which ethnicity paradigms these markers correspond.

*A preliminary hypothesis concerning the issue can be developed this way:*

*Identity markers which according to the Georgian medieval narrative sources are considered to be significant for defining the ethnicity of Georgians should primarily represent an intersection of attributive and subjective/symbolic paradigms of ethnicity. However, the advantage of one of the paradigms may be outlined and/or it may appear that the idea of the medieval Georgians concerning ethnic belonging practically corresponds to all the three paradigms of demonstration of ethnicity and is marked by the tendency of variability of dominant paradigms considering the epoch and the political situation.*

The Georgian Chronicles not only provides us with the rich material and presents the idea of the Georgian society of the early and developed medieval period about nationality/ethnicity but also offers the whole concept regarding this issue. According to this concept, the ethno-cultural image of a Georgian individual comprises the following components: common origin, common language and territory (borders), confession (religion) and common historic past (historic memory).

### *Common origin*

According to The Georgian Chronicles, a common origin implies origination first from Targamos, and afterwards - from Kartlos. All the descendants of Kartlos are Georgians. Therefore, national identity is based on common origin, i.e., blood relations. To denominate this, the work offers a special term outlining origination of Georgians from Kartlos, i.e. their blood relations – “relative of Georgians”, “Georgian by relative.” By this sign, descendants of Kartlos differ from other “relatives”, for example: “Ovsetian by relative”, “Persian by relative.”

At the same time, all Georgians are not descendants of Kartlos. Unlike “Georgian by relative” and descendant of Kartlos, where blood relations are brought to the forefront, the name “Georgian” accentuated the place of origin. It has a much wider context than just a unity of one family – Georgian means a resident of Kartli as a state, regardless of “relationship”, however it also implies “descendant of Kartlos” (Berdzenishvili, 1975).

For example, in the narration of the conversion of Kartli, the following is depicted: “There was mourning and sorrow about *Georgian Jews*, residents of Mtskheta”(The Georgian Chronicles, 1955).

It can be mentioned that from the beginning “Kartveli”, as the name denominating ethnic identity, used to have a synthetic context and implied both citizenship, subordination to one state and possible origination from one biological ancestor which created an illusory sense of relationship. It should also be mentioned that according to generally accepted opinion, in developing the sense of unity it does not matter whether the relationship uniting humans included in “our group” is real or imaginary.

At the same time, the opinion of The Georgian Chronicles regarding desirability and expediency of arrival and settlement of ethnic communities of foreign origin in Geor-

gia is interesting and modernly sounding. The chronicler considers and assumingly, it is not only his personal opinion but also the position of the ruling elite that if foreigners are loyal to Georgian society, its language, religion, and customs and do not contradict the state interests of Georgians but on the contrary, act in favour of the Georgian statehood, their settlement in Georgia is quite desirable because their arrival increases and therefore, strengthens the Georgian society and state in the fight against foreign enemy. We can provide the story about Turks expelled by Persians as an example. According to The Georgian Chronicles “Georgians made friends with these Turks ...and brought them to all cities and fulfilled each other’s will. They waited for arrival of Persians, fortified fortresses and cities. At that time everybody who came after escape from Greece, Assyria or Khazaria became friends with Georgians to help them against Persians”.

### *Territory*

According to The Georgian Chronicles, one of the main preconditions for the nation’s, people’s existence is a unified territory and therefore, the work attaches great importance to showing the borders of settlement of Georgians. It should be mentioned that it is the only monument drawing common borders of the biblical Targamos and his descendants absolutely specifically: “From the east – the Sea of Gurgun (Caspian Sea), from the west – the Sea of Ponto (Black Sea) and from the south – the Sea of Oreti (Mediterranean Sea) and from the north – Mount Caucasus” – which implies the territory between the Caucasus mountain range and three seas: Mediterranean, Caspian and Black Sea. Such self-confidence of the chronicler when drawing the borders of settlement of descendants of Targamos was predetermined by the fact that he imagined the territory of Targamos as the unity of the territories of those states from whose names it derived the names of possible eight sons of Targamos by adding the Greek suffix “os”: Haos, Kartlos, Egros etc. and finally united the peoples residing in the western part of the North Caucasus under the one name Caucasus and derived the name of the eighth son of Targamos – Caucas according to their common name.

After identifying common borders of settlement of descendants of Targamos, “The Life of Georgian Kings, the First Fathers and Relatives” separately identifies the borders of the countries of all the eight “sons” of Targamos – “brothers”. As already mentioned, these are the borders of the kingdom of Kartli that existed during his period and the borders of the neighboring states or political units existing around the kingdom of Kartli in the period of the chronicler.

## *Language*

Georgians also differ from “others” by the Georgian language. The Georgian Chronicles recognizes and accepts two theories of the origin of the Georgian language. The first theory is associated with the destruction of the biblical tower of Babel. According to the bible, humankind speaking one language instantly became multilingual by desire of the God. The second theory, on the contrary, justifies creation of the new Georgian language as a result of the merger of already separated various languages.

According to The Georgian Chronicles language in general and the Georgian language specifically, undergoes several steps in its development: the first step is its origination, the second – its universal spread within the state borders, the third and the highest step is its transformation into the language of education. This work associates reaching this third highest level of development of the Georgian language to the founder of the state of Kartli and its first king, Parnavaz, who, according to the chronicler, “expanded the Georgian language ... and created Georgian education” (The Georgian Chronicles, 1955). To explain how the Georgian language was created, The Georgian Chronicles offers a rather original opinion: descendants of “foreign relatives”: Assyrians, Turks, Khazars, Jews settled during various historical periods resided next to the Kartlosians (Georgians) speaking Armenian in Kartli from ancient times and the Georgian language was created by mixture of languages of all these “relatives”.

In the late 11th century and the 1st half of the 12th century, this opinion used to have a direct and well defined social-political meaning in Georgia: it made the Georgian society believe that “Georgian” is the result of the merger of both “Georgians by relative” and other “relatives” settled in Georgia and therefore, by the 1st half of the 12th century when Georgia became multiethnic in parallel to becoming a monarchy uniting the Caucasus, nothing special happened in this regard, i.e., polyethnicity, and therefore, based on it, the desire or ambition of the Georgian political rulers to transform the Georgia into the power uniting Caucasus, is quite natural.

## *Religion*

According to The Georgian Chronicles, the necessary precondition for existence of Georgians as well as any people in general, is the unity of religion, i.e., confession.

According to the work, religion – confession of ancestors is one of the most signifi-

cant attributes of the nation and state and the guarantee of its sustainability. Therefore, change of confession, betrayal of the confession of ancestors is the case when the The Georgian Chronicles evidences even the murder of the king by his subordinates. This is clearly confirmed by the passage of The Georgian Chronicles which addresses the conspiracy against the king Parnajom and his capital punishment.

When Parnajom's son came to Kartli to regain the throne, he addressed the nobles of the kingdom who had killed his father because of the change of confession: "Murder of my father was fair because he could not maintain the confession of your ancestors." However, it should be mentioned, that as it seems, when discussing the loyalty to the confession of ancestors, a sense of unity/relationship formed on this basis is more significant for the chronicler than the religious component. Religious unity is understood as one of the effective instruments of ethnic integration and predetermined belonging to the in group and this outlines the in group's difference from "other", "foreign" ethnic group. This can be confirmed by the chronicler's discussion about the development stages of religiousness and spirituality, in particular, the passage is related to the period after Targamos and Kartlos. Despite the fact that the chronicler accentuated that Christianity is the highest step of spirituality and religion, when narrating the epoch following the death of Mtskhetos, he said: "In the epoch of commotion and fights and intrigues after the death of Mtskhetos, son of Kartlos, the descendants of Kartlos forgot God and descended to the lower step of development of spirituality – "they started serving the sun and the moon and five stars," but they remained having a strong ethnic unity because they maintained it from the past as the one thing that united them: "The grave of Kartlos was the strong and senior place for them." That was the basis for uniting Kartlosians as one ethnos.

### *Historic memory*

One more component allowing us to attribute the identity markers observed in The Georgian Chronicles primarily to the attributive paradigm of identification of ethnicity, is the chronicler's discussion about the significance of common past, i.e., historic memory. In this regard, The Georgian Chronicles mainly focuses on the fights, agreements, political achievements and compromises related to acquiring/gaining separate territories. The mentioned phenomena are considered to be the common past. For example, in the description of the first years of reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali it is depicted: "At that moment Greeks came to Abkhazia and conquered the territory from Egristkali to Tsikhegoji. All Georgians began to mourn and worry and said: 'We committed

many sins before the God ... the God became angry with us because .... we received the border from Greeks just like the king Varaz-Bakar had received Klarjeti”; In the part dedicated to the conversion of Kartli, Vakhtang Gorgasali says: “Our ancestors secretly possessed this book [Nebrothis], ... after that our father Mirian accepted the Testament by Nino”, or the Arab Asim addresses Archil: “You are the son of great kings Khuasroans” etc. According to the chronicler, all these factors unite the Georgians and contribute to their sense of the past as well as making the sense of their relationship and unity more tangible.

### *Conclusion*

Analysis of the markers related to ethnic identity of Georgians observed in The Georgian Chronicles practically fully confirms the hypothesis presented by us about possible correspondence of the mentioned markers to all the three paradigms of identification of ethnicity. This analysis demonstrates the scholarly-justified opinion of the author of this most significant historical source of the medieval period. Considering all necessary preconditions, the mentioned opinion is politically determined and focused on the perspective of preservation/development of a unified/centralized state. For the population residing on a certain territory but may not be related ethnically, these preconditions should create the basis for firm loyalty to the unity, belonging to the group “we” and culture, traditions and values of this group.

### References

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