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OLD GEORGIAN LITERATURE AS HISTORICAL SOURCE (VITAE, MARTYRDOMS), GEORGIAN CASE

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Abstract

Critical approach of history actively started in Georgia from 19th century. This trend also effected on hagiographic monuments. Some scholars were mistrustful for adopting them as historical sources because of miracles and unnatural motives. That is why philologists were more interested in hagiographies than historians. At the same time historians were publishing, identifying texts and editions, revealing historical people, comparing hagiographic texts. Thus, enormous informational possibility became clear for many researchers. Today there is now doubt that hagiographic monuments (Vitae, Martyrdom) contain significant information while revealing cultural, social, political and economic factors of certain nations.

Apart for solving many interesting issue from hagiographies, it is worth interesting to study Georgian hagiographies (with full of historism) in the context of history of mentality and identity. Years ago I was interested to study ethnic perception. Texts with various ethnic terms provoke me to observe (authentic) hagiographies. Certain conclusions were made through ethnic criteria based on theory of ethnicity. For instance, what was the content of ethnic terms: Relative and Nation? Changes the concept of that terms; How Georgian unity is concerned through centuries; Creating of national heroes in hagiographies and what historical process is related to this issue; What was self-perception and perception towards others. According hagiographic sources / monuments such researches are not novelty not only for Georgian historiography, but foreign historiography as well. Alongside to political history that approach will make history more alive and comprehensive.

For investigation I use ethnosymbolistic approach which ethnic markers represent important framework for the paper.

According to the Georgian hagiographies of 10th-11th cc. we have deal with different perception of ethnicity towards Georgians, Armenians and Greeks.

Keywords

Saints; Georgian Hagiography; Cultural Identity; Ethnicity

1. Introduction

19th century was crucial period in terms of studying Georgian sources. Empiricism that was leading method in Georgian historiography official historical documents took into consideration. Hagiographies were not considered as source of studies for many reasons. But it was not only Georgian case. Hagiographic texts were neglected not only Georgian, but Western historians as well. This is probably explained by miracles and legends in the texts or because of less historicism in it. Hyper-critical approach of hagiographic monuments as historical sources are vivid in historiographies of different people. It is not coincidence, on the first side scientific critic took into consideration authentic sources where hagiographies were left behind it. However critical hagiography led its way in different way. At the end of 19th and at the beginning of the 20th c. researchers started publication of the hagiographic texts but in certain framework. Sometimes they shorten texts and used to take miracles, dreams and revelations. Afterwards historians realized that historical monuments that were neglected while reconstructing the past where key issues for fulfill the narrative.

Interest towards total history linked various disciplines together and reshaped sources for research. Raised interest on hagiographic monuments as well. That genre is common not only Christian but for Muslim and Buddhist people. Despite of miracles and legendary moments, many historical events and facts are preserved there. In this regard Georgian hagiographies are rather special.

Apart for solving many interesting issue from hagiographies (revealing additions, authors, interrelations, raising historical figures, filling historical narrative etc.) it is worth interesting to study hagiographies in the context of history of mentality and identity.

Because of its nature hagiographies became rather interesting for researchers. Unlike to others historical experiences Georgian hagiographies are distinguished with deep historicism (in some cases foreign researchers pay less attention to hagiographies because of fictional characters and events). In spite of this only some sides of hagiographies were studied in Soviet period. One of the reasons was antireligious practice and religious moments were considered as “dirty water”. One the

other side some scientists argued about great sense of self-consciousness and self-awareness (full of national ideas) in hagiographies.

The privileged Marxist theory made certain methods in the hagiographic works. This gap has been periodically filling up by researchers focusing on different sides of hagiographies (for example some scholars are trying to study identity issues, clothing, food, nature description etc.).

Years ago I was interested to study ethnic perception. Texts with various ethnic terms provoke me to observe (authentic) hagiographies. Certain conclusions were made through ethnic criteria based on theory of ethnicity. For instance, what was the content of ethnic terms: Relative and Nation? Changes the concept of that terms; How Georgian unity is concerned through centuries; Creating of national heroes in hagiographies and what historical process is related to this issue; What was self-perception and perception towards others. According hagiographic sources / monuments such researches are not novelty not only for Georgian historiography, but foreign historiography as well. Alongside to political history that approach will make history more alive and comprehensive.

From the beginning of the 20th century critical approach of history actively started in Georgia. This trend also affected on hagiographic monuments. Some scholars were mistrustful for adopting them as historical sources because of miracles and unnatural motives. That is why philologists were more interested in hagiographies than historians. From the process of developing historical thought of hagiographical studies we can distinguish several periods.

At first, started publications with critical analysis and continued till 90ies despite of soviet limitation and economic crisis after collapse of regime. Along with seeking popularity one of the main aims of publications was acknowledge text to wide circle.

Today there is no doubt that hagiographic monuments are significant sources for historians. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of researchers who are studying hagiographies for reconstructing the historical process. On the first side such approach is provoked for filling up the historical narrative and on the other side hagiographical peculiarities that are only characteristics for that sources contain valuable information of past.

Alongside spreading Christianity all over the world raised interest of writing or translating hagiographies in Christian people. Such texts became identity indicator for different nations, among are Georgians and Armenians.

2. Text Analysis

Georgian hagiographies are well studied by literary or historical point of view. Despite some papers devoted to identity issue, Georgian hagiographies are not still studied from this side yet (See M. Chkhartishvili, Saint Giorgi of Mtatsminda and forging of Georgian identity in 11th c. istoire,

mémoire et devotion, 2017). Why hagiographies are interesting for reconstructing identity phenomenon? For investigation I chose texts of martyrs and saints because of authentic character and ideological nature. Observing on subjective perceptions historical sources are unable to fill the gaps without theoretical framework. For selecting proper theory historical experience is needed to foresee. I intend to raise identity task and through methodological framework reveal Georgian identity markers from hagiographic monuments (as a theological framework I use ethnosymbolistic approach of nation).

Georgian hagiographies are characterized by deep historicism. That is why I decided to study Georgian hagiographies for revealing ethnic issues. Ethnic terms are mostly expressed while describing hard times (for example during Persians and Arabs invasion) when author is focused to define unity, sacred land, faith, choosiness or uniqueness. Such expression is common for both, for Georgian and Armenian hagiographies.

The Georgian hagiography is charged with a national ideology. It is characterized with the abundance of terms expressing ethnicity. The authenticity of sources helps us to consider the ethnic issue.

For investigation I use ethnosymbolistic approach of nations focused on ethnic criteria. I focused on several ethnic features in Georgian hagiographies:

1. A collective proper name
2. A myth of common ancestry
3. Shared historical memories
4. One or more differentiating elements of common culture
5. An association with a specific “homeland”
6. A sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (Smith, 1991).

Such kind of research clearly shows us the process of forming Georgian nation during centuries.

According Georgian hagiographies we can single out several stages from the viewpoint of the representation of the phenomenon of ethnicity: the first – characterized with the promotion of religion and its defense; the second – a transitional period, which is characterized with a particular steadiness (hence, the abundance of terms expressing ethnicity and the depiction of the contours of national ideals can be seen in the Georgian hagiography of this period); the third – characterized with the development of national ideals and their advance.

Ethnicity is a permanent, but a changeable phenomenon. Therefore, the contents of the terms expressing ethnicity is also changeable. The alteration of the contents of these terms in the above-mentioned monuments obviously indicates to the alteration of the perception of inner social ties.

Expressing level of identity markers allows us to identify the unity itself. It is interesting to observe above mentioned text from this point of view.

Ethnicity is always visible in Georgian Martyrdoms and Vitae but I intend to focus on medieval centuries when ethnic terms are more expressed. From 5th c. common self-name is already characteristic in Georgian hagiographies. Religious marker of ethnicity is widely expressed. Even more, it is supreme, but situation slovenly changes in further centuries. According Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik that was written in 5th century religion is main factor being member of common union. Not only religion but sense of common ancestry is described in the text, gradually increase sense of attachment of paternal land.

After adopting Christianity as their faith ethnic non-Georgians are considered as Georgian Saints in Georgian hagiographies. Following identity markers are more seen in the Martyrdom of Evstati of Mtskheta. He was Persian in origin, while adopting Christianity in Mtskheta he was punished because of religious treason and sentenced to death in 6th century. After taking Christianity as his own faith St. Evstati became member of Georgian culture and was considered as member of common union besides his Persian origin. After Commander's asking from where Evstati was from or what was his faith the saint replied: I was from country of Persia (Tchelidze, 2011) His national ascription was neglected by Georgian author. The authors usually us question for the saints: Who they are? Or What is their faith. Actually, these inquiries are synonyms and questioned to all non-ethnic Georgian saints.

In contrast to the Georgian hagiographic works of the previous period, the Martyrdom of St. Abo of Tiflis and the Vitae of Grigoly of Khandzta represents more identity markers. Among Ethnic terms: *relative* and *nation* take significant interest. The definition of these terms is the major aim of this paper. A *relative* means the multitude, which comes from a single root. Nowadays, a *relative* mainly has a narrow meaning with expressing kinship. It is obvious that both of examples are seen in above mentioned monuments. According the Martyrdom of Abo of Tiflis (8th c.) ambivalent perception of ethnic identity is preserved. At the same time, he Is relatively Arabian and he Was relatively Arabian (For further information see Kadagishvili, S. 2018).

However, in the 8th-10th centuries the term *relative* expressed a broader meaning than during the following period (Kadagishvili, 2018). It is obvious that in this case, the term *relative* does not exclude a common origin, but it is more imaginary and indicates to the entity, which has the belief in a common ancestor. Terms *tribe* and *relative* are used as synonyms in medieval Georgian sources. The term *relative* puts an accent on a common ethnic origin, on the people with the same root.

11th century is characterized as productive period in Georgian hagiography. It is worth mentioning that holy fathers lived at the end of 10th c. and the second half of 11th c. This period is characterized by significant upheavals. It was connected to political process that proceeded with union of Georgian kingdoms as a single unit. Political processes pushed Georgian intellectuals to work on cultural upraising. Hagiographic sources, namely, The Vitae of Blessed Fathers Ioane (John) and Ekvtime (Euthimius) the Athonites and Vitae of Giorgi the Athonite contain great sense of state ideology, such works were created to strengthen Georgian self-consciousness.

Above mentioned works reflected the political ambitious that existed in Georgian in 11th c. In contrast to previous period Georgian unity is expressed in 11th century's hagiographies. Georgian unity identified itself as Georgian (Kartveli). The examples of expressing self-name and self-identification are vivid in hagiographies.

The authors of holy fathers began to describe biographical moments with emphasizing ethnicity of Georgian fathers. For example: Holy father "appeared for us as jewel for our relative, likening holy apostles, enriched Georgian language and Georgian land (Glonti, 2011)"; In some cases, authors underline that Holy fathers were Georgians in Kinship. World Relative (Natesavi in Georgian (was used in some cases. It shows origin, and the same time it was used to express kinship, in this case author's emphasized remembrance of common ancestry that was one of the crucial markers of Georgian identity.

Language is an marker akin to dress. A different language, or series of public utterances far from the norms, may mark off an ethnic group as does dress; ... It serves an internal reminder of difference (Nash, 1996) Besides ethnic terms and Georgians self-name, Georgian language is described as significant factor for Georgianess in Georgian hagiographies. As identity markers constant at the first side, they are variable in their meaning. For instance, if in contributions from previous period religion is the most crucial identity marker of Georgian ethnicity, historian M. Chkhartishvili pointed out that promotion of language as the main identity marker has direct connection to equal religion. That was important to raise Georgian unique features to be more distinguished and expressed to world cultural society. According to which Georgian Language was the most significant identity market of Georgians because of cultural and political competition with Byzantines. According to M. Chkhartishvili shared religion of Georgians and Byzantines could not be the most decisive indicator. Importance of Georgian Language is deeply emphasized in contributions. Iven more, it is sacred. Sacredness of Language was precondition of sacredness of Georgian unity. I quote some examples. Once when Ioanes's Son Ekvtime became ill virgin Mary came to Ekvtime and told *in Georgian language* "There is no passion on you, rise up, do not fear,

and speak *in Georgian Freely*” (Glonti, 2011). St. Ekvtime who did not know Georgian yet by that time start talking into Georgian “As fresh spring overflows from all Georgians” Glonti, 2011).

The first fact of ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders: between Us and Them (Eriksen, 2002). It is absolutely clear that there was no question or reason for distinguishing Georgian and Byzantine identity because their absolutely different perceptions but Georgian intellectuals are trying to compare Georgianess with Greeks. They wanted to show audience that Georgian culture was not less than Byzantine, but may be more. Different perceptions were depended by political claims and possibilities that had Georgian and Byzantine world. In our case the authors had to deal with empire’s cultural pressure to demolish cultural borders between two Christian countries. Byzantine as an Empire tried to make influence on Georgian culture and politics. In this occasion the role of Georgian cultural elite was high to rise differences and by proving certain advantages took Georgian place. In our case the authors had to deal with empire’s cultural pressure to demolish cultural borders between two Christian countries. According to these hagiographic contributions we can think about Byzantines as Georgians “significant others” with whom Georgians wanted to reshape Georgian identity in 11th c.

Except the language, religion is strong identity marker that significantly defines ethnicity. Ethnicity as a unity based on collective cultural identity requires several distinctive cultural elements according to them ethnic unity perceives itself as “unique we”. In many cases that sense is provoked by two cultural markers language and religion. Ethnic choosiness appeared soon after spreading Christianity in Georgian territory (burying Jesus robe in Mtskheta) Religion became the main actor of Georgian self-consciousness, because of religious and ethnic fusion it was practically complicated to separate them from the texts. Orthodox religion was crucial factor for Georgian membership.

The common understanding of religious and ethnic identity is shown in following example. From the Vitae of Blessed Fathers Ioane (John) and Ekvtime (Euthimius) the Athonites we read: “Once came Jojik who was treasure guardian and baptized because he was Armenian after he was called Arsen” (Glonti, 2011). In this example it is clear that religion identified and indicated ethnicity but it could not be possible in Georgian and Byzantine cases. In this case Georgian intellectuals found out the way, showing religious superiority. In spite of Georgians and Byzantines had same religion, Georgian national culture which in this case is viewed as Georgian Christian culture, is shown as deeply individual. In individuality we mean religious experience that is well illustrated in above mentioned contributions. Byzantine emperor asked to St. Giorgi about difference of Georgian and Greek religion. Holy father replayed: “The faith of my relative (means

nation S.K) is right. As we acknowledged it from the first time, we did not deviate neither left, nor right” (Kochlamazashvili, 2011).

As Georgian ethnicity is well preserved from hagiographic sources, it is worth seen how Georgian intellectuals looked others. Some are less visible from Georgian sources; however, Byzantines and Armenians are more fixed. Before we speak about Georgian perception towards them, it is better to identify how Georgians are seen from Greek’s eyes. According to Vitae of Giorgi the Athonite, Holy Father is described as well accepted person in Greek cultural elite. When St. Giorgi returned in Byzantine from Georgia Byzantine emperor thanked lord: “for receiving angel from all angels, “because he is Georgian relative (means: Georgian in kinship) all his habits are ours” (Kochlamazashvili, 2011). In Greek habits we mean religion, education (erudition) and Greek language. From the texts it is clear that Byzantines were satisfied themselves with high erudition. Despite that fact that ethnicity is closed phenomenon in its nature, it could be open for “chosen” ones. According to the speech of patriarch of Antioch: “it is right that you are relatively Georgian but you are Greek with erudition” or “with your knowledge and erudition you are ours” (Kochlamazashvili, 2011).

Georgian Martyrdoms and Vitae gains interesting information about perception of Georgian ethnicity. They enrich the whole understanding of idea of Georgian medieval sources. The research process enables us to catch the developing steps of deep-rooted nation, shapes unite and lines main characters. Ethnic characters reached high level of expression in 10th-11th centuries. We face Georgian unity with high standards of ethnic criteria, showing national values and ideas.

3. Conclusion

According to the Georgian hagiographies of 10th-11th cc. we have deal with different perception of ethnicity. On the one hand Georgian perception which most of all considered itself as sacred unity spoken sacred language, Byzantine considered mostly considered with high erudition and unique language and it is quite different from Georgians perception towards Armenians who are identified by their religion.

Georgian hagiographies moved to new stage of development in 18th century (For more information see (Kadagishvili. Chkhartishvili 2014 413-421)). Started forming of National heroes that was one of the significant indicators of nationalism process that was characteristic feature of modern nations.

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