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GREEK FACTOR IN THE FORMATION OF THE OPPOSITION EUROPE/ASIA

The opposition of the concepts Europe/Asia at the turn of the century, despite the impressive extent of integration in modern world and the vast opportunities for information exchange, is important not only in geographical terms, but also in terms of culture and weltanschauung.[1] No matter how vigorously we assert the unity of the world, two basic trends can be clearly distinguished in the development of world culture. One of these can be called European or Western, while the other is Asian or Eastern. Each trend is associated with a particular archetype of world outlook, which may vary across cultures. Some may attribute the distinctions to the influences of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, whose distribution more or less fits the regions covered by the European and Asian trends.[2] However, I believe that the main reasons are much more

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[1] This opposition is frequently rendered through the notions *the East* and *the West*. In political sciences, the concept the *West* is also widely referred to the countries oriented to western values, despite their geographical location. The concept the *East* is also applied to refer to countries oriented to another system of values.

[2] There are a number of theories on the chronology and causes underlying the establishment of the opposition Europe/Asia. The following ones can be singled out as the most important: a) The opposition stems from the period of Greek-Persian wars (6-5th centuries BC); b) The opposition was developed in the Middle Ages and is associated with the establishment of Christianity and Islam; c) The opposition was formed in the period of modern history. Cf. Gordesiani R., Die Gegenüberstellung Europa Asien vom Altertum bis zur Gegenwart, Tbilisi 1997; Bengtson H., Griechische Geschichte, München 1969⁴, 181; Wies E. W., Vater und Leuchtturms Europas, Geschichte, 1999, 1, 11 ff.; Geschichte 1993, 1; Dundua T., Pipia N., Georgia and the Outer World – the "Creation" of Europe and the Historical Forms of European Integration I, Tbilisi 2009 *(in Georgian)*.

profound and are associated with the cultural substrata underlying European and Asian civilizations. These substrata, on their part, contributed to the development and respective distribution of the religious systems that nowadays are referred to as "world religions".

The roots of the opposition are to be sought in the remote past, when the formation of civilizations in the Mediterranean and the Near East was underway. Though a number of cultures dating to Bronze and Iron Age have been attested in the Mediterranean and the Near East – the regions that are believed to be the central area to cradle world civilizations[3] – three basic models of civilization development can be singled out. The realization of these models gave rise to the development of all subsequent ancient cultures. They are: 1. Sumerian-Akkadian or Mesopotamian; 2. Egyptian; 3. Aegean-Hellenic. Naturally, when we speak about the realization of these models, we mean only the intensity of their elements in ancient cultures known to us and not their replication. The advancement of contacts and information exchange between the ancient cultures would entail the fusion of various traditions; however, any of the three models would invariably underlie each subsequent culture. More precisely, this concerns two – Mesopotamian and Aegean-Hellenic models as the Egyptian model was isolated. But for an influence, it has not left any mark on the development other civilizations.[4] Contrary to it, the Mesopotamian model, stemming from the Sumerian civilization, and the Aegean-Hellenic one, determined the character of cultures developed in Asia and Europe in the following periods. Hence, each of the three models can be viewed as a substratum, and I would say, as an archetype for European and Asian weltanschauung.

Now I will not dwell on the models in detail. I will only note that the Mesopotamian model basically follows the principle of mythological, i. e. mythopoetic reasoning, which is manifested in the following way: the whole world of things and events is personified, is perceived as part of nature, like human itself and human society. Therefore, human relations with the outer world is based on the principle "I" and "You" and not "I" and "that", as in modern world. Since "I"'s perception of anything else as "you" implies a distinct tendency of viewing each subject as unique and peculiar, the other tendency – that of abstraction – is quite weak. To this extent, many manifestations of the civilizations belonging to the

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[3]   Cf. Kienitz F. K., Das Mittelmeer Schauplatz der Weltgeschichte von den frühen Hochkulturen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert, München 1976.

[4]   For more details see Gordeziani R., Greek Civilization, I, Tbilisi 1988, 8ff. *(in Georgian).*

Mesopotamian circle may appeal as controversial and illogical to modern logic, even if it shows an obvious attempt to bring order into the chaotic multitude of events. At the same time this hinders the process of autonomous development of various spheres of civilization. Therefore, neither art, nor literature or scientific reasoning achieved here the level of independence necessary to shape their own principles of development, despite the fact that the existence of each can be unambiguously attested in the cultures of the Mesopotamian circle. An individual is not interested in "what" is the principle underlying an event, or "how" a particular fact happens; he is interested in "who" causes a particular event, and upon "whose" will it happens. He follows this way up to recognizing the divine "will" and at this point the quest for "what" and "how" naturally loses any importance. This does not of course rule out one's aspiration for receiving knowledge. The brilliant architects, astrologists, physicians, etc. of the Mesopotamian cultures had perfect command of the elements necessary for their job, but they almost never attempted to create the new through the criticism or negation of the old. On the contrary, they tried to achieve success through the systemic preservation and restoration of the old. Hence, in the world outlook and thought of these cultures, the principle of scientific treatment and research associated with analytical and critical thinking is obviously prevailed by the intuitive principle of perception. Self-perception recedes to the background, which contributes to the tendency of idolizing an outstanding person, mainly a ruler.[5] The second, Aegean-Greek model, whose formation started as early as the 2nd millennium BC and reached its peak in the 1st millennium BC, is essentially different from the other two models, despite the profound ties between them. Its major trait was a surprising combination of the mythopoetic reasoning typical of ancient oriental civilization and a new, critical scholarly thought characteristic of the Hellenic spirit itself. Gradually, the analytical and critical trend acquired priority, which led first to the necessity to know oneself and afterwards, to the discovery of personality. First in the history of humankind, a free person emerged on the scene, placing above all kinds of truth the one that is reached through quest and philosophical reasoning.[6]

These two models served as the basis for the development of a substantial contrariety between two forms of civilization and reasoning –

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[5] Gordeziani R., op. cit.
[6] Cf. Meyerhöffer H., Das Erwachen des kritischen Bewustseins bei den Griechen, Donauwörth 1976.

Hellenic and Asian – as early as the 1st millennium BC. At the first stage, it entailed an opposition Hellene/Barbarian, which gradually, along with the shaping of the geographical notions of European and Asia, was replaced by the opposition European/Asian. The latter implied not only geographical, but also, to some extent, cultural and social differences. Europe mostly fit the Hellenic model. The Greek world, which despite the lack of political unity till the Hellenistic period had a firm grip almost all across the Mediterranean and the Black Sea basin in political as well as cultural and spiritual terms, was distinguished by the following features: 1. Multiple, politically disintegrated monoethnic poleis without any centralized authority; 2. The supremacy of laws adopted by free citizens; 3. High Degree of the citizens' political rights and freedom; 4. Loyalty to laws and the polis – the highest manifestation of civil and patriotic consciousness; 5. Recognition of the rights of free person, citizen as a precondition for the performance of a society; 6. Giving priority to the values that are recognized as the supreme truth as a result of critical and analytical reasoning; 7. Lack of a single official state language and usage of one of the dialects for written communication.[7] Contrary to this, Asia was oriented to the Mesopotamian model whose successor in the 1st millennium BC was the Persian Empire. Persia, the greatest empire before the formation of the Hellenistic world, spread on a vast territory from western India to Aegean Sea and from southern Caucasus to the banks of Nile, rested on the following principles: 1. A single imperial, multiethnic structure of state organization and centralized power; 2. The supremacy of an idolized monarch; 3. A low degree of citizens' rights and freedom; 4. Loyalty to monarchs – the highest manifestation of civil and patriotic consciousness; 5. Almost full neglect of free person's, citizen's rights; 6. Recognition of values that are a priori regarded as truth, without any critical and analytical reasoning; 7. Usage of a single state language as of a means of written communication.[8] As the opposition Europe/Asia grew intense, it became more and more obvious that the contrariety would better be neutralized and the two worlds get closer culture-wise. In the ancient times no better way of overcoming the opposition was thought of than the subordination of one world to the other, the conquest.[9] In this regard, Alexander the Great appears as an exception. The world Empire

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[7]   For more details, see Gordeziani R., Greek Civilization, II, Tbilisi 1997 *(in Georgian)*; Bengston H., op. cit.

[8]   Cf. Gordeziani R., Greek Civilization, II.

[9]   The best example is the Greek-Persian wars.

created by him or the Hellenistic world was the result of implementing the principle of three unities: political-economic, cultural and linguistic, which implied integration of different and heterogeneous elements into a single structure of civilization, and though the Hellenistic world significantly advanced in neutralizing the opposition Europe/Asia, the world was not completely ready for the fulfillment of Alexander's model.[10] In terms of removing the opposition, the most successful was the Roman Empire, which subordinated the major part of the world conquered by it to *Pax Romana* that is the ideology of the Roman Peace. The world became more or less integrated for several centuries, though within the boundaries of an empire.[11]

However, evidently the removal of the opposition was rather an outward endeavor than an internal one. Consequently, after the decline of the ancient world and the fall of the Roman Empire, the opposition Europe/Asia rebounded with a new force, developing into an increasingly intense confrontation between Christianity and Islam. The first ideology primarily fitted the countries located in Europe and stemming from the Hellenic-Aegean cultural substratum, while the second one was adopted by the countries of Asia, fostered by the so-called Mesopotamian cultural substratum. The alienation reached its peak after the fall of Byzantium.

The new revival of the European countries was accompanied by repeated attempts for the removal of the opposition, likewise carried out through conquests and colonization. The processes involved China and, India and other countries of the Far East, which so far had not been organically linked to the complex system of European-Asian relations and followed their own path of development; likewise other continents of the world, which fell under the influence of one of the models. The colonization gave a new impulse to the cultural integrity of Europe and Asia. However, the substratum was so strong that as soon as the decolonization process was over, the opposition Europe/Asia regained strength, despite the fact that at the face value the world culture is more or

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[10] For more details on the world state of Alexander the Great see Schachermeyr F., Alexander der Große. Das Problem seiner Persönlichkeit und seines Wirkens, Wien 1973; Rosworth A. B., Conquest and Empire. The Reign of Alexander the Great, Cambridge 1988.

[11] H. G. Pflaum so justly notes: "Niemals zuvos und niemals danach ist es einem Herrscher oder einem Volk wieder gelungen, innerhalb eines so ausgedehnte und von so verschiedenen Völkern Sprachen und Kulturen erfüllten Raumes eine solche Eintracht und Zusammengehörigkeit ins Laben zu zuren." Propyläen Weltgeschichte, Bd. 4, Rom. Die Römische Welt, 383.

less integrated. Naturally, it should also be taken into account that some of the Asian countries are more Europeanized, while others are less. A clear example of how weak European processes can be in Asia is the recent events in Iran.

What can be considered the essential aspects of the opposition Europe/Asia nowadays, at the turn of a century, not only in geographical terms but also in terms of weltanschauung and culture? In my opinion, it is once again the prevalence of one of the principles of weltanschauung and reasoning: mythopoetic or mythological in Asia and critical and analytical in Europe, marked by respective value orientations. The fist one is prone to an authoritarian system, while the second is inclined to democratic values; the first targets deterrence of changes and the canonization of values, while the second is directed to the intensification of critical and analytical changes and decanonization of value; the former favours the loyalty of adopted dogmas, while the latter is focused on the eternal quest for the truth. I am not going to discuss now which of these principles is better for the humankind. All the more so that the question in itself is not clear at all. However, it is obvious that as the time passes, the tendencies will further sharpen the opposition. It is necessary to find new ways for removing the strain. Nowadays, there are more and more discussions on adopting new systems of governance, based not on the hegemony of an empire of a superstate, but on harmony and commonwealth. However, it is difficult to imagine that this alone will remove the opposition. In my opinion, active application of mediating activities will also be an important factor, as a medium incorporates in itself the seemingly incompatible qualities of the opposition members and can make the neutralization process permanent and smooth.

In this case, the role of the medium could be borne by the regions at the border of Asia and Europe where the mythological and critical-analytical principles of weltanschauung are more or less balanced. They can act as a bridge between Europe and Asia – receive and adopt impulses from both sides and afterwards deliver them to the west and the east, having duly transformed the impulses – that is, europeanize the Aisan and asianize the European. I believe active involvement in the role of a mediator will be the best way to ensure systemic neutralization of the Asia/Europe opposition. Now that we have witnessed the cessation of one of the last empires – the USSR, among such regions can be the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, which has been regarded as the borderline of Europe and Asia since ancient sources. As early as the Bronze Age, that is millenniums before the formation of the Europe/Asia opposition, one of

the Caucasian and more precisely, Kartvelian tribes reached Aegean Sea area and then the Mediterranean, conveying along a powerful Kartvelian linguistic component.[12] According to some modern scholars, the very term Europe can have Kartvelian etymology. For example, E. J. Furnee suggests that the stem of the term must have been Kartvelian *wrcoba* ("extending", "spreading").[13]

From the 6th-5th centuries BC, when the differences between the European and Asian ways of development started to be recognized, Georgia was found to be located at the point where these two worlds diverge. According to the information provided by Herodotus, the boundary between Asia and Europe was believed to be the Colchian river Phasis (IV; 45). The mythical characters associated with Colchis, personify these links. According to some sources, Aeetes came to Colchis from Ephira, a historical part of Greece; one of his sisters, Pasiphae, is the wife of the legendary king of Crete, Minos, while his other sister, sorceress Circe, migrated to Italy and became the eponymous mother of a number of Italian tribes. Medea first went to Hellas, and afterwards returned together with her son, Medos, which likewise reflects the ties.[14] Ever since, Georgia always had to make a choice between the two sets of cultural values, European or Asian. Though a substantial part of its ancient and medieval history proceeded in an Asian milieu, all its principal choices in the sphere of civilization gave preference to the European weltanschauung at the level of language, religion and artistic culture.[15] However, it should be also noted that the choice never had an absolute character and consequently did not entail Georgia's outright involvement in the Europe/Asia opposition. The European and the Asian had a long tradition of co-existence in our civilization, which, despite our orientation to the former, offered no grounds for European domination. In our mindset, the principles of critical-analytical and mythological weltanschauung are harmoniously balanced, which has always prevented Georgian civilization from an irreconcilable confrontation against either the European or the Asian weltanschauung. When I consider Georgia's possible role in

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[12] See in detail in Gordeziani R., Mediterranean-Kartvelian Encounters, vol. 4, Tbilisi 2007-2008 *(in Georgian)*.

[13] Furnée E. J., Paläokartvelish-Palasgische Einflüsse in den Indogermanischen Sprachen, Leiden 1986, 76ff.

[14] See sources in Urushadze A., Ancient Colchis in the Myth about the Argonauts, Tbilisi 1964.

[15] About the role of Georgia and Spain as the historical protectors of Europe, cf. Adrados F. R., Spain, Georgia and the History of Europe, Tbilisi 2009.

mediation between Europe and Asia, I mean this specific point of the historical development of Georgia. The role of a genuine mediator in the neutralization of a binary opposition can be borne only by the party who is not a member of the opposition. So far, the most significant effort in the history of civilization aimed at the removal of the opposition has been undertaken by one of its members – the Hellenistic world, Rome, Europe – which used to create only an illusion of neutralization. The dialogue between cultures can become irreversible and mutually acceptable only through a gradual removal of the opposition.