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SOME RELIGIOUS ASPECTS IN PRE-CHRISTIAN GEORGIA

The materials put together in *Caucasus Antiquus*¹ contain important information on mythological and religious conceptions of nations and the historic situation in the Caucasus. It must be clarified from the very beginning what function a text, particularly a literary text may have in researching problems like pagan religions and mythos. It is known that research in pagan religions is based on four main components: written texts, archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics. Any opinion can be expressed as more or less likely only on the basis of comparing and analyzing data belonging to all the four components.

It is also known that research in pagan religions started long ago. Initially, it was based on the analysis of Greek and Roman texts and archaeological data were added later. *The Tale of Two Brothers*, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Song of the Harper*, *Poem of the Innocent Sufferer*, *Babylonian Psalms of Repentance*, *Hymns to the Aton*, and *Ugarit and Hittite chronicles* were discovered and deciphered one after another in the 19th century. From the early 19th century, scientists familiarized themselves with ancient Indian epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Fragments of the Canaanite legends of Keret and Aqhat were discovered in the 1930s. In addition, there are mythological epic texts of *Enuma Elish* and Sumerian and Akkadian myths, as well as the Hittite-Hurrian *Song of Ullikummi* and other monuments that are too numerous to mention here, which means that we have a huge amount of written materials useful for researching the religions of the East and the period of Antiquity.

One major problem makes research in the pre-Christian religion in Georgia quite complicated: no written monuments of pagan period have

¹ *Caucasus Antiquus*, Encyclos disciplina, vol. I, Tbilisi 2010.

come down to us. First known Georgian written texts are Christian in content. It is true that some of them comprise criticism of paganism, but the material is scarce and can serve only as auxiliary data in research. Instead, ethnology, folklore, archaeological materials, and antique texts in foreign languages can help to reconstruct the Georgian Pre-Christian religion. At the same time, the following three major factors should be taken into account in studying Georgia's Pre-Christian religion: 1. There are several levels of development in the Georgian pagan religion (like in all archaic pagan religions); deities are integrated, functions are divided, and new deities emerge; 2. Common Georgian and regional deities can be found in various regions of Georgia²; 3. Pagan deities were Christianized. Correspondingly, the Georgian Pre-Christian religion is quite a large and complicated issue. For this reason, we will concentrate only on one problem - worship of celestial bodies. We will try to show the role of antique sources in studying this problem.

At the early stage of studies of pagan religions, scientists thought that the worship of the sun is common for the whole humankind. However, well-known ethnologist Adolf Bastian found that the solar religion can be found only in several regions of the world.³ The worship of natural bodies (the sun, the moon, and stars) and elements, and rituals of placating them are known to all nations of the world, but heavenly bodies are not so frequently transformed into subjects of religious worship with all components characteristic of deities. What we describe as the religious worship of the sun is found only in Egypt, Asia, and Europe (in archaic times). On the American continent, the solar religion could be found only in Peru and Mexico.

The supremacy of the cult of the sun in specific regions has been explained in various manners. Various stages of the formation of the cult have also been identified. The only thing that can be said for sure is that

² For example, a mini-theogony similar to Hesiod's *Theogony* was recorded in Khevsureti in the 19th century. Albeit in a fragmented manner, this text describes the birth of the sons of god (meaning pagan deities by sons of god). Deity of order is at the head of the Khevsureti Olympus. His duty is to bring the world in order and give birth to sons. Popular images of the pagan religion are Tergvauli, Baaduri, Kopala, Iakhsari, and others. See: Chikovani M., *Problems of Greek and Georgian Mythology*, Tbilisi 1971, 166-175 (*in Georgian*). Other deities can be found in Megrelian folklore: Kapunia, Alarti (Alerti), Rokapi, Mesepe, Ochokochi, and others. See: Tsanava A., *Problems of Georgian Folklore*, Tbilisi 1999, 39-82 (*in Georgian*); Tsanava A., *Megrelian Legends*, In: *Caucasus Series*, Tbilisi 1998 (*in Georgian*).

³ Frazer J., *The Worship of Nature*, London 1926, 441.

primeval solar hierophanies are characterized by the perception of reality as a whole and it is possible to gain an understanding of this reality through comprehending the sacral structure.⁴ In the Mediterranean region, the supreme heavenly figure (the sun) is replaced by the ruler of heavenly events and deities of fertility.⁵ In Mesopotamia, on the contrary, supreme solar deities assume the function of fertility, Marduk being one obvious example.⁶

Correspondingly, two trends are identifiable in the formation of the deity of the sun: attribution of the functions of this deity to other deities (the trend found in the Mediterranean region⁷) and, on the contrary, attribution of the functions of other deities to the solar cult (for example, in the Hittite religion⁸). This process can also be found in the religion of the Vedas, and in the Middle East, north Asia, and Africa.⁹

It is characteristic of solar religions to personify heavenly bodies (transform them into anthropomorphic image), make offerings to them, and offer them prayers. The sun plays a significant role in beliefs and conceptions linked to burials. Sunset was not regarded as death. The sun was supposed to descend to the kingdom of the dead, becoming "the sun of the deceased" for that period. Correspondingly, the sun was also a psychopomp and was linked to the cult of ancestors. The rulers of various countries of the world were regarded as the sons of the sun. This tradition can be found with the Hittites, Babylonians, Indians, and others.¹⁰

The religious worship of the sun is most obvious with the Egyptians, where Amon Ra is the supreme god.¹¹ In Mesopotamia, god of sun Shamash was regarded as the son of god of moon Sin and never had any

⁴ Элиаде М., Очерки сравнительного религиоведения, Пер. с английского, Москва 1999, 129.

⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁶ Frankfort H., Gods and Myths on Sargonid Seals, Irak, 1934, 6.

⁷ Full degradation of the function of the deity of the sun can be found in the Old Greek religion. Helios is not one of the gods on Olympus, his functions being mainly attributed to Apollo. Helios is rather part of mythos than religion. The story of Phaeton is the most well-known among the legends about Helios. In other myths, he is not interesting, the only activity to be discussed later being linked to Helios' Colchian descendants.

⁸ Götze A., Kleinasien, Leipzig 1933, 136.

⁹ Элиаде М., Очерки сравнительного религиоведения, Перевод с английского, Москва 1999, 130-131.

¹⁰ Perry W. J., The Children of the Sun, Adventures Unlimited Press 1927, 138 ff.

¹¹ Williamson R. W., Religious and Cosmic Beliefs in Central Polynesia, vol. 2, Cambridge 1933, 302-322.

special rights.¹² In Greece and Italy, the sun always had an auxiliary function. The worship of sun spread in Rome in the times of the empire under the oriental influence, but it did not become a subject of religious worship.

According to most Georgian scientists, there are traces of solar religion in Georgia. Ethnologist V. Bardavelidze devoted a monograph to the worship of the deity of the sun in Georgia.¹³ She found that the sun was a common Georgian pagan deity. The female deity of the sun was called Barbal/Babar/Kal-Babar in various regions of Georgia (Svaneti, west Georgia, and some areas in east Georgia). In the highlands of east Georgia, Sun-Woman(/Day) had the functions of the deity of the sun. According to V. Bardavelidze, the holy of holies of Georgian pagans – Magna Mater Nana – is the hypostasis of Barbal.¹⁴

In V. Bardavelidze's opinion, the solar religion took shape at a high level of the cultural development of Georgians. The holiday devoted to the deity of the sun – Barbaloba – was marked on 4-6 December – the solar equinox. Barbal was supposed to be responsible for harvest and the good fortune and multiplication of families, and the healing of the sick. The golden colour, sparkling things, and gardens with medicinal plants were the attributes of the female deity of the sun and her companion deities (woman emissaries and masters).

Combinations of rotating images similar to swastika can be seen on clay spindle-weights (needle-spinning devices) of the Aeneolithic Age found in West Georgia (Imereti). Scientists believe that they point to solar cults. Precisely such images were widespread among the tribes of Asia Minor.¹⁵

Several artefacts found in the Kura-Aras culture also attract attention. They are images of stags and cranes "followed" by suns on silver diadems. It is noteworthy that a pair of spirals on two discs with a crane close to them has also been found in the same culture. According to researchers, the spirals symbolize astral pairs.¹⁶

¹² Meissner B., *Babylonien und Assyrien*, vol. 2, Heidelberg 1925, 21.

¹³ Bardavelidze V., *History of Ancient Religion of Georgians (Deity Barbar-Babar)*, Tbilisi 1941 (*in Georgian*); Бардавелидзе В., *Древнейшие религиозные верования и обрядовое графическое искусство грузинских племён*, Тбилиси 1957.

¹⁴ Бардавелидзе В., *Op. cit.*, 107.

¹⁵ Kikvidze I., *Farming and Farming Cult in Ancient Georgia*, Tbilisi 1976, 155-157 (*in Georgian*).

¹⁶ Шаншашвили Н., *Знаки и символы куро-аракской культуры*. Автореферат диссертации, Тбилиси 1988, 7; Khidasheli M., *The Picture of the World in Ancient Georgia*, Tbilisi 2001, 64-67 (*in Georgian*).

The Trialeti culture is the next chronological stage. Trialeti crockery carries images of the world surrounded by cosmic waters with the Sun going around it. Although travelling on the waters of the Sun is a theme well-known in the ancient Middle East, the Trialeti images do not resemble any of these schemes reflecting the rhythmic movement of celestial bodies.¹⁷ Kuftin described images on other types of crockery, which supposedly also depict the route of the Sun.¹⁸ In this case, solar signs are on belts.

Bronze discs dated the 2nd millennium were found in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The discs are decorated with signs denoting the rotating Sun. The signs are in the centre of a composition with various geometrical combinations and astral signs around them. Such discs have been found only in women's graves.¹⁹

Artefacts with astral symbols and Sun discs have been found in the bronze culture of Colchis (the first half of the 1st millennium BC). Analyzing the images, researchers concluded that residents of ancient Georgia believed that land was surrounded by a river-ocean (the river often being represented as a snake) and the Sun travelled along this river-snake, which swallowed the Sun from time to time.²⁰

All the aforementioned means that archaeological materials confirm the existence of solar symbols in Georgia, but this is not sufficient to assert that the religious worship of the Sun certainly existed in ancient Georgia.

Traces of the religious worship of the solar deity can be found in the texts of folklore.²¹ The religious worship of the solar deity is probably reflected in the poem called *Sun at Home*.²² Ancient Svan religious hymns *Lile* and *Barbol Dolash* are particularly noteworthy in this regard. Both hymns are devoted to the Sun. *Lile* glorifies the Sun and *Barbol Dolash*

¹⁷ Куфтин Б., Археологические раскопки в Триаleti, Тбилиси 1941, 74; Gogodze E., The Periodization and Genesis of the Trialeti Culture, Tbilisi 1972 (*in Georgian*).

¹⁸ Куфтин Б., *Op. cit.*, 81.

¹⁹ Surguladze I., *Mythoses, Cults, and Rituals in Georgia*, Tbilisi 2003, 203 (*in Georgian*).

²⁰ Pantskhava L., *Monuments of Artistic Craftsmanship in Colchian Culture*, Tbilisi 1988, 38 (*in Georgian*).

²¹ Javakhishvili I., *History of the Georgian Nation*, vol. I, Tbilisi 1960 (*in Georgian*); Javakhishvili I., *Historic and Ethnological Problems in Georgia, Caucasus, and Near East*, Tbilisi 1950 (*in Georgian*); Chikovani M., *Georgian Mythology and Folk Poetry*, In: *Georgian Folk Poetry*, vol. I, Tbilisi 1972 (*in Georgian*); Virsaladze E., *Barbol-Barbar in Georgian Folklore*, in: *Bulletin of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, vol. XVI, No 2, 1955 (*in Georgian*); Kotetishvili V., *Folk Poetry*, Tbilisi 1961 (*in Georgian*).

²² Kotetishvili V., *Op. cit.*, 322.

describes a religious march held to praise the deity. These two texts could have been devoted to two different deities and there could be a whole era between them. The female nature of the deity and its fertility and generosity are clearly visible in *Barbol Dolash*. *Lile* is more archaic. It glorifies the celestial body, its luminary (not fertile) force, which undoubtedly belongs to an earlier period and must be linked to the masculine origin of the deity.

The Georgian folklore does not rule out the existence of two Georgian solar deities (regarded at times as a masculine and at times as a feminine) in various periods.²³ And indeed, the Sun is regarded at times as masculine and at times as feminine. For example, the Sun is mostly masculine in magic tales (for example, in *The Sun's Son-in-Law*). Scientists have noted that in archaic conceptions, celestial deities often change gender even within one nation. This is explained in different manners. According to one opinion (described above), there may be deities of two different genders.

In my opinion, the Sun and Moon are unique bodies that do not have doublets. Their uniqueness and perfection are expressed in the ideal form of the luminaries, as both are circular. The two luminaries are not commensurate with each other either, as each of them has its own function. At the level of relations between the genders, perfection implies **androgynous** nature. We do not rule out that this may be an explanation of the alternation of the luminaries' genders: the Sun is at times feminine and at time masculine in emanations; it fertilizes, gives force, causes death, or makes healthy, which means that it is ambivalent, precisely like the most archaic and "unpolished" deities of pagan religions.

We presented a short review of the opinions of Georgian archaeologists, folklorists, and ethnologists on the deity of the Sun. We agree with the opinion that it is difficult to assert only on the basis of Georgian materials that the tradition of the religious worship of the deity of the Sun existed in Georgia. I regard as an additional argument in support of this assumption the information from the myth of Argonauts, which says that mythical Colchis was a kingdom of Helios' descendants.²⁴

Scientists, who study mythos using modern theories of research, are well aware of the fact that despite concrete names, the countries reflected

²³ Tserediani D., Svan Hymns of Cult, In Bulletin, No 6, Tbilisi 1970, 165-166 (*in Georgian*).

²⁴ J. Frazer refers to Colchis as a country "where reigned a child of the sun": Фрэзер Дж., Золотая ветвь, Москва 1980, 326.

in myths are unreal lands situated beyond boundaries.²⁵ An unreal land becomes linked to a concrete geographic area, when a myth is transformed into a tale. After a sacral story – myth – is transformed from its purely preliminary structure (symbol) into a liminary text (epic), mythic geographic areas are "brought down to earth" and linked to real historic lands. Archaeological materials show that in most cases, this trend (i. e. the profanation of myths) is not accidental.

I would also like to explain here my vision of the connection between myths and literary texts. Achilles kills Hector and this is a story, but what Hector told Achilles before dying and what Achilles told him in response is a plot. In the antique literature, "pure" stories are effectively equal to traditional stories – myths. Any story – mythical or real – is transformed into a plot in a literary text and the development of the plot depends on the author's fantasy and literary skills. The authors of Antiquity had ready stories in the shape of myths and they created plots from the stories in their works. Authors did not change the main conception of the story; for example: the Trojan war was to start and Trojans were to be defeated in it; both Achilles and Hector were to die; Clytemnestra was to kill Agamemnon and Orestes was to kill Clytemnestra; Odysseus was to get back home; and so forth. If we take a look at the antique texts, which were written on the basis of these stories and have come down to us, we will see that they are not so few in number. However, although the beginning and the end of these stories are well known, readers show amazing interest in reading them. This is a paradox of fiction, which we are not going to discuss at length here. We will concentrate on mythical structures that remain unchanged.

All literary texts written on the basis of the myth of Argonauts say that the mythical king of Colchis – Aeëtes – was the son of Helios,²⁶ which means that in accordance with ancient ideas, Colchis (both mythical and real) was associated for Greeks and Romans with a country, where the Sun was the supreme deity. It is Aeëtes, the son of the deity of the Sun (Helios), who is the ruler of the country. In this context, it is, of course, very important that Aeëtes' sisters – Circe and Pasiphaë – reigned on most important islands in the Mediterranean – Crete and Sicily. In our opinion,

²⁵ Tsanava R., Prometheus and the Human Race, Mythical Nations, Legendary Singers, Soothsayers, Tbilisi 2003, 24-49; 112-122 (*in Georgian*).

²⁶ Fragments from works of antique authors linked to this issue can be found in the encyclopaedia: *Caucasus Antiquus*, Encyclopos Disciplina, vol. I, Fontes, Tbilisi 2010; Urushadze A., Ancient Colchis in the Myth of Argonauts, Tbilisi 1964 (*in Georgian*).

the fact that antique sources are so unanimous in noting that the Sun was the supreme deity in Colchis is one of the most important arguments proving that the religious worship of the solar deity existed in Georgia in that remote era.

Helios occupies an unimportant place in ancient Greek myths. He is not very popular among gods either. Analyzing Greek materials, researchers draw the conclusion that Helios is linked both to earth and the subterranean world. The analysis of Helios' epithets (Pythias and Paeon, which are also Leto's epithets) enables U. Pestalozzi to express the opinion that it is linked to the vegetable world. Helios is also Chthonius and Pluto and, at the same time, Titan. In Crete, Helios adopts the shape of a bull and becomes the partner of Magna Mater. Thus, Helios is not only Pythias, Chthonius, and Titan, but he is also linked to the realm of eternal darkness, magic, and the subterranean world.²⁷ He is offered horses and horse-drawn chariots as a sacrifice and it is known that horses are linked to chthonic symbols. Greek Helios unites a lot of so-called Indo-European signs, but it also contains a lot of Pre-Greek and non-Indo-European elements. The etymology of "Helios" is also not clear. Hesychius regarded the name as a Cretan word, others believe Helios is linked to Indo-European *sehweh and there is an opinion that Helios may be derived from Proto-Kartvelian *šev-el or šven.²⁸

Helios is the father of Aeëtes, Circe, and Pasiphaë and the grandfather of Medea. The only myth, in which Helios is presented in his full divine glory, is that of Argonauts. Many Greek and Roman authors used the story in their works, creating large epic texts. Tragic playwrights and lyrical poets used separate episodes of the myth of Argonauts. Historians, geographers, and philosophers also wrote about the story of Argonauts.²⁹

Although all sources are unanimous in noting that Aeëtes is Helios' son, the texts do not say anything about Helios himself. The sources point to different deities, when they mention Helios' wife – the mother of Aeëtes, Circe, and Pasiphaë. According to Hesiod, Perse, the daughter of Oceanus was Helios' wife (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 956-959). There are other versions, but Perse is most frequent among them. It underscores

²⁷ Pestalozzi U., *Pagine di religion mediterranea*, vol. 2, Milano-Messina 1945, 22.

²⁸ Argonauts: the World of Greek Myths, Narration and Comments by R. Gordeziani, Tbilisi 1999 (*in Georgian*); Furne E. J., *Paläokartvelisch-Pelagische Einflüsse in den indogermanischen Sprachen*. Nachgewiesen Anhand der spätindogermanischen Reflexe urkartvelischer Sibilanten und Affrikaten, Leiden 1986, 181.

²⁹ Cf. Urushadze A., *Op. cit.*, Argonauts: The World ...

connections between the elements of the Sun and water, which we already discussed above. The texts do not describe rituals of worship of Helios. Most authors note that Helios' descendants bore obvious solar signs (appearance – eyes, voice).³⁰

Hephaestus was favourably disposed towards Aeëtes. The function of bulls is particularly important in the myth of Argonauts. In pagan religious systems of all nations of the world, supreme deities have zoomorphic and vegetable hypostases. In most cases, bulls correlate with supreme deities. Likewise, bull is the holy animal of Zeus. Bulls have a different function only in the myth of Argonauts and the Cretan religion. The opinion has been expressed that there is a correlation between Aeëtes' fire-breathing bulls kept in subterranean stalls and the Minotaur dwelling in the Labyrinth. The well-known Cretan mural painting featuring a bull and acrobats is considered in the same context and we will not continue to discuss this well-known issue.³¹

We will now concentrate on one interesting aspect. Words denoting cattle did not differ in gender in ancient Georgia and Greece. In Georgia, one word – *zroxai* – denoted both *cow* and *bull*, and other words denoting gender – female and male – pointed to the difference.³² The situation was similar in Greek: βοῦς (Doric βῶς, Gen. βο(F)ός) meant both *cow* and *bull*. Semantic differences in words denoting *cow* and *bull* emerged in individual dialects of Indo-European languages a little later. In archaic composites, we encounter the stem without the vowel, for example, in ἐνατόμ-βη, where βη denotes "offering".

Not only the stem denoting *cow* and *bull* was the same for Indo-Europeans, but also religions involving them as a supreme cosmic deity.³³

³⁰ For example, *Argonautica Orphica* reads: "Aeëtes in his chariot and lustrous golden robes shone like Helios. Ringing his head was a crown fringed with glowing rays. He swung with his hands a sceptre".

³¹ In connection with the cult of bulls and ritual offerings linked to it cf.: Стратанович Г. Г., Ритуальное убийство быка, Сб. Религия и мифология народов восточной и южной Азии, Москва 1970. It is asserted in this work that bulls were sacrificed to the Sun. It also analyzes the symbols of bull-headed gods – bull-men.

³² Okroshidze T., Characters of Georgian Fantastic Tales – Bull. In: Georgian Folklore, vol. III, 1969, 132 (in Georgian).

³³ Гамкрелидзе Т. В., Иванов В. В., Индоевропейский язык и индоевропейцы, Т. 2, Тбилиси 1984, 575-576; Bull is the supreme cosmic deity in Egyptian, Ancient Semitic, Mediterranean, Anatolian, Hittite, and Greek conceptions. The rituals of bufonia and tauromachia and the sacrifice of pregnant ("eight-legged") cows in Old Indian and Roman rituals confirm this. Cf. Фрейденберг О. М., Поэтика сюжета и жанра, Москва 1936, 95; Пендлбери Дж., Археология Крита, Москва 1950, 238.

Similar ideas are encountered in the life and rituals of Caucasian tribes and in particular Georgians.³⁴ It is possible that this bisexuality of *zroxai* and *βοῦς* is in precise correlation with the androgynic nature of the deities, whose hypostases they are. According to ancient Georgian conceptions, the solar deity is regarded at times as masculine and at times as feminine. In astral symbols, cow correlates with the Moon and bull with the Sun.³⁵ The same is true of the deity of the Moon. Bull plays an important role in rituals dedicated to the latter.

In his *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, Flavius Arrianus wrote: "The statue of Goddess Phasiana is placed to the left of the entrance into Phasis, which deity we may reasonably conjecture, from her figure and appearance, to be the same with Rhea, as she holds in her hands a cymbal, has lions under her throne, and is seated in the same manner as the statue by Phidias in the temple of Cybele at Athens".³⁶

The goddess, whose statue was described by Arrianus, is among the goddesses belonging to the class of so-called Magna Mater. There are traces of the religious worship of Magna Mater in Georgia. According to Georgian conceptions, this goddess is also connected with luminaries (the Sun and Moon). In *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes, the supreme goddess of Colchians is called Hecate. The poem makes it clear that: 1. Hecate was one of the most respected deities in Colchis; 2. There was a temple of Hecate in Colchis; 3. Medea was the priestess of the temple of Hecate and she led secret mysteries and offered sacrifices; 4. A divine garden with a lot of curative and deadly plants growing in it belonged to Hecate; 5. Cattle and humans were offered to Hecate as sacrifices; 6. Prophecies, prophetic trances, soothsaying, and other magic acts were part of Hecate's mysteries.³⁷

Like Rhea-Cybele, statues of Hecate also had the shape of beautiful women, who have a snake, a dog, a dagger, a key, or a torch in their

³⁴ Bardavelidze V., History of Ancient Religion of Georgians (Deity Barbar-Babar), Tbilisi 1941 (*in Georgian*); Abakelia N., Symbols and Rituals in Georgian Culture, Tbilisi 1977 (*in Georgian*); Бардавелидзе В., Древнейшие религиозные верования и обрядовое графическое искусство грузинских племён, Тбилиси 1957.

³⁵ This correlation was reflected also in the symbolism of the horns of cows and bulls. A luminary can often be seen between horns in iconography. Бидерманн Г., Энциклопедия символов, Перевод с немецкого, Москва 1996.

³⁶ *Caucasus Antiquus*, 304.

³⁷ Цанавა Р., Мотивы и образы сказания об аргонавтах в грузинском фольклоре. Автореферат кандид. диссерт., Тбилиси 1983, 7-10.

hands.³⁸ We can see that the image of Hecate as a goddess is presented fully (unlike Helios). The name Hecate is not linked to the Georgian world, but due to the functional signs accumulated in this deity, Professor A. Urushadze regarded it as a Colchian deity.³⁹ According to some explanations, Hecate (Ἑκάτη) means "someone coming from far away".⁴⁰ Presumably, in Greece, the cult of Hecate dates from the 7th century BC. It is believed that the cult was borrowed from Asia Minor (Caria) or Thracia. As a cosmic deity, Hecate is often identified with Rhea-Cybele. It is also often associated with Egyptian Isis.

Hecate is first mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 409-452). According to this text, Hecate is a great goddess, who rules over almost everything in the world. She is a universal goddess elevated to the level of Magna Mater or the mother of gods. In pagan religions, Magna Maters are creators, who bring everything in order in the world: they regulate life and death and the well-being of humans and award and punish them. Magna Mater ends the most important stage of the development of pagan religions. Although Magna Maters have multiple names, the identity of their functions, iconography, and rituals enabled researchers to conclude that Magna Maters played the role of an identifying formula in the development of faiths and conceptions of various nations.⁴¹ In Oriental countries, Magna Mater is the protector of both fertility and war, and light and darkness. It is this ambivalence that defines their ancient age. Both virgins and whores worshipped Ilithyia, Ishtar, Cybele, Anahita, and other Magna Maters. Numerous small clay images of deities with big eyes and large hips and breasts have been found on the sites of Aeneolithic settlements in the Middle East and South Caucasus.

Cosmic rhythms are subordinated to two luminaries – the Sun and Moon. The Moon regulates tides and precipitations, influencing land,

³⁸ Эгейское искусство, Москва 1972.

³⁹ Urushadze A., Op. cit., 66. Materials on the origin of Hecate are collected in this work. Hecate was mentioned by Pherecydes (5th century BC); Demetrius, Bacchylides, Dionysius of Scytobrachion (2nd -1st centuries BC), Dionysius of Miletus (4th century BC), Diodorus of Sicily, and, of course, Apollonius of Rhodes.

⁴⁰ Беляев Ю., Зверобог древности. Мифологическая энциклопедия, Москва 1998, 203-207.

⁴¹ Nilsson M. P., *The Minoan-Mycenaeen Religion and its Survivals in Greek Religion*, London 1970; Evans A., *The Palace of Minos and Knossos*, Oxford 1921; Rose H. J., *Gods and Heroes of the Greeks*, London 1957; Eliade M., *Le Yoga. Immortalité et Liberté*, Paris 1954.

plants, and life in general. Dying, diminution and growth of force (alternation of phases) are also associated with the Moon. It is also known that the Moon has a special impact on women's physiology. Connecting Magna Mater with the Moon is one of the greatest logical gains of the "observational" mythos.

The transition from the worship of luminaries as elements of nature to anthropomorphism points to the establishment of an astral religion. The entire knowledge of primitive human beings – practical, sensual, and intuitive – was generalized in the religious worship of the Sun and Moon. As regards the fact that the deities of the Sun and Moon were sometimes masculine and in other times feminine in the conceptions of not only various nations, but even within one nation, it was explained above that they were regarded as androgynous. In faiths and conceptions of various nations, supreme cosmic goddesses were linked sometimes to the Sun and sometimes to the Moon. As public institutions took shape and developed, the Sun started bearing signs of a masculine deity and the Moon of the signs of a feminine deity.

The myth of Argonauts says that Helios' descendant rules over Colchis. At the same time, the supreme deity Colchians worship is Hecate that corresponds to the deity of the Moon in Greek texts. According to Greek conceptions, three goddesses are linked to the Moon: Selene, Artemis (the sister of Sun-Apollo), and Hecate. Researchers think that they embodied three different lunar phases. Three colours corresponded to the Moon: white to the new moon, red or purple to the crescent, and black to the full moon. These lunar phases corresponded to the three biological conditions of woman; virginity, womanhood, and old age. According to some researchers, the three natures of the lunar goddess can be explained not only by their connection with the lunar phases, but also by their ability to "own" the three worlds (Underworld, Middleworld, and Skyworld). Hecate was the embodiment of the full moon and the last day of the month was named after her. On that day, she was offered eggs, fish, and onions. Dogs, snakes, mules, and lions were the animals linked to her. In magic texts, she is referred to as a dog. It is white dog Hecate that nursed Asclepius. Hecate is the master of the dead and she can summon the souls of the dead. The idea of revival and resurrection is also linked to her.⁴²

In the full moon, Hecate's dogs (/wolves), who constantly accompanied the goddess, gained new force. Hecate was particularly popular among Thessalian magicians, who were able to transform humans

⁴² Грейвс Р., Мифы древней Греции, Перевод с английского, Москва 1992, 89.

into animals and stones. Hecate was the lady of the chthonic world and often replaced Persephone and Erinyes (or is referred to as Erinyes herself). According to some theories, Empusas (Aristophanes, *Ranae*, 294 and further) and monster Scylla are Hecate's children. In Late Antiquity and the Hellenistic period, Hecate was regarded as the protector of magicians and evil forces. It is with his function that she became established in the conceptions of Europeans. Among others, this is confirmed by the fact that Hecate is referred to in Shakespeare's plays as the protector of magicians and evil forces.⁴³

Hecate and Artemis were often completely identified with each other in the nations residing on the Black Sea coast. For example, Artemis of Taurus had several epithets: Tauropola, Dictina, Orthia, Hecate (/Roman Trivia) (Diod. IV, 44; Paus. I. 23, 9; Soph., *Ai.*, 172. Serv Coment., *Verg., Aen.*, II, 116). She needed bloody sacrifices just like Artemis Brauronia and Artemis Orthia. Residents of Taurus called Iphigenia Artemis or Hecate (Eur. *I. T.*, 784; 1045; Ovid., *Pont.*, III. 2, 45; Herod., IV, 103).

Artemis is one of the most prominent figures in Greek myths. Two aspects are noteworthy in the development of the character: 1. Artemis is the deity of fertility (correlated with Magna Mater); 2. Artemis is the deity of the Moon. Studies make it clear that several local gods were united within the image of this goddess that incorporated several functions. She was the protector of flora and fauna and that who granted childbearing. Humans were sacrificed to this deity.

There were about 80 temples of Artemis in Greece, the centre of worship being in Ephesus. Scientists assume that the cult of Artemis emerged in Asia Minor (Ephesus) and spread to the European part of Greece. According to G. Thomson, the image of Artemis developed from the ancient Pelasgian "bear goddess", which reached Greece from the Black Sea area – the Caucasus.⁴⁴

Many-breasted Artemis (πολύμαστος) was worshipped in the well-known temple in Ephesus. This deity had the function of Magna Mater

⁴³ Our opinions on the gradations of Hecate's image and her connection with the Moon can be found in: Tsanova R., *The Motives and Images of the Myth of Argonauts and the Georgian World*, Postgraduate thesis, Tbilisi 1984 (*in Georgian*); Tsanova R., *Mythical Aspects of the Image of Hecate and the Myth of Argonauts*. In: *Georgian Folklore*, vol. XIII, 1983 (*in Georgian*); Tsanova R., *The Problem of Gradation of Hecate's Image*. Theses of the International Conference, Tbilisi-Jena 1990.

⁴⁴ Томсон Дж., *Исследования по истории древнегреческого общества*, Т. 1, Москва 1958, 277.

and at the same time, was associated with the Moon.⁴⁵ The correlation between Hecate and Artemis raises no doubts. This opinion is further supported by the fact that Hecate is replaced by Artemis in *Argonautica Orphica*.⁴⁶ Aeschylus also identifies Hecate with Artemis.⁴⁷ Greeks offered the same sacrifices to Hecate and Artemis – round loaves with candles in the middle of them. The sacrificing ritual was held on crossroads on the 16th day of the month in the old Moon.⁴⁸ Romans identified Hecate with their own goddess Trivia, the goddess of crossroads, where her images were erected. She was offered sacrifices also on crossroads (Soph., Frg., 492).

In the imagination of primitive people, the constant lunar cycles were linked to the rhythms of life. Lunar phases helped people to discover time in the concrete meaning of this phenomenon. The symbolism of the Moon as a measure of rhythmic changes and fertility was expressed from ancient times in the shape of a spiral, snake, or lightning.⁴⁹ As regards time, it was always measured in accordance with lunar phases everywhere. The ancient Indo-European stem denoting luminaries is ***me** "moon". In Sanskrit, it has the shape of **mami** "I measure". All Indo-European words denoting the Moon originate from this stem: Sanskrit **mas**; Avestan, Old Prussian **mah**; Lithuanian **menu**; Gothic **mena**; Greek **mene**; Latin **mensis**.⁵⁰

Symbols linked to the Moon represent the Moon itself. Spiral is the hierophany of the Moon (expressing the alternation of light and darkness) and lightning is its kratophany (along with symbolizing force, it heralds rain). This and other symbols create a common cosmic net. When speaking about the religious worship of the Moon, everything has equal importance – starting with the symbols of pearl and lightning and ending with such well-known deities of the Moon as Babylonian Sin or goddess Hecate.⁵¹ The symbol of snake in the images of the goddesses of the Moon (Magna

⁴⁵ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁶ *Argonautica Orphica*, Georgian translation and comments by N. Melashvili, Tbilisi 1977, 123.

⁴⁷ Томсон Дж., Op. cit., 226.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁹ Furlani G., *La Religione babilonese assira*, vol. I, Bologna 1929, 155.

⁵⁰ Schrader, *Sprachvergleichung und Urgeschichte*, 2nd ed. Jena 1883, 443-450. In Megrelian, "tuta" means both "moon" and "month".

⁵¹ Элиаде М., *Очерки сравнительного религиоведения*, Перевод с английского, Москва 1999, 157-158.

Maters) is due to the functions of fertility and renovation conferred by the Moon.

According to Georgian conceptions, the Moon had the image of a male god. This is how it is seen in written and ethnographic materials. The same is true of folklore.⁵² M. Chikovani believes that the Moon's image of a male god emerged after the emergence of patriarchy. The researcher notes that a code of worshipping the Moon existed in Georgia, including the tabooing system. A lot of things linked to the new, full, and overturned Moon were forbidden. The Sun, however, was not so tabooed and restricted through magic actions.⁵³

According to Academician I. Javakhishvili, anthropomorphically, the Moon has the masculine image.⁵⁴ The analysis of religious, ethnographic, linguistic, and folkloric materials has made it clear that wherever Georgians lived, there are traces of worshipping the Moon. Therefore, the worship of the Moon as the chief Lord and deity should be regarded as the ancient faith of all Georgian tribes. In Javakhishvili's opinion, St George

⁵² Chikovani M., *Problems of Greek and Georgian Mythology*, Tbilisi 1971, 127 (*in Georgian*).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁴ The literary and naming traditions are very important in analyzing this problem. A layer of myths and tales can clearly be identified in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (12th century). At the same time, the text contains a lot of metaphors, some of which can be regarded as symbols. In this context, we are interested in clarifying links between the protagonists of the poem and the Sun and the Moon. This context is most obvious in the following line: "They saw the Moon released by the Snake to meet the Sun" (1428), where the Sun is Tariel (a protagonist of the poem), the Moon is Netsan-Darejan (Tariel's beloved woman), and the Snake is the fortress of demons. In another line, we can read: "The Moon is waiting for you, the Lion" (413), where the Lion is Tariel and the Moon is Nestan-Darejan. Another female protagonist of the poem, Tinatin, is also compared with the Moon. This is how Tinatin's slave summons Avtandil to the palace: "It is the order of the one, who has a body like a poplar tree and a face like the Moon" (124). At the same time, female protagonists are often compared in the text with the Sun: "Tinatin found fault with the Sun, but the Sun behaved like Tinatin" (52). Male protagonists are compared both with the Sun and the Moon. This issue is discussed at length in: Nozadze V., *The Sun in The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Santiago de Chile, 1957. It is also noteworthy that Mzia, Mzevinar, Mtvarisa, and Tuta, comprising stems that denote the Sun and the Moon, are popular woman's names in Georgia. Badri, which is the constant epithet of the Moon and is often used separately to denote the Moon is a man's name. Mangia (mangi means "moon") is also a man's name, as well as Mzechabuki (/Chabua). The aforementioned means that both the epic and naming traditions point to dualism in the perception of the gender of luminaries.

replaced the deity of Moon in Christian Georgia.⁵⁵ He studied rituals linked to St George and found pagan elements in them. The holiday was marked on 14 August, in the full Moon. I. Javakhishvili paid attention to the names of week days extant in Megrelian and Svan. Monday is called in Megrelian *tutašxa* (Moon's day) and in Svan *došdiš*. Sunday is called in Megrelian *žašxa* (Sun's day). According to Pre-Christian conceptions, Monday was Moon's day and a holiday. A children's disease, which is called *tutaš* (Moon's) in Megrelia is also linked to the pagan deity of the Moon.⁵⁶

In the opinion of Georgian linguist R. Pataridze, elements of the pagan cults of the Moon and the Sun were reflected in the Georgian Asomtavruli alphabet: "The first letter in the Asomtavruli alphabet is the ideogram of the Moon. Correspondingly, the letter is called *an*, which means the deity of the Moon".⁵⁷

The opinion of Georgian scientists is confirmed by Strabo: Iberians "worship the Sun, Zeus, and the Moon, but the Moon above the rest. She has a temple near Iberia. The priest is a person who, next to the king, receives the highest honours. He has the government of the sacred land, which is extensive and populous, and authority over the sacred attendants, many of whom are divinely inspired, and prophesy. Whoever of these persons, being violently possessed, wanders alone in the woods, is seized by the priest, who, having bound him with sacred fetters, maintains him sumptuously during that year. Afterwards he is brought forth at the sacrifice performed in honour of the goddess, and is anointed with fragrant ointment and sacrificed together with other victims. The sacrifice is performed in the following manner. A person, having in his hand a sacred lance, with which it is the custom to sacrifice human victims, advances out of the crowd and pierces the heart through the side, which he does from experience in this office. When the man has fallen, certain prognostications are indicated by the manner of the fall, and these are publicly declared. The body is carried away to a certain spot, and then they all trample upon it, performing this action as a mode of purification of themselves".⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Javakhishvili I., *History of the Georgian Nation*, vol. I, Tbilisi 1960, 50, 59 (*in Georgian*).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121-124; Javakhishvili I., *Historic and Ethnological Problems in Georgia, Caucasus and Near East*, Tbilisi 1950, 167-168 (*in Georgian*).

⁵⁷ Pataridze R., *Georgian Asomtavruli*, Tbilisi 1980, 375-376 (*in Georgian*). This hypothesis may be supported by epitaphs in Asomtavruli found in Nekrisi in 2010. Researchers assume that they were written in the pre-Christian era.

⁵⁸ Strabonis *Geographica*, I-III, vol. XI; 4, 7, in: *Caucasus Antiquus*, 228.

We will now raise the most disputable aspects of the issue we are analyzing. How possible is it to regard the deities of the Sun and Moon as androgynous? Why does the Georgian tradition link both deities to Magna Mater? The research in the problem of Magna Mater has made significant progress over the past 50 years. There are now numerous archaeological materials and scientific works. It was believed previously that Magna Mater were the archetypes of all more or less well-known goddesses. However, advanced research raised the problem of an archetype of Magna Mater proper. Scientists came to androgynes in search of an archetype.⁵⁹ Every nation regards its supreme deity as an absolute power, perfect essence, and completeness. Any deity that has supreme power, cannot a priori be perfect if it is only masculine or feminine. Given this, the only essence that is undivided can only be androgynous.

It is known that nations residing on the territory of Italy addressed their gods in this manner: *Sive deus sis, sive dea* ("whether god or goddess"), *Sive mas, sive femina* ("whether male or female"). This form of address makes it clear that the deity was absolutely unperceived to the supplicants. Egyptians, Indians, nations in Asia Minor, the aborigines of Australia and Europe recognized the androgynous nature of their deities.⁶⁰ Indian Dianus, Purusha, and Shiva Kali, Egyptian Horus, Nun, and Ra, Scandinavian Loki, Odin, Tuisto, Imir, and Netrus, and Iranian Zurvan are all androgynous or have extant androgynous signs. The Chinese supreme god that regulates light and darkness is also androgynous.

In this regard, the situation is quite interesting also in Greek mythology. Hera gives birth to Hephaestus and Tithonus parthenogenetically. In Caria, people worshipped bearded Zeus with six breasts positioned triangularly. Zeus "gives birth" to Athena and Dionysus. In Cyprus, people worshiped bearded Aphrodite called Aphroditus. There are numerous deities that give birth individually during the creation of the world described in Greek mythology. For example, Chaos bears Erebus, Erebus bears Nyctes, and so forth.

⁵⁹ For a convincing substantiation of opinion cf.: Кифишин А. Г., "Страшный гнев" богов и "исход народа". К реконструкции одного ритуального мифа, in: Жертвоприношение, Москва 2000.

⁶⁰ Bertholet A., *Das Geschlecht der Gottheit*, Tübingen 1934; Wallis Budge E., A. *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford 1934; Eliade M., *Mephistopheles et l'Androgyne*, Gallimard 1962.

Androgyne cannot be expressed in an iconographical manner. The problem is that androgynes and hermaphrodites are clearly divided from each other. In hermaphrodites, the signs of both genders coexist (which can clearly be seen in antique sculptures and paintings). In the meantime, androgynes are ideals of perfection and no signs of an opposite gender can be seen in them. The only ideogram androgynes can have is circle (mandala), which is the most perfect geometric shape.

In the opinion of scientists, there are several rituals, where we can see the androgynous nature of deities, including the "change of clothes" (females putting on masculine clothes and vice versa) and initiation. Preller, Nilsson, and Crowley note that the change of clothes is directly linked to the worship of the cult of androgynous deities. The aim of the ritual is to become similar to a perfect creature – a deity – and become perfect. Ernest Crowley described the tradition of the change of clothes in India, Iran and other Asian countries. He concludes that this ritual is most important in the cults linked to agriculture. Meyer describes several Greek holidays and orgies, when women put on men's clothes.⁶¹

The analysis of the initiation ritual provides grounds for scientists to conclude that a stage of androgyne was part of the ritual. Many archaic traditions confirm that children were not regarded as having a concrete gender before initiation. For example, the gender of the Greek word *παῖς* can only be established together with an article. As regards the words *ὁ νεανίας* (I declination, masculine) and *ἡ παρθένος* (II declination, feminine), they denoted the age of boys and girls before they became men and women. Before initiation, the word denoting "boy" has the ending of the feminine gender and the word denoting "girl" has the ending of the masculine gender.

Popular deities of pagan religions become "fragmented" as consciousness and life of people develop. This is first and foremost expressed in their division into feminine and masculine deities. The androgynous unity was preserved only in mysterious religions and secret teaching. In accordance with the teaching of the Gnostic sect of Naasites, the celestial archetype of man – Adam – is an androgyne. Since God created Adam in his own image, God is also an androgyne.⁶² First man was an androgyne also in Plato's *Symposium*. According to Clement of Alexandria, asked

⁶¹ Preller L., *Griechische mythologie*, Bd. 1. Nilsson M. P. *Griechische Feste*. 49; Meyer J. J., *Trilogie Altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation*. Bd. I. Zürich 1937; Crowley E., *The Mystic Rose*, vol. I, London 1927.

⁶² Schwally F., *Die biblischen Schöpfungsberichte*, 1906. Bd 9.

when his rule would be established, the Saviour answered: "When you trample on the robe of shame, and when the two shall be one, and the male with the female, and there is neither male nor female" (*Stromata*, III, 13, 92).

We attempted to show the importance of antique sources in studying pre-Christian faiths and conceptions in Georgia. To make this study more concrete, we confined ourselves to the worship of luminaries and the cult of Magna Mater linked to it. We tried to explain the dualism in the anthropomorphisation of the Sun and Moon. The most essential reason for regarding the same luminary at times as masculine and at times as feminine was that initially, they were thought to be androgynes. Another reason why the antique sources regarded the Colchians' supreme deities – the Sun (Helios) and Moon (Hecate or Magna Mater) – as masculine and feminine was the antique tradition itself. According to Greek-Roman conceptions, the deity of the Sun is masculine and the deity of the Moon is feminine.