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LIVER AS A LIFE SYMBOL IN ANCIENT GREEK AND GEORGIAN WORLD VISION

Mythological presentation of life as a definite substance refers to the idea and existence of cosmos structure. Life is characterized with the basic and most important ability of renewal and revival through time in a discrete way. Life contains several stages (birth-growth-degradation-death; birth-life-death...). In particular mythological and religious systems concentrate on the progression of life: from birth up to the top stage - puberty and fertility. One cannot think of the existence of life as a driving force of the world in the abstract. Plants, animals, and people are considered as its parts and carriers. Mythological systems provide a description concerning life carriers being appeared in stages and dissemination of life sources. Often flora (oak-tree, cedar, etc.) is an identification of life.

According to the archaic world vision and cognition sacral or "cosmological" things in a ritual meaning are connected with life-spreading act of creation. "First things" (human anatomical-physiological organs) establish a relationship between humans (microcosms) and the world (macrocosms). They help people feel the world (light - by eye, sound - by ear, smell - by nose, etc.) and people perceive the world through them. Thus the following conclusion may be drawn: somatic elements enjoying the status of "things" are full of peculiar symbolic-ritual meaning. "It is rather important that ancient rituals use deeply symbolic material artifacts of organs, body parts, and their functions (cf. objects-"things" denoting parts of the body - eyes, mouth, tongue, heart, liver, hands, legs, fingers, etc.). In other words, parts of the body having the status of a "thing" certainly have their initial place in rituals.¹

Word-combinations and idiomatic expressions formed by somatic words best express symbolic-ritual meaning of somatic elements. Typological comparison of languages reveals the value of somatic words in a concrete language.

The paper offers the somatic term "liver" and its meaning concerning the idea of life continuity (according to ancient Greek and Georgian materials). The essence of these meanings is connected with the function of the term as an organ of vital physiological importance. It also deals with ancient way of thinking and archaic traditions. The form of the lexem is archaic in the languages presented (Greek, Georgian).²

Greek ἥπαρ is a polysemantic word with the meaning of: 1) liver as a humans' or animals' organ (According to the totemic thinking one word is used for people's and animals' ('or plants') somatic organs³). 2) food (animals' liver is considered a delicacy. Wild boar's liver (ἥπαρ κάπρου) was especially popular).⁴ Different contexts show the differences between those meanings. Moreover the motivation of metaphorical meanings of ἥπαρ can be somehow defined. Taking into consideration the character of the initial meaning, two groups of metaphorical usage of the word "liver" can be singled out:

1) Using the name of a concrete thing (signifie) as the name (signifiant) of a thing (a new thing) as well.

liver > fish

¹ В.Н. Топоров, Миф. Ритуал. Символ. Образ; Исследования в области мифопоэтического, М., 1995, 11-22.

² Э. Бенвенист, Индоевропейское именное словообразование, перевод с французского, редакция, предисловие и примечания Б.В. Горгуна, М., 1955, 27-32.

А. Мейе, Введение в сравнительное изучение индоевропейских языков, перевод с французского, под редакцией и с примечаниями Р. Шор, М.-Л., 1938, 133, 320, 404-405.

³ ჟენრიხი, 8. სარჯველაძე, ქართველურ ენათა ეტიმოლოგიური ლექსიკონი, რედაქტორი კ. დანელია, თბ., 1990.

⁴ W. Burkert, Griechische Religion der archaischen und Klassischen Epoche (Die Religionen der Menschheit); Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz, 1977, 115.

⁵ Liddell-Scott Jones, Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford, 1940.

Relationship between primary signifie (organ) and new signifie (a certain kind of a fish) is established according to the resemblance.

Here is one more example:

liver > fruitful land

Motivation: function of a concrete thing. In this case the function of liver as a life source of an animate being transfers to an inanimate thing. Compare: Svan "wora .qwižiš" - to the victim of the soil (etim. to the liver of the soil).

2) Name of a concrete thing is used for abstract conception.

liver > life (not only for animate but for inanimate things as well).

The word "liver" acquired the meaning of natural phenomenon (life). Thus, liver became the symbol of life.

It is a common knowledge that once people did not make the distinction between the fertility of the soil and that of animate thing. According to the antique imagination land was considered as a woman's organism, and reaping the harvest was the same as confinement.⁵ Greek expression ὑφ ἥπατος φέρειν (E. Supp.919) of a pregnant woman and consequently of life continuity clarifies the motivation. (cf. role of body parts in fertile rituals seems especially important).⁶

Typologically Georgian and Kartvelian languages resemble with Greek. In Georgian "γwižli" (liver) has both a basic (organ, food) and a symbolic meaning, e.g. ritual food. In dialect of Racha fresh part of fruits (grapes, plum, etc.) under the peel is called liver. Liver is a metaphor for blood relative or native ("γwižli žma" - liver-brother, "γwižli šwili" - liver-child, "γwižli bižašvili" - liver cousin, etc.)⁷. It serves as a determinant in a world expression "γwižli šwili" (liver child). Omitted form "γwižli" (liver) is used also.

Liver > close relative, relative by blood (Motivation: "One" distributed through time and space. Relatives are offsprings having a close ancestor).

Ancient Greek lexical unit "liver" gives rather interesting linguistic formulas concerning life symbolics - word combinations and phraseological expressions. ἥπαρ serves as a basic semantic component of the idioms involved in the semantic range of life circulation (life and death). As mentioned above, the identification comes from the medical knowledge and experience collected in Greece during many years: Wound in the liver, hit in the liver, destroy the liver > wipe life out; suicide. Carry beneath the liver - pregnancy, life continuity (See: {βάλε} ἥπαρ ὑπὸ πραπίδων, εἶθαρ δ' ὑπὸ γούνατ' ἔλυσεν - Shoot below the heart, in the liver, and he will bend in the knees (Il. 11,579; 13,412; 17,349); παίσασ' ὑφ' ἥπαρ αὐτόχειρ αὐτήν (S. Ant. 1315), παίσω γὰρ ἥπαρ τοῦμόν ἀμώφκει ξίφει (E. El. 688), etc.)

In our opinion works by Homer show the formation process of liver as a life symbol, though here are other opinions as well.⁸ Παῖσαι ὑφ ἥπαρ of Homer (hit in the liver) must not be understood only with direct meaning. It somehow seems to be poetic metaphor based on the anatomic knowledge of ancient Greeks (Note: breaking the heart does not always suggest the heart breaking into pieces). This opinion is supported by existence of complex adjective ἥπατουργός, meaning killer (liver-destroying).

In a certain group of idioms liver is the center of emotions and a metaphor for the modern conception of heart in tragedies and lyrics.⁹ According to some theories this opinion is related with Greek medical knowledge. Liver is also an emotional center because it suffers from strong passions.¹⁰ At the same time these emotions follow a man during his entire life.

The meaning of "liver" as a center of life and soul (θυμός) is underlined in the antique revenge formula found in Homer's poems: Hecuba wishes to eat Achilles's liver - the act of revenge for Hector (του ἐγὼ μέσον ἥπαρ ἔχοιμι ἐσθέμεναι προσφῶσα (Il. 24,212)). This is a primitive imagination. Eating enemy's part strengthens oneself. It is a stimulus of life.

In the old Georgian language "liver" is mainly referenced by translated texts from Greek. Through the following episode from original texts ("Torture of Gobron") concerning terror of enemies against Christians is rather interesting: "They cut their flesh, as though their livers were stolen by dogs."

⁵ В.Я. Пропп, Проблемы коммизма и смеха, С-Пет., 1977, 212.

⁶ W. Burkert, Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual (translated from German), California, 1982, 120-121, 137. J.C. Cooper, Lexicon alter Symbole, VEB E.a. Seeman Verlag, Leipzig, 1986, 27.

⁷ ქველ-ი, ანბ. ჩიქობავას საერთო რედაქციით, გ.7, თბ., 1962.

⁸ Р. Онианс, На коленях богов, (истоки европейской мысли о душе, разуме, теле, времени, мире и судьбе), Перевод с английского, М., 1999, 103-111.

⁹ Liddell-Scott Jones, Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford, 1940.

¹⁰ Р. Онианс, На коленях богов, М., 1999, 103-111.

Parallel to the antique beliefs and imaginations - dogs tearing the body of dead warriors to pieces are an identification of enemies eating the soul of the dead (cf. Hector asking Achilles not to leave his corpse to the dogs).

Composed words are "gul-γვიღი" - heart and liver, "γვიღის-ყური" - ear of liver (λοβός), "γვიღის-პერი" - liver-coloured (compare: ἡπαίτις), "γვიღის ჟემტ.ყები" - liver-connoisseur.¹¹ Biblical "ear of liver" has a ritual function. It is perhaps a copy of a Greek word. The word "liver-connoisseur" meaning magician, fortune-teller also attracts one's attention.

The following composed word is found in modern Georgian.

"γვიღინადები" ("γვიღიზე ნადები") > "ნადები" - put (or: having been) on the liver.

Put on the liver > put (child, etc.) = real child, blood child (liver child).¹² Compare Greek "carry under liver" (by womb). The two examples prove the significance of liver as life giving or continuing source in life symbolics.

Linguistic materials give a clear example that liver is a necessary attribute of ancient people's rituals. "Liver" composes Greek words concerning rituals and prediction. From this point of view the role of the word is of a great importance (ἡπατοσκοπέω - inspect the liver for soothsaying (LXX Ez. 21,21(26)), ἡ ἡπατοσκοπία - inspecting of the liver (Hdn.8,3.7.)).¹³ Those composed words serve as a reflection of materials and spiritual cultural facts in origin. Liver - an object for divination considers life continuity and future life. (Animal's guts (liver first of all) have been examined to tell the future, so liver would depict the process of life continuity).

An abundance of facts concerning ritual function of liver are found in Georgia. E.g. in Tusheti liver was part of a ritual ceremony commemorating the dead: boiled liver of a slaughtered sheep was cut into small pieces and served to everyone as soon as they were seated at the table. People would start their meal by eating a piece of liver. Relatives of the dead that were starting to fast didn't eat the pieces, they only put the liver on their teeth. After forty days, which was the end of the fasting ritual, those who had already been fasting ate the pieces of the boiled liver.¹⁴ This seems to be an ancient ritual which transformed into communion in Christianity (cf. people in the mountainous regions called "ciloba" (sharing) eating a ritual cake and cuts of sacrificial meat, this meant communion. See: Dionysius torn to pieces¹⁵). We have to stress out Svan linguistic formula expressing the habit of liver sacrifice: .qwiže (liver) - .qwiž (victim).

Vandryes says: "To understand the principle of word meaning development we have to proceed not from the word itself, but from the idea expressed by the word."¹⁶ We have to seek the idea in mythopoetic tradition. The myths about Prometheus and Tityus prove the symbolic meaning of a liver. Here the reference to life symbolism is clear taking into consideration the fact the liver is associated with "θυσμός" - soul, life, - and has the ability of renewal and revival (See myth of Prometheus by Hesiod).

Georgian folklore shows the resemblance with the mythology of Asia Minor and Greece. Georgian fairy-tales contain relics of communion through cannibalism - the oldest type of communion, represented e.g. in Dionysean mysteries and characterized with terrestrial sign concerning synthesis of life and death. Development structure of the common theme of liver eating also looks like the one of an archaic ritual. The theme of liver and heart is represented in the same way in almost every Georgian fairy-tale: stepmother pretends sick and asks her husband to bring heart and liver of her stepdaughter, but receives animal's (either domestic or wild) guts instead ("King and Queen," "Tsikara-bull...").¹⁷ Concentrating on the Georgian fairy-tale "Nine Brothers and a Sister" which reflects on the following scheme: life continues until a part ceases to exist (heart, liver, fish bone, chip of wood...)¹⁸ This is the greatest

¹¹ ი. აბულაძე, ძველი ქართული ენის ლექსიკონი (მასალები), რედაქტ. ე. მეგრეველი, ც. ქურციკიძე, თბ., 1973; ლ. გელენიძე, ადამიანის ანატომია-ფიზიოლოგიასთან დაკავშირებული ლექსიკა ძველ ქართულში, თბ., 1974, 112-113.

¹² ქეგლ-ი, არნ. ჩიქობავას საერთო რედაქციით, გ.5, თბ., 1958.

¹³ Liddell-Scott Jones, Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford, 1940.

¹⁴ გ. ცოცანიძე, გიორგობიდან გიორგობამდე (ეთნოგრაფიული ექსკურსიები თუშეთის ახლო წარსულში), თბ., 1990, 123-125.

¹⁵ თ. ჩხენკელი, მშვენიერი მძლევეარი, თბ., 1989, 187.

¹⁶ Ж. Вандриес, Язык, Перевод с французского, М., 1931, 192.

¹⁷ ი. გიგინეიშვილი, ვ. თოფურია, ი. ქავთარაძე, ქართული დიალექტოლოგია, ტ.1, თბ., 1961, 509-514.

კრებული „იყო და არა იყო რა“ (ქართული ხალხური ზღაპრები), რედ. დ. გოგოჭური, თბ., 1976, 110.

¹⁸ კრებული „იყო და არა იყო რა“ (ქართული ხალხური ზღაპრები), თბ., 1976, 539-549.

miracle of life (secrets of grain growth is the basic principle for Eleusinian mysteries and it gives birth do the idea of possible resurrection). Liver in Georgian fairy-tales probably keeps the mystery of life and thus is considered as an irreplaceable medicine (Considering that fortune-telling through a liver perhaps was not unusual in Georgia, though Georgian ethnographical materials show no evidence of this kind). Liver is considered a carrier of a gene the stepmother wants to annihilate.

The theme of blood drinking in Greek folklore correlates with Georgian liver-eating one. The Sun wed with a poor hunter's daughter, but he didn't want to show his face to her and gave her a potion to drink. But the girl decided to use a trick and did not drink the potion. When her husband fell asleep she took from his head three gold hairs and a key. The Sun found out everything and ordered his servant to take her to the wilderness, slay her there and bring her blood for him to drink (the sister of the Sun is a mythological Lamia - children's blood-drinking ogress). The servant took pity on the poor girl and let her go. Then the girl gave birth to a baby-boy and the husband also returned to her.¹⁹

Such kind of distribution of symbols (liver in Georgian tales, blood-in Greek) is supported by the usage and connection of the lexems "liver" and "blood" concerning the idea of relationship in Caucasian, Kartvelian and Indo-European languages. Caucasian and Kartvelian languages essentially chose liver for expressing the idea of relationship, while Indo-European languages (Greek among them) use blood.²⁰

It can be concluded that typological comparison based on the semantic analysis of the "liver"-lexem in Greek and Georgian languages is a representation of the archaic picture of objective-world perception and cognition. People certainly differ with their cognition's. Here we can underline either similarities (symbolic meaning of somatic words: somatic word>life) or differences: realization of the symbol in different linguistic formulas (the differences come from different access of linguistic groups to the appropriate word). Thus, the comparison is also noteworthy from the linguistic point of view (character of word meaning change, motivation, semantic structure of certain word combinations, etc.).

¹⁹ Folktales of Greece, The Sun and His Wife, Edited by Georgos A. Megalos (Folktales of the World, General editor Richard M. Dorson), Chicago 1977, 57-60.

²⁰ ქ. ლომთათიძე, ნათესაური ურთიერთობის განსაზღვრის საფუძველი ენობრივ მონაცემთა მიხედვით (საკითხის დასმის წესით), „მაცნე“, ენისა და ლიტერატურის სერია, № 3, 1983, 134-140.