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Original Theoretical Research



Christianity and Islam in the Adyghe Culture

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Abstract

Introduction. The core of the Adyghe culture is a moral and ethical code with high stability and minimal variability, and the periphery is a system of public institutions that is constantly changing under the influence of the social environment. One of these institutions is religion, which among the Adyghe people occurs in the form of paganism, Christianity and Islam. The purpose of the article is to identify the social factors that led to the emergence of Christianity in the Adyghe culture, and then to its displacement by Islam.

Materials and Methods. The material was primarily the work of modern researchers, considering the essence of the Adyghe culture, as well as the role that various religious ideas play in it. Publications on this topic belonging to pre-revolutionary researchers of the Adyghe culture from among foreign writers and travelers are also used. The main one is the historical method by which the authors try to show the evolution of the religious component in the culture of the Adyghe people.

Results. Most scholars of Christianity in the Adyghe culture believe that it came from Byzantium, although some of them also mention Georgia and Russia. However, the Christian roots in this culture were not very deep, since the Adyghe people flourished a syncretic cult, which consisted in a mixture of elements of Christianity and traditional beliefs. After the fall of Byzantium, Christianity in the East lost organizational and ideological support, while the Ottoman Empire did not weaken its efforts aimed at Islamizing the peoples of the North Caucasus. Gradually, Islam merged with the traditional beliefs of the Adyghe people, but never became an ethno-forming factor for it, the role of which the Adyghe people continued to play as a moral and ethical complex that forms the core of the Adyghe culture.

Discussion and Conclusion. In addition to traditional beliefs, the Adyghe culture reflected the ideas of two world religions, Christianity and Islam. At the same time, both Christianity and Islam were always intertwined among the Adyghe people with their traditional beliefs. Most Adyghe people are currently adherents of Islam, which, as a result of merging with pre-Islamic beliefs, has acquired a largely ethnic character.

Keywords: Adyghe culture, core of the Adyghe culture, periphery of the Adyghe culture, paganism, Christianity, Islam

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Христианство и ислам в культуре адыгов

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Аннотация

Введение. Ядром адыгской культуры является морально-этический кодекс, обладающий высокой устойчивостью и минимальной изменчивостью, а периферией – система общественных институтов, постоянно изменяющаяся

под влиянием социальной среды. Одним из этих институтов является религия, которая у адыгов встречается в форме язычества, христианства и ислама. Цель статьи заключается в том, чтобы выявить социальные факторы, приведшие к появлению христианства в культуре адыгов, а затем к вытеснению его исламом.

Материалы и методы. Материалом послужили прежде всего работы современных исследователей, рассматривающие сущность адыгской культуры, а также ту роль, которую играют в ней различные религиозные представления. Используются также публикации по рассматриваемой теме, принадлежащие дореволюционным исследователям адыгской культуры из числа иностранных писателей и путешественников. Основным является исторический метод, с помощью которого авторы пытаются показать эволюцию религиозной составляющей в культуре адыгского народа.

Результаты исследования. Большинство исследователей христианства в культуре адыгов полагает, что оно пришло в неё из Византии, хотя некоторые из них упоминают также Грузию и Русь. Однако христианские корни в этой культуре оказались не очень глубокими, поскольку у адыгов процветал синкретический культ, заключавшийся в смешении элементов христианства и традиционных верований. После падения Византии христианство на Востоке лишилось организационной и идеологической поддержки, тогда как Османская империя не ослабляла своих усилий, направленных на исламизацию народов Северного Кавказа. Постепенно ислам сливался с традиционными верованиями адыгского народа, но так и не стал для него этнообразующим фактором, роль которого продолжало играть адыгство как морально-этический комплекс, образующий ядро адыгской культуры.

Обсуждение и заключение. Помимо традиционных верований, в культуре адыгов нашли отражение идеи двух мировых религий – христианства и ислама. При этом и христианство, и ислам всегда переплетались у адыгов с их традиционными верованиями. Большинство адыгов являются в настоящее время приверженцами ислама, который в результате слияния с доисламскими верованиями приобрёл в значительной степени этнический характер.

Ключевые слова: культура адыгов, ядро адыгской культуры, периферия адыгской культуры, язычество, христианство, ислам

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Introduction. The word “Adyghe” is a common name for the autochthonous people of the North Caucasus, which includes the Adyghe, Kabardians, Circassians and Shapsugs who speak the Adyghe dialects of the West Caucasian language family. S.A. Razdolsky defines the Adyghe culture as a thousand-year experience of the Adyghe people who have unique knowledge about the world around them, transmitting them in interpersonal communication as the most important values [13, p. 215]. In the structure of any culture, the core and periphery can be distinguished: the first includes norms, standards, rules of activity, as well as a system of values, while the second covers its elements, which are subject to changes under the influence of various social factors. The core of the Adyghe culture is the moral and ethical code, for which the word “Adyghe” (Adyg. “Adyghagye”) is used. In a broad sense, this word means humanity, and in a narrow sense, it means the traditional norms of behavior of the Circassians, including attentiveness, integrity, truthfulness, shame, respect for elders and persons of the opposite sex, the ability to behave in society, honesty, honor, sensitivity, etc. [2, p. 1].

The core of the Adyghe culture has high stability and minimal variability, due to which it plays the role of its protective belt. In contrast, the periphery of the Adyghe culture does not remain unchanged in the process of its historical development, but constantly changes under the influence of the social environment. One of the social institutions that form it is religion, which is found in the form of paganism, Christianity and Islam among the Circassians. The purpose of the article is to identify social factors that led to the emergence of Christianity in the Adyghe culture, and then to its displacement by Islam.

Materials and Methods. The material was primarily the work of modern researchers, considering the essence of the Adyghe culture, as well as the role that various religious ideas play in it. In addition to the works of modern authors, publications on the topic under consideration belonging to pre-revolutionary researchers of the Adyghe culture from among foreign writers and travelers are used. The main thing in the article is the historical method by which the authors try to show the evolution of the religious component in the culture of the Adyghe people.

Results. Like other ancient peoples, at a certain stage of historical development, the Circassians have a pantheon of pagan deities. At the head of this pantheon there was the god Tha, who was genetically related to the archaic deity of the Sun. As a result of his evolution, the functions performed by him gradually passed to the god Thashkho (lit. Tha

the Great), who began to be considered the creator of everything that exists. In his honor, the Adyghe people regularly organized festivities, which were accompanied by dances and sacrifices, as well as the pronunciation of health resorts in the form of an appeal to the Almighty, called “khokhi” [1, p. 220].

The next after Thashkho in the pantheon of the Adyghe deities was Psatha, who, together with the Supreme deity, was in charge of human souls. His role in this pantheon is evidenced by the fact that he led the feast of the deities, which was arranged on Mount Elbrus (Adyg. Oshhamaho). According to the ideas of the ancient Circassians, Psatha was able to influence nature, pacifying not only storms and hurricanes, but also the raging ocean. Festivities lasting up to two months were held in his honor, during which dances were performed around his idol, which was a wooden fetish. Since Psatha was also considered the manager of human souls, in the existence of which the Adyghe people believed, it was he who determined the further fate of the soul when it appeared before him in heaven. The afterlife of a person, as well as the fate of his soul, depended on how he lived on earth. According to S.T. Chamokova, the perception of Tkhashkho as the Supreme deity among the Circassians indicates that they were ready for the perception of a monotheistic religion, the first of which in their culture was Orthodoxy [17, p. 51].

Most scholars of Christianity in the Adyghe culture believe that it came to it from Byzantium, although some of them also mention Georgia and Russia [9, p. 54]. According to their ideas, the Circassians got acquainted with Christianity in 40, when the missionary activities of the Orthodox St. Andrew the First-Called and Simon Kananaïos, as well as the apostles Bartholomew, Matthew, Peter and Philip, took place in the North-West Caucasus. Greek and Italian travelers familiar with the medieval Caucasus claimed that the Circassians were converted to Christianity by Andrew the First-Called or his followers. The basis for their approval was that the Circassians were familiar with the St. Andrew’s cross, symbolizing the crucifixion of St. Andrew the First-Called [14, p. 58].

The German scientist and traveler Johann Anton Güldenstädt, who, at the invitation of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, came to Russia, spoke about the role of Russia and Georgia in spreading Christianity among the Circassians. In the late 70s – early 80s of the 18th century, he participated in academic expeditions aimed at exploring the Astrakhan province, as well as the North Caucasus and Georgia. The result of these studies was the book “Geographical and Statistical Description of Georgia and the Caucasus from the Journey of Mr. Academician J.A. Güldenstädt through Russia and the Caucasus Mountains, in 1770, 71, 72 and 73”, which was published in 1809. Circassians (the Adyghe people) are characterized by J. Güldenstädt as a special people who has some resemblance only to their neighbors Abkhazians, speaking with them in different dialects of the same language. During the time of Ivan the Terrible, thanks to the Georgian and Russian clergy, the Greek Catholic faith was introduced on their land, in which worship was performed in Greek according to the Byzantine rite developed in the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. Its presence among the Circassians is evidenced by the old stone churches preserved until the 18th century, crosses on graves along the banks of the Kuma River, keeping the fast by them, etc. [3, p. 137].

A large role in the spread of Christianity among the Circassians was played by the Abkhaz kingdom, which in the Middle Ages had significant political influence in the Caucasus, as well as Tmutarakan, which passed at the end of the 10th century under the rule of Russia after the defeat of the Kyiv prince Svyatoslav Igorevich of the Khazar Khanate. The formation of the Tmutarakan principality, in which Saints Cyril and Methodius preached at one time, is considered a special stage in the Christianization of the peoples of the North-West Caucasus. This principality became a major Christian center, in which there was a cathedral, as well as churches and monasteries [12, p. 80].

For several centuries, Byzantium sent clergymen and religious books to the Caucasus, which contributed to the establishment of Christianity in the form of Orthodoxy on its territory. However, its power weakened significantly after the fall of Constantinople, which was the culmination of the Fourth Crusade undertaken by the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 13th century. Against the background of the weakening influence of Orthodoxy in the Northern Black Sea region, the activities of Genoese trading posts (colonies) intensified, which were engaged not only in trade, but also in missionary work, which had the goal of converting the Adyghe people and Abkhazians to Catholicism. The activities of Catholic missionaries not only did not achieve the desired result, but to some extent had the opposite effect. Orthodoxy in the Northern Black Sea region was not supplanted by Catholicism, but retained its positions or even strengthened them a little [10, p. 181].

In 1453, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, nicknamed the Conqueror, captured Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, after a two-month siege. The capture by the Turks of the capital of Byzantium marked the fall of the Empire itself, which served as a stronghold of Christianity in the East. The collapse of the Eastern Roman Empire resulted in a gradual change in the religious preferences of the Circassians, expressed in the emergence of syncretic dualism, in which, along with the Orthodox, they practiced pagan cults.

According to modern scholars, the Christianization of the Adyghe people began in the 6th century and lasted a whole millennium. Initially, it was carried out by Byzantium, Georgia and Russia, professing the Orthodox faith, and later by the Genoese, who were champions of Catholicism. Since neither Orthodoxy nor Catholicism took deep roots in the consciousness of the Adyghe people, the Christianization they experienced is called superficial [4, p. 140]. Moreover, S.B. Filatov claims that it was almost completely eradicated [15, p. 162].

The Christianization of the Adyghe people contributed to its introduction to the cultural traditions of Orthodoxy, although it did not have a significant impact on its consciousness. In the 16th century it was replaced by Islamization associated with the policies of the Ottoman Empire, which had long tried to subjugate the Circassians, if not politically, then with the help of Islam. There is no doubt that Islam has an important place in the religious preferences of the Circassians, but it has not become a decisive factor in the development of their culture [15, p. 141]. In this regard, the following questions arise: (1) how deep were the roots launched by Christianity in the culture of the Adyghe people? (2) why did Catholicism fail to oust Orthodox ideas from the Adyghe culture, and Islam to some extent succeeded? (3) why did Islam not become a decisive factor in the development of the Adyghe culture, although most Adyghe people are Muslims belonging to one of its directions – Sunnis? The answers to these questions, which contain the results of our study, can be formulated as follows:

(1) According to numerous testimonies of Russian and foreign authors who personally observed the life of the Adyghe people, the Christian roots in its culture were not very deep. Since the Circassians flourished a syncretic cult, consisting in a mixture of elements of Christianity and traditional beliefs, some of these authors found it difficult to determine their religion or even called them unbelievers [11, p. 37]. The deeper rooting of Christianity in the Adyghe culture was also not facilitated by the fact that the clergy who used the Greek language in their sermons themselves did not always understand their meaning [19, p. 4062].

(2) After the fall of Byzantium, Christianity in the East lost organizational and ideological support, while the Ottoman Empire did not weaken its efforts aimed at Islamizing the peoples of the North Caucasus. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate, which was in vassal dependence on it, resulted in the penetration of Islam into all layers of the Adyghe society. According to the Kabardian princes to the Crimean Khan, which dates back to the beginning of the 18th century, most Circassians converted to Islam, a mosque was built in almost every village and an elementary school was opened. However, the penetration of Islam into the culture of the Circassians was a rather long process, in which not only Muslim sermons played an important role, but also the forceful methods practiced by the Turkish sultans and Crimean khans [5, p. 73]. Undoubtedly, it had a certain influence on the religious representations of the Circassians, but their confession of Islam, as in its time and Christianity, was formal due to a lack of educated clergy, which makes it impossible to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the religious dogma of Muslims [7, p. 108]. Nevertheless, Islam, relying on the military and ideological power of the Ottoman Empire, was able to do what Catholicism could not do, which lost its influence in the East: to oust Orthodoxy and strengthen its position among the Circassians.

(3) The Adyghe culture was characterized by religious syncretism, which was expressed in the coexistence of traditional beliefs, as well as Christianity and Islam. In order for Islam to become the dominant form of religion among the Circassians, it had to be integrated into their traditional beliefs. Merging with these beliefs, Islam increasingly acquired an ethnic character, influencing the national feelings of the Adyghe people [16, p. 18]. Nevertheless, it never became an ethno-forming factor, the role of which Adyghe continued to play as a moral and ethical complex that forms the core of the Adyghe culture.

Discussion and Conclusion. In addition to traditional beliefs, the Adyghe culture reflected the ideas of two world religions: Christianity and Islam. At the same time, both Christianity and Islam were always intertwined among the Circassians with their traditional beliefs. Most Circassians are currently adherents of Islam, which, as a result of merging with pre-Islamic beliefs, has acquired a largely ethnic character.

The problem of the relationship between traditional beliefs of the Circassians and two world religions, the consideration of which is devoted to the article, is multifaceted. One of its aspects is the understanding of this relationship as an interreligious dialogue, the identification of the essence and typology of which is becoming a popular topic of research in the field of socio-humanitarian knowledge [8, p. 61–101; 20, p. 15–30]. Another interesting and little-studied aspect of the problem we are considering is the reflection in the Adyghe culture of the ideas of Buddhism, which their closest neighbors, the Kalmyks, have been professing since the 13th century [6, p. 21–33; 18, p. 15]. We believe that the aspects of this problem identified by us can become the subject of further research on the philosophical foundations of the Adyghe culture.

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