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Psycho-cultural Patterns of Toasting in Caucasus and Debate on the Roots of Feasting Traditions in Caucasus

In the recent debate on the origins of the traditional Georgian and Caucasian feasting some researchers insist that in the historical sources there is no mention of toasting system before 19-th century, so Georgian and Caucasian feast with elaborate toasts is an "invented" tradition and result of Georgianization of Russian Feast. Therefore, authentic Georgian feast before 19-th century is characterized as ritualized, but uncivilized and uncultured practice of material consumption - drunken orgy as in Safavid Persia, which becomes a "cultured" and spiritual domain only through the introduction of thematic toasting borrowed from Russian literature under Russian imperial and Stalinist totalitarian influence. Georgian and generally Caucasian guest-host relations as foundations of the Georgian banquet are seen by the followers of this approach as maintaining highly centralized, monologic and autocratic relations in society; so Caucasian hospitality is seen as undemocratic, due to mutually obligatory responsibilities for guest and host; thus Caucasian guest-host relations and Georgian supra are seen as contradictory to the establishment and effective functioning of civil society in Georgia (Caucasus).

Recent publications by the same authors again underline importance of toasting traditions in Georgia only from 20-th century as stemming from informal status of Georgian Supra as an institute of anti-imperial resistance but are neglecting religious roots. Georgian Sadgegrdzelo (Toast) was characterized

as an institution of domination losing its importance as a result of declining shadow economy in a separate article of World Informality Encyclopedia.

The aim of the article is to review ethnographic studies left beyond the view of aforementioned critics of Georgian Supra and to analyse religious elements of Caucasian alcohol drinking from ethno-sociological and anthropological view.

The paper presents a review of the 17-19th century travelogues by Guivanni da Lucca (1648-1650), Giudice Milanese (1631-1643), Christophoro Castelli (1640-1657), Volkonski and Khvatov (1637-1640), Tolochanov and levlev (1650-1652), Teimuraz II (1763), Jacques Gamba (1821-1831), Eduard Eichwald (1825), which note authenticity of Caucasian and Georgian feasting traditions, comprised by the system of multiple toasts, elaborate ceremonial drinking (kneeling before and kissing after drink), chanting as part of toasting ceremony, participation of women and frequent toasting for women.

The paper also aims to discuss ideological aspects in recent publications on the roots of Georgian Supra tradition. It is shown that initiators of discussion from the beginning were making accents on ideological criticism of Georgian culture, which later became more differentiated and acquired new directions. During discussion the studies of Georgian ethnographers (Bardavelidze, Gotsiridze, Gambashidze), where ancient roots of Supra tradition were emphasized, were neglected. Compensatory theory of toast was based on only few historical sources and neglected importance of Supra tradition before 19th century and main factor of Supra - religious basis of tradition. Then historical roots of feasting tradition were neglected also for the whole Caucasus. Anthropological analysis of the historical sources reveals psycho-cultural and typological differences of drinking patterns between Georgia and Russia before 19th century. Alcohol drinking traditions in Georgia and Caucasus can be clearly attributed to

the "wine", "wet" drinking culture, where drinking is expected, but drunkenness prohibited. In such Integrated cultures rules, values and sanctions for drinking are well established and fit well in the whole culture, alcoholism is low. Travelogues by Augustin Maierberg (1661-1663), Nicolaus Witsen (1664-1665) and Jacob Reutenfels (1670-1672) confirm, that Russian drinking style can be clearly attributed to "spirits", "dry" drinking culture, where intoxication is the aim of drinking. The difference of alcohol drinking practices between Caucasus and Russia is noted by Russian researchers also.

In the article some elements of Svanetian traditional toast system are reviewed, namely connection between Svanetian toast "sarush" and Zoroastrian "Sarosh" is shown, which indicates the ancient roots of toast.

The strength of religious component of toasting in Caucasus can be confirmed by example of Guivanni da Lucca (1650), which describes his visit to Circassians, where the sons of the host were drinking alcohol kneeling on right leg. Drinking while kneeling on right leg was in tradition also in some regions of mountainous Georgia till the 30s of the 20th century. Modern Adygea Circassians are ending each toast with a religious invocation "Amen", which signals the allowance to drink. In this way alcohol is sanctified and has a role of religious marker for the Adygea Circassians.

The elaborate nature of the toasting rituals described in the writings of the travellers confirms mainly spiritual, Christian character of a traditional feast in the Caucasus and Georgia. The analysis of the recent debate on the roots of the Georgian feast reveals the ideological basis of that approach according to which the imperial context of the 19th century is the key to understanding the peculiarities of the traditional Caucasian feast as a cultural phenomenon.