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ROLE OF RELIGION IN STATE BUILDING IN THE CONTEXT
OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the role of dominant religion in preservation of state. There were dozens of religions in Genghiz Khan's empire. The most significant ones were shamanism and Buddhism, later Islam and Christianity. Genghiz Khan did not follow any religion and thus was tolerant of all of them. His capital of Karakorum was notable for distinctive religious tolerance, however, it was divided into quarters, each for adherents of a specific religion. Believers of different religions coexisted. This empire fell for a number of reasons. The first reason was a lack of a specific Mongol identity. But then, what defines identity of a nation and that of a person? It is its definitive location. Love for home state, distinctive feelings for motherland. Mongols did not constitute a majority among multiple nations forming the empire. The main cause for disintegration of Khazaria was the lack of national identity defined by a common faith. Despite religious tolerance on behalf of the ruling class, irrepressible conflicts arose between Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Situation was different in the Ancient Rus. Despite its seeming unity and might, Kievan Rus was on the brink of disintegration. Currently, the issue of national identity and understanding of one's uniqueness in the global world has become a critical problem. The solution is evident: while respecting and accepting other cultures, one shall not forgo one's own culture. Inter-cultural dialog is the only possibility for keeping equal status of confessions, political ideologies and ethnic traditions.

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1. Introduction

What is the foundation of the state, and broader, of an empire? What kept together the empire of Genghiz Khan, Khazar Khaganate, Russian and then Soviet empire, British Empire or the United States of America? In order to see into the matter, it is necessary to identify the role of a dominant religion in preservation of a state.

For example, let us consider the largest empire of all, that covered the area of 24 to 33 million square kilometers, the empire of Genghis Khan (Temujin). In Genghis Khan's empire there were dozens of religions. The most significant ones were shamanism and Buddhism, later Islam and Christianity. Genghis Khan did not follow any religion and thus was tolerant of all of them. His capital of Karakorum was notable for distinctive religious tolerance, however, it was divided into quarters, each for adherents of a specific religion. Believers of different religions coexisted.

2. Problem Statement

So, what was the foundation of the Genghis Khan Empire if not religion? It was military structure clamped with tight discipline. Genghis Khan undertook a full-scale reform of his army, dividing it into decimal units, from tens to ten thousand. The whole unit was punished for retreat of any subunit. The punishment was breaking one's spine. In his appointments, Genghis Khan rejected ancestral principle. Promotion depended exclusively on allegiance and personal merit (Dahmardeh & Mernar, 2014).

In the beginning, he united all the tribes into a single horde: Mongols, Tatars, Merkits, Onguts, Kereites, Naymans, Oirons, Uyghurs and later Jurchens (Niuchens). It was a terrific army distinguished with exorbitant cruelty. This army subjugated and destroyed Khorezm and Samarkand, pearls of Middle East, not to mention China. However, this empire—spreading from the Pacific Ocean to the Caspian Sea and from Siberia to India—was held together by the power of a single person, Genghis Khan himself. Following his death, it gradually disappeared.

3. Research Questions

What led to the disintegration of Genghis Khan's Empire? This question needs clarification. The author is of an opinion that the empire fell for a number of reasons. The first reason was a lack of a specific Mongol identity. But then, what defines identity of a nation and that of a person? It is its definitive location. Love for home state, distinctive feelings for one's motherland. Mongols did not constitute a majority among multiple nations forming the empire. They assimilated with other nations following the laws of cultural assimilation. The second cause was the lack of dominant religion. The third cause was the lack of a common uniting center. The empire was divided into *uluses* (khanates), each with its own khan. All this causes led to the fall of the great empire. By the 5th century of its existence, the empire completely vanished.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to provide culturological and historical analysis of causes for creation of great empires and follow the causes of their disintegration, showing the role that religion plays in nation building.

5. Research Methods

The principal research methods employed are systemic analysis, comparative method and biographical method. In addition, the researcher finds application for other methods as need arises: linguistic observation, description, linguistic culturological analysis. The methods used allowed making reliable conclusions.

6. Findings

Similar situation took place in Khazaria. The Khazar Khaganate was formed in the late 6th - early 7th century. In the beginning, it was a powerful state that actively opposed Arabs and Persians thus allowing European nations to form. Khazaria was a pagan state, with its religion centered around adoration of Turkic-Mongolic god Tengri. Khazars occupied vast territories in lower Volga (Itil), the river had given its name to Khazar capital, the city of Itil. Rus and its neighbors were paying tribute to Khazars.

However, in 7th century, Khazars allowed Persian and Byzantian Jews to settle within their borders. Employing Jewish brides as tactical means, Jews gradually came to control the administrative class of Khazaria. As a result, Khazarian elite adopted Judaism as the state religion. At that, most Khazars followed Islam or Christianity. Thus, a chimera state emerged (Craig, 2013).

In 965, Sviatoslav I, a Grand Prince of Kiev, devastated Khazar capital of Itil, and in 985 his son Vladimir completely obliterated Khazaria.

The author is of an opinion that the main cause for disintegration of Khazaria was the lack of national identity defined by a common faith. Despite religious tolerance on behalf of the ruling class, irrepressible conflicts arose between Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

There is also an alternative theory for the cause of Khazaria's fall (Lynch, 2008). However, its antisemitic nature does not allow us to accept it. Jews transformed a warrior nation into trader nation. Having lost their warrior spirit, Khazars easily fell under the blows of pagan Slavs.

Situation was different in the Ancient Rus. Kievan Grand Prince Vladimir had been thinking about converting to a monotheistic faith for a long time. Selection of a common religion was preceded by prolonged reflection. Being pagan by faith, he led a life typical for pagan princes. Vladimir had multiple wives and the number of his concubines according to ancient chroniclers reached 800. This number is most probably unreliable due to a common trend for exaggeration in ancient chronicles. Vladimir raped Polotsk princess Rogneda after she refused marrying him arguing that she was not going to be married to a son of a slave woman.

Vladimir decided to marry Anna, a sister of Byzantine Emperor Basil II. Czarina gave her consent, but with a precondition that Vladimir has to adopt Christianity. Vladimir refused. Soon after he lost his eyesight. According to chroniclers, it was a sky-sign. Vladimir recovered his sight soon after taking baptism in Khersones (Korsun).

In 988, Vladimir baptized the people of Kiev. Before that, he had thrown into Dnieper the images of Perun who was depicted with the features of the prince himself. Chronicles attest that the idol of Perun started swimming against the stream.

After adoption of Christianity, Kiev played a special role in unification of Slavs and formation of a unified nation. During the times of Vladimir, Kievan Rus was a powerful state with its own geopolitical features. It was on the path from Varangians to the Greeks and experienced strong influences from both. Following Vladimir's expulsion and escape to Scandinavia, he returned to Rus with a Varangian armed force. His *druzhina* (prince's immediate entourage) was ethnically quite varied. Its backbone was formed by Vikings. However, Vikings were not an ethnic unity, but a social one, a group of people united by a common occupation and lifestyle. They were natives of various tribes and peoples, mostly Scandinavian. Their main occupation was war and plundering incursions towards neighboring lands. They were named scourge of God not without reason. Among Vikings there were Varangians, Rus, Danes and Northern Slavs. In their *drakkars* they went through the whole Europe to Constantinople and terrified all the nations, including Brits and Franks. They took possession of London and Paris. They admired various gods: from Odin and Thor to Perun, Veles and Svarog.

Despite its seeming unity and might, Kievan Rus was on the brink of disintegration, just like the Khazar Khanate, for it was too disjointed ethnically and religiously and was becoming an ethnic chimera.

In his search for a common god, Vladimir first turned to the cult of Perun, but in the eyes of multiple pagan ethnicities populating Rus, Perun was no better than any other pagan god, so he was rejected. Thus, in order to consolidate the country, Vladimir had to choose among three global religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Almazov (2005), author of a reconstruction novel *Ilya the Bogatyr*, writes: "A mistake in selection of faith threatened with a civil war and complete disintegration of the state, even worse than societal catastrophe in Khazaria" (p. 9). For several years, Prince Vladimir evaluated a prospective faith for Rus. Judaism was discarded almost immediately, for the Prince saw the sad fate of Khazaria where the social elite and administration were followers of this religion while the majority of population were either Christians or Muslims. Adopting Catholicism meant a complete submission to the Roman Pope and crusader knights, who saw Slavs only as a subject for subjugation and annihilation (as it had already happened to Prussians), and not as equal brothers in Christ. So, only Islam or so-called *Greek faith* remained as options, the latter being a Byzantine Christianity. Islam appealed to cruel and fearless Vladimir with its warrior spirit and strict order. However, all the previous experience and lifestyle of the Prince were contrary to adoption of Islam. Many years of paganism made the prince used to prolonged feasts and promiscuity, while Islam required rejection of wine. The Greek faith was the most suitable for Vladimir and his subjects; in addition, for many years there were hermit monks living in caves near Kiev, and more and more Kievans adopted the religion from Byzantines. Thus, turning to Constantinople met the needs of the prince and his army, as well and those of Kiev population.

Unlike Khazaria, where elite professed Judaism while the majority of population were followers of various other confessions, the senior *druzhina* consisting of Varangians and Rus adopted Christianity and by doing that united with the Slavs. According to Almazov (2005), "from the time of the Baptism, tribal difference between peoples of the steppe and Kievans vanishes, for in those times the question of what faith you are meant who you are and who you are with" (p. 11). With adoption of Christianity, pagan names, such as Farlaf and Pervusha give way to Fyodor, Pyotr and other names of Christian saints. Christianity brought together numerous Slavic tribes of Drevlians, Polians, Radimiches, Dregoviches with Finno-Ugrian tribes of Meria, Muroma, Vyatches as well as peoples of the steppe, Kumans and Pechenegs, eastern Turks and Khazars. The new religion brought also a new morals, based upon love to one's neighbor, not on hatred towards alien other, thus creating a new state with a common faith and a supreme power, the nation of Rus.

Thus, a new Christian state joined the direction of the Christian civilization, loosing its destructive Varangian foundation, which was especially evident in early princes of Rus, Oleg, Igor and Sviatoslav, who were known for their belligerence and bloodlust. What follows is a description of their plundering expeditions to Constantinople that Karamzin, the first Russian historiographer gives basing on chronicles in his *History of the Russian State*: "They were swimming in blood of unfortunate ones, tortured their prisoners, threw into the sea both living and dead. As Huns and Germans had done in provinces of empire, in that time Northmen, Oleg's fellow countrymen, spread terror through the Western Europe. Nowadays, war gives one a right to kill armed enemies, back then it was a right to cause havoc in a land and boast of one's evil deeds. (Karamzin, 2000). It is not in vain that ancient chronicler compares Oleg and his relatives with representatives of other destructive empires, those of Huns and Northmen, for pagan Rus was just another example of the same.

Having become a Christian, Vladimir changed his ways. Instead of cruel pagan warlord we see a virtuous man and a wise ruler. He rejected polygamy, marrying off his ex-wives. He also offered to marry off Rogneda, but she refused, preferring to retire to a convent. Father's wisdom was inherited by Yaroslav, who was given a nickname the Wise and significantly consolidated the Russian state, continuing the constructive policy of his father Vladimir. He strengthened many aspects of the geopolitical position of Rus, especially in its foreign policy by marrying off his daughters to overseas rulers.

Oleg called Kiev the Mother of Russian cities. Indeed, it was a brilliant star in the constellation of the Russian cities from the 9th to 11th century. However, in the 12th century, with the invasion of Tatar-Mongols, the fame of Kiev declines and a new star is born, that of Moscow.

The idea of bringing together all the Russian lands, the idea of the Empire, was inherited by Moscow princes from Mongols and not from Byzantines. By early 14th century, the concept of apanage principality was replaced with the idea of a centralized multiethnic state of Rus-Russia. Developing the idea of Genghiz Khan's empire, the idea of the Golden Horde, Rus turned to a spiritually closer Byzantium for influence, thus expanding the Mongolic idea with an Orthodox, Russified implementation.

Reign of Aleksandr Nevsky was a time of another ordeal for the Orthodox faith. He was forced to choose who to subjugate himself to: the Horde or Catholics. He preferred the Horde, as Tatars and

Mongols never imposed their beliefs onto other peoples, including Russians. At the same time, Catholics embodied in crusader knights and papal legates, were actively attacking Orthodox Christianity.

A unified Christian faith allowed the Russian state not only feeling equal to other European states but also unified the Russian people. However, it did not mean that Rus-Russia was closed to other peoples. It is remarkable, that pre-1917 questionnaires lacked the field of ethnicity. Instead, there was a field for confession. The dominant confession in Russia was Orthodox Christianity. Any person could become Orthodox, independent of their ethnicity. There is no need to be afraid of the words Russian and Orthodox. These two words form the foundation of Russia. Nowadays, these words have become a marker of national identity.

As for the USA, it has been held for long time that the foundation of the American culture is formed by Anglo-Saxon and broader British culture (Thornton, 2000). However, with the rising self-awareness of ethnic groups comprising the American people, the melting pot analogy was losing more and more popularity. Another comparison became more prominent, that of a salad dish. In this dish, representatives of each ethnic group acknowledged their ethnic roots, their ethnic distinctiveness without solving in the American social communality. This phenomenon may hardly have any negative interpretations. However, the problem is that specific starts prevailing over common (Mayhew, 2016). Less and less American citizens feel like Americans, and more and more feel like Chinese, Spanish, Puerto Ricans, Filipino, Latinos, South East Asians and Black Africans. It is easy to see that colored ethnicities started to state their national and cultural dignity and self-segregate from White population. This problem first appeared in the US during the first decades of the 20th century and has become especially vexed in late 20th and early 21st century (Castro, 1998). The identity of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) has yielded significant ground in the American society and they start feeling vulnerability of their position.

7. Conclusion

Currently, the issue of national identity and understanding of one's uniqueness in the global world has become a critical problem. As we see, the problem is not new. Multiple states encountered it through the ages. However, the solution is evident: while respecting and accepting other cultures, one shall not forgo one's own culture. Inter-cultural dialog is the only possibility for keeping equal status of confessions, political ideologies and ethnic traditions.

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