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**SEMANTICS OF THE CROSS-DZOR IN THE ADYGHES'
(CIRCASSIANS) MYTHOPOETIC VISION**

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Abstract

This research is aimed at identifying or revealing the semantics of such an iconic element of the Adyghe mythopoetic outlook as the symbolism of the cross-dzor. The article analyses the relation of the cross to the concepts of the sacred tree as representing mythological views on the structure of the space as well as the concept of the Centre and the axis connecting space zones. The relevance of the research is determined by the inadequately treated issues referred to archaic mythopoetic representations of the Adyghe (Circassians). The research employs an integrated approach that combines structural-semiotic and comparative-historical methods of analysis. The methods allow considering the semantics of the cross-dzor and its role in the system of mythopoetic views of the Adyghe. The article gives coverage to various points of view related to the interpretation of the sign of the cross. It reveals the multifunctional nature of this symbol as combining a broad range of concepts such as the image of sacred space and the symbolism of the world tree, as well as the Centre in the Adyghe mythological world model. The article provides a glimpse of the main functions of the cross-dzor and explains its correlation with the concepts of structural and spatial nature and the image of the sacred Centre of the world. The research material is of practical value for developing university-level academic courses on Adyghe literature. Its results and conclusions provide the opportunity to pursue a deeper insight into the Adyghe folklore.

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Keywords: Cross-dzor, tree, mythology, Adyghe, rite, symbolism.



1. Introduction

The modern stage of folkloristics as a science requires that national folklore should be given a comprehensive view of through gaining insight into mythopoetic thinking since traditional verbal ethnic culture is based on the mythopoetic vision. One of the topical research subjects outlined within the framework of the studies mentioned above is a set of significant, traditional symbols, images and signs that were fundamental for the archaic thinking. One of such signs representing an essential element of the system of mythopoetic representations and objectifying the structure of the Adyghe mythopoetic model of the world is the cross-dzor as associated with the sacred tree.

2. Problem Statement

This research brings forth the problem to trace the semantic meaning, functions and particular nature of the Adyghe cross-dzor as associated with the mythological symbolism of the sacred tree. The mainstream approach within the research is the traditional interpretation of oral culture in folkloristics where the prehistoric myth construct is an ideological basis. "The particular content of the texts (in the semiotic respect) of that age, according to V. N. Toporov, involves aligning the destructive, chaotic elements with the space origin when describing the successive stages of creating and developing the world. The main way of understanding (specifically-shaped learning experiences) the world and resolving its contradictions (paradoxes, in particular) is provided by a myth as a set (or system) of myths, and what is more important, as a special type of "thinking", which chronologically and essentially is opposed to historical and scientific ways of thinking" (Toporov, 2001).

Circassians' cult of sacred trees and groves that has been described by European and Russian travellers and scientists is an inseparable part of the cross. Whereas, the cross was an indispensable attribute of the rites by the sacred tree. The cross could be drawn on the tree, put nearby or locate among the trees in the sacred grove.

The research takes forward the hypothesis about the space related and dependent on the nature of the Adyghe cross-dzor with its main function to "sacralize" the space. The cross presented in the Adyghe myth-ritual complex and ritual folklore seems to have a multifunctional character and includes a wide range of representations, such as the symbolism of the world tree. The Adyghe cross-dzor in the system of mythopoetic views of the Adyghe appears as a core of the upper sacred values such as life, sun and fertility. It symbolizes the structure of the Universe.

The archaic symbolism of the cross while functioning has absorbed new symbolic meanings that do not exclude the Christian symbolism. However, the initial understanding of the symbolism of the Adyghe cross (in the shape of the letter "T", as well as in its other shapes) associated with the cult of the sacred tree is the representation of the cosmological, structural and spatial nature related to the concept of "sacred", the sacred space - the Centre. It is objectified through the sacred groves and trees.

3. Research Questions

European and Russian researchers of the ethnocultural tradition of the Adyghe associated the sacral symbolism of the cross with the Christian religion. However, it seems that the belief system associated with

the iconic, sacred nature of the cross in the Adyghe mythological views is much more archaic than Christian ideas.

The assumption can be considered as true through exploring data of the traditional culture of the Adyghe by a number of European travellers and researchers. "Circassians" (Adyghe – Zh. K.) are represented in their works as pagans with the culture where neither Christianity nor Islam significant traces can be found. According to Giovanni Lucca (circa 1634): "The only thing they preserved from the Greek religion is the custom of leaving food on the graves and keeping some fasts" (Lucca, 1974).

Later, in the 30s of the XIX century, Edmond Spencer notes: "Greek and Italian researchers of the Caucasian regions in the middle ages based themselves upon the existing crosses in the shape of St. Andrew's cross and claimed that this Saint or his followers converted the inhabitants to Christianity; although others claim that St. Nina, Georgian duchess and a contemporary of Constantine, had the honour to spread the values of our religion among the peoples living in Caucasus. Let it be as it will be, but the fundamental truths of Christianity have not been established enough to resist ignorance: the consequence is that the people are deprived of a written language and of any aid other than the oral tradition" (Spencer, 1994).

The shape of the cross-dzor is described in different ways. It can be represented either as a cross or as trefoil. There are its T-images, so called "Egyptian", or crux commissa (St. Anthony's cross). "A roughly nailed together cross, the upper part of which is made in the trefoil shape sanctifies the place of religious worship; there no one dares to cut down a tree or touch objects hung on the trees". This is the way T. de Marigny describes a rite by the sacred tree during his first journey in 1818 (Marigny, 1974). Later, during his second visit in 1823-1824, he described the so-called crux commissa (St. Anthony's cross).

The letter "T" or "hammer" shaped cross is mentioned by Zh.B. Spencer and Tavernier (Tavernier, 1974; Spencer, 1994). "Their religious ceremonies are always celebrated in a sacred grove that is specially designed for this purpose; and it is distinguished by some religious symbols, by the cross shaped according a Latin or Greek tradition. Once or twice I observed the emblem as I passed through their sacred groves in Adler valley; it was rather more like a "T" letter than a cross. They say that it (the emblem) was really ancient and I was not able to get any information about its (the cross) true meanings" (Spencer, 1994, p.109).

Researchers of the ancient pagan beliefs of the Circassians - L. I. Lavrov, A. T. Shortanov, and their followers S.A. Lyausheva, H. A. Khabekhirova in collaboration with A. I. Musukhayev are also of the opinion that the cross of the Adyghe sacred trees and groves has nothing to do with the Christian religious symbol.

L. I. Lavrov (Lavrov, 1959), and A. T. Shortanov (Shortanov, 1982) consider the cross - "dzor" as a three-pointed pre-Christian fetish of the ancient Caucasian nature. H.A. Khabekhirova and A. I. Musukaev refer the Adyghe "dzor" to the symbolism of the world tree: "The three-pointed Adyghe fetish cross can be a symbol of the world tree (its equivalent is a sephirothic tree), as well as the sacred tree, the equivalent of the deity" (Khabekhirova & Musukayev, 2001). S.A. Lyausheva associates the cross with the cult of the tree and considers it to be a symbol of the sun: "It is not the shape only," she says, "what is important about the symbolism of the cross; the material it is made from - wood, in our opinion, shows the connection of the symbolism of the cross with the tree of life... and the cult of the sun ... The cross in the circle, the sign of

the sun associated with fire meant the movement of the sun across the sky as if it was a wheel" (Lyausheva, 2002).

Despite numerous different contradictory evidence and interpretations about the shape and nature of the Adyghe cross-dzor, the mythological symbolism of the cross, its significance and role in the system of Adyghe mythopoetic views remain unexplored.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this research is to study and identify the oldest mythological representations associated with the cult of the sacred tree and in its correlation with the iconic function of the ancient mythological symbol of the "cross"-dzor. The objective of the study is a comprehensive analysis of folklore texts, rites, ritual games and rituals related to the "cross"-dzor, as well as the study of their relations with the concept of the sacred tree.

5. Research Methods

The earliest evidence of European and domestic researchers of the traditional culture of the Adyghes concerning the usage of the cross-dzor in the rites and rituals where it had a specific, peculiar shape (trefoil, T-letter), descriptions of the rites and rituals associated with the veneration of sacred trees and groves from the ethnographic scientific works with the description of ritual games with the cross, as well as ritual folklore and texts where mythopoetic representations associated with the cross-dzor and the tree are used as material of the study. The paper uses a complex, systematic method involving a comprehensive study of folklore, rites and rituals in the cultural and historical context. The folklore sources under study are presented by the verified authentic domestic editions of the Adyghe folklore and by the materials taken from the works by pre-revolutionary and modern researchers.

6. Findings

The cross considered to be inseparable from the concept of the sacred tree and sacred grove in the myth-ritual complex of the Adyghes. It seems to have been a sign of the upper sacred values reflected in a range of different concepts and functions.

This assumption is supported by a number of evidence that are found in the works of European researchers and travellers who visited Caucasus and the territories inhabited by Adyghe peoples. They found out valuable information about their life, customs, rituals and beliefs. So, John de Galonifotibus after visiting the Circassians in the XV century noted: "As for religion, despite the fact that in some rites and fasts they follow the Greeks, they neglect all other aspects of the religion, since they have their own cults and rites. Instead of fasting for forty days, they fast for 50 days, because they also keep to pre-Christmas and Sabbatical fasts. During great fasts and Sundays they even sacrifice animals and the meat is given and eaten, but they give the animals' heads to the poor and the old, or put them in high places, like tree branches and the rite implies the sharing the food with the spirits. A tree is planted next to the Church, and the cross is hung on it. The tree after the ceremony is considered to become the tree of the Lord. A variety of symbols are located on the branches of the tree; animals' heads are among them. <...> Next to the Church and the

above-mentioned tree of the Lord a circle is drawn where no one will ever dare touch anything. But outside that circle, there is a rule that whoever first touches anything, it should belong to the person".

Planting the tree which is supposed to become sacred near the Church - the Temple of the deity, putting the cross on it as a sign of the divine, sacred beginning, drawing the sacred circle near the tree with the cross inside where no one dares to touch anything are the evidence of the connection and the interweaving of ancient archaic ideas with Christian symbols where pagan views appear dominant.

The Christian Church and the surrounding area become sacred when they are connected with pagan sacred objects and attributes: the tree with the cross attached to it. The place becomes the centre of the sacred space after drawing the sacred circle.

The cross, as one of the most important symbols of sacred values, including pre-Christian ones, is known in European and Asian cultural traditions, as well as abroad. "The cross, according to V.N. Toporov, - both structurally, and chronologically acts as a partition wall between the world tree (connected, as a rule, with zoomorphic images) and a human and it is a kind of description of both objects / subjects" (Toporov, 1982).

It should be noted that dendrological representations in the ethno-cultural tradition of the Adyghes constitute a system of views that is also marked by the concept of "sacred" and divine. As the highest natural symbol of dynamic growth, seasonal dying and regeneration, the tree occupies one of the central positions in the system of Adyghe mythological views. Sacred trees and groves ("ТхьэщӀагъ мӕз" - "the Forest at the foot of Tkha", "ТхьэщӀагъ жыг" - "The tree of Tkha foot") were taken as a symbol of sacred space and an idea of the centre of the Universe that connects the axes between the various Universe levels: the lower, middle and upper worlds.

The concept-centred importance of the tree in Adyghe mythopoetic consciousness is determined by the animistic beliefs that have formed a wide range of views oriented towards the functional significance and mythological symbolism of the tree.

For the Circassians the tree and sacred space at its bottom perform the role of a temple under the open sky where prayers were offered up and anthems (хьуэхьу) were sung in honour of the deities. Substantial evidence of the existence of sacred groves and sacred trees where ritual ceremonies of various kinds were held can be found in almost every "report", "description" and "travel" of European and Russian researchers involved in studies of ethnic culture of the Circassians over the centuries - J. Lucca (Lucca, 1974), J. Bell (Bell, 1840), T. de Marigny (Marigny, 1974), I.F. Blaramberg (Blaramberg, 1974). "The Circassians who live in Pyatigorye Region have no God, no worship, no religion, - as D.K. Kantemir wrote (Kantemir, 2006). They have a dense grove that is located in a valley surrounded by high mountains. It is well watered and is surrounded by a large moat. All the nation gathers there at the end of August<...>. The tradition to gather there is so time-honoured that they do not remember its origin. They gather in order to consecrate and decorate some trees in this grove with their best weapons. They are spiritualized to return there next year, and after coming up to kiss the weapons they return them where they have been located before. These weapons remain there without being watched until they are destroyed by rust or time" (Kantemir, 2006, p.99). Abri de la Motre after visiting Caucasus in 1711 wrote: "Mountain Circassians, as far as I could learn from the stories, are something like druids worshipping old oaks and other trees as dwelling of some invisible deities that can actualize their worldly requests <...>. Gathering in certain

months and on certain days, they organize processions with lit torches around these trees associated with their deity, at the foot of the trees they sacrifice various animals, such as bulls, sheep, lambs, goats". "Sacred groves, according to N. Dubrovin, are holy sites that no one dared to touch them, replaced the Temple for worshipping. Circassians believed sincerely in the sanctity and miraculous power of such groves and forests" (Dubrovin, 1991).

The tree itself was an image of the world, the Universe. The idea of the creative power of the divine spark embodied in the giant trees, much older than people as their age was measured by centuries, became a motivating factor for believing in their sacred nature. In the sacred groves at the foot of the sacred tree they were praying for a part of the divine creative power to be sent down to man: about the rain, cattle and crops productivity, healing and well-being. Trees struck by a lightning were considered to be connected with the deity. The "marked" trees were thought to be a connecting channel between the man and God (the rituals associated with Shibli, the deity of the celestial fire, Tkhashkhoz and Tkhashkho). The tree in the Adyghe mythological and epic picture of the world is used to represent the categories of vertical organization of the space. There are different space zones: the top is the sky, the middle is the earth's surface, the bottom is the underground, so called "after life" world. Also the tree represents the sacred Centre of the world as it is revealed in the myth-ritual complex (Kudaeva, 2012).

The highest embodiment of the mythological symbolism of the tree in the Adyghe cultural tradition is the image of the Zhig-gouache, Goddess-Tree with the face and body of a beautiful woman, with the branches stretching in the heavens and roots penetrating the lower world. It is known that a variant of the world tree and "the tree of life" as well in the system of the Adyghe mythological and epic picture of the world is the image of the "Golden tree" - "Дышгъэ чыгы" (in the Adyghe language.), "Дышгъэ жыг" (in the Kabardian language). (Kudaeva, 2008).

The tree in various cultural traditions are characterized by similar features. It performs cosmological functions when organizing sacred surrounding space. It reflects the image of the Universe, space. "Space is a living organism," - M. Eliade believes, "as it is renewed periodically. The mystery of the inexhaustible manifestation of life is connected with the rhythmic renewal of the Universe. Therefore, the Universe is depicted as a giant tree: the mode of existence of the Universe and its capacity for infinite regeneration is symbolically assimilated to the life of the tree" (Eliade, 1994).

The sacred tree was also related to the idea of the presiding deity: ТхъэщIагъ мээ - the Forest at the bottom of Mount Tkha; prayers were offered up to it in the sacred groves. "In one of these groves, - said N. Dubrovin, - that was considered to be sacred, people gathered for praying. Under the open sky, somewhere under a wide-branching oak tree, people constructed an altar decorated with a simple rough wooden cross; they offered their prayers up to the sky when addressing the Supreme Being -Tkhashkhuo" (Dubrovin, 1991).

It is obvious that such a combination of the symbols – the sacred tree and the cross-dzor - while worshipping the Supreme Being has a reason behind and doubles the symbolic scale of sacred values (the tree and cross-dzor). These iconic images reflect the mythological symbolism of the Centre as the highest point of proximity to the divine essence.

The symbolism of the cross as image of the Centre and the highest sacred values is also confirmed in the myth-ritual complex. It finds convincing confirmation in the rite organized for young Shapsugs (a

Circassian tribe). The rite was described by A. Kunina: "Upon reaching adulthood, a young Shapsug had to perform a ritual that is a very interesting relic of ancient initiations (Kunina, 1940). A young man was involved in a public prayer for the first time. He had to carry the cross (dzuor) to the place where there were prayers and put it against the trunk of the sacred tree (tkhachokh)" (Kunin, 1940, p.21). If we proceed from the initiation gist of the described ritual ceremony where the newly initiated person had to join the higher knowledge and values of the genus, the sacred essence of the "cross"-dzor becomes obvious.

The spectrum of sacred symbols of the cross is complimented with the idea of sunshine. It is revealed when deciphering the attributes and functions of the ritual game "diyur-cross" described by N. Dubrovin: "The most remarkable of all the folk games is the one known as diyur. Diur means the cross in the dialects of some Circassian tribes; < ... > In each village the inhabitants were divided into two parties: the upper and lower. Saklias of the eastern part of the village were called "upper" and in the western part they were called "lower". <...> Before the start of the game, each of the participants brought a huge stick with a huge basket filled with dry hay or straw attached to the top, both parties of the game lined up against each other, set light to the baskets when pronouncing the words "diur, diur!" Then they attacked each other. < ... > The game usually began at nightfall <...>. Each of the attacking parties was aimed at captivating as many prisoners as possible. The prisoners were taken away with their hands tied back to the room for guests of one of the elders of their team. When finishing the game, each side gathered in the room of the elders where all the prisoners were kept. Then both parties started negotiating, they exchanged prisoners, and the party that lost more participants had to buy them back". There is one fact that is noteworthy about the game. According to N. Dubrovin, the aged took part in the game involuntarily. They were "captivated" and "tied with belt chains". "However, - said N. Dubrovin, -"such prisoners were costly to the winners, as well as to the party the aged were taken from: for their grey hair they were carried away in captivity, and all the culprits prepared food and drink for them, and reconciliation with the aged was a new treat" (Dubrovin, 1991, p.118-119).

The general idea of the game is to try and capture as many prisoners as possible and take ransom for them. The scheme of the struggle of "the lower" and "the upper" parties to win embodies, apparently, the opposition of the creative and destructive essence. The object of confrontation for them is the highest sacred value embodied in the idea of light, in the sun and the cross. In this case the symbolism of the cross is associated with the solar fire and represents the archaic motive of the struggle for the fire and light that are the creative power. Actually, that is the fight against the forces of chaos (the names of the opposing parties actualizing the idea of the main opposition of "the upper" and "the lower" are symbolical in this respect).

The "elderly" participation in the game emphasizes the symbolism of the "lower", a chthonic basis. The world of ancestors should "be thrown down" before "reconciling" with them. "Appeasing" is also a characteristic feature of the ritual ceremony. In fact, the widespread rituals are the reflection of periodic regeneration of the Universe.

The spring game "dzor dzagu" - "the game with the cross" that is traditional for the Bzhedughes (another Circassian tribe) was described by S. H. Mafedzev (Mafedzev, 1979). The game took part in spring, at the end of March and in April (the period of celebration of the New Year according the Adyghe pagan tradition). It contains a number of elements that also indicate its cosmological orientation ("reconstruction of the Universe").

As described by S. H. Mafedzev, the game consisted in kindling a large fire of straw, which ignited "dzor" - crosses of the participants; two playing teams lined up opposite to each other on the different sides of the fire. "Members of both teams lit their torches from the large fire and when holding them over their heads, took turns jumping over the fire" (Mafedzev, 1979). Jumping over the fire with their eyes closed and performing the song "dzor uarad" - "the song of the cross", the players ran across the field while continuing to sing. Then they returned and jumped over the fire again. One of the players was given the cross to throw it aside and say: "Dzor, dzor, fall where happiness lies and the hearth is rich!" (Azamatova, 1963). There were different versions of the song "dzor uarad", for example:

Dzor, dzor, we're blind without you, light our way,
Dzor, dzor, sow in the field,
Give us happiness to see your way" (Azamatova, 1963).

One of the most complete versions of the song "Dzor uarad" is presented by S. H. Mafedzev:

Oe-ra-eru-ou-rau (background melody),
О Ерэитокъу, оу-рау,
Тыкъумагъыр зи Iашэ, оу-рау,
Зи Iашэр лЫукIэ, оу-рау,
ЛЫукIырилэ, оу-рау,
ШЫблэр зиуанэ, оу-рау,
Губгъо дахэ тигъахь, оу-рау,
Тыкъызэрыхъагъэр бэгъуагъэ, оу-рау,
ПхъэцакIэр тIэдакъэу, оу-рау,
ЖъабгъумкIэ редзэкIы, оу-рау,
Зытридзэрэ мэбагъуэ, оу-рау,
Лэжыгъэ бэгъуагъэр къитэхь, оу-рау,
О Ерэитокъу, Джор-Джор, оу-рау,
Тэ уинэщIу къытщэф, оу-рау,
Гъэбэжъу къитэт! -

Oe-ra-eru-ou-rau (background melody),
Oh, Ereitokho, ou-rau
The mace is your weapon, ou-rau
Your weapon kills our husbands, ou-rau
It often kills our husbands, ou-rau
The lightning (ШЫблэ) is your saddle, ou-rau
Let's go in the beautiful field, ou-rau,
Let the place be fertile, ou-rau,
A burning torch is in our hands, ou-rau,
They throw it to the right, ou-rau,

Where they will throw it, let the place be fertile, ou-rau,
We'll take in the harvest, ou-rau,
Oh, Ereitokho, cross, cross, ou-rau,
Your mercy we want, ou-rau,
Make the year fertile for us! (Mafedzev, 1979).

The agrarian orientation of this ritual is obvious, as it is the fact that the ritual is associated with the solar cult. The ritual "perfection" through fire such as jumping over the fire, spreading the burning cross-dzor along the field, throwing it when pronouncing words of magical nature: "Cross, cross, fall where happiness lies and the hearth is rich!" singing "the songs of the cross" must have ensured people's well-being and rich harvest and given "fertility" to the community and to each "hearth".

Both the ceremony and the song performed within it were aimed at "getting rid" of the obsolete, "worn out" order and "reconstruction" and "renewal" of the new one. The central attribute of the rite is obvious and it is seen through different manipulations with the burning cross-dzor. The cross symbolizes sunshine. So, that gives another confirmation of the assumption that the Adyghe cross-dzor is of cosmological nature. And its main function is to make the Universe sacred as the heart of the highest sacred values and they are life, sun, fertility. In the rite the cross-dzor functions as a symbol of revival associated with solar fire, as well as an element opposing the darkness, destructive, chaotic roots and is used to explain how the space is organized. In ancient Egyptian beliefs the Tau-cross - crux commissa (patibulata) is also associated both with the idea of life and feminine and masculine principles. The fact is consistent with the symbolism of the cross of various cultural traditions where, as H. E. Kerlot notes "the cross," is a synthesis of the seven aspects of space and time, because its shape is able both to preserve and destroy free movement. Hence, the cross, he writes, is a complete opposite of Ouroboros. Ouroboros is an ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon personifying primal anarchic dynamism that precedes the creation of space and the orderly world... So, the more general meaning of the cross is a combination of opposites: positive (or vertical) with negative, (or horizontal), higher with lower, life and death" (Kerlot, 1994).

7. Conclusion

Thus, the sacred divine tree as a symbol of life interacting with the sign of the cross creates a complex system of concepts: The Centre of the sacred space, the Universe, the point of the highest connection with the deity, connection or intersection of the basic structural coordinates of the Universe. Ritual prayers and ritual ceremonies with the cross near the sacred tree must have contributed to restoring the orderly world through synchronizing micro- and macrocosm. The three-dimensional cross illustrates three dimensions of space (each of them implies two directions) and reflects the ancient concept of space as a three-part structure (with six bearing points) based on the three dimensions of the cross. The seventh point is the Centre.

The general sacral and mythological context implies that the sacred tree is the Centre of the Universe and a symbol of life and periodic renewal associated with the sun. It symbolizes the capacity of the Universe to revive and is believed to be an axis that connects the earth with the sky and the lower world. The vision contributes to understand the symbolic significance of the cross that is thought to be an indicating sign of

all sacral values: divine creative essence, basic structural coordinates (vertical and horizontal) of the Universe. The cross is a sign of the Universe, its structure, sacred space and Centre as a point closest to the deity.

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