

© A.I. PAVLOVSKY

tiranosawr@yandex.ru

UDK 140.8

**NATURAL-CLIMATIC DEPENDANCE
OF ANCIENT CULTURES FORMATION: PARADOX OF THE SUMERS**

SUMMARY. The article explains that formation of the ancient cultures developed during the transition from the primitive to the first states to proceed under the predominant influence of the climatic conditions that are equally acted on the culture of various ethnic origins of cultures.

KEY WORDS. "Afro-Asian" consciousness, the East, hydraulic civilization, the West, historical dynamics of cultures, the nomadic culture of the Middle East, the Middle East settled cultures, primitive society, policy, social solidarity, kinship structures, civilizational approach.

The first fundamental problem we face studying the historical dynamics of cultures is getting an idea of the way in which the universal savagery considered by most theorists of the civilizational approach as mankind's childhood could have born various cultural forms. The author has never met an adequate answer to this question and can hardly solve the problem himself. The problem is redoubled by the fact that there is no primitive society that has not experienced the influence of developed cultures. Besides this, all primitive societies existing on the planet are societies of "deadlock savagery", i.e. societies that can't evolve to a developed culture. And it is a big question: to what extent is information on such societies relevant for understanding the primitive societies which have turned out to be able to grow beyond their savagery? It could be that all really existing primitive societies are marginal and represent deadlock ways of development. In this case, based on their understanding, the attempt to evaluate the predecessors of the existing developed cultures is equal to the attempt to use investigations devoted to gorillas and chimpanzees for understanding proto-man; it is possible, of course, but gorillas and chimpanzees have been preserved just because they have not developed into a man which means that they did not possess the qualities which made that evolution possible.

Nevertheless, even if there is no final solution to the stated problem, it is possible to give some reasons that can shed light on the process of developed cultures' varied formation out of "universal" savagery. Firstly it is quite evident that savagery was not so universal. Investigations of kinship structures by C. Levi-Strauss demonstrated that, particularly, in the world among the preserved primitive societies, there are all possible structural combinations of primary relationship, but, frankly speaking, their geographical distribution, as far as it is known, does not allow to speak about any logic of their distribution over the planet's surface, it is impossible to say that

the tribes of Latin America prefer forms of one kind and the peoples of Africa prefer other kinds of forms [1; 124-170]. Nevertheless, the variety of these forms makes it possible to suppose that in primary savagery not influenced by developed cultures there originally existed a wide range of organizational culture forms and accordingly world-views creating these forms. Theoretically it completely coincides with the above-mentioned statement that culture is an agent in man's interaction with the environment, which is why adaptation can be reached by different forms of social organization and so cultures absolutely different in values.

Secondly, it should be remembered that primitive society was a society of supreme close-range interaction, the lifeworld of tribes was very small and real interaction made these tribes face few neighbours. The interaction between the tribes was of a low intensity, which is why primitive tribes were not enemies with each other but competitors for resources that existed in large amounts. Less efficiently-organized societies could survive by moving from the zone of active resistance for the resources to the "unpopular outskirts". It is highly possible that these very societies have survived and are living now in their primitive state, but this supposition does not directly refer to the question under analysis.

In other words, by the moment of outgrowing savagery, in each cultural zone lived many tribes different in organizational forms and cultures that described the range of existing possibilities of the future peculiarities for the arising cultural zone culture, but in different regions only some of them consolidated themselves as "high" cultures.

Why did it happen this way? Despite the fact that different organizational forms allow human society to reach adaptation to the environment, they do so to a different degree, i.e. different organizational forms possess different efficiency and these organizational forms' efficiency correlation depends on peculiarities of production activity necessary for survival in the associated natural-climatic conditions.

The author would not exaggerate, like S.L. Montesquieu, the dependence of human culture on the peculiarities of local nature and climate. Practice shows that, firstly, formed cultures can spread over the boundaries of the natural-climatic niche where they primarily were formed and, secondly, in conditions of close-range interaction common to savagery the question of relative non-efficiency can't be crucial. We are talking about the historical moment when close-range interaction conditions were replaced by conditions of far-range interaction and small societies united into big ones. In these circumstances, the direct cooperation between the uniting societies became sharp, the competition for the resources became secondary to the struggle for power, that is why under other equal conditions slightly more efficient societies turned out to be those very crystallization "centers" around which ethnic groups and states were formed. Less efficient societies were either assimilated by the unifiers or pushed back to the outskirts where they got conserved. Within the period followed by history, the destruction of these societies marginal for the given natural-climatic conditions was gradually taking place, though some of the societies might have been preserved up to the present. In other words, we are speaking about the crucial influence of nature and climate peculiarities in a very narrow historical range formed only once. It is highly possible to assume that an element of historical hazard took place because comparative efficiency works only at the moment of the primary push up to the "high" culture when the forces of

competitors are equal and it is accidental where exactly within the boundaries of the zone this primary push will start, and what version of organizational forms will be involved in the process.

Some researchers speaking about the ancient states use such notions as “civilizations of great rivers” and “hydraulic civilizations”. Emergence of the first states in the Middle East where they primarily were formed was caused by the necessity to use “great rivers” to organize agricultural production.

First of all it concerns the Sumers and the Egyptians whom “high” culture history begins with. Some researchers habitually unite these societies; speaking about the Ancient East they emphasize the Middle East, India and China in it and oppose them to Greece and Rome as the nominal “Ancient West”. With that, as it has been mentioned above, we are speaking about an absolutely different civilizational status of each of the mentioned zones. Historically the Middle East was the first and the “high” cultures of India, China and Greece became the result of the Middle East societies’ modern influence on their neighbours (Rome is put aside as yet — it is highly possible that it appeared as a result of Ancient Greece’s modern influence). Thus the Ancient East and “the Ancient West” were genetically connected, that is why the question of such great difference in organizational forms and cultures which was asked in the metaphor of the East and West, Europe and Asia antithesis needs explanation. The question is redoubled by the fact that the territorial metaphor “the Middle East” applicable to Antiquity describes Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia, which, in turn, can be characterized normally by Assyria and Babylon, thus overriding the question of the correctness of the hypothesis of similarity of these regional cultures with the Egyptian one (Assyrian and Babylonian) and the Sumers.

The question of the possibility of joining the Sumers to the rest of the Middle Eastern cultures is not idle, as this very cultural “unity” to which India and China are added is the starting point of reasoning about Eastern cultures, tyrannical Asia versus democratic Europe; and the parallel genesis of high culture in Sumer and Egypt is the basis to the theory of hydraulic civilizations (civilizations of great rivers).

The consistent comparison lets us make a conclusion about the conceptual cultural-ideological incompatibility of the Egyptian and Sumerian societies and moreover on the absolute discrepancy of the Sumers and the “standards” of Asia and the East. The Egyptian society is tyrannical and autocratic, bound to idolize the ruler and demands complete subjection. In the culture of Egypt, great attention is paid to another world; this makes the whole life of a man turn into a preparation for passing into it, which gives the Egyptian worldview a mystic character and predetermines the power and might of priests. Power is inherited and gods’ adoration is based on fear because the gods of Egypt, even the best of them, sometimes behave awfully. It looks like Assyria and Babylon, but not the Sumers.

The following is written about Sumer: “From the works by Dyakonov I.M. it became clear that besides the temple land in Sumerian cities, there existed community land, there was considerably much more of that community land. Dyakonov calculated the numbers of the urban population and compared it to the numbers of the temple personnel. Then he compared the general territory of the temple land to the general territory of Southern Mesopotamia. The comparisons were not in the

favor of the temple. It turned out that Sumerian economics had two main sectors: community property (Uru) and temple property (E)" [2; 46-47]. The result is: the priesthood's power was considerably limited.

Let's proceed: "Even at a glance it can be noted that in the monuments of the Egyptian, Indian and Jewish cultures, there is a clear eagerness to understand another world, the last secrets of life and death, i.e. a strong priesthood beginning... as for the Sumers, investigations of their political-economic documents and monuments of literature let us come to the conclusion that the first position of their worldview is occupied by the love of a farmer for his place of work and the feeling of a world order based on rhythms of crop growth with an obligatory time renovation in a new year. The second position belongs to love for beauty and perfection distinguishing a craftsman. The military and priesthood begin to be relegated to the second place: the emperor never gets absolute power in the country even under the condition of idolization; the priesthood performs a typically bureaucratic (handicraft) job by maintaining the god's statue and running rituals. Besides this, the priesthood is not separated from the community and accordingly has no political independence" [2; 54-55]. Thus politically the priesthood depends on the community, the emperor has no absolute power.

Let's go on: "The documents from the archives of Shuruppak city (26th century BC) prove that in this city peopled ruled in turn, and the ruler was replaced every year. Each turn was chosen by toss not only for this or that person but for a definite territorial site or a temple" [2; 58]. The initial electivity of the emperor's power is underlined here.

Further on: "It should be remarked that in ancient times for the Afrasian rulers (the Semites and the Egyptians) it was common to strive for the unification of power, political unity in the country and a strict hierarchization of the pantheon as well as idolizing the emperor. The Afrasian consciousness likes the unity of dissimilar phenomena, the Sumerian one prefers the variety of similar and even alike things" [2; 78]. Here is one more fragment: "In one of the articles, G. Zelts proposed a hypothesis on national-cultural reasoning of the principles of changing emperors in Sumer. He particularly writes about a doubtless connection between the Sumerian system of values and the emperor's electiveness on the one hand, and between the system of values and the throne inheritance via the father's side" [2; 96]. A direct opposition as for understanding of the Sumers and Assyro-Babylono-Egyptians is given here.

About the world of the dead: "The field of the world of the dead demanded constant help from the man as it was necessary to feed the dead ancestors; otherwise they could have turned into hungry and angry spirits and started to avenge themselves on their living offspring by severe diseases" [2; 119]. It does not look like the absolutization of another world by the Egyptians.

Furthermore, in Sumer there existed a competitive law, the Sumerian Gods were more peaceful and prudent than the Egyptian ones, and their idolization was based on love but not fear. "An atypical prayer for Sumerian literature consisted of group song sung in honor of the god accompanied by oblation" [2; 45].

Some other analogies are obvious here. Sumerian culture is very similar to Greek culture and S. Kramer pays indirect attention to this: "Like the Greece of later periods, Sumer represented a union of several city-states vying with each

other for power over the whole territory of the country" [3; 42]. Like Greek culture it is principally sensitive but not mystic, targeted for cheerful exploration of the surrounding world but not serving the highest ideal, gods, or getting a reward from another world. It is democratic as well, accepts theoretical equality of people concerning tradition (moral) though not right (neither have the developed sense of law possessed by the Romans). As for social existence, the key role is played by the community, accepted as a union of potential equals and inclined to incorporate all people.

Sumer's likeness to Greece is not clear if one considers the reasoning on the culture in terms of East-West or Asia-Europe, its unlikeness to Egypt shows up basic concepts of the theory on the great river civilizations, which in this case turn out to be not so analogous. It is necessary to compare these great rivers, the principal difference of which is hidden by the metaphor "great rivers".

The agrotechnical zone of Ancient Egypt joined the Nile and was unified, which meant an absence of obstacles in the forming of the unified socium, the social organization meant the creation of maximum synchrony and timeliness in fulfillment of agricultural measures many of which were astronomically caused, i.e. were based on knowledge the real scientific sense of which was approximately understood. It demanded very strict power, mystic understanding of devotion (by knowledgeable men) and the unity of the whole social system which was simply built like a public social pyramid where the essence of man was defined by his status and the status was characterized by devotion (acquaintance with knowledge). The agrotechnical zone of Sumerian society fell into separate "oases", each of them located at one of several handmade canals (land cultivation was difficult along the river bed). Social solidarity was to provide not the synchrony of a great number of people's activity according to laws that were not understood as in Egypt, but to support the irrigation constructions, the functioning of which is, firstly, understandable and, secondly, gives an opportunity to divide responsibility when every person is responsible for his site. Under such conditions a man's self-identification attached him, first of all, to his own "oases" (the community, city-state) but to the people in general and made up a reserved, almost family unity bound to democratic ruling and mutual acceptance as equals regardless of the subjects' status. In this, Sumer was similar to Greece, where the division into "oases" was provided by mountain ranges that parted fertile lands.

Thus, we may be convinced that in this case the natural-climatic conditions helped to set societies of definite organizational forms and worldviews in distinct zones of man's existence, though it can't be said that this influence was determinant. Some other factors of influence are possible. It is extremely important that the Sumers' living territories' connection with cultural forms of a definite kind did not turn out to be fatal. Beginning with the Akkad rising epoch, gradual replacement of the Sumers' culture by the Semitic culture brought by the migrants from the South begins. This new culture would bring imaginations about the world similar to the ones in Egyptian culture and the difference of natural-climatic conditions wouldn't be able to interfere with it (it has been mentioned above that a culture can leave the boundaries of its primary place of origin).

It must be said that V.V. Yemelyanov's statement on "the eagerness for unification of power, political unity in the country and a strict hierarchization of

the pantheon as well as idolizing the emperor" [2; 78] is common to the Semites' culture and G. Zelts' idea that there is a connection between "the Semites' value system and throne inheritance via the father's side" [2; 96] are disputable. The given peculiarities of the worldview and culture were not common to all Semite tribes but only to those ones which formed their own state and social self-consciousness in conditions of agricultural production of the Middle East, i.e. the historical period of the Ancient world we have spoken about. The culture of the Arabs, the Semites by origin, that formed up its state and social self-consciousness in the conditions of nomadic existence in the desert did not have these features. From here comes the primary electivity of the Arabian caliphate leaders, absence of their idolization in primary Islam, democracy of the Islamic umma ideology, i.e. the cultures of nomadic and settled Semites should be differentiated.

Besides that, it follows that the peoples' related origin does not always mean similarity of high culture forms included in natural-climatic zones, they adapted to them in their primary attempt at state and social self-organization, then they tried to spread the influence of their cultural area over the maximum distance.

In this respect the Semite peoples of the first wave created cultures unlike the culture of the posterior Arabs, but similar to the cultures of the Egyptians and Persians with whom they were not absolutely connected by unity. That is why, speaking about the cultural areas of the Middle East where peoples of different ethnic origin interacted, it would be more reasonable to link their names not with the names of specific ethnic groups but with the place and peculiarities of existence, i.e. we should speak about the nomadic and settled culture of the Middle East considering the fact that we do not include the Sumers here, but we include the Negroid peoples of North Africa.

One more important conclusion out of the reason mentioned above is that the opposition of Europe and Asia, the West and the East, turns out to be a stable myth.

REFERENCES

1. Levi-Strauss C. Structural anthropology. M.: EKSMO-Press, 2011. 512 p.
2. Yemelyanov V.V. Ancient Sumer. The culture sketches. Spb.: Petersburg oriental studies, 2001. 368 p.
3. Kramer S.N. History begins in Sumer. M.: The Science. The oriental literature main office, 1991. 235 p.