

FRATERNITY INSTITUTION IN THE CAUCASIAN HIGHLANDERS

Salome Bakhia-Okruashvili Doctor of Historical Sciences, Corresponding Member of
the Tskhum-Abkhazian Academy of Sciences
E-mail: salomebakhia@gmail.com

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Tskhum-Abkhazian Academy of Sciences*

Abstract. During the so-called brother adopting custom among the Caucasian highlanders two members of a clan not related by blood would become related with each other. Mostly the habit was spread between men. Both in Georgian and Caucasian highlanders' life various rules of fraternity were stated. As a result of negotiations an oathmaking and rulesharing with one another took place. The oathbreaker was declared a traitor and was tried by customary law.

The rule was spread among the Georgian highlanders: Mtiulis, Khevsurians, Pshavs, Tushes; among non-Georgian highlanders: Kists, Ossetians, Khundzibs, Andis, Dargvels, Kabardians, Kumyks, and etc.

The aim of the custom implied establishing a connection among neighbouring peoples and defence against the outer enemy.

There were different rules in different ethnic groups - the so-called "Pits-Vertskhli eating", "blood mixing" in a cup of drink "from cutfingers". Sometimes by making identical signs on wooden sticks and then their burial at the fence of the church.

Brother adoption performed a significant function. It brought the neighbouring peoples together who economically and physically helped each other, and when hostilities, defended each other.

The work is based on own field ethnographical materials and literary sources.

Keywords: *Brother adoption, fraternity, oath, ceremonies, mutual aid, defence.*

The custom of brother adopting with all its norms of feasts and legal rights has been stated in all the Caucasian peoples. It is the custom by which non-blood related kinsfolk or two representatives of neighbouring countries got into artificial family ties. In the past, brother adoption set up exogamy between the adopted brothers' sides that would cover four or more

generations. Fraternity institution had been forming through centuries and were conditioned by lives of nearby living different ethnics. Naturally, every nation had own ceremonies, but at the same time they were interested in the ceremonies of neighbours. Of course, brother adoption rules implied ethnical and moral behaviours as well.

In the life of Georgian highlanders various fraternity rules were stated. Such artificial relationship took place not only between men but also between women (sisterhood). Mostly the habit was spread between men. For instance, in Pshavi with the exception of some individs, the representatives of Jvar-Khatebi (Cross-Icons – a sacred place, a family shrine) of different highlander communities were becoming one another's adopted brothers. They were obliged to live in agreement and assistance. If the common people showed themselves in battles, the representatives of Georgian Power and even kings would award the highlanders' shrines, pastures, gardens, and vineyards in the plain. The rulers declared themselves frats of highlanders' shrines such as are Lashari Jvari, Gudauri Jvari and other sacred sites.

By moving up to the mountains, the kings visited the shrine altar, conversed with “cross and icons” and informed the people about their wish and commission.

In Mtiuleti (the historic-geographical area in east Georgian highland) the adopted brothers' and relatives met each other in the shrines, where one of them was bringing an assumed sheep, a calf or the kind animal to make a donation. Before making a sacrafice they prayed, then the khevisberi (elder) slaughtered the animal and sparkeled the blood over the adopted brothers. Now the latter ones administered the oath of love and devotion to each other, at the same time the probable oath-breaker was cursed.

In the past, in Khevsureti, socio-economic conditions of serf-Georgia encouraged the migration from various regions of the plain. The persecuted people migrated to the untrodded ravines of the Caucasus. Locals were not ardent hosts. That time justice was based on Khar-kvabi (bull-boiler) meeting rule. The habit was spread among mountain people. For the purpose the migrant asked one of the families of the community to protect him or fraternise with him. In case of agreement he had to take an animal to slaughter to the Khati (family shrine), then they would drive a Saman (sign stone) outside the territory of the Khati as a sign of oath solidity. The bull was slaughtered, the blood of the bull was poured on the very Saman. Now the migrant was an equal member of the community. Often he would take the surname of the adopted brother. They were to defend each other in the grief and mirth but if the migrant appeared bad, the fraternity was broken and he was expelled from the community.

The cursing Saman was driven into the earth and then the scolded could go anywhere he liked, he was to change his surname.

In Khevsureti the death of the adopted brother was deeply taken to heart. When burial, the alive one took part in the ride, riding the deceased's horse. A year later the dead's family presented him the dead's talavari (clothes).

The habit of fraternity institution was stated in the neighbouring North Caucasian highlanders: Lezgins, Kists, Chechens and Vainakh peoples.

As it is known sometimes Kists, Chechens and Lezgins migrated to Tusheti (Georgia). Naturally the newcomers could not live out of the community, as the community ruled all the activities. Thus, the migrant's aim was to get acquainted with any family, to trust them, and ask to adopt him.

In North Caucasian highlanders the Georgian habit "Khar-kvabi" (bull-boiler) gathering was known. In case of agreement the migrant was obliged to perform the rule. He himself had to prepare bread, vodka (araq), and a bull to slaughter. He would invite the khevisberi and the elders of the family. The Khevisberi would throw some coal in the yard of the shrine and drive the Saman in. Sometimes to strengthen the fraternisation the migrant would take the family name. The khevisberi would inform the community that the family had adopted the migrant. Nobody would think him nameless. "Be unseparable in grief and mirth and protect each other against the enemy". It must be noted that these relations implied farming and economic interests. Besides it helped to make peace i.e. it served their political interests as well.

Different ways of brother adopting was spread among the highlanders. Those wishing to be adopted made a cut on little fingers of right hands with a sharp knife and mix blood by touching bleeding fingers. Generally, all this happened at weddings or feasts where all the village and the invited neighbours gathered. While finger touching, they were pronouncing the oath of love and devotion to each other. Between highlanders and Georgians the so called Pitsvertskhli (Oath-silver) eating was performed. Those intending to fraternize were throwing a thing of silver or copper into the vessel of wine, beer, vodka (araq) or more seldom of milk from their weapon or from any silver item (the type of drink depended on ethnos; muslims mostly drank milk) and pronounced the text: "Your father is my father, your mother – my mother, your brother – my brother, your wife – my sister-in-law, your enemy – my enemy". Then they one after another would take sips from the common cup. Meanwhile the Khevisberi was praying: "Let the Lord never break your brotherhood, love each other till death, let your grandchildren never hate one another after your death".

Sometimes the Caucasian highlanders had such a rule too: they pierced the little fingers of right hands and dropped blood into the common glass of wine or vodka (araq), which they drank in succession. The sortition was necessary, who would drink first. Then they touched with cut fingers again and mixed the blood and pronounced the above-mentioned oath. After

they presented one another with valuable gifts. Nobody could break the oath. They had to back each other in grief and mirth. Also they tried their adopted brother not to be harmed by their family member.

The Kists performed the ritual by scraping the silver into the vessel of milk and honey. With Ossetians this was called “fire eating” or swearing with fire. The rule was based on moral or psychological factors. During the ritual they also were making the oath of friendship and devotion. It was a basis of solid friendship. Then one after another were drinking from the cup where silver was scraped off or a silver or a copper item was put in.

The Ossetians too gave presents after making an oath.

At the end of 19th century in Pankisi Gorge (Georgia, the Kists lived here) the Georgian and Ossetian populations, troubled by robbery and brigandage because of the criminality increase, asked Kist-brothers for help.

The institution of brother adoption began to set in motion very fast. Partially, the adopted brothers regulated the encroachment of others’ property, which meant returning the robbed till it was alienated. In failure, the adopted brothers themselves apologized and promised the behaviour would not be repeated. Though, at the same time no divulgence of criminals’ personality and their handing to the police or punishment ever happened, not to make personality known.

The fraternity rituals in the Caucasian highlanders was performed by lead exchange, as well. This time the oath pronanciation was essential. If a participer accidentally broke the oath at the end of the ceremony, he was cursed.

In many ethnological literary works the information on fraternity in different ethnic representatives of the Caucasian highlanders is dispersed even in the 20th century. The institution performed its significant social function and brought representatives of different habits and groups together. For instance, by fraternity institutions the Chechens and the Ingush (Vainakh people) were establishing socio-economic relations with Georgians, Hundzibs, Andis, Dargvelis, Kabardians, Kumyks, Ossetians and other ethnical representatives. Among them the rule of mutual aid worked. Adopted brothers were obliged to help with building, when disease, blood feuding, weddings or deaths.

In case of the adopted brother’s early death, the left alive was obliged to keep all the rules the deceased brother kept. What’s more, neighbourly and political relations were regulated. Through this rule Georgians and neighbouring highlanders economically and phisically helped each other. Simultaneously, the community elders’ council from both sides stated common marketing rule on commercial behaviour, the members of ethnic group also stated the rule of

mutual trade in case of hostilities – cattle and captive stealing, robbery- and decided the ransom as well.

In conclusion, the aim of social institution yet was to strengthen relations both among own people and with neighbouring peoples too, at the same time to defend themselves from the enemy by the help of each other, to assist in various spheres and situations, to establish friendly and peaceful relations, but when hostilities to defend themselves from outer enemies. Besides, the institution represented the whole complex of legal duties - the safe nature of loyalty, moral support, the help when hostilities, and ethnocultural contacts.

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მომქმეობის ინსტიტუტი კავკასიის მთიელებში

სალომე ბახია-

ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი, ცხუმ-

ოქრუაშვილი

აფხაზეთის მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის წევრ-

კორესპონდენტი

E-mail: salomebakhia@gmail.com

წარმოადგინა ცხუმ-აფხაზეთის მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის აკადემიკოს გიორგი ჩიტაიას სახელობის ეთნოლოგიის ინსტიტუტმა

აბსტრაქტი. კავკასიელ მთიელებში მმადნაფიცობის ჩვეულების დროს არასისხლითი მონათესავე გვარის ორი წარმომადგენელი ერთმანეთს უკავშირდებოდა. უმეტესად მმადნაფიცობის ჩვეულება მამაკაცებს შორის ხდებოდა. ქართველ მთიელებში და, ასევე, კავკასიელი მთიელების ყოფაში მომქმეობის ინსტიტუტის სხვადასხვაგვარი წესები იყო დადგენილი. სხვადასხვა ეროვნებებს შორის მოლაპარაკებების შედეგად ხდებოდა ფიცის დადება და ერთმანეთის წესის გაზიარება. ფიცის გამტეხი მოლაღატედ ცხადდებოდა და იგი ჩვეულებითი სამართლის წესით სამართლდებოდა.

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