

Man in the Spiritual Culture of the Eastern Mediterranean: A Variety of Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

First of all, in this article we will consider the process of formation of the modern Western philosophical tradition within the framework of anthropology in spiritual culture. It is worth noting that the Eastern Mediterranean region is very important for the formation of world culture. We will touch the problem of man and its nature on the example of the mythological aspects, we explain the mythological stories of the Egyptians, ancient Greeks and consider the interaction between the Ancient Middle East and ancient Greek civilization as the foundation for the development of Greek philosophical thought and man's place in it.

Keywords: pre-philosophy, Orientalism, Eurocentrism, ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, genesis, mythology, philosophy, anthropocentrism

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of cultural anthropology, also referred to as social anthropology and ethnology, is the study of human culture. In regards to humanity, culture can deal with a host of subjects, such as religion, mythology, art, music, government systems, social structures and hierarchies, family dynamics, traditions, and customs as well as cuisine, economy, and relationship to the environment. Any and all of these factors make up important aspects of culture and behavior, and are some of the pieces of human history that cultural anthropology tries to put together into a larger, more comprehensive picture of the human experience.

With the rise of history and humanities studies, along with the natural sciences, during the nineteenth century, such scholars as Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer began to plant the seeds of cultural anthropology, wondering why people living in different parts of the world sometimes had similar beliefs and practices. This question became the underlying concern of cultural anthropology. Grafton Elliot Smith argued that different groups must somehow have learned from one another, as if cultural traits were being spread from one place to another, or «diffused». Others argued that different groups had the capability of inventing similar beliefs and practices independently. Some of those who advocated «independent invention», like Lewis Henry Morgan, additionally supposed that similarities meant that different groups had passed through the same stages of cultural evolution.

II. THE THEME OF MAN IN THE SPIRITUAL CULTURE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

The Eastern Mediterranean region is extremely important for the history of world culture, both spiritual and material. It is here that the ancient civilizations of the Middle East, such as Egypt and Phoenicia, arise, and the civilization of Ancient Greece, which gave rise to the entire Western philosophical tradition. The problem of man and his nature has long attracted intellectuals of the ancient world, and we can see the appeal to this topic in various spiritual cultures of the Mediterranean region. Despite quite obvious differences and a wide variety of approaches, they can identify a number of points that determined the development of spiritual culture of ancient man throughout this vast region.

Despite the fact that in ancient Egyptian culture and, first of all, in mythology, we find quite a large number of subjects of anthropological topics, it cannot be called anthropocentric. In the age of the Old Kingdom, at the dawn of the Egyptian written tradition, man is depicted in myth as an important, but not the dominant, component of the universe. With the exception of the famous «Cannibal hymn» [4], the mythological stories of the Pyramid Texts are hardly focused on the problem of man and his nature. But even in this famous hymn we do not find such definitions: it is an ancient monument of archaic ritual, created long before its written fixation and is not a form of pre-philosophical reflection. A similar picture is formed in the Pyramid texts with the image of the king. Despite the fact that

the king combines both divine and human nature, the main focus here is on the first. This is quite natural, given the role and functions of the ruler in Egyptian society, but the divine in its nature, although it dominates the human, does not destroy it. The king is the son of God and God himself, but at the same time he is also an intermediary between the world of gods and the world of men, between the sacred and the profane, the guardian of the Maat, the sacred order of the world established by the gods during his creation. It is the human side of his nature, though not so clearly expressed as the divine, that helps him to perform this intermediary function in relation to other people, his subjects in the «land of the living». The religious anthropology of the Old Kingdom does not explicitly indicate this, pointing only to the divine characteristics of the king as the owner of a number of entities that are inaccessible to other people (Ka, Ba, Khet, Ahu), but does not deny the importance of this side of the king's nature.

During the First Intermediate period, at a time of acute political crisis of the centralized management model of the Old Kingdom, this situation changes radically. Simultaneously with the «democratization» of the cult of Osiris, which extended the possibility of possessing divine entities not only to the king, but also to some of his subjects, in the culture and religion of this era we see a clear turn to the theme of man and his being. This was most clearly expressed in the theocosmogonic myths, and, first of all, in the famous hymn to the Creator from the epilogue of «Instructions to king Merikare». Unlike earlier myths that describe human creation as just one of many stages in the complex process of creating the world, this text makes this event central to this story. Here people are described not just as a creation of God, as his «flock», but also as beings who occupy a central position in the universe. God creates the world «for their sake», conquers for them the primeval water chaos («greed of waters») and provides them with food. The mention of the construction of the temple, in which he hears people addressing him, also emphasizes the idea of a close connection between the Creator and his creations. This idea of anthropocentrism, so clearly expressed in this hymn, clearly correlates with other parts of the «Instructions to king Merikare», in particular, with fragments where the deceased father convinces his son to use very carefully such a strong means of punishing criminals as the death penalty, and also States that the main strength of the king is not in the physical intimidation of the enemy, but in the persuasive action of his words.

Another text, now strictly religious, expresses a similar idea at about the same time. This is the famous spell 1130 of the Coffin Texts, which Jan Assmann in his works calls «the apology of the Creator» [2]. The most remarkable thing here is undoubtedly the idea of

natural and social equality of people, expressed in the soliloquy of the Sun-God. Here we can equally see the influence of the «democratization» of ideas about the netherworld and the entire cult of Osiris, as well as an important political component. After the collapse of the Old Kingdom, the power of the king was henceforth to be based on new social and moral principles, and this brings this text closer to the «Instructions to king Merikare». One of the most important among them is the principle of consubstantiality of man and deity, which is not new to Egyptian culture and appears in fragmentary form in earlier didactic and political texts. Thus, the traditional ideas of ancient Egyptian culture about human nature are closely connected with two fundamental principles of mythological thinking: the primary ideas about the gods are identical with the ideas about nature, and the laws of society are a continuation of the laws of nature. Of course, this does not mean that man here is completely ontologically equal to the deity, as it happens later in the philosophy and culture of the European Renaissance, but natural barriers between them, nevertheless, do not exist.

So, in this monologue of the demiurge, we can clearly distinguish two main motives: a) the indication of the «continuity» of the creation process as the need to constantly maintain the once established world order (Maat); b) the definition of the fair nature of this world-order and its orientation to man. As we have noted above, such anthropocentrism was not always characteristic of ancient Egyptian thought: it was caused, first of all, by the acute political crisis of the Old Kingdom. However, both of these texts express another idea: a person, regardless of his social status, is always involved in the activities of his sovereign (king) to maintain and preserve this order. Together with the «democratization» of the cult of Osiris and ideas about the afterlife, the Coffin Texts affirm the idea that justification in the afterlife and subsequent immortality in the netherworld (Duat) is impossible without participation in public service during life. The «creation of Maat», the main condition for the successful passage of the Osiris trial, is now directly linked to human social and political activities. The correctness of human nature consists, first of all, in the conscientious performance by a person of his duties to his relatives, superiors, and the king, and only then - in his moral qualities. This social phenomenon Jan Assmann in his works calls «vertical solidarity» [1], when every person, regardless of social status, through public service helps the king to maintain a just order of the world, distinguishing it from «horizontal solidarity», that is, the association of people by class and professional affiliation.

This cultural and social model continued to be relevant in the ancient Egyptian worldview and later, at the beginning of the New Kingdom era. Until the middle of the eighteenth dynasty (XIV century BC), the

theme of man was not central to the Theban theology of Amun, the most prominent focus of Egyptian religious thought at this time. Already in its early texts, such as the Cairo hymn to Amun (Pap. Boulaq 17), we see an increased emphasis on the transcendent character of the deity in relation to man. In our opinion, this particular feature of the Theban theology was one of the reasons for such a harsh persecution of supporters of the cult of Amun in the Amarna period. In the religion of Amarna, which, despite its revolutionary character, goes directly back to the traditional Egyptian solar cults, the problem of man and his nature takes a back seat. In the light of the assertion by violent methods of a new religious paradigm based on the cult of the physical Sun (Aton), man is considered in the Amarna religion and theology only as a part of the vast universe created by Aton and completely dependent on it. In this case, Aton himself acts as the direct opposite of Amun: it is not hidden from the eyes the transcendent God who is outside the world, but the Sun visible to all, creating the world with its rays and maintaining life in it.

Despite the rather rapid cancellation, the Amarna religion had an irreversible impact on the development of Egyptian thought in the second half of the New Kingdom era. Akhenaten's brutal actions to establish a new religious paradigm undermined the traditional ideas of Maat as a just world-order and the mechanisms of social solidarity based on them. In the field of political ethics, the image of the king as the guardian of Maat and the mediator between people and the gods was disavowed. At the end of the eighteenth and especially during the nineteenth dynasty, traditional ideas about the place of man in society and the cosmic order, based on the principles of solidarity and ideas about Maat, almost completely disappear. In their place comes the so-called «ethics of personal piety». The essence of these new ideas was that now a person is responsible for his actions not before his relatives, superiors, or even the king, but directly in the face of almighty God. The king, therefore, loses in the eyes of people his function as an intermediary between the world of gods and the world of men, and as an all-powerful deity, Amun is first and foremost. In the sources of this period, the transcendent character of its nature is further enhanced, which is also characteristic of the earliest texts of the Theban theology. Against the background of fear and uncertainty about the future, a person enters into personal contact with the deity, clearly realizing that his own future depends on it.

This new model of world-view determined the approach to man in the Egyptian spiritual culture up to the Hellenistic era. It is important to note that even in this historical era, the Egyptian world-view was not absolutely anthropocentric: human nature is considered here primarily in relation to the transcendent deity. This brings it significantly closer to the approach of the first Greek philosophers - the Milesians and Heraclitus -

who also focused on the study of the nature of the cosmos, rather than on the problem of man. As in Egyptian thought, in the early Greek pre-philosophical and philosophical tradition before Socrates, the problem of man and his nature was not traditionally fundamental to the formation of doctrines about the nature of the surrounding world. The appeal of Greek philosophers to the problem of man begins only in the middle of the 5th century BC, and this process was largely associated with Athens and the socio-political changes that the Greek city-state was undergoing at that time.

III. INFLUENCE OF THE MIDDLE EAST ON ANCIENT GREEK MYTHS

M. West examines the philological nuances concerning various associations in the language context. For example, we find similar concepts in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew. When a man dies, it is said that his ashes dissolve in the same way as those of his fathers. The word "dust" has a wide range of meanings, including «living being», «independence», «desire», «appetite», «emotions» and so on, and it comes from the Semitic root meaning «blow» for spirit. In the Psalms, for example, another word is used for spirit – ruah, which means mainly «wind»; here we can also mention the etymological understanding between the Greek and Latin uses: anemos → animus (mind, spirit) and anima (soul) [5].

The myths of the ancient Greeks can also tell us a lot about the influence of the Middle East. Different mythologies from different parts of the world have similar features, just as the basis of thinking of different peoples may be similar to each other. Of course, they needed to believe in something, so they made up some explanations that were appropriate to answer a number of questions that concerned them. However, on the other hand, there must have been some differences. Depending on the location around the world, there are, as you know, different conditions, different nature and different creatures. These differences led to the fact that the myths had almost identical bases, but the output results were different.

By analogy, we can distinguish deities. «As an example, we can mention the famous story about the change of generations of the gods, which is dedicated to the «Theogony» of Hesiod. Its origins lie in the ancient Mesopotamian legend according to the extant Sumerian and Akkadian versions. Just as Kronos, in the transmission of Hesiod, stripped the male power of his father Uranus - the incarnation of Heaven - and thus gained power, so the Sumero-Akkadian God of the Sky An (Anu) in the same way was stripped of power by the Hurrian God Kumarbi».

To recreate a more complete picture, it is worth emphasizing the influence of Egyptian pre-philosophy

on the formation of Indo-European mythopoetics on the example of the heritage of Ancient Greece, as the most characteristic and studied at the moment. It is also worth noting that the main attention in the study of philosophy and its sources is paid to Greek mythopoetics, while very little has been said about the mythological representations of the Egyptians. This problem was raised in the course of consideration of the issue of common concepts in the article «Common concepts of Egyptian pre-philosophy and Indo-European mythopoetics (on the example of the concept «gods»)». In our view, this situation arose due to the fact that in the period from the XVIII century to the XIX century in Europe there was racial discrimination, for example, critical researchers in this field emphasize that the study of antiquity was formed under the influence of self-focused Europeans, so that the cultural influence of the Middle East on the civilizations of Greece and Rome was systematically ignored. M. Bernal thought, that the task is to «weaken the cultural arrogance of Europeans» [3], and this criticism seems to us fruitful, contributing to further serious reflection on the problem we have set.

For example, Joseph Campbell, an American researcher of mythology, in his work «Myths for life» noted that the differences between Eastern and Western mythologies indicate that in Eastern thought, mythology is understood as an informer of internal human activity, while in the West, mythology is considered as something literal, being a historical aspect. These differences are both reflective and informative because of the sociological differences between East and West. In the East, the highest priority is society and subordination of the individual to his role in this society; in the West, priority is given to the individual, his uniqueness and freedom from obligations to any ideology or social status, giving the right to choose.

IV. CONCLUSION

The interaction of Greek culture with other cultures and civilizations has long been an indisputable fact, confirmed by a large number of sources and long does not need any additional evidence. However, the worldview aspects of this process still require serious clarification and detail – first of all, in the issue of mutual influence of early Greek philosophy with the pre-philosophical traditions of Ancient Egypt and Iran. This concerns, first of all, cosmological and cosmographic representations (Heraclitus), cosmogonic and natural-philosophical problems (the Milesian school) and religious anthropology (the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition). Further investigation of these mutual influences within the framework of the mythogenic concept of the Genesis of philosophy will undoubtedly not only help to detail many of the provisions of the now-classic formula «from Myth to

Logos», but also give an opportunity to look at the philosophical phenomenon of the «Greek miracle» from the point of view of the General vectors of spiritual and intellectual development of mankind in the era of «axial time». It is no accident that Socrates's treatment of the subject of man was the key moment that defined the beginning of the classical period in the history of ancient Greek philosophy, which laid the foundations of Western spiritual culture. And the origin of this most important intellectual tradition of the European world is largely rooted in the richness and variety of interpretations of the human problem in the ancient cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean.

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