

W. Burkert's Historical and Philosophical Concept-Based on His Work "Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture"

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Abstract—This article examines the historical-philosophical concept of the famous German antiquity historian and philologist, Walter Burkert. In his concept, the author examines the archaeological epigraphy, ritual and mystery side of Greek culture, religious philosophy, along with works by historians, poets and philosophers for centuries. His work focused on combining the universally recognized facts with the archaic finds, a religion that emerged in the Greek culture through the Middle East and Persian influences.

Keywords—*Pre-philosophy; Afrocentrism; Eurocentrism; Borrowings; Early Greek Philosophy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, in our time is considered to be the main concept of Eurocentrism, which is the development of modern philosophical thought from ancient Greek civilization. However, there is orientalist model of perception of this process, the essence of which lies in the consideration of the development of ancient Greek civilization through the study of the Middle Eastern influences. «European tradition, especially in academia, is a unique and isolated the Greeks from other countries, according to the classical tradition. «Classic» in this perspective requires common standards or norms; however, they disappear from our multicultural world and cannot be easily recovered. Such a thing as classical Greece, may be useful in relation to civilization, which is superior in the sense that it became the pattern that is imitated all around the Mediterranean and the policies beyond, to the East and to the West and were re-examined, as this model during the periods of the Renaissance» [2. P. 1]. In this vein, and develops the concept of Walter Burkert (1931-2015), studying the theoretical sources of the Middle East. He offers to dispel this common perception, indicating a balanced picture of the archaic period in which, under the influence of the Semitic East all the Greek culture began its unique flowering, soon adopting cultural hegemony in the Mediterranean. When considering the concept should highlight the following aspects: in its concept W. Burkert considers the archaeological epigraphy, ritual and mystery side of Greek culture, religious philosophy, along with works by historians, poets and philosophers for centuries. His

work focused on combining the universally recognized facts with the archaic finds, a religion that emerged in the Greek culture through the Middle East and Persian influences. W. Burkert describes itself, philologist studying Greek texts in an attempt to find historical, psychological and social explanation of religious phenomena that we face in our era.

At the dawn of Western civilization, according to European tradition, Greece stands as an insular, isolated culture, known as the «Greek miracle». However, Walter Burkert offers to dispel this concept, indicating a balanced picture of the archaic period in which, under the influence of the Semitic East all the Greek culture began its unique flowering, soon adopting cultural hegemony in the Mediterranean.

In this regard, it should again be noted that the study of us regard Ancient Greece to the Middle East is a relevance and interest in many works, in connection with little knowledge of this issue. Thus, the choice of W. Burkert due to the fact, to analyze the impact of the Middle East and maybe try to adopt the orientalist concept of development of all European philosophy.

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GREEKS AND THE PEOPLES OF THE EAST

In this paper, we propose to consider three centers of ancient civilizations – Babylon, Memphis, and Persepolis. Walter Burkert is possible evidence of rethinking Greek culture. In particular, it points to a critical role in the development of writing in the ancient Middle East, starting with cuneiform in the Bronze Age to the rise of the alphabet after 1000 BC. With the invention and spread of the alphabetic writing, followed by the development of the relations between the Middle East and Ancient Greece. Followed by Assyrian influence, and the influence of Phoenicia, Hobbies Greek intellectuals of Egypt, has spread to the Persian conquest of Ionia, which is reflected in the poetry of Homer is in the image of his gods in the mythical foundations of Greek cults, and in the first steps to philosophy and further formation of Western philosophical thought.

In his works, W. Burkert presents to readers of literary and linguistic evidence of the impact of the Middle East in archaic Greece, repeatedly underlines the contribution of Persian (primarily ancient Iranian) mythopoetic in a complex process of formation and development of ancient Greek philosophy and culture.

W. Burkert sees no reason to distinguish between the mythological cosmogonies of the Greeks from their Eastern predecessors: «They obviously belong to the same family, and it is equally clear that the pre-Socratic still follow in their footsteps» [2. P. 60]. In more rational areas such as mathematics and astronomy, where Greek borrowing through continuous and extensive contacts with the Middle East are, in General, are irrefutable, we can see the reflection images of the natural world in theology.

For example, Walter Burkert describes some cases of Persian religious influence on Greek religion. This, for example, «...the possibility of a heavenly immortality, which began to appear in Greek religion in 5th century, was the result of Zoroastrian traditions brought by the Magi» [2. R. 110-113]. The author sees here the influence of the Achaemenes religion on the philosophy of the pre-Socratic, especially in the philosophy of Anaximander. W. Burkert argues that Anaximander is a model of the cosmos where earth rules the stars, then moon, sun, namely, "the divine infinity", this is a reflection of the Zoroastrian model of the action of the heavenly ascent of the soul, which rises with the first star, then moon, sun, and later – Ahura Mazda (deity proclaimed by the prophet Zoroaster — founder of Zoroastrianism — one God). In addition, W. Burkert says that «the Zoroastrian model is not by chance coincides with the model presented by Anaximander's, in its unusual arrangement of stars, as the closest to the ground for empirical observation and suggests that Anaximander not only on the basis of this model is an existing source, but also, this source had a religious meaning in nature. As a result, it is possible an example of Achaemenes religious influence on the philosophy of the pre-Socratic» [2. P. 37].

Many Greek philosophers and poets, in particular Homer in his «Odyssey» describe the relationship between Greeks and the peoples of the East, including trade, exchange of experiences, and other interactions in which the Greeks were taken over by some religious and cultural skills which they later supplemented their culture.

According to W. Burkert, «the Phoenician merchants had always been considered as carriers of Oriental culture, suppliers Eastern imports in Greece in accordance with the picture presented in the Odyssey: Homer mentions the Phoenicians as manufacturers of expensive metal vessels, Maritime traders, and sometimes as people indulge piracy» [3. P. 21]. Despite these facts, many researchers tried to deny the fact of the presence of Phoenicians in Ancient Greece, ferrying their ships in the Aegean Sea, but nevertheless, on Greek Islands such as Kos and Rhodes, the Phoenicians were left a large legacy in the form of ceramics. In this regard, the relationship of the Middle East and Ancient Greece is obvious «...from the excavations of al Mina, the attack of the Greeks in the East was widely recognized. The expansion of the Greeks

and the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean appears from the very beginning and developed through mutual competition» [3. P. 21].

Despite the fact that Iranian populations have not belonged to the tribes of the Middle East initially, thus, had no cultural roots on a par with the civilizations of archaic Greece and Ancient Egypt, however, Walter Burkert emphasizes the fact that the Iranian nation begin to settle in the Middle East around the first Millennium BC. To VII-VI centuries can be traced to the formation of an independent mythological cycles separate Iranian groups, such as East – Scythian-Sarmatia mythology, West – Ancient Media: Old Persian, Sogdian, and others. Through the wars and conquests of Iran becomes an integral part of the Middle East peace, subsequently, also had a great influence on the formation and development of Ancient Greek culture.

III. FROM THE MIDDLE EAST PRE-PHILOSOPHY TO THE ANCIENT GREEK TRADITION (BASED ON THE MYTHOLOGY)

The period of colonization helped the Greeks to emerge from relative isolation in which they found themselves after the fall of the Mycenaean culture. It was during this period finally determined the most characteristic features and peculiarities of the civilization of the so-called new period of the ancient civilization, the history of which cannot be seen in isolation from the Middle East. For two and a half centuries, which is a such short period of time to period of historical development, Greek civilization could not only be equal to other civilizations during the "dark ages", but to exceed in their development the countries of Western Asia, which until that time had prevailed in their cultural development in the Middle East region.

Along with M. West, W. Burkert discusses the Akkadian epic of Gilgamesh, but in a slightly different way. It offers a «...focus on more complex structures where coincidence is unlikely: the system of deities and a basic cosmological idea, the narrative structure of a whole scene, decrees of the gods about mankind, or a very special configuration of attack and defense. Once the historical connection, the fact that the transfer has been established, then further communication, including linguistic borrowing becomes more likely, even if it fully enough to prove» [3. P. 88].

For example, the author identifies the analogue of the mythological story of the marriage of Zeus and Hera in the Eastern tradition, namely, in Sumero-Akkadian the poetics. Describing the oath of Hera and the further actions of the heroes of myth, W. Burkert gives the example, in the context of which are clearly visible parallel. «The famous oath of the gods, that Hera should say, ends in the following way: heaven, earth, and water of the underworld are called to be witnesses. The same cosmic formula ends with the enumeration of the divine witness in Aramaic in the text of the agreement, which has been preserved since the VIII century: «Heavens and earth, depth and source day and night»» [3. P. 93-94].

And this is not all: W. Burkert, considering the Greek myths, saw further interaction of the considered crops in the context of the images of the Titans residing in the underworld. Despite the comments of the author that the influence of Oriental mysteries on the Greek mythology in this context it is

very difficult for deeper analysis, the fact that similarities should not be taken into account. Ideas about the ancient, fallen from the sky gods combine Greek mythology with the Hittites, Phoenicians and Babylonians. It is known that in the Greek tradition Zeus overthrew the Titans to the underworld, such a line we can trace in the Mesopotamian tradition, where «struck by the gods» [3. P. 94] was sent by God or gods.

W. Burkert's researches are concentrated on the ritual and mysteriological parties of the Greek culture, influence of east cults, a role of violence and the victim in formation of social institutes.

In addition, W. Burkert considers the development of astronomy in Ancient Greece. He mentions that the Greeks themselves do not deny the fact of borrowing in this area, saying that the idea of the existence of the planets, for example, they learned from Babylon. «There they were known for centuries, and it is from there, not from Greek mythology, is the Association of planets with individual gods, whose names they named. The Babylonians discovered the most important information about the movement of planets, in particular, about the period of their orbits. At least in the case of Saturn, whose orbit is equal to 29 and half years, it took several generations. The discovery of the planet mercury, which is difficult to observe, also belongs to them; in fact, the stock of accurate knowledge about the planets, without doubt, is the most obvious merit of the Eastern world in the period before Plato» [1].

IV. CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that many scientists, in particular linguists perceived the works of W. Burkert positive, rather than give critical reviews. Although, in our opinion, the concept of W. Burkert is a very unusual view on the problem of the middle East theoretical sources, on a par, say, with Martin Bernal. For example, a very broad perspective on the work of W. Burkert was made by Molly M. Levine, a Professor at Harvard University. Speaking about her attitude to the concept of W. Burkert, we emphasize that it is extremely ambiguous, because as a supporter of more classic models of the Genesis, M. Levin, however, does not deny the possibility of a development of Greek civilization, namely, through the middle East influence.

Thus, in the examples above can be seen the main thread of the concept W. Burkert, which consists, primarily, is to show and point out undeniable facts of influence in the Middle East on the culture of archaic Greece. In our view, the examples well illustrate the closeness between different cultures, thanks to which is possible the formation of ideas about cultural and historical background of the Genesis of the Modern Western philosophy. This fact should be taken into account by a modern historian of philosophy, regardless of what position he takes in the question of the role of pre-philosophy of the Ancient Near East as a theoretical source of philosophy of Ancient Greece. How W. Burkert wrote: «Widely there is an opinion that Pythagoras about whom tell as if he traveled to the East has brought new astronomical knowledge to Greece and has extended them in the school. And really, it is considered the most important link in transfer of East knowledge to Greeks» [1. P. 254].

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