

THE FORMATION OF AN ETHNIC SUBSTRATE: RECONSTRUCTION OF WESTERN SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AND ITS RELATION TO PROTO-KARTVELIAN (GEORGIAN) TRIBES

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Abstract. The Kartvelian (Georgian), also known as the Proto-Kartvelian or Iberian-Colchic tribes, are a group of related ethnic groups that inhabited the central and western parts of Transcaucasia and formed the basis for the formation of the Caucasoid race and, in particular, the Georgian nation. In ancient times, they included the Colchians, Taokhs, Moskhs, Sasprians, Khalibs, Muskhes, and Tubals. The largest sub-ethnic groups that have preserved related languages are the Svans, Mingrelians, Laz, and Kartlians. The adoption of Christianity and its declaration as the state religion (4th century) contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Georgian nation.

The available anthropological, ethnographic, and textual data on the epistemological,¹ ontological,² and political problems of ethnicity are scarce. Nevertheless, a unified approach to ethnicity is being significantly refined.³ Ethnicity is a mental construct, used to identify oneself or others as belonging to a group of common descent, united by a common origin, culture, language, historical memory and territory.

From the point of view of any modern social science concept of ethnicity, it is extremely difficult to attempt to trace the ethnic origins of the Proto-Kartvelian tribes back to the distant past, since the limited amount of archaeological data does not allow for conclusions. We cannot identify ethnic groups in distant prehistory, much less connect these groups with modern cultural or biological descendants. The mixing of race, language, and culture is constantly taking place, although these objects/processes of research do not proceed consistently enough, and the coincidences are not regular enough to allow us to draw valid interpretations. Only where these variables are considered independently, separately, and are found to be con-

¹ Epistemology (Greek: *ἐπίσμη* “scientific knowledge”, “reliable knowledge” + *λόγος* “word”, “speech”) is a philosophical and methodological discipline that studies knowledge as such, its structure, functioning and development. The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its sources, limits, and foundations. Epistemology also studies the structure, functioning, and development of knowledge. Often, epistemology is considered synonymous with gnosiology (Greek: *γνῶσις* “cognition”, “knowledge” + *λόγος* “word”, “speech”) – the philosophical discipline that deals with research, criticism and theories of knowledge, although not in classical philosophy these concepts are divided: gnosiology studies the “subject-object” relationship, and epistemology – “knowledge-object” relationship.

² Ontology (Lat.: *ontologia*; Ancient Greek *ὄν*, gen. *ὄντος* “being”, “what exists” + *λόγος* “teaching”, “cognition”) is a philosophical doctrine that studies the fundamental principles of essence, its most general categories, structure and regularities. It exists in unity with the theory of knowledge and logic. Sometimes the term “ontology” (the metaphysics of essence) is used in contrast to the term “genology” (the metaphysics of the one).

³ In this regard, the research conducted by James F. Pendergast (James F. Pendergast 1991, 1999), helps us define the limits of our knowledge about ethnicity.

sistent, can we consider the concept of ethnic culture as a direct analogue of ethnicity with the preservation of the group. It cannot be assumed that such a self-denoting entity has simple material correlates or even polythetic⁴ features that distinguish it from similar neighboring entities. Ethnoarchaeologists have not discovered regularities in material culture that would allow us to distinguish symbols with ethnic significance, because every symbol can be assigned different meanings, and the analysis of ethnic origin is impossible outside the context of a single case study. A unified interdisciplinary approach is needed to establish the proto-ethnic world.

These methodological and epistemological shortcomings require that the study of ethnicity should have access to the mental constructs assigned to material culture. This is only possible where archaeological data are supplemented by linguistic, ethnohistorical, or ethnoarchaeological information. Moreover, since both ethnic and cultural affiliations change, we cannot expect that established correlations with respect to the distant past will necessarily be maintained.

Keywords: Proto-Kartvelian tribes, prehistoric ethnic identity, language, culture

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Introduction. Since the middle of the 20th century, scientists from many countries have tried to define ethnic cultures and identify them as the ancestors of modern ethnic groups. However, the modern study of ethnicity has fallen into a more complex theoretical framework, and there has been no significant progress in this direction. The methodological problems, political difficulties, gaps and assumptions that arose in the 20th century were significantly revised. Despite some progress in the study of ethnicity, both the cultural-historical and post-processual⁵ theoretical sources in this regard obscure the meaning of this concept (Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Mallory 1989; Meskell 1998; Renfrew 1987; Silberman 1989).

The presented **research topic** is the determination the existence of ethnicity in prehistoric tribes, including the Kartvelian tribes. This is a very difficult task, because neither in the ancient (Greco-Roman) nor in the eastern (Assyrian-Urartian) sources/inscriptions are there any defining characteristics of ethnicity.

The **relevance of the topic** lies in the determination of the probability of the formation of the substrate of ethnicity in the Kartvelian tribes and its nature based on the analysis of the archeological artifacts existing in the prehistoric age.

The main **problem** of the scientific work is the vagueness and shortcomings of the sources. Despite the obvious progress in the study of the prehistoric age, both the cultural-historical and post-processual theoretical foundations of archaeologists in terms of ethnicity in the tribes of this period, including Kartvelian, are exaggerated.

In the article, we refer to the generally recognized scientific research **methodology**: the method of interdisciplinary studies, the comparative-historical method, the method of critical analysis and synthesis of sources, ideographic (description), retrospective methods.

⁴ Polythetic (Greek: πολύ “many” + πετέστις “establishment”) – a taxonomic classification in which the separation of individuals, populations, or taxa is based on the characteristics of the majority of representatives of a particular group.

⁵ The theory of post-processuality (the same as post-processualism) is a philosophical direction that arose in the context of postmodernism and questions the universality and objectivity of the processes that are the basis of human experience and cognition. According to post-processualists, processes are not independent of the observer and do not have a fixed, predictable trajectory. In contrast, processes are dynamic, socially constructed, and dependent on the context in which they are considered.

Reasoning. Attempts to determine the cultural affiliation of the social groups of the anthropological ethnic world have a long history. European and American scholars were interested in their own national histories (Trigger 1989: p. 45-49). However, until the middle of the 20th century, studies of ethnoses were not focused on cultural groups. Only with the revival of the cultural historical tradition in Central Europe, which includes the work of scholars such as Eduard Mayer, Oscar Montelius, and Friedrich Ratzel, did interest in culture increase. This renewed interest can be attributed, at least in part, to German reunification and the rise of romantic nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, ethnic cultures were not defined; they were identified with the ancestors of modern ethnic groups. Nevertheless, many other scientists have worked on this topic before and since.

At the beginning of the 20th century, archeology was in its infancy, not to mention physical anthropology and linguistics. However, only archaeological data is not enough to study ethnicity. For archaeologists who wish to use their work for nationalistic political interests and to flatter a society interested in its own past, the assumption that race, language and culture overlapped (or mostly did) is a convenient package. Finding evidence for any of these three different circumstances would be considered evidence for all three. The underlying assumption was... the belief, based on biblical sources, that racial, linguistic, and cultural differences developed simultaneously as human populations increased, spread into new regions, and became ethnically distinct (Jérôme Lalemant in Thwaites 1896-1901, 21: 193-195).

Cultural anthropologists have long recognized that the correlation between language, race, and culture is complex. At the beginning of the 20th century, the interrelationship of racial, linguistic and cultural features is a fact, empirically determined, which in many cases is wrong (Boas 1940). This empirical approach proved most applicable to complex theories in which cultural dominance was attributed to racial superiority (Childe 1933a, 1933b). Genetic, linguistic and cultural characteristics are not identical, they are integrated to some extent, although the extent of integration is not always the same and is not easily determined (Boas 1930 [1940]: 256; see also Sapir 1916).

One method that scientists use to solve this problem is to expand the unit of study from a specific "people" to members of a larger group. The identification of a specific anthropological material culture is more or less secure. Given that these more general identifications imply linguistic affiliation with a larger language family. Although there may be some reason to assume that aspects of material culture will be shared to some extent within a single language within a relatively limited geographical area, there is no reason to assume that a set of material culture is shared by all members of a large language family, or that it will not be shared by neighboring groups speaking different languages. Neighboring cultural groups that speak unrelated languages but share a similar environment and trade with each other are more likely to show similarities in material culture than peoples who speak the same or genitive languages but are geographically separated and adapted to different physical environments.

Western schools of anthropology believe that endogamy has been the norm throughout human history. We can assume that the tribes carrying the Proto-Kartvelian anthropological genetics should have been based in a relatively large area and dispersed into small groups as a result of the disintegration of the Kartvelian language. Even in the early Neolithic, when individual settlements were often separated by considerable distances, there is evidence that families moved in and out of large communities, and the taking of captives transported genes over even greater distances. Many scholars agree that Proto-Kartvelian-speaking people have lived in the Caucasus and the Middle East, as well as throughout ancient Asia, for thousands of years. They support the theory of the unified development of Proto-Kartvelian cultures, when a unified space of early hunting-gathering and nomadic life was formed. The similarity of Kartvelian languages is identified with a common tradition and culture. In our opinion, they originated in one space of Asia Minor,

Caucasus and Middle East [Metonidze 2022]. This Paleolithic population, which lived in the Caucasus, Asia Minor and Syria-Levant, was of one origin and received the scientific name *Caucasian Hunter-Gatherers (CHG)*. It was the people who later formed the Iberian-Caucasians; from them came the Caucasian (white) race. It should also be remembered that lexicostatistics⁶ (especially glottochronology⁷) and the reconstruction of past population genetics remain controversial. However, most arguments are based on the assumption that areas that share the same material culture also share the same language.

Many historians, archaeologists, ethnologists and linguists admit that the Proto-Kartvelian language-speaking peoples lived in the entire area of the Caucasus and the Near East, as well as the whole of ancient Asia, for many thousands of years. They support the theory of the unified development of Proto-Kartvelian cultures, when the early hunter-gatherer and three-year-old single space was formed. The similarity between the Kartvelian languages⁸ of this region is identified by a common tradition and culture. In our opinion, they originated in the former Asia, the Caucasus and the unified space of the Near East.

In some cases, a correlation between genetics, linguistics and culture can be established. For example, the tribes that arose from the breakup of the Proto-Kartvelian language are mostly culturally non indistinguishable from their neighbors, but they also have their own cultural characteristics, such as specific food taboos, oral history, according to which they had a common Georgian origin. Although the overall South Caucasian ethnicity remains somewhat controversial, and the specific techniques used in genetic reconstruction are somewhat problematic, such studies show that correlations between race, language, and material culture are too sporadic (unstable) and that ethnicity cannot be equated with archaeological culture on the false premise that these three Features have inherent unity. As Lamberg-Karlovsky concludes, “In the renewed context of the relationship between archaeology, culture, and language, we must remember well that neither clay shards nor genes speak specific languages, just as a given language does not require a specific ceramic type or genetic structure” (Lamberg-Karlovsky 2002: 75).

Conversely, when anthropologists believe that specific ethnic differences must exist, they often try to identify them on the basis of a small number of distinctive features. Gordon Childe (1929: vii, 248) argued that ornaments, pottery and burial customs were more reliable indicators of ethnicity than tools and weapons, which would have spread rapidly from one ethnic group to another because of efficiency. Archaeologists today recognize that differences in material culture have many causes: some reflect temporal differences, others differences in environment, resource availability, local traditions of handicraft production, and ornamentation and function. Also, in trading patterns, status, gender identities, inter-group marriage patterns (Wright 1999: 925). The reasons for these variations can be determined by archaeological analysis. However, identifying ethnic identity through material culture is not easy. Ethnicity cannot be determined from a material culture assemblage until the ethnic significance of individual artifact types or attributes is determined. If some ancient Kartvelian speakers had maintained a hunter-gatherer or agriculturalist lifestyle, there is a good chance that their Kartvelian (Georgian) identity would have been preserved or lost. It all depends on individual cases.

The practical difficulties of sorting out the genetic, linguistic and cultural factors in the anthropo-Kartvelian tribes regarding the issue of ethnicity described above lead to our considerable pessimism and

⁶ Lexicostatistics – statistical method in linguistics, which is used to determine the degree of relatedness of languages by comparing their basic vocabulary. This helps determine how close languages are to each other based on the number of common words that have survived from the protolanguage.

⁷ Glottochronology (B.C. Greek γλῶττα “language” + ὄρος “time”; λόγος “teaching”) is a method of prehistoric linguistics that determines the time of separation of related languages. It assumes a constant rate of change in vocabulary.

⁸ The Kartvelian (South Caucasian) languages are a distinct family of four indigenous languages: Georgian, Svan, Mingrelian, and Laz. They are unrelated to any other known language family.

require great efforts. Socio-anthropologists have shown a different interest in ethnicity and opposed the concept of „culture“ (Barth 1969). Contemporary anthropologists offer a definition that defines ethnicity as “a method of classifying people (both oneself and others) that uses origin (socially constructed) as the primary focus” (Levine 1999: 168). Contemporary anthropological approaches to ethnicity not only question cultures as bearers of bounded givens, but also imply that ethnicity is created and manipulated by individuals within different cultures. Ethnicity is not dictated by (although it may be related to) any cultural characteristics. By moving the subject of cultural identification entirely into the realm of culture, modern anthropology has made the determination of ethnicity archaeologically even more difficult, almost impossible.

Ethnic identity is also recognized as hierarchical and situational. Individual tribes were considered members of extended clans, groups, communities, tribes and confederations of both North Caucasian and South Caucasian and Minor Asian families. They also uniquely distinguished people who spoke the same Proto-Kartvelian language, had abundant food and sometimes identical species in different tribes, and lived in unstable societies. All levels of this hierarchy from extended families were “ethnic”. We assume that the community was always the primary ethnic unit among the Proto-Kartvelians. Extended families and localized clans moved from one community to another, just as whole tribes sometimes moved from one confederation to another. Archaeological settlement patterns suggest that over time some neighboring communities united into tribes, and the tribes formed confederations. Nevertheless, each tribe of the Proto-Kartvelian confederation remained in its own territory. Over time, the concept of ethnicity appears to have become more complex and hierarchical, and can vary significantly between groups.

What is known about the Proto-Kartvelian tribes may simplify the assignment of an ethnic label. More general ethnographic evidence also suggests that ethnicity can be defined in many different ways: by language, lifestyle, political and social organization, religion, life values, origin myths, costumes or ornaments, or various combinations of these and other factors. The relative importance of different factors is highly idiosyncratic⁹ and unpredictable from one culture or from one culture to another. Therefore, a specific talk about ethnicity is more justified than a general one.

In the last twenty years, ethnicity has experienced a resurgence of interest in the reconstruction of anthropological ethnic groups. The main emphasis is on post-processual archeology of ethnicity and updated cultural history. Using historical archaeology, particularly ethno-archaeology, vigorous efforts have been made to demonstrate the complex relationships between material culture and ethnic identity. It is here that we should find the golden mean between the ethno-social and anthropological classes in the Proto-Kartvelian tribes.

Not surprisingly, ethno-archaeology and historical archeology have shown that where ethnicity is a relevant criterion for defining group identity, it will usually be expressed in material culture (Hodder 1982; Wiessner 1983; Balint 1989; Larick 1991). However, post-processualist archaeologists have also shown that “the relationship between material culture and ethnic consciousness is not fixed or intrinsic” (Jones 1997: 124). And the correlation between ethnicity and material culture is not epiphenomenal,¹⁰ it is extremely

⁹ The term “idiosyncrasy” originates from Greek ἰδιοσυγκρασία – *idiosynkrasia*, “a peculiar temperament, habit of body” (from ἴδιος *idios*, “one’s own”, σύν *syn*, “with” and κράσις *krasis*, “blend of the four humors” (temperament) or literally “particular mingling”, a genetically determined reaction that occurs in some people in response to certain non-specific (as opposed to allergy) stimuli. Idiosyncrasy is based on an innate increased reactivity and sensitivity to certain stimuli or reactions, which occurs in the body as a result of repeated weak exposure to certain substances and is not accompanied by the production of antibodies.

¹⁰ Epiphenomenon (Ancient Greek ἐπί “with, after, near” and φαινόμενον “appearance”, “presence”) – an addition to a phenomenon, a side event that accompanies other phenomena, but does not affect them in any way; a term used to interpret consciousness as a completely passive form of the material (or ideal) content of the world, which therefore does not play any significant role, used by epiphenomenalists – representatives of natural scientific materialism (T. Huxley, F. Le Dantec) and some idealist philosophers (E. Hartmann, Nietzsche, Santayana); also supporters of behaviorism (a systematic approach to the study of the behavior of people and animals).

complex, often ephemeral and, we can say, completely non-generalizable. Thus, ethnicity can be seen not only as a fixed property of groups of individuals, but also as an assertion of self-identity or other identity that is contested, manipulable, and viewed by individuals according to their political and social goals. It also follows that ethnic identity is not simply an expression of a group's culture or language. This view can be disputed and considered to overrepresent the role of the individual in relation to the traditions that were characteristic of small, tightly integrated societies. There is some evidence that this was not necessarily the case. Even if these societies were internally more homogeneous¹¹ than modern industrial society, cultural variation among them appears to have been greater (Hallpike 1986: 141-142). Accordingly, similar or identical circumstances generated the entire space of ethno-cultural civilizations in the Proto-Kartvelian world as well.

Given such epistemological difficulties, it is clear that this is an unproductive line of inquiry. However, for post-processualists, who prioritize ideas in structuring material culture, to abandon ethnic identity would be to admit that ideas are not as easily reconstructible as they might seem. If this is the case, then Christopher Hawkes's (1954) famous "ladder of inference", according to which belief is the most difficult aspect of human behavior to reconstruct from archaeological data alone, would be in fact true, that is, the very thing that most post-processualists try to deny. In addressing this problem, many post-processualist archaeologists argue that specific, isolated cases around ethnicity are more important than formulating a general theory based on similarities across many different cases. Thus, Jones suggests that "the way in which a particular style of material culture is intrinsically involved in the articulation of ethnicity may be inherent in different cultures, but it is not accidental within specific socio-historical contexts" (Jones 1997: 125). But if each case is considered unique, it is unclear how material culture can be used in isolation to study ethnicity without defining the geographical scope of a common space. In our case, the geographical area of settlement of the Kartvelian tribes and the similarities and differences of the population spread across it must be determined in order to accurately determine which Proto-Kartvelian tribe is the ancestor of today's Georgians and what specific territory they occupied.

One possible way to address this issue would be to identify generalizations, patterns, or limitations in the material expression of ethnicity in ethnoarchaeological or historical research. The study of spatial variation and the formation of boundaries of material culture among contemporary ethnic groups can be used to identify ethnographic analogies to explain variation in the material culture of ethnic groups (Hodder 1982: 186-187). On the other hand, if it is possible to identify general principles that apply to markers of ethnic identity, it may be possible to distinguish ethnic variation from other factors. There is some variation in the archaeological record. Jeff Emberling's (1997: 325) suggestion that a lifestyle, burial ritual, or cuisine may be archaeologically meaningful and have culturally regular ethnic features is not particularly meaningful and does not allow for operationally useful generalizations. These generalizations can be applied to ethnic contexts, including Kartvelian ethnicity. However, even if cross-cultural patterns could be identified, the identification of ancient ethnic groups cannot be directly linked to modern or historically known ethnic groups without additional evidence.

We also found that ignorance of anthropological views on ethnicity negatively influenced archaeological practice, especially in the assignment of tribal or ethnic names to archaeological cultures. This practice also tended to prevent careful compilation of variations in material culture. There was ethnographically and

¹¹ Homogeneous system (Greek: ὁμός "equal", "similar" + γένω "birth") – a physical system that does not contain parts that are different in terms of composition or properties and separated from each other. A distinction is made between homogeneous (all physical characteristics of a homogeneous system are the same in all its parts) and non-uniform (these parameters change continuously from point to point) homogeneous system. In an inhomogeneous homogeneous system, in contrast to a heterogeneous system, there are no areas bounded by dividing surfaces, where the parameters change abruptly.

historically attested well-defined groupings of people; each of them inhabited a specific territory. However, the languages of many neighboring tribes were very similar, and in some cases identical, and the differences in material culture that corresponded to historical tribal boundaries (as opposed to random polythetic variation) were in some cases so small that archaeologists have not yet determined them. This is precisely the case with Kartvelian tribes, who exhibit a wide range of habitats, lifestyles, languages, and traditions.

Ethnic consciousness and identity are more strongly expressed and relevant in times of political and economic stress (Hodder 1979, 1982). Some scholars consider ethnic groups in complex societies as features of state societies and suggest that in pre-state societies the role of self-identification according to cultural group may not have had the same importance as ethnicity according to its anthropological definitions. We believe that this very circumstance also shaped the characteristics of the common Kartvelian ethno-cultural civilization, because Georgia was historically located at a crossroads and, due to this strategic location, always had many enemies. Fighting against a common enemy and defending one's own land would certainly contribute to the unification of Kartvelian tribes and their formation as a single ethnos.

For the post-processual approach to cultural-historical and processual views, ethnicity was valuable for its deconstruction of essentialism,¹² as well as for exploring ways in which ethnicity was actively used and mediated in historical and ethnographic contexts. Post-processualism aligned the archaeological understanding of ethnic origins with modern social anthropology. Post-processualism has aligned the archaeological understanding of ethnicity with modern social anthropology. While post-processualists rightly argue that ethnicity must have existed in the past, there is no reason to assume that the same identities existed in tribal ties that are found in the global economy or in the structure of many modern groupings based on the state. There is also no reason to claim that just because something existed in the past, we can reconstruct it in a perfect form in the present, defining it element by element as an ethnic entity.

We still believe that valid studies of ethnicity are possible when scholars work in protohistoric and late prehistoric contexts using archaeological data. Features that are ethnographically or historically associated with a particular ethnic identity. This can be reasonably extrapolated into late prehistory if there is a significant degree of continuity between prehistoric and historical contexts. However, given the rapid rate of change in cultural characteristics that has occurred in many regions, such efforts can, at best, only be related to the recent past. What sense of ethnic identity existed in proto-themes (including Proto-Kartvelian)? In the distant past, ethnic identity may not have existed beyond the boundaries of individual communities. The observation of initially dispersed communities that moved in close proximity to each other may in some cases indicate the development of broader tribal or confederal identities (Tuck 1971). However, the impact of political events on material culture remains to be studied to establish a unified picture.

The success of ethnic archaeology may be due to the detailed use of ethnohistorical and linguistic data in the study of ancient cultures. Ethnicity, as a collective self-identification, cannot be confirmed if there is no correspondence/correlation between language and material culture. Identifying an anthropological sample of material culture with a specific group or tribe is even more incorrect, since we do not know whether historically documented ethnonyms were used in prehistoric times. Care must be taken in research: data from different sources should be compared – not as substitutes for each other – but as complements.

¹² Essentialism – (Lat. *essentia* “essence”, “being”) – a theoretical and philosophical postulate that attributes certain permanent properties to some essence. The concept according to which things have a certain deep reality, a true nature, which is not directly visible, although this hidden essence is important. The term originated in scholastic philosophy as the Latin equivalent of the Aristotelian “second essence”. The term is used in relation to theories that assert the existence of unchanging and eternal properties of things. In modern and contemporary philosophy, essentialism has been significantly criticized by such authors as Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, and many others.

This is the only way that scientists can follow and study language, ethnicity, and material culture in a area of the proto-world.

We cannot investigate the origins of modern ethnic groups, or any significant aspect of ethnicity. How people identified themselves or were identified by others is impossible to say without textual or ethnographic evidence, and because cultures and ethnic groups may be constantly changing, extrapolations¹³ into prehistory must always be treated as tentative. Instead, identification must be limited to historical and late prehistoric contexts.

Conclusion. Attempts to trace the ethnic origins of Proto-tribes, including Proto-Kartvelian tribes, back into the distant past are extremely difficult, as the limited amount of archaeological data does not allow for firm conclusions in terms of any modern social science concept of ethnicity. We cannot identify ethnic groups in distant prehistory, much less connect these groups with modern cultural or biological descendants. The mixing of race/ethnoce, language, and culture is ongoing, but these objects/processes of research are not sufficiently consistent and the coincidences are not sufficiently regular to allow for valid interpretations. Only where these variables are considered independently, separately, and consistently can one speak of the concept of ethnic culture as a direct analogue of ethnicity. Ethnicity is a mental construct used to determine one's own or others' belonging to a group of common origin. It cannot be assumed that such a self-identifying entity has simple material correlates or even polythetic features that distinguish it from similar neighboring entities. Ethnoarchaeologists have not discovered regularities in material culture that would allow us to distinguish symbols with ethnic significance, since all symbols can be assigned different meanings. The analysis of ethnic origin is impossible outside the context of a single case study. A unified interdisciplinary approach is needed to establish the proto-ethnic world.

These methodological and epistemological shortcomings require that the study of ethnicity should have access to the mental constructs assigned to material culture. This is only possible where archaeological data are supplemented by linguistic, ethnohistorical, or ethnoarchaeological information. Moreover, since both ethnic and cultural affiliations change, we cannot expect that established correlations with respect to the distant past will necessarily be maintained.

Recognizing the limitations of archaeological data and the inherent difficulties of ethnicity in ethnographic and historical contexts is a necessary first step. In addition, archaeologists can contribute to detailed analytical research that examines the relationships¹⁴ between group and geographical names, as well as between language families. It is time to replace both outdated cultural-historical and relativistic views of proto-ethnicity with a reasonable, albeit rather limited, approach.

¹³ Extrapolation (Lat. extra “outside”, “beyond”, “besides” + polio “I correct”, “I change”) – the transfer of conclusions drawn in relation to any part of objects or events to the entire set of these objects or events, as well as to any other part. Simply put, extrapolation is the prediction of the future based on the past.

¹⁴ Relativism (Lat.: relativus “relationship”) – a set of philosophical views that rejects objectivity and argues that facts are relative, that is, perceived differently depending on the perspective of the observer and the context of the environment in which they are presented. There are many forms of relativism. The subject of moral relativism is the different moral values and ethical norms of different peoples and cultures. According to epistemological relativism, there are no absolute facts with respect to the norms of faith, justice, and rationality, and they are only relative in nature. Alethological relativism denies the existence of absolute truth and argues that truth is always relative to certain environmental conditions, including social, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Descriptive relativism describes the differences between cultures and peoples without evaluating them. Normative relativism is concerned with the evaluation of the morality and truth of a view within given limits. Some forms of relativism are related to philosophical skepticism. The Sophists are considered the founding fathers of relativism in Western philosophy. Elements of relativism appeared in their thinking in the 5th century BC. According to the Sophists, the understanding of right and wrong changed from one polis to another, from one generation to another. Accordingly, “truth” is variable. The famous statement of the Sophist Protagoras is: “Of all things man is the Measure” (Ancient Greek: Πάντων μέρον ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν). The Sophists' views became known thanks to their opponent, Plato, who, unlike them, recognized the objectivity of truth.

Western anthropological schools believe that endogamy was the norm throughout human history. We can assume that the tribes carrying the Proto-Kartvelian anthropological genetics must have been established over a relatively large territory and dispersed into small groups as a result of the collapse of the Georgian language.

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