

THE INTERFERENCE OF VARIOUS 'SUPERSTRUCTURAL' FACTORS
IN CAUCASIAN STUDIES
CONCERNING POLITICAL AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

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The topics we will deal with in detail can be summed up as follows: a) commensurability of ethnic, cultural, political and religious parameters – in what sense and by what criteria they can be compared; b) identity: methods and criteria by which they can be defined; c) influences and interactions: principles and methods of evaluation; “mimesis” and “centrism”.

It is clear that the main point of view of this research will be the one offered by ethnic, national and ideological problems, which often interfere in the discussion of the various topics in a negative or unilateral way. The above topics certainly do not cover the whole range of the main matters concerning the methods of Caucasological researches. They do not describe a picture wide enough to lead the research on a way free from obstacles, which only create tensions and make interethnic contrasts graver, putting to risk the serenity of the inquiry.

We will not consider the problems concerning nature and definition of the Caucasological discipline, not because we consider them less important for the unity and coherence of the entire discipline, but because of the limited length of the text itself, and mainly because they have a smaller direct influence on this research, in spite of their theoretical importance.

We will not examine the elementary and universal “rules” that should lead any human debate, all the more if it is scientific: respect for the boundaries of the topic which is being discussed, respect for the people and the community. The two main qualities of these rules, which confirm their importance, make them universally accessible, provided that good sense and good will are present¹. Once we are sure of these predispositions, eventual complications should be due to particular “technical” reasons, which we will widely discuss.

The main idea which leads our analysis and supports its axiological system can be considered the synthesis of a contextual reading – against any temptation of transposition and anachronistic levelling – and a contrastive-analogical reading, aiming at deciphering the historical phenomenon, in a process of comparative referentiality – that is a “contrastive analysis” – of its analogies with better known phenomena.

Our aim is not that of providing solutions with no alternatives (it would be too simplifying and simplistic), but that of individuating at least which paths lead to no results.

We are aware of the dimension and complexity of the hermeneutic moment: no analysis, either concerning the subject matter or methodological, can totally ignore the social and cultural background of the historical moment, without referring indirectly to it and without being influenced by it. Being aware of this is maybe one of the best ways of exorcising the risks of subjectivism as much as possible. Thus we will consider the subject matter from a certain distance, which will avoid any excessive identification with the object, without subtracting the subjective dimension.

¹ The effect is not directly evident, as it would seem natural. The widely known case of *Versi Satanic* by Salman Rushdie confirms what has been written so far. There can be no doubt about the absurdity and criminality of what was decided about him and of what he was threatened by certain fanatical movements and powers. However we honestly think that this is not the only problem that must be ethically and deontologically discussed. Many of us have wondered if it is right, or simply worthy of human freedom, to offend faith and religious sentiment of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. It has nothing to do with reducing or censoring any kind of rational criticism, one of the greatest conquests of the western culture and civilisation. The question concerns just the sarcastic, offensive way, evident from the very first line, even if romanticised, of proposing the criticism. By now, particularly in western society, we are totally accustomed to any sort of “demystification”, “demythification”, “deconsecration”; we cannot comprehend at all the question concerning the “offence”, while we do perceive the problem concerning the counteroffence, since it is empirically monstrous and empirically perceptible.

Between the questions debated in the various disciplinary sectors of Caucasology – from philosophy to history, from literature to linguistics –, referred to a number of ethnic groups and languages that is enormous if compared to the limited geographical area, there is one which subtends many others: the question of the ethnic definability of the various “anthropological objects”² contended by the different factions involved.

Certainly many of these cases could find a solution, at least with fewer difficulties, if it wasn't for the interference of political factors. However, not only political matters make resolutions more difficult but also other factors, other preconceptions, which are worthy of discussion; three of them are particularly frequent and determinant. We are going to discuss them first.

0 *Factors of confusion or simplification.*

i. The equalisation or confusion between the concept of “nation”, intended as an ethnic unit, with its own language, culture, institutions, territory, and the concept of “nation” intended as including also a State political structure³. In more concise and immediate terms: the confusion between the concept of “nation” as an ethnic-cultural entity and that of “nation” intended in conformity to the ideology of State-nation. This ideology, subjected to the lucubrations of modern human sciences, which have been elaborated in the West or in westernized contexts, is often a mean of applied interpretation of history, even if most times in silence, with no exclusion of religion and of the ages which are now of interest for our research.

ii. The maybe often unconscious tendency to equalising or proportioning historical reality – boundaries, territory or state configurations, population extension and density – to contemporary political reality.

iii. The reductive simplification of the concurrent factors in the determination of an ethnic-cultural specificity. This simplification is just an aspect of a more general simplification, aiming at ignoring or reducing the complexity of the factors that at various levels and in different ways share in the development and in the disappearing of historical phenomena.

We must now try to understand better the mechanisms concerning these factors, through the use of examples and through attempts of brief analysis that will make clearer what we mean.

We will now premise a few considerations before proceeding.

1. The critical observations we will make concerning the various examples don't implicate any overall negative evaluation of the works and of their authors. On the contrary, we are aware that many of them have studied the topics we are concerned in at a high level. However, this doesn't prevent them from making mistakes. We will concentrate on these mistakes, in relation to the aim of our research.

2. We must also notice that in the examples taken into consideration, as in many other cases, more methodological slips are present and act simultaneously in a reciprocal correlation. We will examine these examples mainly under the point of view that is more relevant to our study.

² By “anthropological object” we intend any reality belonging to men, part of their natural and social habitat (for example territory, monuments, cultural products) or men themselves, that is the people acting on the historical scene.

³ Concerning the conceptual debate on an ethnic-cultural identity, consciously marked outside the state structure, we recommend a few publications between the many existing: [...]

3. Finally, we will deal particularly with those theories and solutions that we consider absurd, barely methodologically correct (aside from any historical-philological detail, which we won't discuss). Many times in those debates, sometimes conditioned by ideological and generally extra-contextual factors, both aspects contribute to the progress of logical reasoning under many points of view. This means that a thorough examination of these factors, led on an excessively detailed historical-philological level, may not be the best way of showing the methodological principles and the criteria of their application in their mere essentiality; this is exactly what we mean to do.

We will deal just with those cases that we consider almost absurd, and even these won't be examined in detail. The aim of this study is in fact neither that of finding a solution to these questions, nor that of summarising all or at least the most controversial cases. Our aim is that of finding a few methodological principles and paths, hoping that we will contribute to the overcoming of certain impasses that often hamper Caucasological studies.

1 A few examples

i. As far as the first point is concerned, we will derive the first example from the words of a well-known Byzantinist, Paul Lemerle. Talking about Pakourian/Pakuriani he states that: “Qu'il soit géorgien, nul doute: géorgien sang pur”.

This is a really meaningful example of confusion between the many parameters that come together in the determination of an ethnic and ethnic-cultural identity; it would probably be more correct to consider it “ignorance” or non-consideration of some parameters. It is most of all an example of the tendency, typical of the ideology of the State-nation, to considering an ethnic-cultural identity unidimensionally. This conception is averse to much Armenian experience and in any case insufficient to show in an adequate and coherent way many cultural phenomena and many ethnic components, typical of the Middle Ages, of the Middle Eastern peoples, and of the Subcaucasian people in particular. In fact, the case of Pakourianos is destined to remaining an insoluble rebus without a conception of the ethnic-cultural identity that perceives it in terms of pluridimensionality and multivalence (compare paragraph B. iii, in particular number 29 and 31, in reference to the Armenian-Chalcedonians).

The confusion perceived is stressed by the emphatic tone of the expression – “sang pur” –, with no doubt foreign to that shrewd moderation that the research for a scientific objectivity should impose – at least as a boundary-concept, as a purpose not to be forgotten, even if not an easy one.

Reading the statement more attentively one more slip can be found, regarding the relations between the different parameters of the ethnic-national identity. First of all, as we have already said, the various parameters are absorbed and confused in one only dimension and meaning. This confusion is made even worse by the reduction of state parameters to a level similar to that of ethnic-racial determinations. In other words, we are in front of a representation (or an attempt of representation) of the juridical-political reality of the subjection to a state structure, in terms typical of a bio-physiological qualification, of almost racial connotation. We are fully aware that Lemerle's statement has nothing more than a rhetorical-metaphorical meaning, but this does not deny its referential connotations, the more if the stature of the scientist is taken into consideration.

ii. As far as the second point is concerned, a first example, very trivial and usual, is the projection in the past of the modern names of cities and monuments, whose denominations have changed in the centuries, many times reassuming their most ancient names, as in the case of Tbilisi or Gumayri (Giumri, the former Leninakan in Armenia). A widely know case, even if not directly connected to the Subcaucasian ambit, is that of the capital of the Ottoman Empire: many call it Istanbul, not only talking about the modern city, but also referring to the Ottoman Age, even if its official name has

always been Constantinople, that is Kostantaniyye/Konstantiniyye in the Ottoman form, during the Empire⁴.

b) One more example, more relevant in content, comes from the indiscriminate use of the word “Caucasian”, in reference to the Armenian reality of the Middle Ages and of Antiquity. References to the “Caucasian peoples” and to “Caucasian Christianities” are very often made talking about the past⁵.

Such a use has become more and more frequent during the twentieth century, due to the vanishing of the Armenian people in Eastern Anatolia, and to the consequent disappearing from the geographic map of what the Ottoman Empire simply and justly called *Ermenistan*, *Ermeniya*, *Eyalet-i Ermenistan* (Armenia, region of Armenia).

We think that the expression “Subcaucasia”, which we proposed years ago and which was positively accepted by authoritative scholars, might offer a useful mean of obviating at least terminological imprecision. Obviously words are not everything, but when they are not used with their current acceptation there is a serious risk of causing misunderstanding. The Cartesian rule of expressing clear and distinct concepts, which we think to be nowadays more necessary than ever, entails the use of a clear and appropriate language and terminology.

d) The last two examples of historical anachronism that we are going to examine are taken from contemporary historiography, precisely from the Azerbaijani and Armenian ones.

The first example deals with the transposition in the past of the boundaries of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan, very common in contemporary Azerbaijani historiography, aiming at establishing a criterion of ethnical identification. The result is the equalisation of the Azerbaijani identity and the Albanian-Caucasian one, or at least the affirmation of a strict continuity between the two, justified by the simple fact that the two ethnic groups have followed each other as inhabitants of pretty much the same territories⁶.

⁴ The name was changed by authority in the “vulgar” and, ironically, still Hellenized Istanbul (not Istambul, as Italians often misspell it) just in the twenties, after the accession of the Turkish Republic in 1923, at the beginning of the campaign of systematic “Turkishization” of the ancient toponyms, which has lasted many decades, reaching its climax in the fifties (and which doesn’t seem to be over yet).

⁵ An emblematic example is the classical and in many ways still unsurpassed work by Cyril TOUMANOFF, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Georgetown University Press, 1963. It is necessary to notice that while a metonymic awareness of such a denomination is present in the works by Toumanoff (compare *ibid.*, I, pages 11-12. Also compare N. G. GARSOIAN, *Iran and Caucasia, in Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essay in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, edited by R. Gr. SUNY, Ann Arbor, MI 1983, page 7, number with an asterisk), it is often lacking in the works by many other authors. The geographic map of Caucasia, always present during our Week of study, confirms what we are saying, since it doesn’t reflect the political reality of Subcaucasia during the Middle Ages, during the whole period that we were studying, while it does reflect the political situation of Caucasia during the twentieth century. Terminology is always conventional. The important is that the Subcaucasia or “Caucasia” of the VII or IX century is not mistaken for the Caucasia of the XX century.

⁶ The purely descriptive review of F. Memedova’s studies by Keith Hitchins, published on *RÉGC*, 4 (1988), pages 171-172, must here be mentioned. The review ends with the following statement: “Although the Albanians as a separate ethnic group disappeared, she [i.e. Memedova – B.L.Z.] denies that they vanished without a trace, for they are one of the ancestors of the Azerbaijani people, a fact which, in her views, justifies the continued study of their history”. It is amazing how the author of the review doesn’t realise, not even at this point, what confusion she is making between the different levels of an eventual physiological-generational continuity and of the cultural-spiritual one. (Also view the *NDLR* to a precedent review of the author in *RÉArm*, XVII (1983), page 669).

We may try to make clearer what we mean through the analogy of a case that nowadays won’t be considered too shocking: the “genetic” ancestors of the modern Turkish people. Except for the Kurds, the Lazes, the “Gürücü”/Georgians, the “yürük”, and other extinct or extinguishing Islamic minorities (such as the “ubih”/ubyx, the “çerkez”/Circassians and the “arnavut”/Albanians), acknowledged by their origins in the popular tradition, the rest of the modern Turkish population is composed by unidentified stratifications of Greek, Armenian and Syrian masses and individuals, converted to Islam throughout the centuries, forcedly or by their own will, and thus Turkified. This fact is alive in popular traditions and sometimes inspires smart jokes of an ironical-ethological character, such as the one found in an article by the well known journalist Hasan Pular, published on *Milliyet* in the seventies, in which two friends are talking about the names of their ancestors. When they start taking into consideration their great-grandfathers, one of the two tells the other:

Confusion has been made between space-time parameters and anthropological-cultural ones. This confusion implies a radical inversion of the type and quality of their relations. In fact, the correlation between anthropological-cultural parameters and space-time factors is a very complex matter, which often varies throughout history, because of the succeeding of peoples and cultures.

There are two main types of correlation, referred to the cultural level and not to the demographic transformations and exchanges: a) the typology of “fusion”; b) the typology of “exclusion” or “secession”.

The first typology acts when a new culture is born from the synthesis of two or more groups of peoples and/or cultures. This typology is present throughout history in many different forms and shades, which we are not going to discuss in detail. An example, almost a model, is that of the birth of the culture of Central and Northern Western Europe from the fusion of German and Celtic roots with the Roman culture.

The typology of exclusion and secession, opposite to that of fusion, implies the unilateral and hegemonic domination of a new culture of emigration, and the marginalization, if not extinction and suppression, of the preceding local culture. An example is that of the domination of the Anglo-Saxon Culture on the pre-Colombian cultures in North America. This typology is present in many variants and shades, too. Sometimes the extreme variations of the two typologies can be so similar that it's very difficult to distinguish between the two of them. In any case the two theoretic models remain clear and distinct.

As far as the passage from the local Subcaucasian cultures, in the specific case of the Albanian one, to the Turkish-Azerbaijani culture in superior Atropatan, it clearly followed prevalently, if not entirely, the model of exclusion and secession. It would be a big mistake to consider the relation between the Azerbaijani and Albanian culture as based on the model of “fusion” instead of that of “secession”: it would mean mistaking a space-time succession for an anthropological-cultural connection.

e) A parallel temptation, even if connected to a different historical problematic, seems to have affected recent Armenian historiography, still mainly of a popular kind and often due to the work of amateurs.

It has to do with the pre and proto-Armenian phases of the East-Anatolian highland, from the Urarts up to the various populations of Hurritic and Indo-European roots, who lived there during the second millennium B.C.: those populations are often defined as *hay*, that is “Armenian”, with no further distinction⁷. Obviously in this case the historical problematic is on a different level if compared to the preceding example. Here the problem doesn't concern the temporal overlapping of two cultures of which one vanishes, without leaving any trace of its presence in the other culture; this time the problem has to do with the process of formation of a new culture from the synthesis of many precedent cultures. In other words, we are in front of a process of “fusion”.

Armenian “popular” historians don't make any distinction between the process of formation of a culture, on the one side, and its historically formed reality⁸, on the other side.

“We'd better not proceed, since mine was called Yani [John, in Greek – B.L.Z.] and yours was certainly called Agop [James, in Armenian – B.L.Z.]”.

Obviously it would be very hard to define as Turkish the culture and art of the two ancestors, virtually the ancient Armenian, Byzantine and Greek heritage. Temptations of doing so are not lacking in Turkish modern politics and cultural literature. As far as the Armenian heritage is concerned, it has been most often denied or simply ignored.

⁷ There is one group of authors who are neither amateur nor foreign to historical-philological methodology, who are often in possession of highly specialised tools: for example Martiros KAVOUKJIAN, by which compare in particular *Armenia, Subartu and Sumer. The Indo-European Homeland and Ancient Mesopotamia*, translation from the Armenian Original, Montreal 1987. The works of these scholars point out with scientific exactness how deep the roots of the Armenian ethnos are in the East-Anatolian highland, both on a phisio-genetic and on a mythological-linguistic-cultural level. But these authors seem to forget the distinction between the phase of formation of an ethnic unit and its configuration when it is already born.

⁸ A different and anterior question is the “migratory” (“autochthonous”, not “adventitious”) hypothesis debated during the last fifty-sixty years in reference to the formation of the Armenian ethnos. Compare: B. ARAK'ELYAN, *Hay patmagitut'ean mi k'ani harc'eri masin* [About certain matters of historical knowledge on the Armenians], in *Patma-*

f) The confusion between the process of formation of an ethnic identity and the identity itself subtends certain historiographic theories (with a functionality derived from the fundamental nationalistic tendencies), such as the one on the origin of the Bragats, by P'. Ingoroq'va. Ingoroq'va maintains that one of the reasons for such a theory is that the land of origin of the Bragat dynasty is in the region of Syspirtis (the modern Ispir, in northeastern Turkey). Now, if the word "origin" is referred to the time when the dynasty appeared on the historical scene, that is the II-I century B.C., this land was part of Armenia (the Georgian influx has been reaching it starting from the IX-X century A.D.). If reference is instead made to ages anterior to the VI-VII century B.C., talking about "Armenians" and "Georgians" as ethnic-cultural identities seems inappropriate. This historical anachronism takes origin from the confusion, or from the lacking distinction, between the phase of formation (respectively pre- and proto-formative) of an ethnic unit, and the unit itself when it has already formed.

As Kalistrat Salia notices: "The question of the dynasty – whether it is national or foreign – is of scarce importance", without forgetting that "feeling of unity that in those days prevailed among the aristocracies of the three Caucasian kingdoms – Armenia, Iberia, Albania".

iii. a) The third point is the reductive simplification of the factors concurrent in the determination of an ethnic-cultural specificity.

A significant example is the reduction of the Armenian-Chalcedonian art to Iberian or Byzantine art.

This reductivity may have different reasons:

1. Confusion between ethnical-cultural parameters and political-state parameters, which we have already discussed.

2. Misunderstanding of the complexity of the factors determining historical phenomena and processes;

3. A certain approach to the phenomenon on a formal level of artistic analysis that could be defined as "centralist" and "globalist", since it follows the parameters directly taken from the study of "imperial" arts, without the necessary attention to the characteristics of a particular micro-area. This approach could be defined as simplistic – a different version of the old Eurocentrism, which is still present in various sectors of Eastern studies. As far as Armenian-Chalcedonian art is concerned, recent studies, in particular the ones by Lidov⁹, even if partly confutable, should make us think about the reductive way in which local and marginal arts are dealt with.

bansirakan Handes, 1989, 2 (125), particularly p.16, where scholars such as N. Marr, Gr. Lap'anc'ean, B. Piotrovskij, A. Laribean and "many others" are quoted in favour of the "migratory" hypothesis. This technical debate between specialists and scholars has probably had a certain influx on people technically less prepared, because of the imperfect elaboration of the theoretical apparatus on the fundamental concepts in discussion. We strongly feel that any comment on historical data should be preceded by a conceptual explanation on the fundamental notions that the historical data are supposed to show: a preliminary explanation on what is the exact meaning of "adventitious" people and of "autochthonous" people is lacking (an other example of application of this methodological principle can be found in the debate on the affirmability of an eventual Armenian and Georgian Renaissance: compare the paragraph *Temptations of "mimesis" and "centrism"*, i).

For an overall knowledge of the different points of view on this matter, compare MATT'ĒOSEAN, *Hayoc'cagumi harc'er* [Questions on the origin of the Armenians], in *Handes Amsorya*, CV (1991), pages 89-122. A preliminary explanation is missing in this text, too.

⁹ Lidov's theories have provoked a strong reaction from Nicole Thierry, an authoritative historian of Byzantine and Subcaucasian art. Since our study deals just with methodological matters and not with iconographic styles, we must alas notice that Thierry's reaction is on a very weak methodological level. In fact, Thierry reacts to Lidov's theories without having even read his whole study, but having read just a summary that was given out at the beginning of the V Symposium of Armenian Art: "Voici une brève critique du résumé de sa communication" (N. THIERRY, *A propos de*

4. Finally, as far as artistic phenomena are concerned, the underestimation of any factors, apart from purely formal elements, in the definition of an artistic identity. If even formal analysis is inadequate, the result will be an approach reductive in many different ways. This can explain certain shocking remarks made by well-known scholars such as when, not too long ago, the church of Tigran Honenc' in Ani was simply defined as nothing more than an *église géorgienne*.

b) The discussion on the Armenian-Chalcedonians doesn't deal just with art, but almost with any aspect of social life; this is the reason why it represents a really important matter for anthropological, ethnological, sociological and religious studies.

It certainly creates much confusion in the usual schemes of these disciplines, which often use Western models as ideal models, datum points, and means of interpretation. The Armenian-Chalcedonians, instead, offer a model of really unique ethnical-national conscience, acutely analysed by Arutjunova-Fidanjan¹⁰. This model can't be exactly outlined either according to national-state parameters, neither ancient nor modern, or to cultural, linguistic, religious parameters. It can be expressed through symbolic values, behavioural typicality, which on the one side bind them to the common national root, and on the other side do specify them almost as a sub-ethnic entity, with strong inter-ethnic connotations, similar in this to the nearby areas where they have developed.

peintures géorgiennes du XIIIe siècle, in *RÉGC*, 5 (1989), pages 231-233; see also by the same author, *A propos des peintures de la grande église de K'obayr*, *ibid.*, 2 (1986), page 226).

It is methodologically unacceptable to try to confute a thesis knowing only a brief summary of the original text. The only reason we can think of for doing so is that of having lost one's patience of a possible wait (the Acts of the Symposium have been published just in February 1992). This seems to be a sign of a certain "agitation", which is fully revealed in the very last words of the brief note: "La revendication de ces oeuvres géorgiennes par les Arméniens relève du même état d'esprit que la revendication des églises arméniennes du Karabag par les Azéris" (*ibid.*, page 233). It really seems appropriate to refer to the old say: *si quid probat, nimis probat*. Apart from the iconographic-stylistic discussion, the fact that N. Thierry cannot perceive the big difference between the two types of "vindication" that she has homologated, is certainly due to the fact that she can perceive the identity of the artist and his/her artistic work only in the category of the State-nation, which she has probably learned from the French Revolution. This is a clear sign of the Cartesian need for "clearness" and "distinction", whose methodological need we have stressed (compare *sup.*, B, ii, b and d). We strongly think that in the study of human matters clearness and distinction should be accompanied by "wits" and "topic", typical of G.B. Vico., in order to be able to perceive the non-geometrical variability of human reality.

The simplification with which the scholar approaches the problem is clearly evident from the precedent study: *Les peintures de la Cathédrale de Kobayr (Tachir)*, in *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 29 (1980-1981), pages 103-121, in particular pages 120-121. It is written in n. 65 (page 120): "Il s'agirait donc d'Arméniens qui auraient perdu leur identité arménienne et adopté la géorgienne: le fait est intéressant pour l'histoire de la sociologie des peuples mais non pour l'histoire de l'art". It really seems like there is no way in between the "loss" of the Armenian identity and the "adoption" of the Georgian one, as if ethnical-cultural identities were fossilised monoliths; art seems to be an eternal form, disconnected from real life, from the history of the peoples: there seems to be no sociology of art!

Concerning the possibility of a culturally pluridimensional approach of the artist and of his/her artistic work, compare the already quoted *Les identités polyvalentes* (n. 10). Between the texts cited in note n. 10, pay close attention to the works coming from the French area of influence, having France been one of the maximum exponents of the State-nation ideology, and to the work by Tzvetan Todorov, because of its thorough, acute and balanced analysis.

Considering the problem of the Armenian-Chalcedonians in analogy to a similar event closer to our age could make it easier to understand for those who are accustomed at thinking according to ways and categories distant from the concept of cultural multivalence: compare the already quoted *Le croisement culturel* (n. 2), in particular pages 85-87.

¹⁰ We must make a clearing up of a valuation that V. A. Arutjunova-Fidanjan has attributed us in her valid study. Ms. Arutjunova-Fidanjan writes: "ZEKYAN (1982) [the reference is to our already quoted (n. 2) *Le croisement culturel* – B.L.Z.], pages 87-89 attributes the emergence of the Armenian-Chalcedonians either to the Hellenizing policy of the Byzantine Empire, or to "Georgianization" in the period of the Zak'arids" (page 346, n. 7). This is simply due to a misunderstanding. In the article under discussion we didn't attributed to such factors the origin of the Chalcedonian tendencies of the Armenian Church, but only the process of "Hellenization", respectively of "Georgianization/Hiberianization" of those same tendencies. The difference between these alienating processes and the simple adhesion to Chalcedony is clear enough not to need any further explanation.

At the beginning of our analysis of factors influential in the controversies on the ethnical identification and qualification of anthropological objects, we made reference to political motivations. Nowadays, after the fall of the Soviet Union and with the beginning of inter-ethnic conflicts, we can perceive more clearly that during the last few decades many controversies were nothing more than the transposition on a scientific-historical level (it would be more accurate to say pseudo-scientific-historical) of wars yet to be fought with the use of weapons.

i. One of the clearest examples is the Azerbaijani-Armenian controversy over Caucasian Albania. The Azerbaijanization of the Albanians, that is the “retro-Albanization” of the Azerbaijani people operated by the Azerbaijani side, can be easily comprehended in the context of the conflict of Karabakh: this is a historical deformation within sight of a precise political aim¹¹. In front of this historical forcing, not even the Armenian reaction was always free from political conditionings: for example the embarrassment of recognising the long process of assimilation, that is of Armenization, of the populations bordering the peripheral areas of Armenia¹².

This embarrassment can be explained mainly as the result of a chain reaction, whose outbursts are very often too strong, especially if considered not only in the ambit of a purely scientific reasoning, but also in relation to a cultural and political tactic or strategy. In fact, this historical process of assimilation can be considered as part of the process of interaction between stronger and weaker identities, which is very frequent in history. Today its recognition should not interfere in the rights of the Armenian population in Karabakh. This shows that the outburst of political motivations is often excessive, if compared to what would be necessary for the defence of certain rights.

ii. One more example of political conditioning over a scientific analysis, in the Subcaucasian ambit, is given by the tendency of a certain Georgian historiography and philology to historically considering the Caucasian populations of the Republic in the unitariness of the Georgian nation.

¹¹ Concerning the historiographic procedures of cultural “retro-Albanization” of the Azerbaijani reality, compare n.20.

The conflict of Karabakh, which became of international concern outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union between February and March 1988 (with mass manifestations in the streets of Erevan, and with the following massacres of the Armenian population in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait), didn’t originate at that time, as it could seem. It actually originated at the time of the birth of the independent Republics of Caucasus, in 1918, and of the Soviet Union itself.

¹² This and other observations made by Hewsén, which we consider highly appropriate, should be thoroughly examined and completed. For example, it seems like he doesn’t perceive the distinction and the difference between phisio-genetic descent and cultural continuity (compare sup., B.ii.d). This is Bunjatov’s biggest mistake, and Mnac’akanyan seems to make the same mistake in his counteroffensive. If he had clear the difference between the two types of continuity, he probably would not feel the need to look for strict genetic continuity in order to confirm the Armenian character of the cultural documents and monuments he deals with, and above all of the people to whom they belong, who have considered themselves Armenian throughout the centuries (on the meaning and importance of “ethnic conscience”, compare our *Processi di balcanizzazione e sentieri di debalcanizzazione. Analogie e tipicità di un caso emblematico: il Caucaso*, in *Letterature di Frontiera/Littératures de Frontière*, IV (1994), pages 260-262).

These considerations also show the qualitative difference between Bunjatov’s “mistake” and Mnac’akanyan’s “oversimplification”. While the first one believes in a connection between the Azerbaijani people and Albanians, which cannot be justified by any element in the ethnic conscience of the Azerbaijani people, the second one ignores eventual remote origins which haven’t been perceived in their ethnic conscience in the last few centuries – at least not in contrast with today’s Armenian identity.

They should be based neither on the personal interest of the Great, nor on violence, as it often happens – causing enormous tragedies for everybody but the merchants of weapons. It is not a minor problem the fact that today’s international law hasn’t been able to solve such intricate situations, in particular those that have been generated by the implosion of the Soviet Empire, from the Adriatic Sea to Central Asia. This is due to that dogma-taboo of international law that is the “intangibility of frontiers”. This principle, which can be right in many cases regarding the West, can’t be applied to the East, where boundaries are often the result of the will of moody dictators and impulsive personalities. It is sufficient to view the configuration of certain boundaries in order to be convinced of their arbitrariness. International law is definitely a scientific matter, which is partly, not mainly, influenced by history. We tried to analyse all the factors that should be considered by a fair judicial system in the recent article: *Processi di Balcanizzazione*, pages 260-265.

Certainly the historical problems here implicated are different from the ones concerning the Azerbaijanization of the Albanians: the populations here concerned are in fact ethnically and culturally similar and they have always been living together, in the same regions in which they are living today.

The conditioning acted by political motivations over scientific research brings research itself into discredit, and it also discredits its eventual consequences on a judicial level. This topic, which we have already considered in other studies¹³, lies outside our present concerns.

INTERACTION BETWEEN DIFFERENT CULTURES

One of the most tedious problems in Caucasological studies and in Middle-Eastern studies in general, apart from ethnic-national identifications, is the interaction between different cultures.

In fact, a very primitive concept of “influx” is still very common. A received influx is considered negative: a deprivation, a humiliation, a subjection, almost an offence; in order not to be considered inferior, a people must deny any influx received, while they must show that they have been the once influencing their neighbour-enemy.

This shouldn't be too shocking. Europe itself, before reaching an equilibrium, at least concerning its internal relations, – at the end of an evolution which has lasted hundreds of years of wars, but which has been homogeneous and autonomous –, has very acutely suffered from similar illnesses¹⁴. We must now go back to Caucasus.

During the whole century the problem of influxes has been harshly debated by Georgians and Armenians, with the exception of the most illuminated personalities of both sides: Nikolaj Marr, Korneli Kekelidze, Grigol Peradze, Ilya Abuladze, Michael Tarchnišvili, Nikolos Adontz, Hakob Manandian, Nerses Akinian, Sirarpie Der Nersessian, Lewon Melikset-Bek, Suren Eremyan, and various others. It is necessary to mention a person like Cyril Toumanoff, today the “patriarch” of Caucasologic science, whose fully conscious multivalent personality of Armenian-Georgian, is reflected in his serenity of scientist, as much equidistant as equi-involved.

A negative role, instead, was that of various personalities who weren't always able to accompany equity of judgement and freedom of spirit to their acute minds and wide erudition. Between others, we must mention Girogi N. Cubinašvili, considered the father of the history of Georgian art. Cubinašvili comes from a cultural contest which is really adverse to the recognition of the art of his people, in their individuality and originality: it was often confused with Armenian art or considered subjected to it, almost as one of its regional variants¹⁵.

¹³ In *Processi di balcanizzazione*, already quoted (n. 33), pages 249-265.

¹⁴ We may think, for example, about the controversy concerning the primacy over the invention of the infinitesimal calculus that opposed the followers of Newton and Leibnitz. Talking about it, an expert writes: “it also comprehends reasons of national prestige; ... I would dare to say that we are not in front of individual projects of particular people whose names correspond to those of Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibnitz. No, they both represent much more than just themselves. They represent the realisation of a global and social project: on the one side the British project, on the other side the continental one, much conditioned by France. The fight in which our protagonists are involved is part of a much bigger fight, which has often been thought with the use of weapons” (A. PERES DE LABORDA, *Leibnitz e Newton*, translation from the Spanish, Milan 1986, page 20). The described drama is much more instructive if we think that Leibnitz and Newton were in perfectly friendly relations (*ibid.*, page 11). A good number of similar cases could be listed; some of the worse cases go as far as the denial, during war, of things that were openly admitted during peacetime.

¹⁵ Even the *Enciclopedia Italiana* by Treccani, one of the most rigorous and informed of the kind, through the words of Giorgio Rosi, calls Armenian the Georgian church of Katzkhi/K'ac'xi in Imeretia (*Armenia, Arte*, pages 437-438, pictures n. 10-11).

Cubinašvili himself, in the introduction to his main work on Armenian architecture, traces a clear picture of this situation: *Razyskanija po armjanskoj arxitekture*, Tbilisi 1967, pages 1-5. The work by Joseph Strygowski, which provoked a strong reaction by Cubinašvili and which was one of the strongest unilateral influences on the studies on Armenian art of the beginning of the century – and indirectly on the studies on Georgian art –, even if Strygowski was ideologically influenced himself, was born as a reaction to an anterior situation of opposed tendencies: “jene wertvolle Folge von Bänden ... die die Moskauer archäologische Gesellschaft ... unter dem Titel “Materialien zur Archäologie des

The right reaction to such a situation shouldn't be excessive (compare what has been said in the precedent paragraph about the excessive Armenian reaction to the Azerbaijani mystifications on the Albanians). Such was, instead, Cubinašvili's promptness in confuting any Armenian influx over Georgia that sometimes he ended up devaluing Armenian art in a way that was really not adequate to his talent, erudition and artistic sense. For example, he wrote that the marvellous church of St. Hrip'simê, like every other Armenian church of the same kind, is a mediocre work that gives proof of its total dependence from the Georgian Gvari, or that the splendid basilicas of T'alín and Aruc have no artistic value and no real *grandeur*, and that in general Armenian architecture is characterised by a "conscious tendency to ... tracing"¹⁶, provoking the sound criticism made by Anatoly Jakobson, a famous scholar of Subcaucasian art, which is inexorable but in the same time a model of scientific "style"¹⁷.

Today we are probably in a situation that is in theory more advantaged, if compared to the twenties-fifties, for a possibly impartial study of influxes and interactions. The development of comparative studies in literature and art, and the structuralist and semiotic way of thinking, have in fact contributed to the elaboration of a wide range of inter-textual theories and approaches in the last

Kaukasus" ... seit 1888 herausgibt. Bis 1909 waren zwölf Bände erschienen, die sämtlich Georgien behandeln". (*Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, Wien 1918, page 6). The admission of such a lack is immediately followed by a methodologically incorrect assumption that it is not necessary to deal with Georgian architecture in particular, since it is nothing more than a ramification, geographically the most immediate, of Armenian architecture (*ibid.*, pages 7, 846). History of science, just like history, proceeds through alternate reactions! If *mediocritas*, criteria of virtue dear to Aristotle, was qualified as "golden" by the whole ancient and medieval tradition, this didn't only signify a judgement of high appreciation, but also the rarity, the difficult availability of that path.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page. 6 "tracing": the Russian term is *podrazanie*; the negative value of the word is evident both from the immediate context and from the macro-text (compare n. 42). A list of similar valuations, spread all over the work, could be easily multiplied. We must notice that the long summary in German language (*Zusammenfassung*, pages 177-201, 25 pages in place of the 176 pages of the Russian text) stylistically proceeds on a bland tone. Even less "shocking", in many ways moderate, even if a certain tendentiousness is still present, is the exposition of Armenian Art made by Cubinašvili himself, in the *Enciclopedia Universale dell'arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Universale – Venice/Rome, Florence 1958, vol. I, coll. 706-718.

¹⁷ Cubinašvili, in his intent of individuating the national characteristics of Georgian and Armenian Art, quotes many Western authors, in particular Heinrich Wölfflin who had tried to make an analogous operation regarding Italian and German art (compare *Razyskanija*, pages 7,201). It is not our duty to express a judgement on how the authors cited by Cubinašvili, and in particular Wölfflin, have led their researches (compare S. BOTTARI, *Introduzione a H. Wölfflin, L'arte classica. Introduzione al Rinascimento italiano*, Italian translation, by R. PAOLINI, new edition with an introduction by S. BOTTARI, Florence 1953, pages IX-XXII), neither can we discuss if their model has been understood and applied in a methodologically correct way by Cubinašvili. We must otherwise take into consideration one thing that Wölfflin wrote in Italian, in 1941, in the preface to the first Italian version of his work: "Today I would deal with this matter in a different way" (*ibid.*, page 4) and then he added: "having learnt to affirm more promptly national characters is certainly a progress for modern art and for the history of art ... The world is not divided in single isolated national entities; the highest values of art overcome any strictly national boundary ... Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael have origins different from ours, but in front of their works even the Nordic is struck by a tone that penetrates the deepest part of his soul" (*ibid.*).

Regarding the comparative study of Armenian and Georgian art, of their peculiar characteristics, of their respective connections to the West, already in 1929 a magnificent work had been written by one of the most important historians of art who ever lived during this century, and who, we think, should still be a model for this kind of studies, because of his remarkable equilibrium: we are talking about J. BALTRUŠAITIS and about his work *Études sur l'art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie*, Paris 1929, with a "préface" by H. FOCILLON, pages VII-XV.

A controversy analogous to the one between Jakobson and Cubinašvili had taken place at the end of the nineteenth century between Marr and Akaki Tzereteli: N. MARR, *Le relazioni armeno-georgiane nel passato*, in "Murc", X (1898), 4, pages 489-517 (it is the summary in Armenian language and the Armenian version of two writings in Russian by Nikolaj Marr, the first one entitled *Il poeta georgiano Akaki Tzereteli sugli armeni*, appeared on "Novoe Obozrenie", N°4841,4842, February 5th and 6th 1898, the second one entitled *In risposta al poeta giornalista*, *ibid.*, March 31st and April 2nd 1898). Marr (1864-1934) was born in Georgia, from a Scottish father and a Georgian mother, and he grew up there. He has been with no doubt the philologist-Caucasiologist with the most various specific competence, and the vastest disciplinary competence.

The negative reaction of the most nationalist modern Georgian intellectual circles, the most nationalist ones, against the Armenian reality represents a form of reaction against the Armenian prevalence in the public life of Tiflis during the whole nineteenth century: compare R. G. SUNY, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Indiana University Press, 1988, pages 86-95, 115-121, 139-145, 298-300.

five decades. Even if these theories and approaches treat mainly literary texts, in any case they develop very interesting views of the interweaving and interactions between art works, of the mechanism of influxes, of its typologies and of its stylistic-artistic importance¹⁸.

A fundamental datum that emerges from these studies is that an influx itself is a neutral category regarding the artistic, intellectual and cultural value, even on the level of the progress of civilisation, both for those who exert it and for those who receive it. The influx exerted is not necessarily a sign of grandeur, as much as the received one is not a sign of inferiority and subalternity. On the contrary, it is not impossible for a work inspired by a certain model or prototype to overcome it in vigour and geniality.

We must now transpose this principle on the level of historical influxes and interactions in general, of any kind. The consequence is the neutrality of these historical processes with reference to the scale of the values of civilisation. In this prospective the influx becomes simply the result of a historical “conjuncture” of the various dimensions which determine together exercise, mechanism, nature and direction of influxes and interactions.

Not to disturb theorists of literature and art, comparatists, semiotics and structuralists, it seems fundamental not to belittle the things that belong to others in order to exalt or defend what is one’s own.

This admission requires two further clarifications in order to be fully comprehended in all its importance: a) it obviously doesn’t signify the unimportance of the studies of interactions and influxes. It just corrects their aim. Interactions and influxes must in fact be studied not in order to affirm or celebrate superiority of level or of any other kind, but in order to understand better the mechanisms of historical, cultural and artistic processes¹⁹; b) at the same time, it doesn’t either

¹⁸ Regarding the complex matter of influxes and interactions in art, beginning with the case of the literary text, view: [...]

¹⁹ Strzygowski’s ideologised exasperations had in fact the effect of putting on a secondary level (particularly in France and Italy) the problem of the historical interweaving of Armenian architecture – and particularly of Georgian architecture – with Western architecture. The fulcrum of attention had slipped on formal and stylistic analysis, with a prevalently philological approach. The scarcity of historical knowledge has reinforced such an approach. The admission of the end of “the dilemma East-Rome”, which accompanied from the very beginning (Milan 1968) the series *Documenti di Architettura Armena*, which originated from the collaboration of the Politecnico di Milano with the Institute of Art of the Academy of Science of RSS of Armenia, and which is still being published (nowadays in Venice, by OEMME Edizioni; 22 issues have been published so far), has always been considered more like a veil of silence over the genetic problem than like awareness of the complexity of the matter, of the plurality and concurrence of different factors. This silence has caused the regret of Cesare Brandi, an eminent critic and historian of art, even if he wasn’t a specialist of Subcaucasian art (C. BRANDI, *Le chiese di cristallo*, in *Corriere della Sera*, July 5th, 1968, reprinted in *Ricerca sull’Architettura Armena*, 12: *Antologia Critica*, vol. II, Milan 1974, p.18).

In a more recent phase this “silence” seems to have been overcome, in a new balance of perspectives and, obviously, with a richer historical knowledge and new documents; compare for example the extremely cautious attempt in this direction by G. IENI, *Il problema delle arcate cieche*, already quoted (n.8), pages 50-65; a more recent attempt: A. ALPAGO-NOVELLO, *L’Architettura armena e l’Italia*, in *Gli Armeni in Italia*, by B. L. ZEKIYAN, Rome 1990, pages 58-70. The study by Laura Cristiani Testi on the lozenges between Subcaucasia and the West, cited by Ieni, *ibid.*, page 64, n.48, hasn’t been published yet.

G. Ieni writes: “The possibility that such contacts took place in the Subcaucasian area is less likely. We don’t have knowledge, in fact, of any permanent colonies of Pisan communities in continental Armenia. ...On the other hand, the penetrations by the Republic of Pisa towards the emporiums of the Black Sea must have taken place in a more recent time” (*ibid.*, p.65, n.51). The premises are definitely true, but we cannot be so sure of the correctness of the logical sequentiality and of the conclusion. It is not sure, in fact, that the presence of “permanent communities” was the premise or the necessary condition for any other contact; moreover, our knowledge is definitely not adequate, almost fragmentary. We may think, for example, about the X century “Frankish” frescos of the monastery of Tat’ew. These frescos would still be a mystery if Step’anos Orbelean, a XIII century bishop of Siwnik’, had not transmitted us the “strange” news of the invitation made by his predecessor, Yakob, in 930, to a group of *zolraf* “from the faraway land of the Franks” to decorate the newly built church. Reaching the top of the inaccessible rock of T’at’ew is a deed to be remembered even today. The fact that during the X century the world was so small and communicating is really surprising. If we think about it thoroughly, as far as communication is concerned, we have probably made regresses, not progresses. All the means of communication that we have mastered advantage us in speed, but not in depth, making our communications much faster but also more superficial. One thing is certain: the bishop of Siwnik’ would never send for painters from Lombardy or Germany if this reality wasn’t something familiar to him. Arguments *ex silentio* need the maximum caution. We are

signify the equalisation and levelling of the value of art works; it only means that such value must be judged through aesthetic criteria intrinsic to the art work and not in base of real or supposed influxes that explain its genesis²⁰.

As far as Armenian-Georgian relations and interactions are concerned in particular, they undoubtedly have a very rich history, with roots in the most ancient antiquity, also made by influxes which are often reciprocally mistaken according to the contextual factors of the different ages. Relations between Armenians and Georgians, in the alternation of joyous and adverse happenings throughout history, offer a rare model in which there are many points in common – such as the ones concerning the concept of one's identity, social organisation, way of life, religious sense –, but also many differences of form and content – from language to religious confession, from characteristic features to artistic expression²¹. Not in vane the Georgian tradition considers Haos (in Armenian: Hayk) and K'art'los (eponyms of Armenians and Georgians) brothers, sons of one only father, T'orgom(a). Even if it would be hard to historically identify these characters, legend once more reveals itself as the shell of a historical truth, if it is necessary to admit that the very ancient East-Anatolian/Caucasian tribes have had a fundamental role, side by side with Indo-European elements, in the formation of the Armenian ethnos. This appears to be the convergent conclusion of the most serious studies.

dealing with probability and verisimilitude, but many clues convince us of the probability of a frequency of contacts or reciprocal news. Compare our considerations in *Le colonie armene del Medio Evo in Italia e le relazioni culturali italo-armene (Materiale per la storia degli Armeni in Italia)*, in *Atti del I Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena* (Bergamo 1975), San Lazzaro – Venice 1978, pages 843-847. Regarding the church of Tat'ew of the Most Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, compare M. M. TĒR MOVSISEAN, *Haykakan erek' mec vank'eri, Tat'ewi, Halarcni ew Dadi Ekelec'inerë ew vanakan šmut'iwnerë* [Churches and monastic complexes of the three main Armenian monasteries, Tat'ew, Halarcni and Dad], Jerusalem 1938, pages 4-13; P. CUNEO, *Architettura armena*, I, De Luca, Rome 1988, pages 416-420, with relative bibliography.

Concerning the interactions between neighbouring areas, the concept of “model”, in a structural sense (not necessarily formal, neither concerning the subject matter), seems to be a useful hermeneutic mean both for the diffusion of artistic currents and movements, and in general for the development and diffusion of historical-cultural phenomena. We proposed an attempt in such sense, taking part in the debate between J. Greppin and Th. Gamkrelidze on the origin of the Armenian alphabet, as a general interpretative hypothesis of the process of alphabetisation of Subcaucasia. We think that comprehending what historical processes, ideological motivations, cultural and structural models have acted is as much important as determining what mind and what hand created those marvellous alphabets, for the comprehension of the cultural period that this area went through between the IV and V century, first with Christianisation, then with alphabetisation. An Armenian functionality seems to be the best model to explain the reason of the propagation of the spiritual and cultural movements that characterised this era. Compare J. GREPPIN, *Some Comments on the Origin of the Georgian Alphabet*, in “Bazmavep”, CLIX (1981), pages 449-455; Th. GAMKRELIDZE, *Reply to John Greppin*, *ibid.*, pages 457-459; ZEKIYAN, *Prémises*, already quoted (n. 2).

²⁰ Milan KUNDERA writes: “if all the cultures and cultural activities are equalised (Bach and rock music, cartoons and Proust), ... the “historical evolution of art” will lose its sense, will collapse, will become an immense and absurd bunch of art works” (*Sessantasei parole*, in *L'arte del romanzo*, Milan 1986, page 213).

²¹ A history of Armenian-Georgian relations, in the various fields and in their long historical evolution, is still to be written, even if excellent partial studies already exist, such as the ones by Toumanoff and Baltrušaitis (number 14 and 42), and an attempt of general outline by A. SARUXAN (SAROUKHAN), *Vrastan ew Hayeré. Patmakan ew mšakut'ayin yaraberut'iwnerë anc'ealum* [Georgia and the Armenians. Historical and cultural connections in the past], I, (Azgayin Matenadaran/Nationalbibliothek, 146), Wien 1940 (the second volume has never been written). Saruxan begins his work with the following words: ““Even if we are a small and weak nation, often subjected to other reigns, in our land many great deeds have taken place” [History by MOSÉ CORENESE, Italian version illustrated by the Armenian Mechitarist Monks, stylistically recognised by N. TOMMASEO, 2nd edition, Venice 1850]. These sincere words by the father of our historiography, Movsēs Xorenac'i, with equal right, could put also our neighbours, the Georgians, at the beginning of our history. History, as much as everyday life, shows that the more neighbouring nations and peoples are studied and reciprocally well known, the more numerous common points are discovered ... This is particularly the case of the Armenians and the Georgians, neighbours during the last twenty-five centuries and bound together by strict relations” (pages 1-2).

Just as much could be said, obviously *mutatis mutandis* and in spite of much more tragic moments, about the Armenians and the Azerbaijani people, the Armenians and the Turkish. If a misunderstood patriotism, tensions and conflicts may condition scientific research, we must never forget that this scientific research, if conducted by true scientists, can be again an instrument of clarification of ideas, and of *ataraxia* for the souls.