# HUNTING AS A SACRED EVENT IN GERMANIC AND GEORGIAN MYTHOLOGIES

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**Abstract** - Wild Hunt is considered to be a universal and sacred event in world mythology. More specifically, In Georgian and Germanic mythologies, an importance of a hunter and his/her relation with pagan gods should be noted. In addition, hunter's zoomorphic nature is worth mentioning. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in Teutonic written sources and Georgian epic stories are examined in details to identify some common characteristics of both cultures.

**Keywords** - Sacred, Wild Hunt, Odin, Ochopintre

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Georgian and Germanic Mythologies from the earliest times hunting was considered to be a "sacred", "pure" business. Also considered as sacred were the places where hunting took place, some of the animals, and especially the animal that was killed. Before going away on a hunt, in order not to profane it, the hunter was obliged to observe a complicated system of taboos. "On the basis of such ideas", writes A.Robakidze, "among the superstitious hunters foul language was forbidden already for several days before going off on a hunt" [8]

While The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, one of the earliest and foremost histories of the Anglo-Saxons, who were descended from the same Germanic tribes as the Norse and broadly shared the same body of religious lore, records the following event as having happened in CE 1127:

Let no one be surprised at what we are about to relate, for it was common gossip up and down the countryside that after February 6th many people both saw and heard a whole pack of huntsmen in full cry. They straddled black horses and black bucks while their hounds were pitch black with staring hideous eyes. This was seen in the very deer park of Peterborough town, and in all the woods stretching from that same spot as far as Stamford. All through the night monks heard them sounding and winding their horns. Reliable witnesses who kept watch in the night declared that there might well have been twenty or even thirty of them in this wild tantivy as near as they could tell.[1]

## II

In Georgia, The hunter was obliged not to spend the night before a hunt with a woman, even with his own wife. He was especially obliged to avoid pregnant and 'unclean' women. There also existed a complicated symbolism of dreams, portending success or misfortune on the hunt, and specifying the choice of the day and route of hunting (FAI, No 31415; FAI, XL, 103 and others). On his way the hunter was not supposed to answer questions or have conversation with those he met.

According to materials recorded in Guria (Western Georgia) in 1971, the wife of a hunter who did not return for a long time would cut her hair with the words:

"O God, so trim Dali's hair,
Down to the very roots, at her neck,
So she will let my man come home,
However sound is his sleep!"
Until her husband's return from the hunt the wife had to abstain from meaty and fatty foods, especially from lard. She was forbidden to speak to anybody at all about the reason for her husband's absence.

In Svanetia we recorded a ballad about the hunter Tabi Goshteliani: Tabi killed a leopard, and the dead leopard was mourned by the hunter. "Such was the custom inthe old days", added the narrator, "as many stripes as there were on the skin of the leopard, that many ways it was necessary to mourn him" [10]. In Khevsuretia they would put a chain-mail shirt and the attire of a warrior on the slain snow leopard, and next to him they put a warrior's arms: a shield, sword and Khanjali (dagger), and thus they would mourn him.

## III

According to some materials recorded in Georgia, the sovereign, or angel, of the beasts, their herder, is zoomorphic in nature. It is the female of the mountain ibex, of the gazelle or the deer, a bird or a wild boar. Relative to the other beasts of its type the sovereign, master, angel or herder of the beasts is distinguished

only by some signs: a white colour, a white mark on the forehead, an unusual size, golden horns, a shining horn, intertwined or twisted horns, a single horn, or a dappled or multi-coloured skin. This animal guards the herd, and if by a mistake or thoughtlessness the hunter does not manage to distinguish it from the wild animals and attempts to kill it, the death of the hunter is inevitable.[10]

A.Jensen cites a tradition recorded among the Eskimos of Labrador about caribou-elks:

where the sun sets there stands a house built of stones and grass. On its threshold stood a gigantic elk. It was their king. He was so great that a herd of elks passed through between his legs, heading into the house.

In Georgia, diverse stages of development of this model are represented. The mistress of the animals in Georgia mainly controls the herds of cloven-hoofed animals: wild goats, deer, ibex, roebucks, fallow deer, etc. The male deity of hunting, Ochopintre, Avsati, Zhini Antari is usually a deity of hunting in general; all types of animals submit to him.[2]

The motif of selection is clearly expressed in the Georgian material. The mistress of the beasts renders help and gives success in hunting to the one who renders her a service (rescues her child, shelters her from the pursuit of the forest ochokochi or devi), or especially to the hunter to whom she is attracted, provided that he shares her love. The motif of sexual selection is especially frequent in Georgian folklore. Around the interrelations between the mistress of the beasts and hunters there has been created an enormous cycle of ritual songs, traditions and epics
Great interest is presented by folklore texts recorded in recent years in Guria. According to the Gurian legends, the mistress of the beasts is linked to water. She sits in the water and combs her golden plaits with the prickly casing of a chestnut, with which she scratches her head all over and the blood drips from it. Her hair shines and lights up all around like the sun Narrator, M.Tsiklauri, inhabitant of the village of Opshiteli, aged 56. Recorded in 1962 by E.Virsaladze. She makes her appearance out of the water, and in another legend her hair also shines as a flame, although it does not actually burn up.[8]

**IV**

When accounts of the Wild Hunt mention a leader, the figure who filled this role varied greatly. In Germany, the leader could have been “Perchta, Berhta, Berta, Holt, Holle, Hulda, Foste, Selga, Selda, Heme, Herla, Berchtold [or] Berhtolt.”[9]

However, as the Wild Hunt’s various names across the Germanic lands attest, one figure was especially closely associated with it: Odin, the god of the dead, inspiration, ecstatic trance, battle frenzy, knowledge, the ruling class, and creative and intellectual pursuits in general. Two of Odin’s hundreds of names further demonstrate his association with midwinter, the time of the year in which the holiday Yule (Old Norse Jól) falls: Jólnir and Jauloherra, both of which mean something like “Master of Yule.”[9] The myths describe him frequently riding throughout the Nine Worlds on his eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, on quests of a shamanic nature, another theme that connects him to the Wild Hunt. As H.R. Ellis Davidson put it, speaking of the manifestations of the Wild Hunt that continued well into the Christian era, “it was natural that the ancient god of the dead who rode through the air should keep a place in this way in the memory of the people, and it reminds us of the terror which his name must once have inspired.”[6]

**V**

In Georgia gradually the functions of the supreme god go over to the male deity, but nevertheless the mistress of the animals continues to exist alongside him. In some cases she preserves her independent condition, whereas in others she is subordinate to the male authority. Sometimes she is even consigned generally to oblivion, and traces of the ancient beliefs are felt only in some prohibitions or individual customs that have already lost their ideological foundations.

In Khevsuretia, for example, the central place today is occupied by male deities of the hunt, in spite of remnants of ancient notions about a tiny mistress of the crags and the customs connected to them, and even of the name of Dali, which is preserved in individual hunting songs which have already lost their former ritual significance, . The male deity is Anatori, whom I.Javakhishvili links to the Mingrelian Antari: a deity conferring fertility, and the protector of the animals; the deity of hunters and of abductors of flocks is Tetri Saneba Tsrolis-Goris khati ("White Trinity deity of the Mountain Tsroli").

Besides these, the Khevsurs believed in the existence of Ochopintre, or Ochopinte. "If a hunter, when going hunting for ibex does not pray a little for himself to Ochopinte beforehand, the hunter will not kill an animal. This Ochopinte is hidden from sight, he is invisible to a hunter, but when the hunter creeps up to a beast, then this Ochopinte says to the ibex: “All right then run. A hunter is stealing towards you', and the ibex hide themselves in such places as the tops of the mountains, where they take shelter".

For this reason it is really necessary, during the course of the whole hunt, for the hunter to pray to Ochopinte for victory and for help. For this reason, while creeping towards the ibex, the hunter says, "Herder of the beasts, Ochopinte, I pray you, grant me some ibex, let me kill them! The souls of the beasts are yours, after all, you will not be any the worse for it". After that ochopinte grants victory to the hunter. At the point when the hunter throws down the carcase of the ibex killed in the crags, he exclaims, "I thank you, O Ochopinte, that you gave me an ibex to kill! However many of your beasts I have killed, may there become twice as many of them in your flocks! May the grazing of the beasts not be taken from you, and henceforth help me! Let ibex always turn up on my path. May the ibex on the mountain tops not come to an end. If I kill one, may two of them increase for you. May there be unending meat of ibex in Gaberdis Ekhi (a geographical name). May the Arkhoti people (a mountain community) always conquer the ibex" [5]

Georgian pagan pantheon Ochokochi, which means a "goat-man" The ochokochi is of enormous size, with his body covered in fur, and with his chest sharpened in the form of an axe. The stories are universally widespread about the pursuit by the goat-man of the mistress of the animals, who always escapes from him. There are numerous stories about the meetings of him with the hunter who saves himself from him by means of cunning or by appealing for help to the Christian saints, in the first place to Saint George [8]. The Ochokochi, in distinction to Ochopintre, never fulfils the function of the protector or watchman of the animals. The prohibition against shooting more than once at the Ochokochi is interesting. The hunter, meeting the Ochokochi in the forest, must not shoot a second time, knowing that a second shot will heal the mortally wounded Ochokochi. As an answer to the request "one more", to repeat the shot, the hunter keeps silent or answers, "Saint George will give one more". Regarding this it is very curious about the children's song and game preserved in Mingrelia to this day and connected with the name of the legendary hunter.

Makhutela. The children run after one another, like in the game 'tag', trying to hit one another with the words, "Give me one more, Makhutela!" The text of the song is actually the exclamation of the Ochokochi addressing the hunter:
Give me one more, Makhutela,
Give me one more, or else
Be accursed, Makhutela,
You and all your family!
Give me one more, Makhutela,
Give me one more, or else
Be accursed, Makhutela,
Your home, your wife and children!

**VI**

In Finland the wild animals of the forest were also considered as the herds of the forest god Taplo and his proud beautiful wife. Nobody had the right to kill any forest animal without the gracious permission of the deities, the sovereigns of the forest [3].

At the present time we cannot give an answer to the question about what kind of ideas about the deities existed in the hunting epoch, writes A.Jensen, "however, there are in existence very rich materials containing the idea of a deity, that clearly stem from the religion of the hunting epoch. The question is concerned with a being who is called the sovereign, the master or the protector of the beasts, and who at the same time renders protection to the hunters"[7].

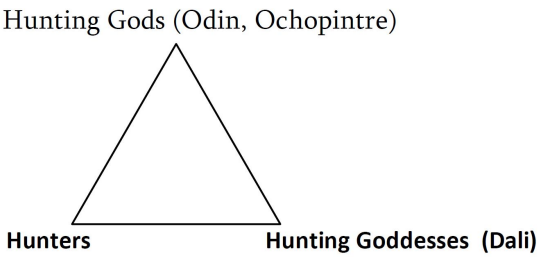
**VII. CONCLUSION**

In the body of lore surrounding the Wild Hunt, we find a number of themes that connect it powerfully with the dead and the underworld. For one thing, there's the ghostly character of the hunters or warriors themselves. Dogs and horses, animals that were closely associated with death (amongst a great many other things),[6] were almost invariably present. In some accounts of the Hunt, the riders can hardly, if at all, be distinguished from land spirits, who were themselves often conflated with the dead, as if the two were thought of as being in some sense one and the same.[4]

Finally, for the ancient Germanic and Georgian people, the worlds of the living and the dead were especially permeable during midwinter,which goes a long way toward explaining why this troop of apparitions haunted the land during that particular part of the year. In the words of Claude Lecouteux, "[T]he Wild Hunt fell into the vast complex of ancestor worship, the cult of the dead, who are the go-betweens between men and the gods."[5]
It was as if the very elements of midwinter – the menacing cold, the almost unrelenting darkness, the eerie, desolate silence broken only by the baying winds and galloping storms – manifested the restless dead, and the ancient northern Europeans, whose ways of life and worldviews predisposed them to sense spiritual qualities in the world around them, recorded the sometimes terrifying fruits of such an engagement with the enchanted world in their accounts of the Wild Hunt.

As for the Georgian hunting myths, a general model is the same as in Germanic hunting myths. There is a triangle of huntsmen, Hunting Goddesses and Hunting Gods The latter ones control the hunting process. The hunter's wife is another significant

figure. The triangle seems to be very special in terms of a successful hunting procedure.
Hunting Gods (Odin, Ochopintre)




A hunter can be considered as a moderator between gods and ordinary humans, hunting itself is a sacred event. For example, we remember that in Svanetia a hunter was not able to hunt successfully unless one was blessed by the god on the basis of which hunting can be considered as a holy event. On the other hand, in Germanic Mythology Odin's hunt is closely associated with Yule (Christmas time) as a beginning of a new, successful year. A hunter's wife can be regarded as a prototype of a hunting goddess.

The main similarity in both mythologies is a general model of hunting like a triangle with similar characters and functions of these figures. Thus, hunting as a sacred event with sacred acts is cited by means of which we conclude that universal notions and events are worth mentioning in Germanic and Georgian mythologies.

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