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FOR THE HISTORY OF EPIDEMIC DISEASES IN SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI

Abstract. During the spread of epidemic diseases, along with official measures, the population in Samtskhe-Javakheti developed folk traditions against the spread of these epidemics, based on the knowledge gained from the symptoms, etiology and nature of empirical observations, epidemic disease population etiology empirical.

Keywords: epidemic diseases; Samtskhe-Javakheti; folk traditions.

It should be pointed out that the more time passes, the greater the human impact on the bio-environment. That is why in the period of the rise of the intellectual-technical level of the society, special importance is assigned to the anthropological research, which has been accumulated by this or that society for centuries as a result of the cognition of nature. Therefore, the study of folk medical traditions is of special importance.

The disease posed a threat to both the individual and the community everywhere, in every type of society. It affected not only the biological condition of a person or a group of people but also the socio-cultural system, the process of historical development. For example, one of the reasons for the migration of the ancient Indo-European population and the directions of this migration in the second millennium is considered to be the epidemic of the plague and malaria of the Indo-European population (Mindadze: 2013: 8)

Currently, we want to speak about the epidemic disease periodically spread within Samtskhe-Javakheti, one of the regions of Georgia, namely - Dysentery, typhoid/enteric fever, cholera, fever/malaria, rarely black plague. There is little
information about the folk traditions of prevention and treatment of these diseases.

Pursuant to the materials obtained, the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti was well aware of the symptoms of epidemic diseases, their nature, and their forms of infection. Somehow this contributed to their prevention.

Malaria has been spread in Georgia since ancient times, especially in the lowlands of western Georgia, which was primarily caused by geoclimatic factors. Hippocrates provides significant information about the spread of malaria in the Phasis plain (Kaukhchishvili: 1965: 20-21).


The collections of the 19th century Caucasian Medical Society preserved important data on the prevalence of malaria in Georgia. The most interesting works on this topic are papers of Golitsynsky, Koturnicki, Landa, Erickson (Erickson: 1904: 1-60), Pantyukhov (Pantyukhov: 1890: 645-651) and others.

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, the fever did not take on an adverse nature though it spread quite often in some lowland villages (Khizabavra, Toloshi, Khertvisi, Baraleti).

Local citizens have linked the fever to the environment - swampy places, some even name mosquitoes as the cause of this disease, which may be influenced by modern medical knowledge. Colds and fear are also named as the causes of colds. There were also identified the types of fever: "rotten fever" - characterized by: first a strong cold, then high fever, weakness, thirst, headache and jaundice. This fever sometimes lasted up to a month; "Silent Cold" (Rukhadze: 1917: 33-35) - characterized by the same mild symptoms: weakness, periodic, mild chills, they said that: "silent cold is not characterized by shivering, makes a person calm and relaxed".

According to folk observations, fever attacks took place every day or every other day. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani calls the fever "Tskhro" The clinical picture of malaria described by him is similar to the folk description of Samtskhe-Javakheti. "Daily fever or Tskhro is called Enamero and Afikaro ... The fever or tskhro of the
second day, which is left in the middle of one day, is called Levaia; Two days without fever and the third day with fever attack is called Etrateos” (Orbeliani: 1993). According to N. Chubinashvili: "Tshkro or fever disease attacks a person daily or day after day or mostly after two days" (Chubinashvili: 1961).

A similar clinical picture is described in ancient medical manuscripts. According to the "Incomparable Carabadin", malaria was most prevalent in the summer, and the symptoms were as follows: "...and fever was mostly spread in summer days... " (Kananeli: 1997: 208). " ... with the following symptoms: a man had a fever for a day and another it did not" ... (Kananeli: 1997: 207) " ...a man had pain in the body, waist and there should be a pain in the joints" (Kananeli: 1940: 210).

According to the modern classification, this form of fever corresponds to three-day malaria, which once again proves that this form of fever was the most common in Georgia.

It is noteworthy that the local population of Samtskhe-Javakheti avoided the villages considered to be the center of malaria: Khizabavra, Toloshi, Khertvisi ... in order to avoid Malaria disease. They also avoided contact with an infected patient and tried to isolate the patient.

For the treatment of fever, locals cut multi-vessels, poured vodka, waited for a while and the juice was given to the patient several times a day. They also gave patients a little bit of vodka poured in milk, two or three cloves of garlic mixed in syrup or sour cream. The patients were given boiled, moistened, skinned and pierced eggs moistened in vodka, which is said to cause vomiting. After vomiting, the patient felt better. They also used to drink their own urine.

This method of treating malaria was common among different people. It’s not beyond the realm of possibility that urine therapy had a positive effect in this case, as uric acid, like quinine, kills the malaria parasite (Topuria: 1977: 56).

As for garlic, it was considered to be one of the means against not only malaria but also infectious diseases in general in Georgia. Garlic also protected a healthy person from infections in case of contact with the sick. The bactericidal properties of garlic are known in modern medicine, and medicines made from garlic are also
It was also known to throw a cold patient into cold water for treating malaria. It seems that in this case the water had an apotropaic purpose. Chardin also gives information about the treatment of a person suffering from fever by throwing him into the water: "Padre Raphael assured me that he had seen in this country people cured of fever who were brought to the edge of the water and threw into the water" (Chardin: 1975: 355).

From the above-mentioned materials, it can be identified that the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti was quite familiar with the symptoms of malaria, which, in addition to the narrators descriptions, is indicated by the folk terms denoting the disease: "fever", "cold".

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, malaria is not a widespread disease, its endemic forms are found only in lowland villages (Khizabavra, Toloshi, Khertvisi ...), which are characterized by swampy terrain.

In general, Samtskhe-Javakheti has a healthy climate. This is the reason why malaria has not taken on an epidemic character here.

According to Froneli, in Samtskhe: "... winters are cold and snowy in some places; At some locations, it is very warm and mild in summer. The climate is good for health. As long as there are no swamps and swampy waters, this place is not characterized by fever unlike Samegrelo and coastal Abkhazia" (Froneli: 1991: 123).

According to Froneli, Javakheti was especially distinguished by its healthy climate: "There is no healthy climate similar to Javakheti in all of Georgia. No one here has heard of fever. Or how will the fever appear on this high field, where there are no puddles and swamps. In summer, the water in the bar is stagnant and sour to drink, while in Javakheti there are such cold springs that it bites the tooth" (Froneli: 1991: 162-163). Thus Froneli also notes that only in some lowland villages of Samtskhe-Javakheti was there swampy, stagnant (warm, tasteless) and sour water.

Typhoid fever was quite common in Samtskhe-Javakheti the contributing factors of which were considered to be drinking water, poor nutrition, poor quality product ... (Ivanov: 1889: 80).

According to the locals, typhoid fever was characterized by: headache, nausea,
diarrhea, high fever, sometimes rash. According to legend, in some regions (Aspindza) the epidemic spread periodically in such a way that people who died of typhoid fever were transported by cart (Chirgadze: 1988: 23).

Typhoid fever was considered contagious, it was highly avoided and the patient was isolated.

Typhoid fever is a cyclically ongoing acute infectious disease with expressed intoxication, intestinal damage, fever, rash, and hepatorenal syndrome.

Folk medical treatments are less proven in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The patient was sometimes given a cube of ice for soaking to catch a fever. They were also given the remedies such as decoction of elder, wild pear...

Old Georgian medical manuscripts describe a contagious disease called "Sudatory Fever". Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani explains the "Sudatory Fever" as follows: "This is not a contagious disease" (Orbeliani: 1993). Sudatory Fever described in the books from the 16th century reminds us of typhoid fever with some signs: "It is known that a person who is infected by this contagious disease will develop such a fever that will drive him crazy" (YadigarDaud: 1985: 145). "...and the sick person catches the illness for forty days" (YadigarDaud: 1985: 142).

According to the above extracts, the duration of the disease is forty days and is progressing with fever. All this gives us the right to think that in this case, we may be dealing with a description of typhoid fever.

Treatment or prevention of typhoid fever: Isolation of the patient, as well as treatment with ice and plants (elder, wild pear ...) in some cases, had a positive effect, because it is known that the use of ice or cold compresses to raise the temperature is advisable.

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, cholera was often equated with the plague. According to the legend, the disease was more common during the war. It was spread in summer (July-August), characterized by: diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain. According to the observation of locals, it was "moving in the air" - spreading through the air. They would say: "Khorvela will catch you and take you away". They would burn down the house and the mill, throw lime on the ashes from above, and say: "Let the air go no more ".

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Folk remedies for cholera are not proven in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The patient would drink vodka from time to time. The population was very afraid of cholera. If cholera spread to the village, a healthy part of the population would be displaced. The sick were usually isolated, left alone at home, sometimes given to an elderly woman as a caregiver, and left food and drink at the gate.

The cholera epidemic first spread around the world in the XIX century, including in Georgia. According to church records, people died in families in two or three days.

In the fight against cholera, the activities of the Committee for the Care of the Nation are distinguished. The committee set out to ban the killing of livestock in the fences of churches, to swim in the Mtkvari, to use the water of the Mtkvari, to sell unsuitable fruit in the public market. Tightening of sanitary measures has yielded results.

During pandemics, many hid the disease, which contributed to the spread of epidemics. In 1919-1920, Georgia had a time of epidemics. The cholera epidemic has passed since the vaccination. In 1920, a cholera vaccine was developed through the Military Medical Laboratory. Information about epidemics in Georgia has not been spread since this period. Cholera is considered as defeated today, there is a vaccine, and the patient is treated with antibiotics.

The plague was considered to be a more serious disease than cholera and the same remedies were used: isolating the sick, burning the source of infection, filling up the lime ... During the epidemic, the villages were completely evacuated.

Leaving home during the epidemic, avoiding the sick, was a widespread tradition in Georgia.

According to Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani - "Evacuation means avoiding enemies and diseases" i.e. This term refers to eviction during enemy invasions or epidemics, because evacuation, according to scholar, is a refugee (Orbeliani: 1993).

Besides the facts of families evacuation, the facts of evacuation and eviction of the whole village have been confirmed in Georgia. For example, during the Black Death epidemic in 1881, the population of the village of Vani in Imereti was evicted, the whole village was burned down and relocated to Guria (Shengelia:
According to the historical sources of the first half of the XIX century in the study region, a number of state-governmental measures were taken against the plague. The "Committee for the Protection of the Black Death Epidemic of the Transcaucasian Region" was established, and the poet Alexander Chavchavadze was appointed its chairman. As it turns out, the course of the plague and the clinical picture was known with considerable precision, they distinguished bile, nervous and rotten forms (Shengelia: 1970: 231).

Plague is one of the oldest infectious diseases. In medieval Georgian medical monuments it is referred to by different names, such as: "Evil Time", "Tkaaguni", "Tauni" and others. According to "Incomparable Carabadin": "The sign of the Evil Time which is called Tkaaguni. The sign of this time is the pimple sitting or coming out near the ear, in the bottom of the tongue, or between the breast or armpit or groin; it will remain for a long time and creates evil time between cities. The region of this pimple becomes pale, and the sound of the heart appears, the darkness appears; The sign of pimple is evil and killer; and the black colored pimple is malicious, reddish or yellowish is less malicious" (Kananeli: 1997: 520). That is, the main clinical sign of this disease was a large purulent bump of black, reddish, or yellowish color in the area of the ear, groin, armpit. Characterized by palpitations and frequent heartbeats. The epidemic nature of the spread of evil time is emphasized, especially in densely populated areas (cities).

In a medical book dating back to the 15th century, the symptoms of Evil Time are more widely and comprehensively presented, the most notable of the clinical signs being: Fever, headache, palpitations, nervous excitement, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. In the 16th century, "Evil Time" was considered to be a very dangerous disease: "May you know that this is the most difficult illness you may have and there is not worse ill out there..." (YadigarDaud: 1985: 527).

The plague is still the subject of international health regulation, two of which are located on the territory of Georgia. Three historical plagues of the Black Death have caused deaths on an unprecedented scale and left an indelible mark on the history of mankind. According to official archival records, plague epidemics were
recorded in Georgia in the early 19th century, namely 1803-1807; 1811-1812; 1838-1883. For example, the epidemic started from southern Georgia, in particular, from Akhaltsikhe and spread mainly in western Georgia (Racha, Imereti), the third pandemic in 1838-1843 started again from southern Georgia - Akhaltsikhe. The last case of plague in Georgia was recorded in 1910 in Batumi (Zhgenti: 2019: 10).

The Black Death was recorded at the end of the early twentieth century and this disease is not completely defeated in reality. There is no vaccine, but it is certainly a rare disease in our time. It is a bacterial infection and can be treated with antibiotics if detected in time.

It is noteworthy that during the spread of epidemics, along with folk traditions, the Christian religion also played a positive role in the spread of disease in Georgia. The facts of building churches to end the Black Death epidemic have been confirmed.

As in many other countries in Georgia, during the various epidemics, the care of the sick was mostly provided by the clergy. In the XVII-XVIII centuries the Catholic missionaries also played an important role in this matter.

As we can see, during the spread of epidemic diseases, along with official measures, the population in Samtskhe-Javakheti developed folk traditions against the spread of these epidemics, based on the knowledge gained from the symptoms, etiology and nature of empirical observations. For example, the population had some idea of the causes of the spread of these diseases (contaminated food, water) and forms (airborne).

In addition to government measures to prevent epidemic diseases, the widespread traditions of the centuries-old folklore have helped to limit the spread of the disease, which meant, for example, isolating the sick, disinfecting basic items and shelter (filling up with lime), and in the case of a strong epidemic, leaving the fireplace (burning) and destroying (burning), which was effective in taking into account the living conditions of the local population and should also be considered expedient from the point of view of modern medicine.

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