

Litovchenko E.V.

**THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF CLASSICAL TRADITION IN THE
MENTALITY OF LATE ANTIQUITY'S INTELLECTUALS**

Belgorod State National Research University

This work is dedicated to the detection of main elements of classical tradition in the mentality of Late Antiquity's Intellectuals. The author is coming to a conclusion the basic elements were: mythology, neoplatonism, "imperial idea". In the capacity

of particular forms of translating these backbone elements the rhetorical education, poetic tradition and trends of Postclassical Latin were acted.

Key words: classical tradition, Late Antiquity's Intellectuals, mentality.

Due to the conservatism of the tradition and the active transitivity, the Late Antiquity in the Latin West is of a great interest to us in the "human dimension", that is, through the alembic of the world-view of those times' most typical representatives. It is evident that forming students' holistic perception of the Late Antiquity picture is impossible without giving an idea of thoughts and feelings that the great men of that time conveyed to us by means of their testimony.

As well as according to other studies (Av. Cameron, P. Brown, G. Bowersock and at al.) the peculiarity of the postclassical world is in the cultural continuity of the Europe from the Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. Meanwhile, as for any transition stage, two main qualitative characteristics are tradition and transitivity (of historical process and elements of culture under complex interaction of different factors).

Such a dynamic model "continuity-discontinuity" was characteristic feature of world-view reflected in the works of "Last Romans".

The description "Last of the Romans" [Cobham Brewer E. Last of the Romans // Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (1898)] (Ultimus Romanorum) has historically been given to any man thought to embody the values of Ancient Roman civilization - values which, by implication, became extinct on his death.

Such a definition is actively developed in the domestic science by V.I. Ukolova. She uses it to denote the very representatives of the well-educated elite that already belonged chronologically to the Middle Ages, lived in barbarian realms, but concerned themselves with the active revision of the antique heritage, adapting it to the needs of the medieval civilization (Boethius, Cassiodorus, Isidore Hispalensis and other). She means as a rule authors of the 6 AD or later.

In my study I deal with some personalities of the 4-6 AD representing the stratum of aristocrats-intellectuals. They were Christians, nevertheless they were

bearers of classical traditions (Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, Sidonius Apollinaris, Dracontius, Fulgentius the Mythographer and other).

The specific traits of Classical tradition represent the system, which was a foundation for the mental formation of Late Roman intellectuals. As a constituents of this system can be treat the following elements:

- **Mythology** as the core of antique consciousness;
- **Neoplatonism** as the interpenetration of antique and Christian ideas forming the foundation of the medieval Christian ideology;
- **“Imperial idea”**.

The neoplatonic ideas were the peculiar bridge between the mythological and Christian world view. Neoplatonists tried to restore the feeling of unity of man and universe. This doctrine was a fusion of mysticism and logic. Its base is a triad: the one, the Absolute, the Mind and the Soul. The matter is the amorphous substance; it suppresses the spiritual impulse which proceeds from the One through the Mind and Soul. The Soul can mount and reunite through the ecstasy with the Absolute (the preparation for it is the ascetic life) (*Paul. Epist. ad Auson. 40-50; 60-80*).

The paradigm of the absolute immaterial soul was asserted by ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus. This teaching influenced upon St. Augustine, his work signified a conversion of the antique tradition to the medieval Christian world view. Augustine imparted to the interpretation of the soul the specific character. He regarded the soul as an implement which ruled the body. He considered a will (but not a mind) as the base of the soul.

Many theological terms of Christian lexicon came from Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and religion such as “Logos” (the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son) and “Hypostasis”. However, the Church Fathers paid tribute to the ancient culture, not ranked it equally with the religion. They sought to find in the ancient culture the elements of monotheism and rejected the polytheistic elements. As a result philosophy was changed into theology.

“Imperial idea” (including the conception of «*Aeternitas Romae*») as one of the most long-lived conceptions existed till XX century and influenced the mankind’s history.

The substance of “Imperial idea”:

1. Rome is the capital of the World, «*genetrix hominum*» (*Symmachus*) because it unified people of the World under its authority.

2. Rome is the cultural centre of the “*oikuménē*” vs the barbarian world.

3. Providential mission of Rome is to give peace and justice to peoples and tribes conquered by the Empire.

4. Eschatological idea of «*Aeternitas Romae*» as the beginning and the ending of the history.

5. The legitimization of the Roman power referring to the antiquity.

6. The basis of the emperor’s “autocracy” legitimacy is an old pagan idea of the Divine governor, sacral Lord. «*Lex animata in terris*».

These theses were the most important in the mental formation of Late Roman aristocracy.

Imperial ideology elaborated the categories of prestige and behaviour such as customs, insignia, tradition of “friend-or-foe” discrimination, determining the attitude to barbarians. In compliance with these categories the Late Roman aristocrats could identify themselves as true Romans even in that time, when the Roman Empire died.

Antique tradition implied the presence of particular forms of translating its backbone elements:

- **rhetorical education** promoting the formation of single (the same for all) for all members of the intellectual elite the Code of Conduct and providing a means for transmitting an ancient heritage for future generations;

- **poetic tradition, lexis, trends of the Low (postclassical) Latin** enriched the cultural constituent of medieval civilization.

This model was the basis of the mentality of late Roman high society in the Latin West, especially for the educated part of the so-called intellectuals. The Roman

aristocracy was the main force that kept the classical tradition and the transmitting to their successors.