

Identity Palimpsest – Ekklēsia: Linguistic Foundation and Creator of Civilizations

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ABSTRACT: The term *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), over time, has existed as an identity palimpsest in the pleiade of human civilizations, its dynamic consisting in selecting people from a whole, from the totality of a community, in order to conclude a legitimized convocation in an institution. Thus, we first identify the term in Athenian democracy, *ekklēsia* mirroring the general legislative assembly of the people in an *ekklesiastirion*, from which the activity of decisions founded by the casting of votes, *ekloghes* (εκλογες) transpires. With the establishment of Christianity, the concept is taken over in its substance and form, this time defining religious affiliation, later being linguistically converted to the culture and mentality of peoples who share the principles and values of Christ's teaching. The term underwent a slight transformation in Latin, taking the form of *ecclesia*, and the concept of *ecclesiology*, also built on Greek linguistic foundations, later developed as a branch of theology dealing holistically with both the principles of Christianity and the Gothic architecture of churches. This study revolves around linguistic considerations with the creative potential of human civilizations. The ancient Greek immaterial heritage is always present and certainly will be reinterpreted in the rendering of values to the world.

KEYWORDS: *Ekklēsia* - democratic legislative assembly, *ekklesiasterion*, *ekloghes* (εκλογες) suffrage, *Ecclesia* - Christian Church, *ecclesiology*

***Ekklēsia*: General Legislative Assembly in Ancient Greece**

Ekklēsia was one of the three state institutions of Athenian democracy (Sessions of the Church of the Municipality n.d.) together with *βουλή*, *boule*, pronounced *Vouli* in the Modern Greek and *Dikasteria*, which functioned between 480 BC and 404 BC, representing the General Legislative Assembly of the citizens in the city-states of ancient Greece. The assembly convened in an *Ekklesiasterion* on the hill of Pnykas, in Agora, or in the Theater of Dionysos. In ancient Greece, an *Ekklesiasterion* was a purpose-built and specially designed building in which the supreme meetings of the *Ekklēsia* were held. This venue could attract large audiences of 6000 citizens out of a total population of 30,000 to 60,000 citizens in Athens during the 5th century BC. Like many other cities, Athens did not have such a building in its patrimony, which is why the regular meetings of the *Ekklēsia* were held on Pnyx Hill, and two annual meetings were held in the Theatre of Dionysos. Later, around 300 BC, popular assemblies were moved to the theatre.

The democratic assembly was open to all adult male citizens, irrespective of economic status, with full political rights deriving from the Athenian citizenship of both parents, over 20 years of age and military obligations honored in the compulsory two-year military service; the society of that archaic world excluded women, slaves and those who had offended against public order from civil rights (Rotaru 2019, 214-215).

In ancient Greek cities, the *βουλή*, *boule*, was a popular council appointed to run the daily affairs of the city. Originally in the structure of a council of nobles advising a king, the *βουλή*, *boule* evolved according to the constitution of the city: in oligarchies, the positions of *βουλή*, *boule* might have been hereditary, while in democracies the members were usually elected by lot with a term of office for the period of one year. The most information that has been preserved over

time is that of the original Athenian council which was the Areopagus; the *βουλή*, *boule* under the leadership of Solon heard appeals to the most important decisions of the courts (Beck 2013, 199).

Dikasteria, elaborate Athenian legal system centered on the full rights of citizens. The authority exercised by the Athenian courts had the same basis as that of the *ekklēsia* popular assembly, both of which were considered to express the direct will of the people (Dover 1994, 23).

Solon (b. 630 BC - d. 560 BC), one of the seven sages of ancient Greece (Rotaru 2005b, 65-68), Athenian statesman, legislator and poet, through his reforms halted the economic and moral decline of Athens, thus laying the foundations of Athenian democracy. He drafted a new constitution around 594 BC in order to quell the internal strife in Athens at the time, making it easier for all citizens to participate in the People's Assembly, regardless of class. In his measures to reform society, he provided for the cancellation of all debts and the release of the poor from serfdom, thus making it possible to include the needy in government, as members in the *Ekklēsia* and as jurors in the courts, as Aristotle's text, *The Constitution of the Athenians - Αθηναίων πολιτεία*:

„And many whom fraud or law has sold
Far from this blessed land, an outcast slave,
I have restored to Athens; yea, and some,
Exiled from home by the heavy burden of debt,
Not speaking the dear Athenian tongue,
And wandering far away, I brought them back;
And those who here in the lowest slavery
Crouched beneath a master's frown, I set free.
Thus power and justice were united in harmony,
Since by the force of law I have gained my ends.
And kept my promise. Equal laws
Which I gave to evil and good impartially.
Choosing justice for every man's fate”.

In accordance with its powers, *Ekklēsia* was responsible for making decisions regarding declarations of war, military strategy and the choice of strategists and other officials. It was also responsible for appointing and electing the *árchontes* magistrates, thus indirectly electing the members of the Areopagus.

Areopagus, with the Ancient Greek name: *Ἄρειος Πάγος*, translated as the Hill of Ares, referred in classical times to the Athenian governmental council, later limited to the judicial council or Athenian court that tried cases of intentional homicide, wounding and matters of religious matters, as well as cases of olive burning. The god of war Ares was supposedly put on trial by the other gods of the Areopagus for the murder of Poseidon's son Halirrhothius, a typical example of an etiologic myth (MacDowell 1978, 27).

Ekloghes (εκλογες), the suffrage origins of meaning and practice

The system of *ekloghes (εκλογες)*, translated as elections based on voting, has its roots at the beginning of the great historical civilizations (Encyclopedia Britannica 2024a), e.g., ancient Greece and ancient Rome, as well as throughout the medieval period to select rulers such as the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope of Rome (Encyclopedia Britannica 2024b).

Following *Ariadni's thread* in the linguistic grounding of ancient Greek society, the space-time context of the institution of *Ekklēsia* and its establishment and role emphasizes the activity of suffrage found in the notion of *ekloghes (εκλογες)* translated as free elections; like *ekklēsia (ἐκκλησία)*, finds its origin in the verb *εκ-καλώ*, *ek-kalo*, the Greek particle *εκ* having designated identity established in the preposition and article from *a*, which is analytically interpreted as meaning to invite people from a whole, from their total to conclude a group in the case of *Ekklēsia*, and as regards *εκλογες*, *ekloghes* is promoted in the sense of choosing, extracting the best, the most eligible variance from what is meant to be the exposition of *logos*,

knowledge, arguments, motives supported by possible candidates from the upper hierarchical classes in a sophist society where the science of rhetoric was held in high esteem, or a more rudimentary suffrage intended for the Hellenic *demos* organized by drawing lots.

The earliest such popular electoral activities mentioned in historical records for the election of officials to public office, by popular vote, in which all male citizens were eligible both to cast their vote and to hold public office, date back to the Ephors of Sparta (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2024c) in 754 BC, under the mixed government of the Spartan Constitution (Herodotus n.d.).

Democratic elections in the Athenian state, in which all male citizens could hold public office, were introduced much later than in Sparta, more precisely after about 247 years, until the reforms of Cleisthenes (History.com 2023). Under the early Solonian constitution c. 574 BC, all male Athenian citizens were eligible to vote in popular assemblies, in matters of law and politics, as well as jurors in the judicial body, but only those belonging to the three upper hierarchically hierarchized classes of citizens. The last and lowest class, so defined by the extent and volume of property rather than by birth, was not eligible to hold public office, even by the reforms of Solon (ASCSA 2024).

Ecclesia and Ecclesiology

***Ekklēsia*, religious linguistic foundation in the sense of the Christian Church**

The Greek notion of *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), with the Latin variant *ecclesia*, is an archaic, dynamic and perpetual one, which has been used since ancient times and which finds its usefulness and its counterpart even in our civilization today in the concept of church, in the sense of the institution in which the Christian faithful are organized. This has its origin in the verb εκ-καλώ, ek-kalo, conveyed in the adjective ek-klisi (ἐκ-κληση), the Greek particle εκ having its identity established in the preposition and article from α, which is analytically translated with the sense of inviting people from a whole, from the totality of them, with the final aim of bringing a group together: *kalesma gia prosevhi* (καλεσμα για προσευχη), adapted to the expression to invite to prayer. The notion of *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), in this period describes both the process of religious assembly and its outcome.

The ancient *ekklēsia*, in its profane dynamics, with reference to the legislative assembly of the people, is thus converted into a palimpsest of identity in which the religious concept of church first appears in the Septuagint, which formed the basis of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, in the historical books and in the psalms. Thus, for the first time, the concept is found in I Samuel 17:47:

„All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands”.

It is also important to note that in the Old Testament, *ekklēsia* competes with the older term *synagogē* with the first reference in Exodus 12:3, with the clarification that as long as synagogue is "the assembly of those who are gathered together" (*syn* together; *ago* a hand), passive assembly, the church is *the assembly of those who are called* (ek din; kaleuō to call).

The New Testament first picks up this usage in Matthew 16:18: „You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.” In the New Testament, according to *James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, the word *ekklēsia* occurs 118 times, under six conjugations, as follows:

- *eklesia*, 33 times, in Matthew, Acts, the Pauline epistles and III John;
- *ekklesiai*, 8 times, in Acts, the Pauline epistles and the Apocalypse;
- *ekklesiais*, 18 times, in the Pauline epistles and in Revelation;
- *ekklesian*, 20 times, in Matthew, Acts and the Pauline epistles;
- *eklesias*, 32 times, in Matthew, Acts, the Pauline epistles, Hebrews, James and III John;
- *ekklesiōn*, 7 times, in the Pauline epistles and in Revelation.

Ekklēsia, the religious linguistic foundation in the culture and mentality of other peoples

Ecclesia - for the Latin language and its successors.

The Latin language has taken the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), in the form *ecclesia*, extending its meaning to embrace not only the institution of the Church but also worship places. The other Romance languages and those in their vicinity have taken over the same term in the following forms: French, *église*, Spanish, *iglesia*, Irish, *eglwys*, Portuguese, *igreja*, Walloon, *eglijhe*, Italian, *chiesa*, etc.

Kyriakē - for Germanic and Slavic languages

Germanic as well as Slavic languages first used a name for the place of worship, after which the meaning was extended to the institution of the Church. Thus, the Greek word *kyriakē* adapted to the meaning of *royal house* became in Swedish, *kyrka*, in Scottish Welsh, *kirk*, in Dutch *kerk*, in German *Kirche*, in English *church*, in Ukrainian, *Церква* - *țerkva*, in Russian *церковь* - *țercovi*, etc.

Basilica - for Romance languages

According to the same principle, some Romance, Slavic and Germanic languages, which are based on the Latin noun *basilica*, which in turn comes from the Greek βασιλική - *basiliki* meaning *royal house*, or *aulè* - *royal court*, are adapted to Romanian as the term *church*, in Rhaeto-Romance, *baselga* in Rhaeto-Romance, *bašalka* in Dalmatia.

House - spiritual shelter

Other languages use the notion of church in all its senses certain derivatives of the concept of house. Thus, in Hungarian, the church has the equivalent of *egyház*, a *house*, in Polish *kościół* *castle*, and in the liturgical language of European Christians the expression *beta Kristian*, *Christian house* is used.

Ecclesiology - Skill, Art and Character in Christian architecture

Etymologically the linguistic foundation of the term ecclesiology comes from the union of two words of Greek origin (Laertios 1964), the first as *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) with its Latin equivalent, *ecclesia* (Bauer 2000, concept of *ekklēsia*, ἐκκλησία), with the meaning of *assembly*, *church* and the second meaning modulated in the content *logia*, (λογία), translated and adapted into the forms of *knowledge*, *words or logic*, a highly dynamic linguistic product often used in the composition of sciences names or bodies of knowledge.

Also, worth noting the difference between the Greek term *ekklesiastirion*, interpreted as atypical spatial architecture in ancient Athens, and *ecclesiology*, a concept built on Greek linguistic foundations representing both the study of the architecture of places of worship and the theories of Christianity. The similar word ecclesiology first appeared in the quarterly journal *The British Critic* in 1837, in an article written by an anonymous contributor expressing the concept thus:

“We mean, then, by Ecclesiology, a science which may treat of the proper construction and operations of the Church, or Communion, or Society of Christians; and which may regard men as they are members of that society, whether members of the Christian Church in the widest acceptation of the term, or members of some branch or communion of that Church, located in some separate kingdom, and governed according to its internal forms of constitution and discipline” (Anonymous writer, “*Ecclesiology*”. *The British Critic Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record* 1837, 218–248).

In January 1845, the Cambridge Camden Society, in volume IV of *The Ecclesiologist*, published in January 1845, that it was the rightful creator of the concept of *ecclesiology* (White 1979, 48-49):

„(...) as a general organ of Ecclesiology; that peculiar branch of science to which it seems scarcely too much to say, that this very magazine gave first its being and its name” (*The Ecclesiologist*, IV.1)

The Cambridge Camden Society, known since 1845 when it relocated to London as the Ecclesiological Society, was founded in 1839 with the aim of promoting the study of Gothic architectural study associated with cathedrals built in the late Middle Ages in Europe and the support of knowledge of ecclesiastical antiquities. The publication of the monthly journal, *The Ecclesiologist*, mirrored the activities of advising church builders on architectural plans to support a return to a medieval style shrouded in Gothic splendor known as Gothic Revival architecture. At the height of its influence in the 1840s, the Cambridge Camden Society, through these notorious publications, was considered the center of the wave of Victorian restoration that swept through England and Wales in the second half of the 19th century and had over 700 members, including bishops of the Church of England, deans of Cambridge University and members of the English Parliament. Thus, The Ecclesiologist Society and its publications enjoyed a wide influence on the conformist aesthetics of the English churches and are often known as the ecclesiological movement.

The situation regarding the etymology has been summed up by the Northern Irish theologian, Alister Edgar McGrath:

„Ecclesiology' is a term that has changed its meaning in recent theology. Formerly the science of the building and decoration of churches, promoted by the Cambridge Camden Society, the Ecclesiological Society and the journal *The Ecclesiologist*, ecclesiology now stands for the study of the nature of the Christian church” (McGrath 1999, 127)

Thus, in Christian theology, ecclesiology is the study of the Church (Rotaru 2017, 57-76) and the origins of Christianity, its relationship to the Savior Christ, the role (Rotaru 2012, 5) and polity of the Church in the whole world, its discipline and governance, and its inherent eschatology. The Christian theological landscape encompasses Catholic ecclesiology, Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology, and Protestant ecclesiology, which extends from the Martin Luther magisterial reformation to radical reformed ecclesiology (Rotaru 2014, 379-384).

Conclusions

The intangible heritage of mankind that has sprung from the prolific Hellenic language is colossal. Every civilization (Rotaru 2023a, 62-79) is particularly complex and, beyond the controversies inherent in the bastion of influence and power, the only constant present is its continuity, cyclicality, transformation, adaptation, and updating, all starting from the true, primordial foundations that define the reality of every world. The linguistic foundation of *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), presented in the role of a creator of civilizations, deserves recognition as part of a palimpsest of identity—a formula that encompasses its form, substance, meaning and purpose in the flow of time. Thus, as we have presented, it builds itself out of the heresies of other civilizations (Rotaru 2023b, 825-874), figuring as a political institution in Athenian democracy, legitimized as a general legislative assembly of the people in an *ekklesiastirion*, from which the activity of decisions founded on the expression of the vote, *ekloghes* (εκλογες), transpires.

The term was later converted to Christianity and underwent a slight transformation into Latin, this time taking the form of *ecclesia*. The concept of ecclesiology, also built on Greek linguistic foundations, developed later as a branch of theology that deals holistically with both the principles of Christianity and the Gothic architecture of places of worship. This concept influences and technically advises in order to modify, change, reactualize by returning to the Gothic splendor; that is, as the dynamics of the linguistic particle *ek* (εκ) suggest, it aims to choose from a variety of architectures the one that corresponds to the verticality of Creation (Rotaru 2005a, 295-324).

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