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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS
OF ETHNIC SURVIVAL

It is only recently that social scientists have concerned themselves with the issue of ethnic survival. Historians had naturally come across the problem of the factors involved in the survival or dissolution of *ethnie*, but social scientists were slow to appreciate the importance of this question. That importance is not only intrinsic; it is also vital to our understanding of both nations and stratification. For it is within the context of ethnic formations that strata and classes evolve and come into conflict; and conversely, the interplay of strata and classes is an important factor in transforming and renewing *ethnie* and nations.

The meaning of „Ethnic surival"

The subject of ethnic survival and dissolution is vast. It embraces every continent and several epochs of history; depending on how one defines the central concepts, its ramifications are wideranging and complex. It is therefore necessary at the outset to limit the scope of this discussion by a rather selective use of examples from different epochs and areas (mainly the Middle East and Europe), and by focussing on the question of how *ethnie* renew themselves. I shall accordingly deal rather cursorily with several factors that require much more sustained investigation, and concentrate on those aspects that are immediately relevant to problems of ethnic selfrenewal, notably those concerned with popular participation and mythmaking capacity.[1]

But, first, what do we mean by terms like „ethnic survival" and „ethnic dissolution"? Does not such a formulation imply a rather „instrumental" manner of approaching ethnicity, one which fails to grasp the inner significance for the participants of

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[1] That similar phenomena can be found in other areas, notably Africa, India and the Far East, is clear; but the rather different social organisation and religious traditions in these areas may require some modification of emphases, if not approach. Some modern examples of the interplay between religious mobilisation and social change in Asia can be found in D. E. Smith (1974).

„ethnic ties"? This would only be true if one accepted a rather extreme „primor-dialism" which saw ethicity as a natural datum and *ethnie* as fixed quantities „out there", indestructible building-blocks of humanity. Such a view finds no support in the historical record, which is full of variation in ethnic experience, including ethnogenesis, ethnic transformation, ethnic renewal, and ethnocide. This is not to imply that ethnicity is such a malleable resource and *ethnie* are so ephemeral and situational that it becomes almost impossible to speak of „ethnic survival". There are enough durable and long-lived *ethnie*, and sufficiently strong and pervasive ethnicity at that, at least in some cases, to allow us to pose the problem of „ethnic survival". Besides, it is a problem that, both in the past and today, exercised the minds of many members of ethnic communities whose decline was viewed with alarm.[2]

To pose the problem of „ethnic survival" in a way which might yield fruitful answers, it is first necessary to define the concept of *ethnie* and ethnic ties. „Ethnos" in ancient Greek reffered originally to the „band" or „tribe" (of friends, warriors, Lycians, – in Homer) and thence to any group that lived together and shared a common history and culture in virtue of an alleged common ancestry. *Ethnie* are not blood groups, they are culture-communities based on fictive descent ties, a genealogical myth. Myths are, in fact, essential to ethnicity, as are symbols, values, traditions and memories. Indeed, one might define an *ethnie* as a named human group of common fictive ancestry and historical memories, shared culture and territorial associations, and sentiments of solidarity. (This last may vary considerably as to intensity, durability and social penetration). While not every *ethnie* needs to be in possession of „its" territory all the time, it must feel a link with, and be associated with, a particular „homeland", a territory which it, and others, regard as historically linked with the particular *ethnie*. This is true even of diaspora communities like the Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Ethnicity is not some vague, ethereal or purely emotional quality; it has concrete dimensions, of which „land" is one, and a vital dimension.[3]

It follows from the above definition that when one poses problems of „ethnic survival", it is primarily to the culture, historical memories, ancestry myths and sentiments of solidarity that one must address oneself. When we speak of „ethnic transformation" or „ethnic survival", we are primarily interested in the patterens of maintenance and change of „myth-simbol" complexes, of memories, traditions and values. Of course, there is a demographic dimension; myths, symbols and memories refer to individuals and groups (and places and epochs) and are narrated and believed by people. But it is the fund of symbols, myths, memories and values, which define a given population as an *ethnie*, irrespective of the real provenance (which may have been forgotten) of different segments of the historical community.[4]

It is, of course, a hazardous and often subjective undertaking to try to determine the boundary between ethnic „survival" and „transformation". As we shall see, different elements change at differing rates, so that while we may legitimately speak of

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2 For a discussion of rival approaches to „ethnicity", and the possibility of synthesizing them, see McKay (1982); cf. A. D. Smith (1984a).

3 The symbolic and fitive-genealogical aspects of ethnicity are also stressed by Hörowitz (1985, ch. 2). For a fuller discussion of my basic approach, see A. D. Smith (1986, Part I) and A. D. Smith (1981a).

4 For the concept of „myth-symbol" complex, see the seminal work by Armstrong (1982), which also concentrates on the pre-modern Cristians and Islamic worlds, but deals only cursorily with the ancient world.

„survival" along some dimensions, it would be more appropriate to speak of „transformation" along others. Names like Egypt or Persia may be long-lasting, for example, even when much of the cultural content of „Egyptian-ness" and „Persian-ness" has been more or less radically transformed. Language, religion, symbolism, ancestry-myths change at different rates, and in some cases more profoundly than in others. The area bristles with conceptual and methodological difficulties.

Identity-maintenance and dissolution

Nevertheless, some preliminary remarks can be made to open up discussion in this area. No attempt is made here to be comprehensive. Instead, I shall focus on the modes of „self-renewal" of *ethnie*, and the particular place occupied by participatory election myths. But first it may be useful to list a few of the main factors relevant to the larger problem of „ethnic survival" and „dissolution".

1. *Autonomy and subjection*: The most obvious factor, and the one usually cited by nationalists, is that of foreign rule and the need for „self-determination". What is alleged here is that one of the pre-conditions of „ethnic survival" is self-rule, because „authencity" is only possible in a condition of „autonomy". This is, in fact, a modern philosophical position, one favoured by Rousseau, Kant and their followers; but it finds little correspondence with historical or contemporary fact, unless of course one defines „authenticity" to include (or logically to entail) „autonomy", in this special philosophical sense. In practise, many *ethnie* have survived more or less intact under foreign rule, especially when organised as *millets* in a polyethnic empire, as the Greeks and Armenians were under the Ottoman empire. (That they also suffered oppression, neglect, etc. is another matter; the question here concerns only the degree of survival of their central patterns of myth, symbol, memory, tradition and values). Even today, it is possible for *ethnie* included within larger states to maintain their basic cultural patterns, despite the ravages of „modernisation" and an alien state; one thinks of the Basques and Catalans under Franco's rule, or the Tamils and Sinhalese under British rule.[5]

This is not to imply that autonomy, and more especially a history of independent statehood, is not an important source of ethnic maintenance and even self-renewal. Operating as folk memory, often heavily idealised, an epoch of independent statehood, often associated with heroic kings and lawgivers, and appearing from afar as a „golden age", can frequently serve as a model for ethnic regeneration, after a period of decline and transformation. This suggests that such folk memories, important as they are, do not in themselves promote the retention of ethnic identity patterns; they function rather to guide ethnic self-renewals and ethnicist movements of restoration, as with the nationalist movements of self-renewal among the Slovaks and the nations of Yugoslavia.[6]

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5 On the Basques and Catalans, see Payne (1971) and Heiberg (1975). For the Sri Lankan situation, see Horowitz (1985, 132–4, 244–6). For the European philosophical tradition of autonomy, see Kedourie (1960); on „authenticity" in Herder, see Berlin (1976).
6 On the rise of Slovak nationalism, see Brock (1976); the classic account of the rise of nationalism in south-eastern Europe, remains Stavrianos (1961); cf. Singleton (1985).

2. *Rootedness and exile*: Another frequently cited factor is residence. Again, it is part of the nationalist vision of a world of distinct nations that each should not only occupy „its own" historic territory, but that, since a nation's energy and creativity springs from the „soil", its identity depends on a close and lasting symbiosis with the „homeland". Rootedness is therefore viewed as a precondition of national survival, while exile is seen as a „living death". Again, the ideology is true only by a special, almost tautological reading; „exile" in this sense implies spiritual deracination. But, historical facts suggest another possibility: exiled *ethnie* (or their elites) certainly undergo some change in their cultural patterns, but to compensate for their physical removal, often seek to strengthen their traditions and memories. This was certainly the case with armenians and Jews; just as it was exile that impelled many greek intellectuals to seek to recover their „roots" in antiquity.[7]

Again, this does not mean that residence in a territory which has come to be regarded as the „homeland" (which, in origin, is quite often a conquered territory, if one goes far enough back in time) is not vital to the retention of ethnic ties and culture-patterns. For one thing, homelands delineate, if only roughly in pre-modern epochs, the boundaries of the community in relation to „strangers"; for another, they furnish the „poetic landscapes", the pictures and images of cultural association, which form so important a part of the cultural heritage of *ethnie* and nations, even of those whose members reside far from the homeland, in „exile". A certain, perhaps unmeasurable part, of an *ethnie's* cultural patterns are formed and maintained through continual interaction of the population with the peculiar features of the landscape and the location.[8]

3. *Immigration and isolation*: The issue at stake here is the degree to which isolation from external populations and their cultures is conducive to ethnic survival. This was certainly the prescription of the more extreme nationalists, particularly in Germany; but we also find intimations of the idea from the Old Testament and Rome's early rejection of foreign cults from Asia to the Spanish *limpieza de sangre* in the sixteenth century. In practice, the injection of foreign elements, both people and ideas, often enhances ethnic survival, by modifying traditional ways and beliefs to meet changing external conditions. Nationalists, despite their rhetoric, have often borrowed ideas and practices from their neighbours; the Meiji Japanese reformers did so on a fairly large scale, albeit selectively. The question of ethnic survival arises only where the scale of cultural borrowing and/or immigration into the community is such as to imperil the very existence of its fund of myths, memories, traditions and values.[9]

A case in point is the question of Greek identity. The early nationalists were convinced of a demographic and cultural continuity between the population of ancient and modern Greece. That a Greek identity exists is not in question. The issue concerns the provenance of that identity, whether Byzantine or (ancient) Hellenic. It was an issue that left a profound mark on Greek politics in the nineteenth and early

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7 For the Greek case, see the essay by Koumarianou in Clogg (1973), and for the Armenians and Jews, see Armstrong (1982, ch. 7).

8 I have discussed in more detail these „poetic landscapes" in A. D. Smith (1986, ch. 8); for other aspects of „national territory", see A. D. Smith (1981b).

9 For the Völkisch writers' rejection of the „alien" in Germany, see Mosse (1964); for racist ideas in Spain and other European countries, see Poliakov (1974).

twentieth century; but its ramifications go much deeper. The decisive question was the degree to which any continuity could be discerned between the Greek population and culture under late Roman and early Byzantine rule, and the population and culture in Greece and Ionia under middle and late Byzantine rule. Given the massive influx of Slavic migrants from the north into Greece in the sixth and seventh centuries, how can we speak of „continuity" between ancient and medieval „Greece"? The latter can only figure as a geographical expression, but no longer as a cultural and demographic one. Against this argument, was the continuity implied by the name, the language (despite changes) and the Hellenised form of Christianity known as a Greek Orthodoxy with its Greek liturgy and concepts. In other words, a measure of cultural continuity (including ancestry and other myths) can coexist with considerable demographic discontinuity, even if the continuity was confined to the elites, mainly in Constantinople.[10]

4. *Religious conservatism and conversion*: This example raises the further problem of the role of religion in assuring ethnic survival. If it is not solely a question of demographic reproduction and continuity, perhaps the answer to our problem of ethnic survival can be found in the resistance of religious traditions to external pressures and change. That is undoubtedly what many religious leaders believe, as they exhort their flock to remain faithful to ancestral beliefs and mores. Again, the Greek example will serve. At the time of the 1821 revolt, the Patriarch and many senior Orthodox clergy in Byzantium exhorted their followers not to join; they rightly feared that success in that venture would undermine their position as guardians, not only of the faith, but of ethnic tradition and even ethnic survival, at least in the form that they knew and recognised.[11]

This last phrase is vital. The fact is that ethnic forms, though long-lasting, do change and are transformed. Even in pre-modern eras, a *particular* religion may not be necessary for the maintenance of ethnic identity. A people may „change its religion", and yet remain identified by themselves and others as the same people. Of course, the change within that identity has been profound. When the Persian Sassanid empire fell to the Arabs in 642, and Iran was gradually Islamised over the next three centuries, Persian identity did not disappear: a name, a sense of difference from the Arabs and others, memories of Sassanid glory, various myths and legends, remained to set the Persians apart. Succeding Persian dynasties, notably the Saffarids and Samanids, did much to revive a sense of Persian greatness, albeit in Islamic garb. Indeed, it was under the Samanids and the succeeding Buyyid dynasty, that New Persian developed and with it the glories of Persian poetry and history, notably Firdausi's *Shah-nama*. All this was accomplished at a time when the state religion of Sassanid Persia, zoroastrianism, went into popular decline and became the preserve of a cultured minority in Iran itself. Hence, religious conversion, far from destroying an *ethnie* and its sense of identity, may actually revive it in new forms.[12]

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10 For a preliminary discussion of this vexed issue in modern Greece, see Campbell and Sherrard (1968, ch. 1); cf. the essay by Mango in Clogg (1973). On late Byzantine Greece, see Armstrong (1982).

11 See on this Frazee (1969).

12 On these dynasties and their „Persian" identity, see Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. IV (1975) and Morgan (1988. ch. 2).

Indeed, religious conversion may sometimes stand at the cradle of ethnic forma-tion. A case could be maintained for this in respect of both Polish and Russian origins. The conversion to Roman Catholicism of the Piast dynasty in 966, and of Vladimir of Kiev in 988, are often taken to mark the effective beginning of their respective ethnic communities, along with the formation of their polities. Such conversions may, indeed, be viewed as political manoeuvres against political rivals; but their effects go far beyond immediate circumstances of state or dynastic strengthening. By creating a myth of royal conversation, the former tribes and cities are given a dynamic and distinctive *mythomoteur* which „ethnicises" the religion, makes it the property and expression of the people and its rulers; and thereby infuses both with a sense of being „chosen" to do God's work.[13]

5. *Hierarchy and participation*: A final factor, among the many that might be discussed, is the role of social penetration in maintaining a sense of ethnic identity and its cultural patterns.

Generally speaking, it is the upper strata which „bear", in Weber's sense, the values and traditions of the community. Indeed, in many case, we hardly stop to ask about the ethnic identification of the vast majority of an area's inhabitants in pre-modern eras, i. e. the peasants and herdsmen. They stand as mutes to the ethnic dramas played out by the elites; and quite often the latter recognise little or no sense of cultural identity with peasants who are tenants or serfs, even where in some „objective" sense (e. g. language or religion) they share some of their culture. This was certainly true of several areas in Eastern Europe, though the extent of aristocratic cultural exclusiveness is disputed.[14]

It is sometimes thought that this failure to strike deep ethnic roots in the countryside and in the lower classes, can explain the decline of *ethnie* and even their dissolution. Certainly, a growing social and cultural remoteness from the Assyrian peasantry played its part in weakening the sense of Assyrian identity in the seventh century B. C. But it is only one of several factors which must be invoked to give a satisfactory explanation of the dissolution of the Assyrian *ethnie*. It may also help to account for the eventual demise of ancient peoples like the Hittitens and Philistines, who ruled over other ethnic groups and constituted „lateral" aristocratic *ethnie*, faced with waves of tribal immigration bringing new cultures.[15]

Yet we should not be misled by these examples. Several „lateral" and extensive *ethnie*, such as the Arya in India, or the Magyar knights, were able to perpetuate large elements of their cultural patterns and later incorporate into that culture large numbers of tribes and peasants possessing other, if less well-defined, cultures, usually through political action and state structures. On the other side, more „vertical" and demotic *ethnie*, whose lower strata were much more prone to participate regularly in the culture of the elites, and who were often enthused with a sense of cultural „mission", have not always proved able to maintain that culture; one thinks of the Sumerian and Phoenician city-states, and the somewhat different case of the coptic

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13 For the concept of mythomoteur, see Armstrong (1982); on the Russian case, see Pipes (1977).
14 This is Gellner's contention in Gellner (1983, ch. 2); but see Sugar (1980) and Pearson (1983) for some variations.
15 For the Assyrian case, see Roux (1964, chs. 19–23); for the Phoenicians, see Moscati (1973). I have discussed the question of their eventual dissolution in A. D. Smith (1986, ch. 5).

culture in Egypt, which has survived but as a minority in the land of its origins, the majority having adopted both Islam and Arab culture, though of a quite separate variety.[16]

This suggests that popular participation in the ethnic culture offers no guarantee of ethnic survival. At the same time, a refusal by aristocratic elits to share, or impose, their culture on the countryside and the lower strata, poses problems of ethnic self-renewal, and makes the „lateral" *ethnie* vulnerable to other elites or immigrants bearing a more salvationary and participant culture.

Modes of ethnic self-renewal

It is clear that none of the factors briefly reviewed above can of themselves account for the survival or dissolution of ,ethnie. But what they suggest are various modes of regeneration, through which *ethnie* can prolong their identities, albeit with important changes in their patterns of culture. For what threatens ethnic survival most are the twin dangers of ossification and attenuation. This, I would argue, was what drained Assyrian identity of its vitality; on the one hand, attenuation of the Assyrianness of that culture through the influx of Aramean-speakers and Aramean culture, and on the other hand, too close a dependence of Assyrian religion and culture on the state and Babylonian religious models, creating an ossified political and ritualistic culture. [17]

When we consider those instances of *ethnie* where survival was ensured, it becomes clear that various mechanisms of self-renewal are at work. They include:

1. *Religious reform:* Given the fundamental importance of religion in maintaining ethnic identity in pre-modern eras, the abilitiy of an ethnic religion or ethno-religious community to renew itself through religious reform becomes pivotal. This is not to say that religious reformation is the main or even a necessary condition of ethnic survival; or that it will ensure such survival. Over the long term, even a successful religious reform may fail to stem ethnic decline, particularly where a degree of ethnocide is practiced by powerful neighbours or rulers. This was the case with the priestly reforms among the Samaritans in the fourteenth century; by the seventeenth century the community was in decline in Palestine, Egypt and Syria.[18]

Nevertheless, other factors being favourable, religious reform represents one of the main ways in which *ethnie* renew themselves; and it is no accident that a number of early nationalist movements were preceded by movements of religious reform, notably in southeast Asia and the Middle East.[19]

Given the strong „ethnic colouring" of even the world-religions in particular areas, and the dangers of ossification, notably through exessive emphasis on priestly ritual, the influence of religious reform on ethnic identity and survival, should occasion no

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16 For the Coptic case, see Atiya (1968, Part I) and Wakin (1963); for the distinction between „vertical" and „lateral" ethnie, see A. D. Smith (1986, ch. 4).

17 This is implied in Roux (1964); cf. Oppenheim (1977).

18 For the Samaritans today, see Strizower (1962); and for their medieval priestly reforms, cf. Encyclopedia Judaica (1971: under „Samaritans").

19 On which, see Wertheim (1958); and Sharabi (1970).

surprise. At the same time, the content of that reform needs to be considered; the more salvationist, yet textual, the reform, the greater the chances of a religiously-inspired ethnic renewal.

2. *Selective borrowing*; *Ethnie* are always undergoing some degree of change, and are normally subject to periodic external influence. One habitual mode of ethnic self-renewal is through culture contact, and especially the guided borrowing of ideas and practices from other, perhaps technologically more advanced, cultures. The stimulus of hellenistic culture undoubtedly helped to renew the Jewish community in Palestine in the three centuries before Jesus and shape both Cristianity and Rabbinic Judaism[20]. The conflict in Judea over the pace of hellenisation under the Seleucids reflected this problem of selective borrowing. Similar concern surfaced two millennia later in the Ottoman empire. Again, the question revolved around the degree to which Western ideas and institutions provided appropriate models for a polyethnic empire subjects to Islamic cultural patterns; the era of Tanzimat reflected the need to contain borrowed elements within a traditional framework. In this case, the borrowing came too late to preserve the empire, but it paved the way for the resurgence of a Turkic identity based on a neglected culture and despised memories.[21]

3. *Incorporation and participation*: The opening up of an *ethnie* to wider strata may also serve to renew the fabric of the community. Thus the Safavid Shi'ite regime in Persia drew in more of the Iranian populations, especially the Persians, in a way that earlier Islamic regimes in Iran had failed to do. Such opening up by the State we may term „incorporation". It is not to be confused with the „participation" from below of lower strata in a demotic community. Here there is a genuine movement of the lower classes, often against the elites, as the socio-religious movement of Mazdak was directed against the Persian Sassanid state in the fifth century, and in turn provoked the repressive reforms of Chosroes I.[22]

One of the ways in which „lateral" *ethnie* can prolong themselves is through bureaucratic incorporation of middle and lower strata. The classic examples are the French and English kingdoms in the later medieval era. It was the state, based on the elite culture of the dominant *ethnie*, which diffused the fund of ethnic myths, memories and traditions to outlying areas and lower social strata, not without class and regional conflict. Nevertheless, the outcome was successful from the standpoint of the French and English elites and their cultural survival, even if minority cultures were not completely absorbed. From the medieval era to the modern, it is possible to trace a continuity in terms of French and English language, symbolism, mythology and historical memory, despite all the changes in form and content which each have undergone.[23]

At the other end of the spectrum, we find those „vertical" communities, in which popular participation has periodically generated an extraordinary enthusiasm, and in which an almost missionary zeal has from time to time overwhelmed the social order

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20 For this influence, see Tcherikover (1970).
21 This is analysed in Berkes (1964); for the revival of a „Turkic" identity, see Lewis (1968, especially ch. 10).
23 See generally on this, Seton-Watson (1977) and armstrong (1982). For ethnic myths in England, see MacDougall (1982).

and spilled out into the wider political arena. Such, of course, are the socio-religious movements which founded the Jewish and Arab communities and fuelled their migrations, and which reappeared from time to time in both communities, ensuring their survival in change. Such movements are often bound up with the appearance of carismatic leaders, who are later treated as heroic exemplars of a „golden age", now lost but perhaps, with effort, capable of restoration... These are the Mosaic or Davidic eras, or the Age of the Companions.[24]

4. *Myths of election*: Linked to these mobilising religious movements are those characteristic myths which define a special role for the ethnic community, one that sets them apart from others. The sense of being favoured and chosen by the gods or by God, made its appearance quite early in human history. At first, it seems to have been a „holy land", or simply, as in ancient Egypt, „the land". The lands of Sumer and Akkad acquired this special character by the late third millennium B. C., but it is unclear how far these early civilisations regarded themselves as sacred (as opposed to sacred centres Within each). The first great example of a whole community being treated as „chosen" was, of course, the children of Israel; and in time, Canaan, the promised land, acquired a similar sacred character, along with its former Jebusite stronghold and now Israelite capital, Jerusalem[25].

From the Jews, the sense of election passed to various Cristian and Islamic peoples: Amharic Ethiopians, Copts, Armenians, various Shi'ite sects, Druse, etc., as well as Byzantine Greeks, Russians, Irish, English, French and many others. This sense of chosenness and special destiny was also fed by the ethnocentrism typical of pre-modern *ethnie*, such as could be found in ancient Greece, Egypt and Persia, where the centrality and superiority of one's community was widely taken for granted. The combination often produced a missionary fervour, which simultaneously set the elect apart, while driving them to seek converts by example or the sword, as in early Christianity and Islam. In the Christian case, the sense of election was quickly separated from any ethnic dimension (though it later re-emerged in several Eastern versis of Christianity); whereas in the Islamic case, it was the sense of Arab election which played a major mobilising and sustaining role, even in periods of disunity and decline.[26]

Myths of election, once formulated, play a key role in ensuring the survival, if not the continuity, of ethnic identity. Even they, however, may not be able to assure ultimate survival and rebirth. The Copts, for example, underwent a long period of decline in their own land; though in the last century they experienced something of a religious revival, linked to their original monastic traditions, they have not been able to stem their own marginalisation in an Islamic Egypt. The same was true over long periods for the Irish, Greeks, Persians and Chinese, until the advent of nationalism revitalised their sense of identity and gave their myths of election a new, if secularised, lease of life. On the other hand, failure to formulate such a myth, as seems to have happened in Phoenicia and Assyria, despite all their ethnocentrism, undermined their capacity to withstand adversity in war and division at home. There was nothing to sustain their identity, nothing with which to interpret their destiny.[27]

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24 For the Arab Islamic movement, see Lewis (1970); for the Jewish case, see Seltzer (1980).
25 On this, see Zeitlin (1984, especially chs. 3, 6–7). For some intimations of „chosenness" in relation to the land in Sumer and Akkad, see Roux 91964).
26 See on this Carmichael (1967); for the „ethnicisation" of eastern Christianity, see Atiya (1968).
27 On some of these election myths, see A. D. Smith (1984b). On modern Coptic history, see the essay by Meinardus in Arberry (1969).

Crisis and choice

What emerges from the preceding brief analysis is the importance of mobilising myths for ethnic self-renewal. This is obvius in the case of the more „vertical" demotic *ethnie*, where common cultural patterns and a sense of solidarity pervade all strata and regions of the community, and where there is a tradition of popular participation. But we also find such mobilising myths at work among the „lateral" aristocratic communities, particularly where their sense of position, including their class situation, is bound up with a sense of religious mission against infidel enemies, as with the Hungarian knights against the Turks. Sometimes, an aristocratic *ethnie* may manifest ambivalence towards a mobilising myth of election, particularly if it emanated from the artisan or peasant strata; many French aristocrats in the early fifteenth century, while welcoming English defeats, were suspicious, even hostile, to the mission of French election proclaimed by Joan of Arc to the Dauphin.[28]

This example suggest that what determines the emergence and role of mass mobilising myths of election in ensuring ethnic self-renewal, is the combination of a salvation tradition with periods of danger and crisis for the community. The case, analysed by Weber, was the prophetic and Deuteronomic movement in ancient Israel and Judah. In a situation of recurrent crisis and danger from the conflicts between Egypt, Aram and an expanding Assyria,from the ninth century B. C. to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar in 587 B. C., there emerged twin revivalist movements, the one priestly, the other prophetic, urging the renewal of Israel's Covenant with God, the core of its election myth. The oracles of the classical prophets, and the reforms of Josiah, were premissed on the belief in a „holy people" inhabiting a sacred land, on condition of fulfilling divine commands which included the retention of a distinctive life-style, traditions, values and symbolism. It was this election myth, evoked by an adverse international situation, that thereafter helped to sustain a flagging sense of identity, particularly in the diaspora.[29]

This example also ilustrates the importance of individual and collective choices. There were, after all, other conceivable responses to crisis; some of the kings of Israel and Judah made them, to their detriment, and bought about further decline in morale and assimilation to pagan ways. The crisis of the Byzantine empire after 1204 served to reinforce the election myth of the Greek Orthodox, by stressing the hellenic aspects of its culture and identity; even though the choice was made on religious grounds, it strengthened the sense of election of the Greeks as the imperial dominant *ethnie*[30]. Similarly, the choice of a „Byzantine ideology" (of the Third Rome) by Ivan III and his successors, though no doubt a predominantly political calculation, served to undergird the dynastic ideology of the redeemer-Tsar and his sacred church and people. At any rate, the choice of this election myth had profound consequences for the rising tide of Russian ethnic solidarity.[31]

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28 On which, see Warner (1983).
29 See Zeitlin (1984, chs. 6–7).
30 See Baynes and Moss (1969, chs. 1,9) and Armstrong (1982, 178–81)
31 See the essay by Baron Meyendorff and Baynes in Baynes and Moss (1969), and by Cherniavsky in Ranum (1975). For a recent analysis of some election myths, notably in America, see O'Brien (1988).

In this essay, I have only sketched in some of the main factors which influence ethnic survival and self-renewal. A more detailed examination of these factors, and their effects for ethnic transformation, would demand a volume. But I hope I have been able to provide some pointers for future discussion, and highlight the role of mobilising election myths and popular participation in ethnic self-renewal.

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