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**ANALYSIS OF EXISTING VERSIONS OF ETHNOGENESIS OF
THE CHECHEN PEOPLE**

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Abstract

The paper contains analysis of the most well-developed scientific versions of Chechen ethnogenesis. For a long time this problematic has been a subject of discussions among Chechen and other Russian historians and ethnographers. Despite quite a long history of research in this field, principal stages of ethnogenesis of Chechens are still a matter of dispute. At that, the questions of ethnogenesis of the specific Chechen ethnicity are considered in a broader context of the ethnogenesis of Nakh peoples that beside Chechen also includes Ingush and Batsbi peoples, the latter are living in the territory of the Republic of Georgia. There is no unity in the sciences society even on the question of the initial point of formation of the Chechen ethnicity. Some researchers are willing to connect it to arising of the first forms of ethnicity at the primitive society stage. However, most researchers link the initial stage of Chechen ethnogenesis to a common Nakh ethnic-linguistic community that had formed in the area of Koban culture, whose time frame was from the late 2nd millennium BCE to late 1st millennium BCE. Many questions are still unresolved, such as influence of ancient migrations from Trans-Caucasus and Western Asia in the ancient times onto Chechen ethnogenesis, as well as that of many-sided contacts with nomadic tribes of Pre-Caucasian steppe starting from the time of Scythians (at least 7th century BCE) and until early medieval period. The article also touches upon the problems of relations between Chechen ethnogenesis and political genesis.

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1. Introduction

Modern Chechen people may be included with the peoples whose past is still understudied. Among the blank pages in the ethnic history of the Chechen people there is a still unresolved problem of Chechen ethnogenesis. All the while, there have been a multitude of versions proposed on how the Chechen ethnicity underwent its formation.

2. Problem Statement

Studying the Chechen ethnogenesis is not only important for understanding the history and modern state of the ethnicity. Being a part of multi-ethnic Russian society, they are in a complex socio-cultural interaction with other ethnic communities and are involved in sociogenetic processes, including those taking place due to globalization. Studying of these processes is important for preservation of Russia.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this article is published scientific concepts of Chechen ethnogenesis.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze well-known scientific versions of formation of the Chechen ethnicity, thus facilitating developing a common understanding in the sciences society.

5. Research Methods

Research methods are: analysis, synthesis, abstraction.

6. Findings

There are several schools of the ethnographic science that are trying to explain the phenomenon of ethnicity. The most widespread are: primordialism, passionarity theory of ethnogenesis and constructivism. The primordialism is based upon the idea of ethnicity as a group of persons with a set of common features, at that, ethnicity is seen as a quality inherent to humans. For example, De Vos (2001) understood an ethnic group as "...an assembly of people realizing themselves as carriers of a wide range of common traditions" (p.104). Among prominent European proponents of primordialism one may name Brubaker (2012), Heidegger (2003) and others. Among the prominent Russian primordialists there was Iu.V. Bromley.

An outstanding representative of the passionarity theory of ethnicity was Gumilev (1993).

Proponents of constructivist theories assume that ethnicity may be created by means of intellectual influence from cultural elites and authorities; that is, an ethnicity may be constructed through social activities. Due to this, Anderson (2001) saw ethnic categories as "imaginary", as "...members of even smallest nation will never know majority of their brethren, ... while having an image of their community in each of their minds" (p.12).

Well-known versions of Chechen ethnogenesis have been reflected in both separate articles and in integrating works (Kozenkova, 2011; Bagaev, 2011).

Theoretically speaking, most versions of the Chechen ethnogenesis may be fit into the primordialism framework, according to which formation of ethnic communities takes place at a stage of primitive society.

Initially, studies in the Chechen ethnogenesis did not go deeper in time than the early Middle Ages and were limited to chronologically most recent stages in a long process of formation of the Chechen people. It is emblematic, that initially a point of view prevailed according to which the Chechen ethnicity was formed in the mountains. One of the first to write about it was Laudaev (1872): “This tribe (Chechens – author’s note), ... formed below snowed mountains near the riverhead of Argun, from where it started to expand around due to a need in land. It occupied the mountains of the former Nazran district and Chaberloy, then inhabited Ichkeria and Aukh and finally inhabited the flatland thus ending its settlement” (p. 73).

Laudaev’s (1872) statement of formation of the “Chechen tribe” near the riverhead of Argun was based exclusively on teip lore. However, the idea that the Chechen ethnicity was formed in the mountains had become a foundation for the earliest attempts to cover the Chechen ethnogenesis from the scientific positions. At that, the authors were almost completely based upon the lore about Nashkha region in the Galanchozhsky district, which was assertedly the origin of dispersal of the Chechen teips. For example, Vagapov (1989) placed ancestral homeland of Chechens in the medium and upper course of Gekha, that of Karabulaks – in the medium and upper course of Fortanga, that of Ingushes – in the upper course of Assa.

A similar point of view was expressed by Desheriev, who saw the Nashkha region as a territory where the foundation of the Chechen ethnicity had been formed and, at the same time, as the origin of Chechen migration, initially directed towards current Itum-Kalinsky, Shatoevsky, Cheberloevsky and Vedensky districts. From there, settlement of lowland parts of Greater and Lesser Chechnya proceeded, followed with settlement of Terek neighborhood. Desheriev (1963) supported his point of view with observations that Galanchozh dialect of the Chechen language includes interweaving of features characteristic of various other dialects of the language, as well as similarities with the Ingush language.

However, this peculiarities of the Galanchozh dialect are probably due to migrants from Argun gorges had been initially settling in Galanchozh, which had become an important milestone in their way to lowlands. Most probably, the lore that Chechens originate from Nashkh is allegoric and figurative. The reality is that the Nashkh region was ancient cultural, religious and sacral center (Gapurov & Umkhaev, 2018).

There is sufficient foundation to state that ethnogenesis of Vainakh peoples has deeper roots, but there is evident lack of agreement on a number of essentially important questions, including whether Nakh are Caucasus aborigines or moved here from other territories. This question is important for defining the territory where ethnogenesis of two Vainakh peoples, Chechens and Ingushes, took place (Main implications and recommendations of the All-Union Scientific Conference “Problems of genesis of Nakh peoples”, 2011).

Dating the initial stage of Nakh peoples ethnogenesis is also an important question. For example, a well-known Abkhaz researcher Gumba (2017) links the origins of the Nakh ethnic group to Koban archaeological culture, within whose area a convergence of material and spiritual culture of the Nakh tribal groups proceeded starting from the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE. Nakh state union had been serving

as a main consolidating factor starting from the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. The formed Nakh ethnicity had a stable territory, language, common culture and economic relations, as well as a common self-designation and external designation. A common Nakh consciousness founded in the historical memory has been preserved among Chechens and Ingushes until now (Gumba, 2017).

Community of members of the Koban culture is often considered as a substrate on which almost all Central Caucasus peoples formed. Way back, Krupnov (1960) voiced a hypothesis that local variants of the Koban culture may be linked to individual tribal or ethnic groups.

More recent researchers, for instance, Kozenkova (2011) believe that materials of the Koban culture make it possible to speak of coincidence of the archaeological culture and ethnicity. In particular, this refers to the eastern variant of the Koban culture, which are being related to the Nakh ethnic group.

Tellingly, formation of Nart-Arshtin epic of Vainakhs is relegated by researchers to the Koban period (Muzhukhoyev, 2011).

A number of researchers put the beginning of formation of the Nakh ethnic-linguistic community to an even earlier date. For example, Markovin (2011) noted continuity in development of the ancient highland and lowland populations within the modern area currently inhabited by Vainakhs starting from the end of the 4th millennium BCE, when members of Maykop and Kura-Araxes cultures interacted in the north-easter Caucasus. Thus, in their genesis, proto-Vainakhs are related not only to the members of Kura-Araxes, but those of Maykop tradition, including some cultural and linguistic features. That may be the time of the first stage, when proto-Vainakh tribal groups were starting to get their ethnic uniqueness.

Bagaev (2011) believes that the initial point of Chechen ethnogenesis is dissolution of Nakh-Dagestani linguistic community that happened approximately in the 3rd millennium BCE. When analyzing archaeological materials from this point of view, Bagaev (2011) concluded that members of eastern variants of Maykop, North-Caucasus, Kaiakent-Kharachoi, Koban and Alan cultures were proto-Vainakhs. A feature of Vainakh ethnogenesis is that they were being formed into a community consisting of two tribal confederations. One, known as *laman nakh*, highland Nakhs, united highlanders inhabiting upper courses of Terek, Kistinka, Armkha, Assa, Sundzha, Fortanga, Argun, Khulkhulau, Aksay and other rivers, as well as those within the Black Mountains from Terek to Aksay. Another one, known as *arenan nakh*, lowland Nakhs engulfed the population in middle and lower courses of those rivers. In the period from the 7th century BCE to 10th century CE, population of each of the stated tribal confederations started realizing themselves as a united people. In the 10th century CE, both confederations transformed into early feudal unions: Dzurdukia in the foothills and highlands, and Alania in the lowlands, at that Alania included both highland and lowland Nakhs, together with Ossetians and other peoples. At that, Nakhs of Dzurdukia and Alania identified as peoples of a common language and common culture (Bagaev, 2011).

Vagapov also believed that the lowland element played an important role in the Chechen ethnogenesis. In particular, the unity of the Chechen language may be explained only a powerful convergent influence of lowland Vainakhs onto divergent processes that went in the dialects of highland gorges (as cited in Demelkhanov, 2018).

Constant living of the main body of the Vainakh ethnicity in the lowlands is supported by a peculiar detail of Vainakh version of Nart-Arshtin saga: heroic *narts* permanently live in the lowland and periodically visit their highland relatives (Muzhukhoyev, 2011).

The version of Bagaev (2011), reflects a two-part culture of the modern Chechen ethnicity with its existing division into highlanders and lowlanders within a general concept of ethnogenesis. At the same time, it allows considering the most ancient states of Koban tribes as corresponding to a certain stage of existence of the common Nakh ethnic community.

Additionally, nowadays, when it has been established that Nakhs of North Caucasus were only the northern periphery of a larger ethnic Nakh mass, Chechen and Ingush ethnogenesis should be considered in the context of Trans-Caucasus and taking into account migrations from southern areas, including those from Urartu.

Dating the separation of the Nakh language family is still controversial. In this case, the authors agree with those linguists who believe that the conclusive decision on divisions of the East Caucasus linguistic communion is possible only after creating comprehensive comparative historical grammars of all the languages in question (Alekseev, 2011).

Speaking of ethnogenesis of the modern Chechens, it is necessary to take into account ancient connections between Nakhs and nomadic tribes of Pre-Caucasus steppes, as appearance of steppe dwellers almost never resulted in total replacement of population. For example, during the Scythian era, population of Terek-Sunzha interfluvial area kept largely the same ethnic composition as previously, with some infiltration of Iranian-speaking tribes. The same may be said about Sarmat period (3rd-1st century BCE) (Abramova, 2011).

Vinogradov noted that contacts between Koban people and Iranian-speaking steppe peoples in the foothills and lowlands were by their nature a mutual adaptation to co-existence with complete preservation of ethnic picture of both sides. He believed that the language of the Koban community was proto-Vainakh language (Vinogradov, 1972).

Vagapov (2011) undertook an effort to substantiate involvement of Nakhs into Sarmat tribal confederation with linguistic materials, while Markovin (2011) had no doubts that collective Sarmats and Alans included large elements of Vainakh component.

Only Hun invasion resulted in moving the traditional Iranian-speaking groups of Terek region to the highlands, leading to formation of a foundation for subsequent early-Medieval variant of the Alan culture in the Middle Terek region (Abramova, 2011).

However, in this case the sum of available materials allows concluding that establishment of the Alans material culture on North Caucasus was caused not by changes in the ethnic composition of the population, but by internal development of local sedentary population (Arsanukaev, 2011).

Of interest is the point of view of Demelkhanov (2018), who believes that the divide of the 3rd-4th century CE is one of the key stages in formation of the modern Chechen ethnicity, being its final detachment from the common Nakh linguistic environment as an independent ethnic organism. Formation of the eastern variant of the Koban culture may be assumed an initial stage of this process (Demelkhanov, 2018).

The question on the role of migrations takes an important place in existing versions of the Chechen ethnogenesis. Chechens have many stories about ancestors arriving to their current location from the land of Sham (Syria) and other regions of Western Asia. Legends about Greek builders of Vainakh battle towers have also got wide currency (Osmaev, 2015). The more recent versions of these stories usually contain references to Arabic ancestors, usually of noble birth (Semenov, 1895; Ivanenkov, 1910). During the Soviet

time such stories were interpreted as a desire to justify their privileged position on behalf of feudal upper class (Kharadze & Robakidze, 1968). Currently, it is generally acknowledged that foundation of the migration theory includes serious arguments in linguistic parallelism, as well as affinity of ethnonyms and toponyms of the Western Asia and Chechnya (Gapurov & Umkhaev, 2018).

However, the mainstream version is still the one, where Chechens are among the native inhabitants of Caucasus, having had various links to Western Asia and Trans-Caucasus: "...centuries-long formation of Vainakh peoples ... proceeded in the Caucasus continuously, thus, Chechens and Ingushes are aboriginal population of the region" (Main implications and recommendations of the All-Union Scientific Conference "Problems of genesis of Nakh peoples", 2011, p. 46).

In light of the most recent scientific data, this point of view underwent significant correction: "...Studies of the history of contemporary Nakhs – Chechens, Ingushes and Batsbis – shall begin from extreme antiquity – starting from the history of a large Nakh ethnic massif and Nakh-speaking world of the Western Asia and Caucasus" (Resolution of the International Nakh Scientific Congress Ethnogenesis and Ethnic History of Peoples of Caucasus no. 1, 2018).

7. Conclusion

Concluding the analysis of well-known versions of Chechen ethnogenesis, it should be noted that recently research in the field has advanced significantly, and the main stages in formation of the contemporary Vainakh peoples are showing up quite clear. These words said back in 1991 are founding their confirmation: "Formation of each ethnicity, including Vainakhs is not a one-off act that happened in a certain era, but a result of prolonged historical development that apparently started not later than Neolithic period and finished in the Middle Ages" (Munchaev, 2011, p. 105).

Thus, development of a comprehensive version of the Chechen and Ingush ethnogenesis is still a current issue.

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