

**ISCKMC 2022****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****ETHNIC COMPONENT IN STEPPE NOMAD CULTURES OF  
SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE IN ANCIENT TIMES**

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**Abstract**

The Caucasus, as it is known, had a very great influence on the material culture of the steppe tribes through metal, ceramics, etc. at that time. However, researchers pay very little attention to the identification of the Caucasian ethnic component in the steppe nomadic cultures of Eurasia, in particular, in the archaeological cultures of the South -Of Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, such connections, with a careful and detailed study of material culture and contact language zones, are clearly traced for a long time. Historians singled out the Circumpontian metallurgical province – an archaeological community of the Bronze Age, the area of which in the 3rd – 2nd millennium BC included the Caucasus (with Transcaucasia), the Northern Black Sea region, the Balkans and also Central Asia. The first phase of the functioning of this community (mainly the 3rd millennium BC, until the beginning of its last third) is characterized by the complete similarity of the technology for casting axes in double-leaf casting molds of an open type. In the second phase (from the last third of the 3rd to the first third of the 2nd millennium BC), the widespread use of copper alloys with arsenic begins, which in essence was a giant step forward in technical progress, especially in the Caucasus, in Anatolia, in Aegean basin. All these processes of intercultural exchange continued in subsequent times with varying degrees of intensity.

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## **1. Introduction**

Cross-cultural ties, the issues of interethnic contacts and mixing in antiquity laid the foundation for the formation of common components of culture in the vast expanses of Eurasia. It also contributed to the spread of cultural achievements from East Asia to Western Europe. It was in antiquity that large ethnocultural communities were formed, which later became the basis for the formation of large ethnic units, which received their further development in the Middle Ages. The shifts in the development of culture and economy, the transmission of cultural impulses over long distances due to the ethnic movements of tribes and peoples in antiquity gave impetus to the further social and cultural evolution of many tribes and peoples in the vast expanses of Eurasia. It also allowed new innovations to appear in various areas of human life.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The problem is the identification of the North Caucasian ethnic component in the nomadic cultures of the Eurasian steppes in the era of antiquity.

## **3. Research Questions**

The authors study the facts of archeology, linguistics and ethnology confirming the presence of the North Caucasian ethnic component in the steppe zone of South-Eastern Europe in antiquity.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research purpose is to study the interethnic contacts of the population of the Caucasus and the steppe zone of South-Eastern Europe in the era of antiquity as well as to identify the specific manifestations of cross-cultural ties.

## **5. Research Methods**

As research methods the authors used the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency, analysis of historical sources. The work is based on the problem-chronological principle.

## **6. Findings**

The North Caucasian ethnic component (North Caucasian tribes) was widely represented in the archaeological cultures of antiquity. The linguistic component inherent in the North Caucasian tribes and peoples is present not only in Iranian (Indo-European) languages, which indicates closer and longer contacts between the bearers of the cultural traditions of the Caucasus and the nomads. These connections are also confirmed by the data of linguistics. Moreover, the influence was not one-sided: nomads influenced the population of the North Caucasus, in turn, the North Caucasian ethnic component was quite widely represented in the zone of domination of nomads – the steppe zone of South-Eastern Europe.

Written sources of antiquity and archeological data testify in favor of wider ties between the North Caucasian tribes and the Iranian-speaking nomadic tribes of Eastern Europe. If so far these ties have been interpreted as a unidirectional vector of the dominant influence of steppe nomads on the aboriginal sedentary population of the North Caucasian foothills and mountain gorges, then a comprehensive consideration of the issue at the junction of data from narrative and archaeological sources indicates a counter movement of the North Caucasian tribes deep into the steppe regions of the North Caucasus and Eastern Europe. A detailed study of archaeological and written sources allows reconstructing a picture of their ethnic movements and wider settlement in these regions. Speaking about the centuries-old isolation of the North Caucasian tribes in mountain gorges, many researchers simply ignore the demographic factor, as well as the presence of distant pastoral (yailage) cattle breeding developed since ancient times among the indigenous population of the North Caucasus.

The limited pastures in the mountainous and foothill zone, where already from the 3rd millennium BC arable farming was spreading, followed by a sharp increase in population on the one hand, and favorable natural and climatic conditions of the Ciscaucasian steppes, on the other, naturally contributed to the emergence of an extensive form of cattle breeding. As pastures were depleted and the number of livestock increased a certain part of the pastoral population was forced to look for new places for grazing herds of livestock, migrate to the steppe regions, gradually taking on components of a semi-nomadic, and then a nomadic economy.

This probably explains the significant influence of the North Caucasus (metal, ceramics) on the material culture of Eastern Europe (from the Lower Volga to the Dnieper) in the 3rd–2nd millennium BC, which is confirmed in numerous studies by archaeologists Leskov, Kotovich, Erdniev, Terenozhkin, Pogrebova, Raevsky and others.

In the academic publication “History of the peoples of the North Caucasus” about the catacomb culture of the 2nd millennium BC it was reported that it was spread over a vast territory from the Volga region to the Dnieper region, and the tribes themselves – the carriers of this culture, “being closely connected with the Caucasus ... spread in the steppes the achievements of culture that were accumulated by the Caucasian tribes” (Lyubin et al., 1988, p. 125). The catacomb burial rite itself, which is one of the main defining features of this steppe culture, is also associated with the North-East Caucasus (Gadzhiev et al., 1996; Kiselev, 1965). In terms of their physical appearance, the people of the Catacomb culture were neither the descendants of their predecessors in the steppes of South-Eastern Europe – the bearers of the Yamnaya culture, nor the ancestors of the Srubna culture tribes that replaced them. “They were closest to the tribes of the North Caucasus”, as the authors of the collective monograph stated (Lyubin et al., 1988, p. 128).

The issue of the place and time of contacts between speakers of the Indo-Iranian and Pranch languages is also important. One of such contact zones could be Asia Minor, where the Hurrians, related to the Nakhs lived. A number of researchers (Gamkrelidze, Ivanov and their supporters) consider it as the ancestral home of the Indo-Europeans. However, in the light of the latest archaeological research of the Lolin culture and the Kuban cultural group related to it, which are a part of an extensive post-Catacomb block that was formed in the final Middle Bronze Age in the steppe and partly forest-steppe zones of Eastern Europe (Mimokhod, 2005; Mimokhod, 2006; Mimokhod, 2007), we suppose that the most

probable zone of such contact is the vast expanses from the Northern Black Sea region to the Southern Urals.

The formation of the Lolín culture (the 22nd – 28th centuries BC) is associated with the migration of mountain tribal groups of the North-Eastern Caucasus to the Ciscaucasian steppe at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. “We are talking about a rather serious migration,” writes Mimokhod (2007), “which changed not only the material culture and the funeral rite, but also led to a significant transformation of the craniocomplex” (Mimokhod, 2007). The migration impulse from the mountainous and foothill regions of the North-Eastern Caucasus catalyzed the process of cultural genesis in the Volga-Ural region:

The post-Catacomb groups of the North-Western Caspian region had a significant impact on the cultural genesis of the early Late Bronze Age and the genesis of chariot cultural formations. The participation of the Lolín culture and its derivative of the Volga-Ural group can be traced most clearly in the ritual and inventory complex of the Sintashta culture (Mimokhod, 2013, p. 18).

Due to this we can take a fresh look at old problems. At one time, Genko (1930) wrote that some lexical convergences from the Nakh languages with Indo-European languages cannot be explained only by borrowings from Ossetian (p. 705). Numerous Indo-European-Nakh lexical parallels identified by Vagapov (1992; 1996; 1998; 2011 and others), did not find a satisfactory explanation in terms of the chronotope. The conclusions made by Mimokhod on the basis of archaeological research make it possible to significantly expand the range of the Caucasian (and Nakh, in particular) ethno-cultural world far beyond the geographical concept of the Caucasus itself. If, until recently, all Indo-European-Nakh lexical convergences were interpreted unambiguously as borrowings from Indo-European (or more broadly, Nostratic) into Nakh, now it becomes obvious that everything is much more complicated and the problems are much deeper than was commonly thought so far.

This refers to the issues of ethnogenesis, cultural genesis and areal linguistics. The assumption expressed by Dyakonov (2007) in one of his latest works finds more and more confirmations: “North Caucasian languages, together with related Hurrian and Urartian, apparently belong to an ancient language superfamily, spread from Eastern Europe to the Caucasus and Central Asia 6–8 thousand years ago” (p. 87).

A hypothesis about the genetic links of the North Caucasian languages with the Sino-Tibetan, Yenisei (Ket) and Afroasian (Semitic, Berber, Cushitic) languages was put forward. The ancestral home of the Sino-Afro-Caucasian community is presumably placed in Western Asia, and its collapse is attributed to the 9th-8th millennium BC. According to glottochronology (a certain relativity of this chronology should be recognized), the Proto-North Caucasian language existed until the 6th millennium BC, collapsing approximately in the middle of the 4th – beginning of the 5th millennium BC into Proto-Abkhaz-Adyghe and Pra-Nakh-Dagestan (it is necessary to note that not all problems regarding the genetic relationship of the Nakh-Dagestan and Abkhaz-Adyghe groups have found their final solution).

Some archaeologists note the presence of the North Caucasian ethnic component in the steppe zone of Eastern Europe and in the 1st millennium BC. Blavatsky (1952) in her special work notes: “The currently available archaeological material testifies to the existing ties between the Thracians and the

carriers of the Koban culture who lived in the Caucasus at the end of the 2nd – beginning of the 1st millennium BC.” (p. 407). The archeologist Kozenkova, a well-known researcher of the Koban culture, also writes about the extensive ties of the Carpatho-Danubian world with the North Caucasus. She supposes that, there is so much in common between the cultures of two indicated regions that it “can hardly be satisfactorily explained only by regular exchange contacts. We can probably talk about some kind of ethnic inclusions” (Kozenkova, 1980, p. 34).

In Mountainous Chechnya, from ancient times, for a season or several years, neighboring or related pastoral associations “matt” were created, consisting of two or three or more families. Meanwhile, the component “-mat” is widely represented in the ethnonymy of the nomadic population of the steppes of the North Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe of the Sarmatian-Alanian era – Sirmats, Yazamats, Yaksamats, etc. In the Urartian language related to the Nakh-Dagestan languages, the word *matu* is in the meaning “country” (Melikishvili, 1960). In the Chechen language, the word “matt”/“mott” also has several other meanings – “place”, “language” (and in ancient times it also meant “tribe”).

It is also interesting that the representatives of the Keloy and Satta types, according to their genealogical legends, consider their ancestors two brothers – Kelamat and Sattamat, whose father was the no less legendary Tushshep (compare Khurr, Teshshub and Urart, Teisheba). The Dzheyrakhs call their first ancestor Dzharakhmat. These names also contain the component -mat. The “Armenian Geography” (the 7th century) mentions the Nakhchamatyan tribe (“Nakhchi” is the self-name of the Chechens, -yan is the suffix of the Armenian language) (Khorenatsi, 1877, p. 99). Meanwhile, in the “History” of Herodotus (the 5th century BC), on the territory of modern Azerbaijan, where in ancient times the tribes belonging to the circle of the Nakh-Dagestan languages lived, along with the Caspians, certain pantimates were noted (Herod. III, 92). The early medieval Armenian chroniclers (Faustus the Byzantine and others, the 5th century AD) also placed tavmats and khechmats here (Byzantine, 1953, p. 78).

Such recognized academician as Javakhishvili (1939), in his analysis of ethnonyms with the component -mat, based on his Nakh etymology, believed that the name of the tribes themselves should be their first part, for example, sir-, yaza-, yaksa – etc. In the toponymy of Chechnya, the -mat component is also not uncommon (Vagapov, 1990).

The recognized authority in the field of Iranian linguistics prof. Abaev (1949) admits that:

A significant part of the “barbarian” names and names from the Northern Black Sea region of the Scythian-Sarmatian era cannot be explained by means of Iranian languages. Tracing the changes in the composition of “barbaric” words and names to the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD it can be stated that the Iranian component increased gradually, reaching a maximum by the first centuries of our era. It is no coincidence that in the works of earliest author, Herodotus, we find the largest percentage of terms and words that do not have a satisfactory Iranian explanation. (p. 189)

For Javakhishvili, the confirmation of the Caucasian origin of the Savromats//Sarmatians was the fact that out of 425 non-Greek names of the Black Sea region, only 167 could be explained by Iranian languages, and a completely satisfactory etymology of the remaining 258 can be given by means of the North Caucasian languages.

## 7. Conclusion

The North Caucasian ethnic component was undoubtedly one of the most significant components of various nomadic tribal associations that arose in the plains of Ciscaucasia, such as the Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, and so on. It is no coincidence that researchers, noting the great originality of the monuments of material culture of these nomadic tribal associations in the North Caucasus, state their striking difference from the corresponding standards in the starting point of migration – the Southern Urals and the Northern Caspian.

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