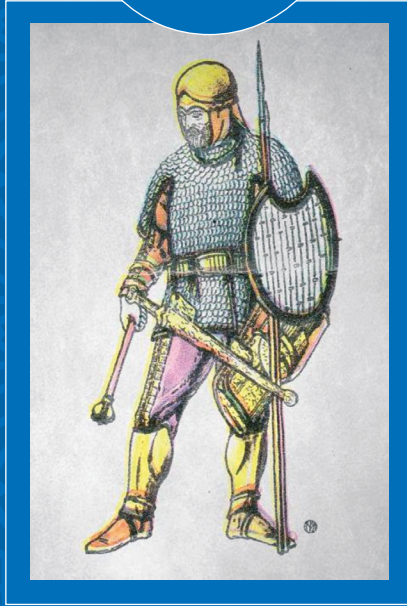


IRAN AND THE CAUCASUS MONOGRAPHS



Scytho-Alano- Ossetica

*From Scythian Saddle
to Ossetic Word*

Edited by

Garnik S. Asatrian, David Buyaner
and Alexey Chibirov

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Preface

Among the peoples inhabiting the Caucasus multiethnic and multicultural region, the Ossetians occupy a unique position. They are the only surviving direct descendants of the Scytho-Sarmatian and Alanic nomadic societies that once stretched across the Eurasian steppe from the Black Sea to the Altai. The Ossetians' language, belief systems, folklore, and social customs retain distinctive features of their ancient heritage, making them a focal point for researchers interested in Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, and Caucasian studies, comparative mythology, ethnography, and historical linguistics.

The present volume brings together a carefully curated collection of scholarly essays that together provide a multidimensional portrait of the Ossetian cultural continuity from antiquity to the present. It manifests original research by leading experts in the fields of Ossetology, Caucasian history, Indo-European mythology, and ethnographic theory. Each contribution offers a rigorous examination of particular elements – linguistic, mythological, archaeological, ritualistic, or historical – that help to articulate the complex interplay between antiquity and modernity in the Ossetian society.

The articles included in this volume, appeared in Russian from the late 19th century to the present day, essentially represent landmark publications on the Scytho-Alano-Ossetian problematics. The volume, in essence, reflects the development of this field of Iranian Studies over nearly a century and a half.

Professor **Paolo Ognibene**, a recognized expert in the field, opens the volume with a detailed and highly informative *Introduction*.

Features of Antiquity in Folk Legends and Everyday Life of the Ossetians by one of the pioneers of the field **Vsevolod Miller**, is a seminal study, which identifies specific ancient elements that have persisted within Ossetian oral traditions and daily practices. Drawing on his extensive fieldwork and philological expertise, Miller demonstrates that many folk motifs, rituals, and proverbial expressions found in Ossetian culture bear unmistakable marks of ancient Indo-Iranian belief systems. He illuminates how seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life – burial customs, hospitality rituals, or agricultural practices – encode a symbolic continuity that stretches back to the Scythian and Alanic periods. His work, in fact, frames the central theme of this volume: the dynamic survival of antiquity in the cultural landscape of a modern people.

Building upon this thematic foundation, **Vasily Abaev's** *Scythians and Ossetians* explores the historical, linguistic, and ethnogenetic connections between the Ossetians and their Scytho-Sarmatian ancestors. Abaev, a towering figure in the Iranian comparative linguistics, draws upon historical sources,

etymological parallels, and mythic structures to argue for the essential continuity of identity between the Scythians described in ancient Greek and Persian texts and the Ossetians of the modern Caucasus. His rigorous linguistic analysis demonstrates that the Ossetian language preserves archaic features of the Eastern Iranian branch of the Indo-European family, serving as a living fossil for reconstructing the language and worldview of the ancient nomadic cultures of the steppe. This chapter is essential reading for anyone interested in how languages function not just as tools of communication but as repositories of civilizational memory.

While Miller and Abaev ground the Ossetian cultural experience in long historical arcs, **Yuri Gagloity**, in his *Tri-Functional Division in Ossetian Ethnic Culture*, applies the theoretical framework developed by Georges Dumézil to illuminate the mytho-social structures of Ossetian society. Gagloity explores how Ossetian narratives, social roles, and religious functions align with the Indo-European tripartite ideology – namely, the division between priestly, warrior, and productive classes. His analysis extends to the Ossetian Nart epic, traditional law codes, and ritual structures, revealing a cultural logic that resonates strongly with Indo-European patterns found in different ancient cultures. This chapter offers both a theoretical model and a practical case study of how ideological systems persist in folk memory and social organization.

Turning from broad structural patterns to focused linguistic analysis, **Yuri Dzitstsojty's** *To the Etymology of the South Ossetian Toponym K'wydar* delves into the onomastic landscape of Ossetia. Place-names, Dzitstsojty argues, are more than geographical labels – they are, in fact, linguistic monuments. Through meticulous etymological analysis, he uncovers ancient roots and semantic shifts that reflect patterns of settlement, conquest, and cultural exchange. His study not only clarifies the origins of a specific toponym but also highlights how geographic names can encode layers of historical consciousness and mythic resonance, thereby connecting local memory to broader historical processes.

Konstantin Kochiev, in his chapter *Ossetian Issue in the Commentaries on Herodotus' Report about Exampaeus and the Cauldron of Ariant*, returns us to the classical world, interrogating Herodotus' accounts of the Scythians from the perspective of Ossetian cultural history. By re-evaluating classical ethnographic descriptions in light of Ossetian mythology, Kochiev identifies intriguing continuities between Herodotean narratives and Ossetian symbolic practices. His analysis of the “cauldron of Ariant” and the Scythian rituals surrounding it opens new avenues for interpreting these ancient texts, suggesting that elements of Herodotus' Scythians may well survive in Ossetian ritual symbolism and oral tradition.

Alan Twallagov's essay *Christianity and the Alans of the North Caucasus* examines the religious transformations during the Christianization of the Alans, the mediaeval ancestors of the Ossetians. Drawing from archaeological evidence, textual sources, and hagiographical material, Twallagov details the complex and often syncretic nature of Alanic Christianity. Rather than replacing older belief systems outright, Christianity in the North Caucasus often absorbed and reinterpreted pre-Christian motifs, saints merging with ancestral spirits, and sacred sites continuing to function across religious transformations. This chapter provides essential context for understanding the spiritual landscape of modern Ossetia, where elements of Christian doctrine and ancient pagan practices coexist in a unique religious synthesis.

In *The Scythian World and the Nart Epic*, **Ludwig Chibirov** presents one of the most compelling arguments for the continuity of Scytho-Alanic myth in the Nart sagas, the national epic of the Ossetian people. Chibirov draws structural and thematic parallels between the heroic figures of the Narts and mythological characters found in Indo-Iranian, Greek, and Eurasian steppe traditions. He analyzes the narrative logic, moral values, and cosmological underpinnings of the Nart stories, demonstrating how they preserve and reshape the heroic ideal of the ancient nomads. The Narts are not simply folk heroes – they are mythological archetypes that encapsulate the ethical, social, and metaphysical worldview of an ancient people.

The symbolic and ritualistic depth of Ossetian folklore is further explored in **Zalina Kusaeva's** contribution, *Semiotics of the Mirror in Folklore and Ethnographic Traditions of the Ossetians*. Kusaeva examines the multifaceted symbolism of mirrors in Ossetian ritual, myth, and gender dynamics. In traditional belief systems, mirrors are not mere reflective surfaces – they are liminal objects, gateways between the visible and the invisible, the human and the divine. Drawing on semiotic theory, Kusaeva shows how the mirror functions within a larger symbolic economy, mediating themes of identity, transformation, and otherness.

Alexey Chibirov's essay *Sacral Archaics of Ossetian Kuvd in the Context of the System of Ancient Techniques of Religious Ecstasy* focuses on the ritual practices and trance states associated with religious specialists in traditional Ossetian culture. The figure of the *kuvd*, a type of seer or ecstatic mediator, is situated within a comparative framework that includes Siberian shamanism, Zoroastrian magi, and Indo-European ecstatic traditions. Chibirov explores the techniques used to induce altered states – fasting, chanting, isolation – as well as the symbolic language used to interpret visions. His work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand how ritual ecstasy functions as both a spiritual and sociopolitical phenomenon.

In *Wastyrgy's Three-Legged Horse in Religious and Mythological Beliefs of the Ossetians*, **Anzor Darchiev** investigates the unique iconography and symbolic logic behind one of the most enigmatic figures in Ossetian religion – Wastyrgy's three-legged horse. Wastyrgy, often compared to Saint George, is a liminal deity associated with justice, oath-keeping, and the male sphere. His mount, a three-legged horse, defies naturalistic interpretation and invites symbolic analysis. Darchiev argues that this zoomorphic symbol manifests principles of imbalance, speed, and divine agency, resonating with widespread mythological motifs across Eurasia.

The volume concludes with **Boris Mysykkaty's** *Noose in the Ethno-Cultural Tradition of the Alans-Ossetians*, a penetrating exploration of the motif of the noose as a juridical, punitive, and sacral object. Drawing from historical accounts, ethnographic fieldwork, and comparative mythology, Mysykkaty examines how the noose figures in rituals of punishment, sacrifice, and spiritual binding. In doing so, he offers insights into the darker aspects of the Ossetian symbolic imagination, where death, justice, and sacredness are deeply entangled.

Taken as a whole, this volume provides a compelling illustration of the resilience of ancient cultural structures in the face of historical change. The Ossetians – heirs to the Scytho-Sarmatians and Alans – have carried forward traditions that not only recall the past but continue to shape their present. Through language, myth, ritual, and memory, they offer us a window into a world where antiquity is not a distant echo, but a living presence.

This volume will not only be of value to specialists in Ossetian Studies, but also to scholars of Indo-European religions, comparative mythology, historical linguistics. I hope, it will inspire further exploration into the depth of the Scytho-Alano-Ossetica.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. David Buyaner for his excellent work in editing this collection and his meticulous approach to the text. I am also grateful to my friend Alexey Chibirov for compiling the materials for this volume. Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge the active participation of Matthias Weinreich in the realization of this project.

Garnik S. Asatrian

July 2025, Yerevan-Karbi (Ashtarak)

Abbreviations

BDC	Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.
BSOS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies (bis 1940). London.
ESIJ	Rastorgueva, V. S., Ėdel'man, Dzh. I., <i>Ėtimologičeskij slovar' iranskikh jazykov</i> . Vols. 1–6ff. Moscow, 2000–.
IAA	Istoriko-arkheologičeskij al'manakh. Moscow.
ICINII	Izvestija Čečeno-Ingušskogo Naučno-issledovatel'skogo Instituta istorii, jazyka i literatury. Groznyj.
IFA	Istoriko-filologičeskij arkhiv. Vladikavkaz.
IIAK	Izvēstija imperatorskoj arkheologičeskoj komissii. St. Petersburg.
IIJ	Indo-Iranian Journal.
IJONII	Izvestija Jugo-Osetinskogo Naučno-issledovatel'skogo Instituta Akademii Nauk Gruzinskoj SSR / Izvestija Jugo-Osetinskogo Naučno-issledovatel'skogo Instituta im. Z. N. Vaneeva. Tskhinval.
IONIİK	Izvestija Osetinskogo naučno-issledovatel'skogo instituta kraevedenija. Ordžhonikidze.
ISOIGSI	Izvestija Severo-Osetinskogo Instituta gumanitarnykh i sotsial'nykh issledovanij. Vladikavkaz.
ISOIGSI/ShMU	Izvestija Severo-Osetinskogo Instituta gumanitarnykh i sotsial'nykh issledovanij. Škola molodykh učenyykh. Vladikavkaz.
ISONII	Izvestija Severo-Osetinskogo naučno-issledovatel'skogo instituta. Džadzhyqau / Ordžhonikidze / Vladikavkaz.
LO	Literaturnaja Osetia. Ordžhonikidze / Vladikavkaz.
Mannus	Mannus. Zeitschrift für Vorgeschichte. Leipzig.
Memnon	Memnon. Zeitschrift für die Kunst- und Kultur-Geschichte des alten Orients. Leipzig.
MAGW	Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien. Vienna.
MD	Makh dug. Vladikavkaz.
MSKI	Masalebi Sakartvelosa da Kavkasiis istoriisatvis. Tbilisi.
NAA	Narody Azii i Afriki. Moscow.
Nartamongæ	Nartamongæ, The journal of Alano-Ossetic Studies. Paris-Vladikavkaz.
OIJ	Osnovy iranskogo jazykoznanija. 7 vols. Moscow.
PAV	Peterburgskij arkheologičeskij vestnik. St. Petersburg.
PIIE	Polevyje issledovanija Instituta ètnografii. Moscow.
PNT0	Pamjatniki narodnogo tvorčestva osetin. Vladikavkaz.
PPK00-1	Chibirov, L. A. (ed.), <i>Periodičeskaja pečat' Kavkaza ob Osetii i osetinakh</i> . 7 vols. Tskhinval, 1981–2014.

- PPKOO-2 Chibirov, L. A. (ed.), *Periodičeskaja pečat' Kavkaza ob Osetii i osetinakh*. 3 vols. Vladikavkaz, 2014–2017 (2nd ed.).
- RA Rossijskaja arkheologija. Moscow.
- R.E. Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft. 1st series A–Q: 49 (half)vols. 2nd series R–Z: 19 (half)vols. Supplements: 15 vols. Register: 3 vols. Out of series: 2 vols. Stuttgart, 1893–1980.
- RHR Revue de l'histoire des religions. Paris.
- RusAr. Russkij arkhiv. Moscow.
- SE Sovetskaja étnografija. Moscow.
- SMOMPK Sbornik materialov dlja opisanija městnostej i plemen Kavkaza. Tiflis.
- SPNO Sovremennye problemy nauki i obrazovanija
- SSK Sbornik svědenij o Kavkazě. Tiflis.
- SSKG Sbornik svědenij o kavkazskikh gortsakh. Tiflis.
- UZTGU Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Tartu.
- VDI Vestnik drevnej istorii. Moscow.
- VJ Voprosy jazykoznanija. Moscow.
- VOJ Voprosy osetinskogo jazykoznanija. Ordzhonikidze / Vladikavkaz.
- VSOGU Vestnik Severo-Osetinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. K. Khetagurova. Vladikavkaz.
- VVGPU Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogičeskogo universiteta. Volgograd.
- VVNTS Vestnik Vladikavkazskogo nauchnogo tsentra. Vladikavkaz.
- WPZ Wiener prähistorische Zeitschrift. Vienna.
- XIF *Xussar Irystony folklor*. Staliniri, 1940.
- ZKV Zapiski kollegii vostokovedov pri Aziatskom muzee Akademii Nauk SSSR. Leningrad.
- ZhMNP Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosvěschenija. St. Petersburg.

Introduction: the Northern Iranian Element – on the Iranian Linguistic, Religious, and Cultural Continuity North of the Caucasus and the Black Sea

Paolo Ognibene

The geographical distribution of currently spoken Iranian languages on the map shows a fairly compact block extending from Eastern Anatolia to the Pamir and further north into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, while to the east it traverses Iran and continues into Afghanistan, after which it gradually gives way to Dardic and Indian languages. If we overlook the small enclaves of Tāti south of the Caucasus ridge and that of Kumzāri (کومزاری) in the Arabian Peninsula, the only puzzling element is the presence of an Iranian-speaking region in the Central Caucasus both to the north and south of the ridge. This territory, inhabited by the Ossetians who speak two distinct languages (Iron and Digoron) (see Abaev 1949; Isaev 1966; Thordarson 2009), is entirely surrounded by populations speaking non-Iranian Caucasian, Turkic, or Indo-European (Slavic) languages. Understanding why this Iranian “island” exists in the midst of the Caucasus – which effectively represents the only trace of Iranian presence in present-day Europe – is possible only if we go back in time at least a couple of millennia.

In the first millennium BC, the ethnic situation in the region north of the Black Sea and north of the Caucasus ridge was profoundly different from the present. The Caucasus effectively marked a watershed between territories predominantly inhabited by nomadic populations and territories predominantly inhabited by sedentary populations.¹ There were no Slavic populations yet along the northern coast of the Black Sea, nor Turks along the southern coast. Perhaps the eastern coast shows greater continuity, although the arrangement of populations was not entirely as it is today.

1 As much as the Caucasus may indeed appear as a barrier, especially when approached from the north (as described by Olenin in Tolstoy's *The Cossacks*), passages from north to south have been numerous since antiquity. The simplest routes followed the coast of the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea (up to the famous Iron Gates): thus, according to Herodotus' account (Hdt. IV, 12), Scythians and Cimmerians passed from north to south. There were also passes like Dar'jal' through which one could cross from one side to the other. The most famous crossing through the Caucasus was that of the Mongol troops commanded by Ĵebe and Subedei in 1222 (regardless of whether they passed through Derbent or Dar'jal') (see Ognibene 2017; Ognibene/Sayaf 2011).

Nomads neither wrote nor built cities: it is evident that studying these populations requires methods very different from studying the ancient Near East. We do not have inscriptions or tablets to decipher, nor cities to excavate: archaeology can help us in the investigation of tombs, the kurgans, which are abundantly scattered throughout the territory. But the kurgans can mostly provide us with insights into the afterlife beliefs of these populations and, with their contents of objects, give us an idea of the material culture and artistic capabilities. Therefore, we must rely on sources from other populations that already used writing in the first millennium. Dealing with external sources requires proceeding with great caution: not necessarily because the external source is biased – indeed, the internal source can also be – but it can, and most often does, misinterpret the data due to a shallow understanding of the population it describes.

The best candidates to provide us with information about the regions we're discussing are the Greeks. Information about nomadic peoples can also be found in other sources (Ognibene 2014: 581, fn. 1), but none delve into these populations in as much detail as the Greeks do. There are several reasons for this. Greeks have always had a penchant for travel and predominantly moved by sea. They ventured westward, reaching Southern Italy, and also eastward, soon reaching Anatolia. They relatively quickly penetrated the Black Sea and were particularly drawn to its eastern coast: Aeschylus imprisons Prometheus in the Caucasus,² and Jason with the Argonauts sets out for Colchis.³ Herodotus “saves” the myth of the Amazons by having them shipwrecked in the Maeotian Swamp⁴ at a time when it was clear to the Greeks that in Anatolia, where Homer had placed them, they were not to be found.⁵

The Greeks began to found colonies, true commercial bases, along the shores of the Black Sea, including the northern coast.⁶ It is there that the Greek

2 Aeschylus = A. Ed. A. Sidgwick, Oxford (OCT).

3 Apollonius Rhodius = A. R. Ed. R. C. Seaton, Oxford (OCT).

4 Herodotus = Hdt. Ed. C. Hude, Oxford (OCT). Hdt. IV, 110: «... τότε λόγος τούς Ἑλληνας νικήσαντας τῇ ἐπὶ Θερμιάδωντι μάχῃ ἀποπλέειν ἄγοντας τρισὶ πλοίοισι τῶν Ἀμαζόνων ὄσας ἐδυναέτο ζωγρηῆσαι, τὰς δὲ ἐν τῷ πελάγει ἐπιθεμένους ἐκκόψαι τοὺς ἄνδρας. πλοῖα δὲ οὐ γινώσκειν αὐτὰς οὐδὲ πηδαλίοισι χρᾶσθαι οὐδὲ ἰστίοισι οὐδὲ εἰρεσίῃ· ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐξέκοψαν τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐφέροντο κατὰ κύμα καὶ ἄνεμον, καὶ ἀπικνέονται τῆς λίμνης τῆς Μαϊήτιδος ἐπὶ Κρημνοῦς· οἱ δὲ Κρημνοὶ εἰσὶ γῆς τῆς Σκυθῶν τῶν ἐλευθέρων».

5 *Il.* III, 184–90: «ἦδη καὶ Φρυγίην εἰσήλυθον ἀμπελόεσσαν, | ἔνθα ἴδον πλείστους Φρύγας ἀνέρας αἰολοπῶλους, | λαοὺς Ὀτρῆος καὶ Μυγδόνος ἀντιθέοιο, | οἳ ῥα τότε ἔστρατόωντο παρ' ὄχθας Σαγαγαρίοιο· | καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐπίκουρος ἐὼν μετὰ τοῖσιν ἐλέχην | ἤματι τῷ ὅτε τ' ἦλθον Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι· | ἀλλ' οὐδ' οἳ τόσοι ἦσαν ὅσοι ἐλίκωπες Ἀχαιοί».

6 Very often, Greek colonies arose in places where trading emporia already existed, see Yurgevič 1872: 7 f.: «... тем более, что Греки селились здесь иногда в городах существовавших, как

world comes into contact for the first time with the surrounding nomadic populations. The Greeks called these nomads Σκύθαι, a term that has the same value as the Old Persian *saka-*.⁷ The Persians called all nomadic peoples living north of their empire *Sakā*, regardless of whether they were from the Pontus region or Central Asia. Over time, as they learned more about them, they began to distinguish them by associating other determinatives with the term *saka-*: thus, we have the *sakā tigraxaudā*, the *sakā haumavargā*, the *sakā tyaiy paradraya* ...⁸ The Greeks did the same: they began to distinguish between real Scythians, nomadic Scythians, Greek Scythians, farming Scythians, and ploughman Scythians,⁹ etc.

In the times of Herodotus, the knowledge of these territories, regardless of whether Herodotus actually travelled to Scythia or not,¹⁰ was already greater, and the Greek historian, through his fourth book of *The Histories*, aims to systematize Greek knowledge about the region by describing the customs and traditions of the Scythians and distinguishing what is Scythian from what is not. This represents a significant step forward. Herodotus provides us with the first detailed description of a nomadic people from antiquity. What we glimpse through his work is the clear conservatism of the nomadic world,¹¹ which is also evident in subsequent works. These works may not necessarily have copied from the historian of Halicarnassus, but they described societies that differed very little from the Scythian one.

Unfortunately, the ancient world did not pay particular attention to languages. Herodotus clearly tells us which peoples in the region spoke languages

это видно из древнейших их названий, гораздо раньше появления греческих эмпорий и таким образом находили в них жителей, которых число далеко превосходило число пришельцев».

7 *saka-*: “Adj. bezeichnet ein Volk Sake, Scythe” (Bartholomae 1904: 1554 f.); *Saka-*: “adj. Scythian [...] Elam. *šá-ak-qa*, Akk. *gi-mi(r)-ri*, Gk. Σκύθης” (Kent 1953: 209 f.).

8 *Sakā tigraxaudā*: DNa, 26, DSe, 25, XPh, 26–27; *Sakā haumavargā*: DNa, 25, DSe, 24–25; XPh, 26; *Sakā tyaiy paradraya*: DNa, 28–29.

9 Hdt, IV, 59: «οἱ δὲ καλεόμενοι βασιλῆιοι Σκύθαι»; Hdt, IV, 19: «τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἡῶ τῶν γεωργῶν τούτων Σκυθέων, διαβάντι τὸν Παντικᾶπην ποταμόν, νομάδες ἤδη Σκύθαι νέμονται»; Hdt, IV, 17: «ἀπὸ τούτου πρῶτοι Καλλιππίδαι νέμονται ἐόντες Ἑλληνέες Σκύθαι.... ὕπερ δὲ Ἀλαζόνων οἰκέουσι Σκύθαι ἀροτήρες».

10 Already F. G. Miščenko addressed this issue in his respective publication (Miščenko 1886: 349 ff.; Italian translation, see Miščenko 2019: 93 ff.).

11 For the Scythians, the Greek world did not necessarily represent a model; see Hdt. IV, 76: «ξεινικοῖσι δὲ νομαίοισι καὶ οὗτοι φεύγουσι αἰνῶς χρᾶσθαι, μῆτε τεῶν ἄλλων, Ἑλληνικοῖσι δὲ καὶ ἥριστα». However, the cases of Anacharsis and Scyles demonstrate that even some Scythians were not indifferent to the Greek way of life (including religious aspects).

different from Scythian,¹² and he also includes some Scythian words,¹³ but there is a lack of reflection on the Scythian language in general and its proximity to ancient Persian and Greek. This is not surprising because a reflection on the closeness of languages only emerged in the second half of the 18th century and intensified in the 19th century with the emergence of historical linguistics. However, the Greek world inadvertently offers us valuable information about the language of the nomads in the region through the inscriptions of Greek cities on the northern coast of the Euxine Pontus (Latyšev 1885–1901; Zgusta 1955). These inscriptions were crucial in shaping what was termed in the 19th century as the “Scythian issue”.¹⁴

The Scythian issue presented itself under a dual aspect: on one hand, there was debate over whether the Scythians and the subsequent nomadic populations (Sarmatians and Alans) were Iranian or Mongolic peoples; on the other hand, whether there existed a Scythian, Sarmatian, Alanian people, or if these were merely labels beneath which hid different ethnic populations but with a similar lifestyle. Many arguments of those supporting the Mongolic hypothesis nowadays appear inappropriate;¹⁵ the predominance of the Iranian element is no longer contested. However, one must not fall into the tendency to overly simplify the ethnic landscape of the region: inscriptions from the Pontic region demonstrate an undeniable inclination towards Iranian identity, but at the same time, they reveal a wide linguistic variety (Ognibene 2019b: 587 f.; idem 2023a). 25% of the barbarian names found in the inscriptions cannot be interpreted as Iranian; as of today, we simply do not know their origin. Despite the legends reported by Herodotus about the origin of the Scythians and their arrival on “deserted” land,¹⁶ we know well that things were not at all like that and that those regions were certainly not uninhabited before the Scythians. The characteristics of the Greek cities of the Pontus, ports, and trading centres

12 Regarding the Androphagi, Geloni, Budini, and Amazons, see Herodotus IV, 106, 108–109, III.

13 Hdt, IV, 110: «τὰς δὲ Ἀμαζόνιας καλέουσι Σκύθαι Οἰόρπατα, δύναται δὲ τὸ οὐνομα τοῦτο κατὰ Ἑλλάδα γλώσσαν ἀνδροκτόνοι· οἰὸρ γὰρ καλέουσι ἄνδρα, τὸ δὲ πατὰ κτείνειν»; Hdt, IV, 27: «... ἄριμα γὰρ ἔν καλέουσι Σκύθαι, σποῦ δὲ ὀφθαλμόν».

14 On the “Scythian issue”, refer to Ognibene 2019a: 7 ff.

15 The Scythians’ affiliation with Mongolic populations was partly supported based on their crudeness and ferocity. For a critique of these considerations, see: Miller 1887: 117 ff. (in particular, 118); for other hypothesis regarding the ethnic belonging of the Scythians, see: Vasmer 1971: 123 f.; Slavic hypothesis, see: Cuno 1871; Celtic hypothesis, see: Soltau 1877 (considered by Vasmer to be devoid of value = wertlos).

16 Hdt. IV, 5: «ἄνδρα γενέσθαι πρῶτον ἐν τῇ γῆ ταύτῃ εὐούση ἐρήμῳ τῷ οὐνομα εἶναι Ταργιτάον»; Hdt. IV, 11: «Σκύθας δὲ ἐπελθόντας λαβεῖν τὴν χώραν ἐρήμην».

that faced the sea where ships from various countries arrived, are not enough to explain the high percentage of non-Iranian names in the inscriptions.

The second aspect of the Scythian issue was even more delicate: by emphasizing the structure of the large nomadic formations, an attempt was made to demolish the very idea of Scythian, Sarmatian, Alanic: it would have been a set of peoples even ethnically distinct but united by the same lifestyle, by the same customs. Although in antiquity it is Ammianus Marcellinus who pushes in this direction when he talks about the Alans,¹⁷ it should not be forgotten that in most cases there was a common element: the waves of peoples that succeeded each other and incorporated previous ones until the beginning of our era were fundamentally Iranian. It will only be in the subsequent centuries that predominantly Iranian peoples will be replaced by newcomers predominantly speaking Turkic languages.

Nomads do not know the concept of ethnic cleansing: when the Sarmatians arrived, they did not exterminate the Scythians, and the arrival of the Alans did not mean the extermination of the Sarmatians. The previous populations were absorbed, following a practice that is most known to us through the formation of the Hunnic empire of Attila and then centuries later of the Mongolian one: what fundamentally changed was the military elite that held power.¹⁸

The panorama that can be outlined is therefore a succession of populations subjugating those pre-existing in the territory, and at least until the beginning of our era, they are predominantly Iranian. Within this Iranian element, it is worth examining whether there are elements of continuity that connect these peoples linguistically, religiously, and more generally culturally.

17 Ammianus Marcellinus = Amm. Marc. Ed. C. U. Clark, L. Traube, W. Heraeus, Berlin 1910–1915. Amm. Marc. XXXI, 2, 13: «paulatimque nationes conterminas crebritate victoriarum attritas ad gentilitatem sui vocabuli traxerunt», ma anche Amm. Marc. XXXI, 2, 17: «ad unum concessere vocabulum, et summatim omnes Halani cognominantur, ob mores et modum vivendi, eandemque armaturam».

18 Amm. Marc. XXXI, 3, 1: «Igitur Huni pervasis Halanorum regionibus ... interfectisque multis et spoliatis, reliquos sibi concordandi fide pacta iunxerunt, eisque adhibitis confidentius Ermenrichi late patentes et uberes pagos repentino impetus perruperunt». The dual name by which the Mongols are known in Russian and Western sources (Tatars-Mongols) arises precisely in this way. Genghis Khan, after defeating the Tatars, incorporated them into his army: during campaigns in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Tatars largely constituted the front lines of the Mongol army. In the *Povest' o bitve na reke Kalke*, which describes the first clash between Russians and Mongols, the Mongols are systematically referred to as *Tatary* (= Tatars): «Въ лѣто 6732 ... Том же лѣтъ, по грѣхомъ нашимъ, придоша язъци незнаеми, их же добръ никто же не вѣсть, кто суть и отколе изидоша, и что языкъ ихъ, и котораго племене суть, и что вѣра ихъ; а зовуть я Татары» (*Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов*, Москва-Ленинград, 1950: 61).

The distance between Iranian languages in the first millennium BC must have been minimal (see Panaino 2015): we recall that at the time of Cyril and Methodius, several centuries later, another group of Indo-European languages, the Slavic languages, showed such proximity that ancient Bulgarian could be used to evangelize several Slavic peoples. Scythian and Old Persian were unlikely to be too distant, and the misunderstandings between the Achaemenids and the Scythians during Darius's expedition were certainly not of a linguistic nature.¹⁹ Over time, the differences have undoubtedly accentuated; however, this doesn't negate the possibility of comparing Ossetian words with Scythian ones and finding remarkable points of contact. Each language, in a sense, has its own mechanism and rhythm of change: Northern Iranian seems to have changed quite slowly. In these terms, considering the rates at which Northern Iranian languages have changed, one cannot deny a form of linguistic continuity even through different stages of Iranian languages (ancient Iranian, middle Iranian, neo-Iranian). Certainly, the centuries-long contact of Ossetian with surrounding languages has profoundly influenced its lexicon: the pressure has been such that it has affected the phonology of this language, as well as its morphology and syntax. Abaev has often been accused of considering testimonies from the Scythian and Sarmatian periods on the same level, as if they were entirely contemporary.²⁰ Undoubtedly, this may have been a

19 The Persians are unable to comprehend the behavior of the Scythians: Hdt, IV, 126–127: «ὡς δὲ πολλὸν τοῦτο ἐγίνετο καὶ οὐκ ἐπαύετο, πέμψας Δαρείος ἱππέα παρὰ τὸν Σκυθῆων βασιλέα Ἰδάνθουρον ἔλεγε τάδε. “δαιμόνιε ἀνδρῶν, τί φεύγεις αἰεὶ, ἐξέόν τοι τῶνδε τὰ ἕτερα ποιεῖν; εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀξιόχρεος δοκέεις εἶναι σεωυτῷ τοῖσι ἐμοῖσι πρήγμασι ἀντιωθῆναι, σὺ δὲ τὰς τε καὶ παυσάμενος πλάνης μάχεσθαι· εἰ δὲ συγγινώσκειαι εἶναι ἥσσω, σὺ δὲ καὶ οὕτω παυσάμενος τοῦ δρόμου δεσπότη τῷ σῷ δῶρα φέρων γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ ἔλθε ἐς λόγους”. πρὸς ταῦτα ὁ Σκυθῆων βασιλεὺς Ἰδάνθουρος λέγει τάδε. “οὕτω τὸ ἐμὸν ἔχει, ὦ Πέρσα. ἐγὼ οὐδένα κω ἀνθρώπων δείσας ἔφυγον οὔτε πρότερον οὔτε νῦν σὲ φεύγω, οὐδέ τι νεώτερον εἰμι ποιήσας νῦν ἢ καὶ ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐώθεα ποιεῖν. ὅ τι δὲ οὐκ αὐτίκα μάχομαι τοι, ἐγὼ καὶ τοῦτο σημανέω. ἡμῖν οὔτε ἄστυα οὔτε γῆ πεφυτευμένη ἐστὶ, τῶν περὶ δείσαντες μὴ ἀλῶ, ἢ καρῆ ταχύτερον ἂν ὑμῖν συμμίσγοιμεν ἐς μάχην. εἰ δὲ δέοι πάντως ἐς τοῦτο κατὰ τάχος ἀπικνέεσθαι, τυγχάνουσι ἡμῖν ἐόντες τάφοι πατρῶιοι· φέρετε, τούτους ἀνευρόντες συγγέειν πειρᾶσθε αὐτούς, καὶ γνῶσεσθε τότε εἴτε ὑμῖν μαχησόμεθα περὶ τῶν τάφων εἴτε καὶ οὐ μαχησόμεθα. πρότερον δέ, ἦν μὴ ἡμέας λόγος αἰρέῃ, οὐ συμμίζομεν τοι. ἀμφὶ μὲν μάχῃ τοσαῦτα εἰρήσθω, δεσπότης δὲ ἐμοὺς ἐγὼ Δία τε νομίζω τὸν ἐμὸν πρόγονον καὶ Ἰστίην τὴν Σκυθῆων βασίλειαν μόνους εἶναι. σοὶ δὲ ἀντὶ μὲν δῶρων γῆς τε καὶ ὕδατος δῶρα πέμψω τοιαῦτα οἷα σοὶ πρέπει εἶλθῆναι, ἀντὶ δὲ τοῦ ὅτι δεσπότης ἐφθασας εἶναι ἐμός, κλαίειν λέγω.” τοῦτο ἐστὶ ἢ ἀπὸ Σκυθῆων ῥήσις». The Persians do not understand and misinterpret also the gifts of the Scythians: «οἱ Σκυθῆων βασιλεῖς μαθόντες τοῦτο ἔπειπον κήρυκα δῶρα Δαρείω φέροντα ὄρνιθά τε καὶ μὺν καὶ βάτραχον καὶ οἰστοὺς πέντε. Πέρσαι δὲ τὸν φέροντα τὰ δῶρα ἐπειρώτεον τὸν νόον τῶν διδομένων. ὁ δὲ οὐδὲν. ἔφη οἱ ἐπεστάλθαι ἄλλο ἢ δόντα τὴν ταχίστην ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι· αὐτοὺς δὲ τοὺς Πέρσας ἐκέλευε, εἰ σοφοὶ εἰσι, γνῶναι τὸ θέλει τὰ δῶρα λέγειν. ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες οἱ Πέρσαι ἐβουλεύοντο» (see Ognibene 2012; Ognibene 2018b; Ognibene 2021a).

20 Cf. Toxatas'ev 2005 (p. 3): «Абаев представил иранские языки кочевников евразийских степей от скифов и савроматов до сарматов как одно лингвистическое целое и даже

negligence, but practically speaking, in his examination of names and potential roots, the effects are minimal.

Regarding religious systems, Herodotus has transmitted to us the names of Scythian deities with their Greek equivalents²¹ and has indicated how sacrifices were performed.²² Comparing these passages of Herodotus with those of Ammianus Marcellinus on the Alans, we find profound similarities.²³ Consider, for example, the sword, which represents the god of war for both populations. The northern Iranian world remained unaffected by Zoroastrianism and seems to exhibit over time many common elements indicating a form of continuity, even from a religious standpoint.²⁴ The study of Scythian burials and those of later periods provides us with insights into the afterlife beliefs of these peoples: life did not end with death; the deceased required in the afterlife common-use objects, their horse, and even the people closest to them: wife and servants.²⁵ The description of a Scythian royal burial by Herodotus²⁶ has been fully confirmed by excavations in the kurgans. Another passage from Herodotus shows us that the Scythians feared the return of the dead and their revenge: slaves

доводил историю скифского языка вплоть до осетинского. В этом отношении Абаев сделал шаг назад по сравнению с Фасмером, от которого он в значительной степени зависит в отношении материала; в Словаре скифских основ Абаева скифские и сарматские основы поданы вместе в алфавитном порядке».

- 21 Hdt. IV, 59: «θεοὺς μὲν μούνους τούσδε ἰλάσκονται, Ἴστίην μὲν μάλιστα, ἐπὶ δὲ Δία καὶ Γῆν, νομίζοντες τὴν Γῆν τοῦ Διὸς εἶναι γυναῖκα, μετὰ δὲ τούτους, Ἀπόλλωνά τε καὶ οὐρανίην Ἀφροδίτην καὶ Ἥρακλέα καὶ Ἄρεα. τούτους μὲν πάντες Σκύθαι νενομίκασι, οἱ δὲ καλεόμενοι βασιλῆιοι Σκύθαι καὶ τῷ Ποσειδέωνι θύουσι. ὀνομάζεται δὲ σκυθιστὶ Ἴστίη μὲν Ταβιτί, Ζεὺς δὲ ὀρθότατα κατὰ γνώμην γε τὴν ἐμὴν καλεόμενος Παπαῖος, Γῆ δὲ Ἄπι. Ἀπόλλων δὲ Γοιτόσυρος, οὐρανίη δὲ Ἀφροδίτη Ἀργίμπασα, Ποσειδέων δὲ Θαγιμασάδας, ἀγάλματα δὲ καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ νηοὺς οὐ νομίζουσι ποιεῖν πλὴν Ἄρεϊ. τούτῳ δὲ νομίζουσι.»
- 22 Hdt. IV, 61 (to the gods in general); Hdt. IV, 63 (to Ares).
- 23 Amm. Marc. xxxi, 3, 23: «Nec templum apud eos visitur aut delubrum, ne tugurium quidem culmo tectum cerni usquam potest, sed gladius barbarico ritu humi figitur nudus, eumque ut Martem, regionum quas circumcolunt praesulem, verecundius colunt» (see also Ognibene 2021b).
- 24 The first real rupture will occur in the 10th century AD with the conversion of Alania to Christianity. However, after the conversion, a unique form of religious syncretism emerged in that area. The penetration of Christianity (the conversion occurred under Byzantine influence, but through Georgia as demonstrated by the Ossetian religious lexicon) was strong enough to change the names of the previous deities, which took on the names of Christian saints, but they continued to retain many of their previous attributes and behaviors (see Ognibene 2006; Ognibene 2020; Ognibene 2023b).
- 25 Hdt. IV, 71: «καὶ ἔπειτα, ἐπεὶ ἀν θέωσι τὸν νέκυν ἐν τῆσι θήκησι ἐπὶ στιβάδος, παραπήξαντες αἰχμᾶς ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν τοῦ νεκροῦ ξύλα ὑπερτείνουσι καὶ ἔπειτα ῥίψι καταστεγάζουσι, ἐν δὲ τῇ λοιπῇ εὐρυχωρίῃ τῆς θήκης τῶν παλλακῶν τε μίαν ἀποπνίζαντες θάπτουσι καὶ τὸν οἰνοχόον καὶ μάγειρον καὶ ἵπποκόμον καὶ διήκονον καὶ ἀγγελιηφόρον καὶ ἵππους καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἀπαρχὰς καὶ φιάλας χρυσέας ἀργύρω δὲ οὐδὲν οὐδὲ χαλκῶ χρέωνται.»
- 26 Hdt. IV, 72.

sacrificed to the god of war had their right shoulder and arm cut off to prevent them from seeking vengeance if they failed to enter the afterlife immediately.²⁷ The Ossetian Nart epic preserves the idea that the dead cannot enter the underworld after sunset, and the last ray of sunlight before sunset in Ossetian is called *mærdty xūr* “the Sun of the dead”.²⁸ The Nart epic also preserves the case of a deceased who, with the permission of Barastyr,²⁹ manages to leave the Land of the Dead and temporarily return among the living.³⁰

If the languages of Iranian nomads have not left many traces in European ones³¹ – including Alanic, although the Alan people crossed Europe and settled permanently in some regions³² – it cannot be said that Iranian populations have not influenced other aspects: remarkable are the parallels between the Nart epic and the Arthurian cycle.³³ Many aspects of the Nart cycle show a continuity that delves into a distant past: it is not given to us to know how ancient the Nart epic is, which was orally transmitted until the introduction of an alphabet for Ossetian.³⁴ However, there are many aspects that, while reflecting the long and complex adventure of the northern Iranian world, tie the peoples of the Iranian past with those of the present.

It is with this spirit that the volume containing this introductory work should be read: a collection of texts written in different periods and by different authors that, however, show how the ancient and contemporary Iranian elements are indissolubly linked by an uninterrupted chain beyond the fate of European Iranian peoples that have disappeared all except Ossetians in Central Caucasus.

27 Hdt. IV, 62: «ἄνω μὲν δὴ φορέουσι τοῦτο, κάτω δὲ παρὰ τὸ ἱρὸν ποιεῦσι τάδε· τῶν ἀποσφαγόντων ἀνδρῶν τοὺς δεξιοὺς ὤμους πάντας ἀποταμόντες σὺν τῆσι χερσὶ ἐς τὸν ἡέρα ἰεῖσι, καὶ ἔπειτα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀπέρξαντες ἰρήνια ἀπαλλάσσονται. χεῖρ δὲ τῆ ἄν πέσῃ κέεται, καὶ χωρὶς ὁ νεκρός.»

28 *Mærdty xūr* [мæрдты хур] (Abaev 1989: 246 f.).

29 In the Nart epic, Barastyr, is the lord of the Land of the Dead (see Abaev 1958: 236 f.).

30 See in particular the respective tale (“The Nameless son of Uryzhmag”) in Colarusso/Salbiev 2016: 34 ff. The Nart epic also preserves the opposite case of a living individual entering the Land of the Dead. This concerns the hero Soslan (see Ognibene 2022; idem 2023c).

31 The most frequently cited case is the Hungarian word *híd*, meaning “bridge”, borrowed from Alanic (*Magyar-ország szótár*. Budapest-Moszkva, 1987: Akadémiai Kiadó: 303.).

32 For the settlement of the Alans in Europe and later in North Africa, one can refer to Bachrach 1973; Gaggero 1996; Thordarson 1998; Ognibene 2011; idem 2015; idem 2018a; idem 2021c.

33 This is a very delicate issue, but one that has been at the centre of attention for years (cf. Scott Littleton 1978; Scott Littleton/Thomas 1978; Littleton/Malcor 2000).

34 For Ossetian alphabet, see Tomelleri/Salvatori 2011.

Features of Antiquity in Folk Legends and Everyday Life of the Ossetians

Vsevolod Miller

Among all the peoples of the North Caucasus, the Ossetians have attracted the special attention of scholars. A number of scientists and travellers, such as Julius Klaproth, Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux, August Haxthausen, Antoine Jean de Saint-Martin, Viktor von Rosen (Виктор Романович Розен), Andreas Johan Sjögren (Андрей Михайлович Шёгрэн), Schifner and others, had particular interest in the Ossetians and reported information about their language, life, morals and legends. Such interest in a small mountain people, not outstanding in terms of culture over numerous other mountain groups of the Caucasus, is, of course, explained by the curious and by now quite established fact that the Ossetians belong to the peoples of our Indo-European family, namely, to its Iranian branch.

When we meet our relatives in mountain gorges, enclosed on all sides by peoples alien to them by language and type,¹ we will naturally be interested in the past of this people. Moreover, we will have a number of questions to which we would like to get answers: What fate drove the Iranian-Ossetians to the places of their present settlement, cutting them off from the other Iranian peoples? What memories of their past have they preserved? What information has been recorded about them in historical documents? What is their way of life, what are their religious views? What place does their language occupy among the Iranian dialects? What is the nature of their folk culture and art, etc.?

Some of these questions can be answered in works devoted to the language and life of the Ossetians. The academic study of their language has been initiated by the grammar of Prof. Sjögren; a lot of information about life, customs and beliefs of the Ossetians was collected in different publications, mainly in the Collection of Findings about the Caucasian Highlanders (“Сборник сведений о кавказских горцах”), the Collection of Findings about Caucasus (“Сборник сведений о Кавказе”), the Collection of Findings about the Terek Region (“Сборник сведений о Терской области”) and others. Ossetian Heroic

¹ The Ossetians are enclosed from the east by the Chechens, from the south by the Georgians, from the west by the Turkic societies of Kabarda, from the north by Kabardians.

(i.e. Nart) legends, sagas, and fairy tales are included in the first part of my Ossetian Essays (Miller 1881). In its second part I will try to give answers to some of the questions listed above.

In the present article I would like to pay attention only to those features in the Ossetian legends and everyday life, which are curious examples of facts of so-called survivals (in the sense the terminus is used by Taylor).

As I am taking these facts from heroic legends and rituals, I think it is not superfluous to give some ideas about the Ossetian epic in advance. The most important part among the works of Ossetian epic creativity are the so-called Nart legends, corresponding to our Russian “bylinas” about heroes. The name *Nart* – epic hero – is well known to other peoples of the Caucasus: the Kabardians (*Nart*), the Chechens (*Nyart*), the Avars, the Kumyks and others. All of them believe that before the present generation of people heroes had lived in their countries who performed various amazing feats of strength and valour. The Kabardians, Balkars and Ossetians share many names of the Narts: all three peoples know such Nart heroes as Xamyts, Sozryko, Batraz, Syrdon and the cunning heroine Satána. The first acquaintance with the Ossetian Nart sagas suggests, that they are attached to the soil of Ossetia: for example, on the way to Styr-Digora village, at the turn to the valley of the river Uruk, near Nar village, I was shown a stone burial chamber, inside of which a huge hulk rests, and they called it the grave of the Nart Soslan. According to the local population, this is *Narty Nykhas* ‘Narts’ gathering place’, i.e., the location where they gathered for council, before undertaking a daring raid. In the Styr-Digora village the Xamytsevs live, a clan which descends from Xamyts, a hero known from the tales; the main sanctuaries of the Ossetians, Rekom and Mykalgabyrtæ, appeared, according to the legend, from the tears shed by God on the death of Nart Batraz (Miller 1881: 8).

However, these assignments are of no more importance than our own Russian folk assignments of the names of heroes to famous places: in the same way in our north, they show the grave of Svyatogor, in Murom region – a spring beaten out by the horse of Ilya Muromets, in Kiev – even the relics of this hero. Like the Ossetians, the Kabardians and Balkars show traces of heroes in their regions. This is what, for example, Mr. Urusbiev says, who published four Balkar Nart legends in Russian: “Monuments testifying to the existence of the Narts in the Kuban Region are very numerous. I have been told by eyewitnesses that at the confluence of the Tiberda River into the Kuban, near the Khumara fortification, there is a large castle on a high rock called “Chuana”. According to the legends, it was once inhabited by the evil-tongued Nart Gilyakhsirtan. Near Chuana a large stone lies called the stone of Nart Sosruko. According to one story, Sosruko rode his horse onto this stone, and it left its hoofprints on it (Urusbiev 1881: 111).

At the present time, when the Caucasian Nart legends have just begun to be collected and recorded, when comparatively few of them have been published in the local languages, and when the detailed development of this epic material has not yet begun, it is certainly too early to draw conclusions about the significance of the epic for the ancient history of the Caucasian peoples. Meanwhile, there have already been attempts to use such tales for history. Thus Dr. Pfaff, a diligent researcher of the legal life of the Ossetians, uses tales from the "epic" about Batraz as a source for their early history. He collects without any criticism separate hero's adventures in which Batraz the Nart takes part, considering them to be excerpts of one epic created two or three thousand years ago, and comes to the unexpected conclusion that these tales "contain the most authentic history of the Ossetians from its beginning to the end of the feudal age" (Pfaff 1871: 171).²

No less fantastic are the views of Shora-Bekmursin-Nogmov, the author of the history of the Adygh people, concerning Circassian tales about Narts. Nogmov endeavours to find in the names of various Kabardian Narts memories of historical persons who had influence on the life of the Adygh people. Thus, for example, in the Nart Sosruko (otherwise Ssosiriko or Kossirikh) he sees the name of Cesar, and regards the Circassian legend of Sosruko's miraculous birth from a stone as an echoe of the Roman legend about the birth of Julius Caesar (Caesar's section), allegedly transmitted to the Circassians (Nogmov 1861: 47; Nogmov 1866: 29).

Leaving aside all fascination with the Caucasian hero epic and dreams of finding extraordinary historical revelations in it, we can only say that these tales, very rich in content, are worth serious study. Sharing the fate of all oral compositions, the epic contains a lot of revisions, mixing of names, but it still preserves a lot of antiquity, some historical memories and such features of life that have already outlived their age.

The significance of the Caucasian epic, in our opinion, is determined by the significance of the area in which the Narts' exploits are performed. The Kabardian Narts do not limit their activity to the current borders of Kabarda: they usually raid the rivers Tan (Don) and Idyl' (Edil', Volga).

In the Ossetian Narts' legends, as a result of the centuries-long isolation of the Ossetians in the mountains, to which they were forced from the plains

2 Batraz, in Pfaff's opinion, "does not represent one indivisible individual, he is the prototype of a man and a representative of the whole nation of Indo-European origin. He came to the Caucasus, and, having settled among the natives, occupied at first a very subordinate position". But later, "when his moral matchlessness and extraordinary intellectual virtues, compared to the generally low level of the natives, became apparent", he won himself an honourable position and even became a proud lord of the people (Pfaff, *op. cit.*: 170).

by the Kabardians, the place of the Narts' adventures is already the mountains, but at the same time the Narts often make their appearance outside the present limits of Ossetia, i.e. in the Kasazhskaya Plain (*Kasadzhy bydyr*), i.e. in the Kabardian lowland, the former homeland of the Ossetians. Thus, the Narts legends preserved hints of the ancient geographical location of the present-day peoples.

The Narts' epic can be called North Caucasian. We can for the moment leave aside the question of which of the North Caucasian peoples created the main types of the Narts.³ But it is important to point out that many personalities of heroes are equally familiar to the neighbouring Caucasian peoples. Centuries-long neighbourhood, the same way of life, constant military and peaceful intercourse, all this disseminated the same Narts' epic motifs on the plains of the North Caucasus, from where they later spread to the mountains. Due to geographical conditions, the way of life in the North Caucasus did not change for many centuries. In this area, at this crossroad from Asia to Europe, there could not emerge a steadfast and settled culture, whether it be in ancient times or in the Middle Ages.

In deep antiquity, north from these places a part of the Indo-European peoples moved to Europe. Entering Europe through the natural gateway between the southern spurs of the Urals and the northern coast of the Caspian Sea, the Indo-European tribes strove towards the Black Sea, and crossing the South Russian rivers, moved further and further westwards, constantly on the heels of each other.

Such Indo-European peoples, the last of those who left Asia for Europe, emerge a few centuries before our era under the name of the Scythians and Sarmatians in the works of the classics. Once the movement of Indo-Europeans was completed, the peoples of another stock – the Ugro-Finns and the Ural-Altaians – began to move from Asia along the same route. What role did the North Caucasus play in these migrations? What we can assume with some degree of probability is that the Caucasus was serving as a kind of refuge for all those peoples and nations, which by historical circumstances were seeking protection from the pressure of stronger tribes, for all those who were driven southwards and found themselves, as if in a deadlock, in that space, which is geographically surrounded by barely passable natural barriers: in the east by the Caspian Sea, in the west by the Maeotis and the Pontus, in the south by the high wall of the Caucasus Range.

3 Our personal opinion in this case is that the Kabardinian epic made a strong impression on the Ossetian, and the latter together with the Kabardinian influenced the tales of the Balkans. But of course, this is nothing more than a guess.

This is the only way to explain the amazing number and diversity of the Caucasian peoples. The Caucasus embraced the remnants of all those tribes that once under different names roamed the northern plane, and which quickly appeared and disappeared in the works of the classical geographers, and were driven southwards by the constant onslaught of more and more new settlers from Asia.

With the constant movement of peoples in the North Caucasian steppes for many centuries, no cultural progress could arise: under the given conditions every tribe had to bear the same way of life; it kept the existence of a nomad, a brigand, a raider, an enemy of peaceful farming, always undertaking thieving incursions on its neighbours. Whether we take a Sarmatian of Herodotus' time, an Alan of Ammianus Marcellinus' time, or an Ossetian of the recent past, all of them will expose familiar features of this type. Two millennia passed leaving no cultural development and not because the Ossetians were not capable of it because of their race – they are undoubtedly Indo-Europeans, – but because their way of life was formed under the influence of such physical conditions that could not be overcome.

This stubborn persistence in their way of life and their intellectual concepts determines the importance of the North Caucasian epic. There is nothing surprising if in the tales recorded today, we discover echoes and traces of notions and behaviour, which we recognize, for example, in Herodotus' accounts of the Scythians and Sarmatians, and find these features mentioned alongside cannons and guns.

In the tale of Sozryko (Miller 1881: 28 ff.), it is said that this Nart, having defeated the hero Eltagan, cut off his scalp. When after his adventures he came to the Narts' village, he gathered all the maidens and young women, saying to them: "Make me a coat from the head hair and the moustaches". And the young women saw that Sozryko had taken the skins from heads and moustaches. One said: "This is my father's scalp". The other said: "This is the skin of my brother's moustache". A third said: "This is the skin from my husband's head". And they told him: "Tomorrow morning we will come". In the morning they came to him and made a coat. Then they went to the sorceress and said, "We have made for Sozryko a coat from the headskins of our fathers, from the moustaches of our brothers from the headskins of our husbands. Teach us what to do".

The witch told them: "Leave his coat without a collar, and when it is made, put it on him and say to him: "Your coat is good, but it lacks a collar; if you bring for it the scalp of Mukkara, the son of Taryk, – and he is called the golden one – then your coat will be complete". The young women followed the witch's advice, and Sozryko went to get Mukkara's scalp, got it and ordered to make a collar for his coat from it.

In this way the given tale preserves memories of the custom of scalping and utilization of scalps for fur coats, which once existed in the North Caucasus. Indeed, such a custom is historically attested by Herodotus for the Scythians. Here is what the Greek historian tells (Herodotus IV, 64): “A Scythian ... carries the heads of all whom he has slain in the battle to his king; for if he brings a head, he receives a share of the booty taken, but not otherwise. He scalps the head by making a cut around it by the ears, then grasping the scalp and shaking the head off. Then he scrapes out the flesh with the rib of a steer, and kneads the skin with his hands, and having made it supple he keeps it for a hand towel, fastening it to the bridle of the horse which he himself rides, and taking pride in it; for he who has most scalps for hand towels is judged the best man. Many Scythians even make garments to wear out of these scalps, sewing them together like coats of skin”⁴

This Scythian custom was well known to the Greek, as is evident, among other things, from the fact that some writers (Euripides, Athenæus) use the term ἀποσκυθίζειν “to scalp”, compounded from the proper name of the Scythians.

A little further Herodotus reports another Scythian custom (VI, 66): “... once a year each governor of a province brews a bowl of wine in his own province, which those Scythians who have slain enemies drink; those who have not achieved this do not taste this wine but sit apart dishonored; and this they consider a very great disgrace ...” Intriguingly, a legend about such a hero bowl has been preserved in the Ossetian epic. This bowl was given miraculous properties and even bears a proper name of *Nart-amongæ* (pointer at the Nart) or *Waciamongæ*.⁵ The usually used background in the epic is that the heroes take part in feast, retelling each other their adventures: whoever turns out to be worthy of the hero's cup, to his lips it miraculously rises. Thus, one of the epic in our collection (Miller 1881: 149) introduces us into the setting of a Scythian gathering. The Narts are feasting and arguing about their valour. The marvellous cup did not rise to anyone, but Soslan. Then the Narts say to the old man Xamyc, the father of young Batraz, about whose exploits nobody has ever heard: “Come on, old man, tell us what you have seen; maybe the cup will go to you!” Xamyc keeps silent and with his eyes searches for little Batraz. The boy comes and sits down before his father. “Here I am, father,” he says, “I will now

4 Henceforth the translation of Herodotus' *History* is cited according to A. D. Godley, Cambridge, 1920.

5 The word *wac* is of unknown origin, it is found in the names of the deities Was-Gergi, Wac-Illa. (Many years after Miller's article was published, oss. *wac* 'deity, divine, sacred' was connected with Old Iranian **uāč-* '(divine) speech', s. Abaev 1958–89: IV/26ff., *Red.*)

tell you what I have done: I have killed five *dawæg* (higher spirits) and six *wacillas*. I have killed the father of the bread-spirit Bor-xuar-ali, and in testimony to this, let the Wacamongæ rise to my father's moustache and let the old man drink". In a moment the cup itself has risen to Xamyc's mouth ...

From the hero's cup let us move on to another feature in the Ossetian tales, which may have preserved an ancient historical name. As it is known from Herodotus, the Scythians drove the people of Cimmerians from the places of their settlement. Scythia, according to the Greek historian, still preserves traces of the Cimmerians; there are Cimmerian castles and graves, and there is a strip of land called Cimmeria and the Cimmerian Bosphorus (Herodotus IV, 12). Thus, in the time of Herodotus, in the present territory of southern Russia, from the once powerful people known in the Bible under the name of Gomer, and referred to as Gimirrai in Assyrian monuments, the people who strongly pressed Lydia in the time of Gyges (Assyrian Gugu) in the 7th century BC, only traces remained: graves and names of certain localities.

Let us now recall a fact which often occurs in folk legends: the historical names of ancient peoples which are associated with tombs, ruins and in general with ruins of human constructions in a certain area frequently receive the new meaning of "giants, heroes". So Shafarik derives Slav. *spolin*, *ispolin* (plural: *spoli*, *spolove*, *spolini*) from the name of a people called Spali, mentioned in the Gothic legend retold by Jordan (*Getica* 28), a people who lived somewhere in Scythia and subdued by the Goths at the times of Filemer. In the same way, Polish *otbzym* or *obrzym* 'giant' is the name of a people known to Western chroniclers in the form Avari. Similarly, the name of the Huns, which entered medieval Germanic tales, was attached in the form of Hunen to ancient graves, which are known in Germany under the name of Hunengräber 'giant graves', and the Russian word *vólot* 'giant' is derived from the name of the people *Volot*, *Velet*; people see the remnants of the Volots in the giant bones of pre-historic animals, and in Siberia they believe that the whole Volot people went alive under the earth. The same legend is told there about the people *Chud'* or *Chudaks*. Scared of Ermak, Chud' or Chudaks (Chudaki) dug holes, went there with all their goods, cut down the posts and perished (Dal' 1903-09: IV/1369).

In view of these and other examples of the semantic transition of names of disappeared peoples to designation of "giants", it is not difficult to assume that also the name of the Cimmerians attached to localities could pass into folk traditions with the meaning of "giants". Indeed, Ossetian Nart stories often mention the giants Gumiritæ (sgl. *gumir*) and Wæjgutæ (sgl. *wæjug*) hostile to the Ossetian people, for example to the hero Amiran, who fights against them (Miller 1881: 145f.). One legend says that God created the giants before the Narts. It is hardly too bold to assume, that in the Ossetian word *gumir* "giant"

the name of the Cimmerians (Gimmirai) was preserved, whom, according to Herodotus, the Scythians drove from the Caucasus into Asia. Another question, of course, is whether this name is an echo of ancient legends, like in the case of coats and scalps or of the hero's bowl, or whether it entered the epic from a foreign literature, such as the Georgian.

Herodotus records folk legends about the origin of the Scythians. According to one of them, the ancestor of the Scythians Targitao, probably a mythical hero, was the offspring of a union between the supreme god (whom Herodotus calls Zeus) and the daughter of Borysthenes, i.e., a mermaid, the daughter of a river or a water deity (Herodotus IV, 5). According to another legend, which is a Hellenized version of the first, Hercules (obviously a Greek interpretation of a Scythian god), looking for the cows of Geryon, found in one of the caves in Gila a strange creature, a half-woman half-snake, and entered into a relationship with her, the fruit of which were three sons, the ancestors of three peoples, the Agathyrsi, the Gelonians and the Scythians (Herodotus IV, 9 and 10). In this way, and so the legend says, the ancestor of the Scythians descended from a god and a nymph, whose half-snake appearance indicates her watery origin. Since, according to Herodotus, Targitao lived a thousand years before Darius' campaign against the Scythians (so the Scythians themselves told), he should be regarded as an epic hero occupying an important place in the Scythian tradition. A similar legend exists among the Ossetians. In one version about the birth of Batraz, the most important of the Narts, it is told that the Nart Xamyc pursued a marvellous white hare for a long time. The hare, struck several times with a whip, pretends to be dead, then revives and thus lures the nobleman to the sea, where it disappears into the water. Then an old man comes out of the sea and explains to Xamyc that the hare is a nymph, the daughter of the water god Don-bettyr, and that she has fallen in love with Xamyc and will marry him if he returns in a month. Indeed, Xamyts returns to the seashore to visit the water god and marries his daughter. She makes it a condition, that she will wear turtle scales during the day (remember the serpentine nymph in Herodotus), as she is afraid of the sun. However, Nart Syrdon burns the scales, and the mermaid leaves her husband, who remains with a blister on his back, from which Batraz will be born (Shanaev 1876: 1ff.).

Of course, other peoples also have tales about the connection of heroes with water nymphs, but it is curious that in the Scythian and the Caucasian tale the main national hero is the fruit of such a union.

Another legend about a Nart marriage may preserve an echo of a custom that once existed. As it is well-known, among Iranians marriages between close relatives were once considered the most respectable, on the grounds that they preserve the purity of lineage. Such marriages, for which there is a special term

x^vaētuuadaθa in the Zendavesta, angered the Greeks, who knew them from the Persians. Diogenes Laertius says that among the Persians it is even allowed to marry one's mother or daughter (von Spiegel 1852–63: 11/11f, n. 4). It could well be due to this Iranian custom, as a last echo in the epic, that the honourable Nart Wryzmæg is married to his sister Satána. Of course, there is no mention of such a custom among Iranians-Ossetians now, and the epic itself points to its inconsistency with generally accepted customs, but “you can't knock words out of a song”: the narrators *kadæggænags* keep repeating that Wryzmæg's wife was at the same time also his sister.

I move from traces of ancient life in the epic to similar echoes in modern Ossetian rites and beliefs.

Ossetian and Caucasian witchdoctors and sorceresses still continue to cast spells and engage in fortune-telling, whereby they observe almost the same techniques that Herodotus described two thousand years ago among the Scythians. “There are many diviners among the Scythians,” he says (Herodotus IV, 67), “who divine by means of many willow wands as I will show. They bring great bundles of wands, which they lay on the ground and unfasten, and utter their divinations as they lay the rods down one by one; and while still speaking, they gather up the rods once more and place them together again”. It is difficult to make a precise sense of such divination with sticks, which – let it be noted – was also in use among Iranian Magi, the Germans (according to Tacitus), the Alans (according to Ammianus Marcellinus) and the Baltic Slavs (according to Samson Grammaticus).

As for the Ossetians, such divination is, according to the testimony of Mr. Gatiev (Gatiev 1876: 1f.), at present performed in the following way: The healer, invited to the sick person, orders to spread a felt cloak (*burka*) on the floor, places a small bench and sits down; then he takes four sticks and arranges them in this way: their front ends split fork-shaped, are put one into the other, and the opposite ends are stuck into a hat. The witchdoctor holds the front ends of both pairs of sticks in his hands; after a prayer he says: “If the sick person suffers through your fault, God, let the sticks rise in the right hand; if by the will of the evil spirit, in the left hand”. Afterwards he pretends that against his will the sticks from under his left hand jumped to the floor, and consequently the disease was caused by an evil spirit. In the same way the trickster guesses which goat, white or black, should be offered as a propitiatory sacrifice.

Another method of divination among the Scythians, used by the Enarians (impotents), was that they took a piece of linden bark, cut out of it three ribbons (*basts*), and, while predicting, first wind them on their fingers, then unwind them (Herodotus IV, 67). Again, Herodotus' description is extremely unclear. Perhaps, it could be explained by the way fortune-telling is performed

by Ossetian witchdoctors. A sorceress, invited to a house where there is a sick person, tries first of all to find out in an indirect way, whether the family has not offended some *zwar* (saint, spirit, sanctuary) by forgetting to slaughter a lamb in honour of him.

To find out about what happened, she asks for a piece of canvas, ties a knot at one end of it and starts measuring from it with her elbow. Suppose she had counted five cubits in the piece. Measuring them off, she each time pronounces the name of a saint, e.g. Wastyrgý (St George), Wacilla (St Elijah), and shows that each time there are exactly five cubits. When she reaches the name of the *zwar*, whom the family of the sick person has supposedly affronted, she demonstrates with a quick twitch, that the piece of canvas has increased or decreased in length: it is now not exactly five cubits long, but $4\frac{1}{2}$ or $5\frac{1}{2}$. Having deduced from this "miracle" that such and such a *zwar* was offended and has caused the illness, she advises to slaughter a lamb as soon as possible, so that the sick person will recover (see Miller 1881b: 55ff.).

It seems to us that the Scythian wrapping of flannels round the fingers and unwinding them was based on the same "miracle". Probably, the length of the flannels also increased or decreased depending on the wish of the fortune-teller. It should also be noted that among the Scythians such divination was exclusively performed by Enareans, while the divination with canvas among the Ossetians is only done by women.

Ossetian funeral rites are extremely archaic. Not only relatives but the whole village and even the neighbourhood villages take part in mourning the deceased. As soon as someone dies, a messenger (*qærgænæg*) hurries to the neighbouring villages to inform them of the death, and people from all sides go to the house of the departed. The family of the deceased spares nothing to honour his memory with an abundant treat: they hurry to sell everything they can without counting on the future, and often go bankrupt. There have been cases when on the death of a person all the family's livestock was used for the first commemorative feast and children became beggars. According to the Ossetians themselves, the holding of commemorative feasts in honour of one person can cost a well-off family more than two thousand roubles a year; all in all there are twelve commemorative feasts in the first year.

The mourning of the deceased is characterized by a similarly inordinate expression of grief. The men, who are escorting the coffin to the cemetery, beat their foreheads with their fists and groan; the women, crawling on their knees, beat their hands on their faces and knees and howl.

When the coffin is lowered to the ground near the grave, the men stand apart from the women, and from the crowd of women sisters, nieces and other close relatives come forward. First standing quite far from the coffin and then slowly

approaching it, they tear their hair on their heads and scratch their faces with their nails, so that their cheeks cover with scabs. Then the brothers, sons and nephews begin to approach the deceased step by step, hitting themselves on the back of the head with whips and screaming. Then the widow approaches the coffin, cuts off her braid and places it on her husband's chest, in the belief that in this way she will remain his wife in the afterlife (Gatiev 1876: 3f.).

While the Ossetians now no longer bury with the deceased his weapons and things, the memory of this custom is preserved in the image of such things on the grave pillar. We have often seen colourful monuments which depict a number of cartridges, a powder magazine, a knife, a pistol, a gun, a whip, and below, a horse, a jug and a cup. Undoubtedly, these images serve as a replacement of the custom to put all these objects in the grave of the deceased.

However, the Ossetians still have one rite echoing the custom of burying a horse with the deceased. It is the so-called *bæxfældisyn*, the dedication of a horse. The purpose of this rite is that the deceased should have a horse in the afterlife in order to be able to get safely to the place intended for him. During the burial, when the corpse is already lowered into the grave, a horse is brought forward, and one of those present makes a long speech in which he depicts the difficulties of the afterlife journey and describes the meetings that the deceased is supposed to have there.⁶ At the end of the speech, the horse is led around the grave three times, given a taste of fermenting wine and the cup from which it drank is smashed against its hoof. To enable the deceased to recognise his horse in the other world, the horse's lug is cut off or at least incised. Then one of the people present gets on the horse and rides it until it starts to sweat.

Among other funeral rites, we should also mention the so-called sitting of the dead (*mærdty badæn*), which takes place a week after the New Year and on the day of Epiphany. This rite is celebrated in families that have lost someone close to them during the previous year. In honour of the deceased they bake a bread of a huge size, so big that it would be sufficient for one person during a whole month. Then by dressing his cloths on sticks an effigy of the deceased is made. This effigy is placed on a bench, and around it all the favourite things of the deceased – a rifle, a sword, a dagger, a pipe with tobacco, a balalaika, etc. – are laid out. Porridge and a bottle of arak, intended for the deceased, are placed in front of the effigy, as there is the belief that his soul is asking from the ruler of the dead Barastyr time off for a visit and is temporarily moving into the effigy. During the day, the mourning takes place and then the meal is served.

6 The rite of horse sacrifice is recorded in my "Ossetian sketches" (Miller 1881: 108ff.).

Observing these rites, still preserved among the Ossetians, one recalls some features of Scythian funerals recorded by Herodotus. He writes that not only close relatives of the deceased, but also all his acquaintances take part in funerals of the Scythians, and that the corpse of an ordinary mortal is transported around the region within forty days (Herodotus IV, 73). The corpse of the king is taken all over Scythia from region to region and everywhere it is mourned, while grief is expressed in a visual way: every Scythian cuts off the tip of his ear (among the Ossetians this is done to a horse), shaves off his hair (among the Ossetians this is done by the widow of the deceased), makes cuts on his hands, scratches his forehead and nose (this is still done by the women in Ossetia) and pierces his left arm with an arrow (Herodotus IV, 71). His wife, servants, horses, weapons and vessels are buried with the king. Echoes of all this we have just pointed out in the listed Ossetian rites. A year after the Scythian king's death, 50 effigies of young men and horses killed in his honour are placed around his tomb, which reminds of the Ossetian rite of sitting of the dead, where an effigy of the deceased is made, who is again mourned and fed.

As for the hearth of the home, Ossetians honour it hardly less than the ancient Scythians. From Herodotus we know that the highest deity of the Scythians was Tabiti, which he equates with Hestia (Vesta) (Herodotus IV, 59). From another passage (IV, 68) we can deduce that the oath by the hearth was considered the most sacred. So an illness of the king was explained by the fact that somewhere a Scythian had made a false oath by the royal hearth. Among the Ossetians the hearth and even more so the iron chains (*raxys*) hanging over it are considered to be the sanctuary of the hut. The Ossetians hold on to the chain to say their vows; in a marriage rite, current before the introduction of Christianity, the bride was led round the chain three times, after which the marriage was considered formally consummated.

The Ossetians consider the taking off the chain from the hearth and throwing it out of the door to be the strongest insult to the family. Such an action was always followed by an irreconcilable blood feud, and only in recent times judges have managed to impose as compensation a high monetary penalty (from 60 to 100 roubles) for this offence. Studying a legal case, Mr. Pfaff found the following phrase in a related petition: "He not only killed my son, but even threw the chain out of the door" (Pfaff 1872b: 274). The patron of the hearth chain is considered to be the deity Safa, who, according to a testimony by Shanaev, "is the god of the sword and all weapons".

In very recent times, the same collector of Ossetian tales says, – Ossetians, laying down their children to sleep, entrusted them to this god of the sword; stroking the child's head and putting their hand around the chain at the hearth, they said: "Safa, have mercy on my poor children, forever strengthen

their life with your firm power. Protect them from unclean and evil forces". The Ossetians highly revere the name of Safa: in honour of this god of weapons, it was the custom on the third day of the Great Lent, on Wednesday a blacksmith was asked to heat up very small iron rods, from which pieces were broken off, sewn into a pocket together with a piece of cotton wool, a piece of cloth or silk and put around the neck of children as an amulet to protect them against evil spirits and the evil eye (Shanaev 1876: 41, n. 6). Relying on the judgement of Mr Shanaev, who is of Ossetian origin, in identifying Safa with the god of the sword, we cannot but recall the Scythian cult of the god of war in the form of an iron sword, to which sacrifices were made in all parts of the Scythian steppes (Herodotus IV, 62).

Limiting ourselves to these examples of traces of antiquity in Ossetian life and legends, we ought to answer to the question of why in our comparisons we cited only features from the life of Scythians, although some parallels could also be cited from the life of other peoples. Our answer is as follows: the Ossetian language indicates that they are undoubtedly Iranians, the last remnant of a more numerous and powerful people, who in the Middle Ages occupied not only the mountains, but also the plane of the northern Caucasus, the present Kabarda. This is evident from a whole range of historical accounts, which shall be collected in our "Ossetian sketches". The Iranian layer of the population is witnessed by proper names in the inscriptions of the Bosphoran kingdom. There is reason to believe that the ancestors of the Ossetians were part of the Alan people who lived in the northern Caucasus at the beginning of the Middle Ages. Going further back into antiquity, we find on the Don (*Don* in Ossetian means "river") a nomadic people called Sarmatians, the nearest neighbours and relatives of the Scythians. Of all the speculations proposed about the ethnicity of the Sarmatians and the Scythians, most noteworthy is the hypothesis of Zeiss and Müllenhoff. On the basis of language data (i.e. proper names), they identify these peoples as Iranians, who had once moved together with other Indo-European peoples to Europe, while their remains were assimilated in southern Russia by other non-Indo-European peoples, advancing from the east.

We think that this hypothesis should be adjusted in the sense that the designations "Scythian" and "Iranian" are not equivalent. We consider it more probable that "Scythians" was a cover term for Indo-European tribes among which in the eastern parts of Scythia, along the North Pontus coast, and mainly in the Don basin, also Iranians could be found. Without this assumption it is neither possible to explain the presence of an Iranian element in the Bosphoran kingdom of the time of the Savromat dynasty, nor explicate the existence of Iranians-Ossetians (Osses, Yasses) in the Caucasus. To an assumption that

the Ossetians could have come from Asia to the Caucasus in the Middle Ages there is no reasonable evidence. They came to Europe together with other Indo-Europeans, and not when the movement of Indo-Europeans had already stopped and was replaced by the movement of non-Indo-European peoples from Asia. It is in view of this hypothesis, whose substantiation would have gone far beyond the scope of the present paper, that we tried to provide parallels to some features of Ossetian everyday life and epics from Herodotus' testimonies about Scythians.

Yet even leaving aside all hypotheses, such common features are in our opinion more useful and convincing than parallels taken from the life of non-Indo-European peoples, especially those for whom there is no recorded history. Even if some redskins of America also engage in scalping, face-scratching at funerals, fortune-telling, and so on, this is less interesting for us than the existence of such features of archaic life among contemporary Indo-European people, because it testifies to the possibility of an extraordinary stagnation in the development of Indo-Europeans.

Secondly, since the assertion of the antiquity of a particular rite can sometimes be unsubstantiated, it is pleasant when the such antiquity is actually documented, especially by such a writer as Herodotus.

And finally, the indication of the features of an underdeveloped material culture of Iranian-Ossetians can weaken the theory of Niebuhr and Neumann, who exactly on the basis of the crudeness of the customs of the Scythians regards them as Mongols.

Scythians and Ossetians

Vasily I. Abaev

The Scythian people did not disappear from the face of the earth without leaving a trace. If we look at an ethnographic map of the Caucasus, which is a patchwork of more than forty different nationalities, we find in the central part a small group of people, known as the Ossetes, whose population numbers 400,000.¹ It has long been established that the origin of the Ossetes differs from that of their Caucasian neighbours. Immigrants from the steppes of south Russia, they are descendants of the Alani who, according to Josephus Flavius, a Jewish scholar and historian of the 1st century AD, were a Scythian tribe living in the vicinity of the Don and the Sea of Azov. During the great migrations of the 4th and 5th centuries AD, some of the Alani moved across Europe as far as France and Spain. The French name Alain and the English Alan trace back to that period.

The remaining Alani made their way from Eastern Europe to the foothills of the Caucasus, where they established what was for the times a powerful feudal state. They were converted to Christianity in the 10th century, and during the Middle Ages they maintained active relations with Byzantium, Georgia and Russia.

The Mongol invasion and the campaigns of Tamerlane were a disaster for the Alani: one part of the population was annihilated in the incessant wars; another fled to Hungary, where they were known as the *As* and retained their ethnic individuality for another several hundred years. A third part joined in the expeditions of the Mongols and was dispersed in foreign lands.

The Alani who remained in the Caucasus took refuge in the narrow passes of the central part of the Main Caucasian Range.

One cannot help comparing the vast territory between the Altai in the east and the Danube in the west, which had been the home of the Scytho-Sarmatian tribes during the last millennium of the pre-Christian period, with the handful of narrow ravines which was all that was left to the Ossetes in the 18th century AD.

Here, indeed is food for thought about the reverses of fortune! At Pitsunda, on the Black Sea coast, a little grove of pine trees is all that remains of a

¹ Nowadays c.700 000 (Red.).

once-enormous forest. Fate dealt similarly with the ancient Scythian world, which is now reduced to a tiny group of Ossetes, lost in the Caucasian mountains. Two priceless treasures of their remote past have, nevertheless, survived: their language and their epic. As the famous German philologist Jacob Grimm wrote, “Our language is also our history”. The Ossetes did not create literacy in the past and had no chronicles, but their language and epic are truly their history.

The Scythians themselves left no written texts. Yet Greek epigraphic inscriptions dating from the period when the Scythians occupied the lands north of the Black Sea contain hundreds of Scythian and Sarmatian common nouns.

Eminent philologists of different countries, such as Vsevolod F. Miller, Max Vasmer and Ladislav Zgusta, have convincingly demonstrated that these inscriptions are best understood through the Ossetic and can be considered as examples of the language of the ancient Ossetes.

A number of words still used by the Ossetes, such as *farn* ‘delight, welfare’, *æxsar* ‘military valour’, *ændon* ‘steel’, *ældar* or *ærðar* ‘lord’, *lymæn*, *limæn* ‘friend’, *furt* ‘son’, *fyd*, *fidæ* ‘father’, *sag* ‘deer’, *sær* ‘head’, *styr*, *stur* ‘big’, are easily recognized in these inscriptions.

Modern Ossetic also provides the key to the meaning of many names on the map of the region between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. A representative example is provided by the name of the Don river: it is in Ossetic and in this language alone that the word for ‘river’ is *don*. The same element can be discerned in the river names of Dnieper and Dniester. Traces of the Scythian world as evident as those found in the language of the Ossetes are also to be found in their folklore, and more particularly in the heroic epics which, like other peoples of the Caucasus, they still relate. The heroes of these epics are a race of warriors known as the Narts. Vsevolod Miller and the French scholar Georges Dumézil have concluded after careful comparative analysis that much of what happens in the tales of their adventures corresponds very closely to the Scythian customs and way of life described by Herodotus and other ancient authors. All these sources mention, for example, an enchanted cup from which only the most valiant warriors may drink, sword worship, very similar burial ceremonies of the Ossetes and the Scythians etc.

Comparison of the Epic of the Narts with similar narratives from other cultures immediately reveals one salient feature – the central character is a woman. It would be difficult to find in other epic poems of the world a female personality of such stature and strength.

Satána, as she is called, is the essence, the centre through whom all things flow. She is the mother of the people, the provider and mentor of the principal heroes, Soslan and Batradz. She is the wise counsellor, the omnipotent

sorceress and the guiding force without whose intervention nothing worthy of mention can be accomplished. None of the heroes is indispensable to the Epic of the Narts. Without Satána, there is no Epic. Obviously so imposing a figure could only emerge from a society where women occupied a dominant position. And such, according to the unanimous testimony of ancient authors, was the society of the Sarmatians and the Massagets. "The Sarmatians are governed by their women", one of these authors tells us. Satána thus joins the ranks of the Scythian, Saka and Massagete queens and warrior-maidens, to stand beside Zarina, Amaga and Tomiris, whose names have also been handed down by tradition. She is a product of the steppe and not of the Caucasus.

Nor do the natural surroundings in which the Epic of the Narts unfolds bear any resemblance to the mountain fastness of present-day Ossetia. Broad expanses of sea and steppe are the usual setting for the adventures of the Narts. The wind of the steppes lashes through the narrative. We feel the endlessness of the Scythian plains and hear the stampeding of horses, as a herd of stags appears, pursued by tireless hunters.

The Narts had the closest of relationships with the watery element. Thus, they are relatives of Don Bettyr, the ruler of the depths: Satána, the founder of their stock, was his daughter. All this excellently fits the physical conditions of ancient Scythia. The favourite animal of Narts and Scythians alike was the deer. In the Epic the deer is often referred to as *æstession* 'having eighteen horns'. Curiously enough, the famous golden deers of the Scythian animal style have exactly eighteen branches on their horns.

As mentioned above, a part of Alani reached in the 4th century the Western Europe and settled on the territory of the future France. Obviously, there too they did not lose the property of the soul, called by Goethe *Lust zu fabulieren* ("passion for inventing stories"). As the modern research has shown, the Cycle of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table contains narratives and motifs, which are close to those of the Ossetic Nart-Epic. Thus, the stories about the death of the Nart Batradz and King Arthur coincide even in detail. The two heroes ask before the death that one casts their swords into the sea. Once, after some delay their request is finally fulfilled, the sea comes to a great excitement, the waves come in bloody colour etc.

In the absence of chronicles or documents, the language and folklore of a small settlement in the Caucasus have bridged the gap of over 2,000 years, bringing to us the sounds and images of the inimitable world of the ancient Scythians and Sarmatians.

Tri-functional Division in Ossetian Ethnic Culture

Yuri Gagloity

The study of the Scythian cultural and historical heritage and its critical comprehension is not only of cognitive importance, but is also one of the indispensable conditions for the correct solution of many cardinal issues of the ancient history of the North Caucasus and the Northern Black Sea region. In this respect, the Scythian-Ossetian ethnographic parallels preserved both in the Nart stories and in the real life, language and beliefs of the Ossetians are of undeniable interest.

It should be said that a great work has been done in the study of Scytho-Ossetian ethnographic parallels, thanks primarily to the well-known research of V. F. Miller, V. I. Abaev and J. Dumézil (Abaev 1979: 231; Grantovskij 1980: 152; Grantovskij 1981: 79; Kuz'mina 1983: 102f.). Nevertheless, the scope of Ossetian ethnographic material attracted up to date for solving some topical problems of Scythology and history of Indo-Iranian peoples is clearly incommensurable with the importance of this material, since the already identified Scytho-Ossetian parallels can by no means be considered as exhausted.

Of particular interest in this respect are the parallels between the social structure of the Scythian society of Herodotus' epoch and the Ossetian tradition. The legend cited by Herodotus about the origin of the Scythians and their division into Auchatae, Paralatae, Katiari and Trasprians, which he allegedly wrote down from the Scythians themselves (IV, 5–7), as well as its variants recorded by other antique authors, has long attracted the attention of researchers. This story was interpreted differently in the literature: some scholars regarded it as a reflection of some ethno-social reality (Dovatur/Kallistov/Shishova 1982: 209), whereas the others considered the concerned structure as purely social (Dudko 1988: 168ff.). The latter point of view seems to be nowadays the most discussed. Its supporters see in the names of the Scythian genealogical legend three social groups (priesthood, military aristocracy and ordinary community members), exactly corresponding to the Indo-Iranian castes and reflecting the tripartite division inherent in the Indo-European social structure.

The adherents of the social interpretation differ further in their views on the question of the reality of such a division in Herodotus' epoch and the probability of its existence in general (Dumézil 1986: 441ff.; Grantovskij 1960; Xazanov 1975; Raevskij 1977: 145ff.). The Ossetian material, in which it can be

traced in different spheres of the ethnic culture, is of great importance for elucidating the essence of the tripartite division of the Scythians.

In the Ossetian Nart epic, the division of the Narts into three families or clans – the *Æxsærtagatæ*, the *Borætæ* and the *Alægatæ*, otherwise called “the three famous Nart families” or “three (groups of) Narts” (Ossetian *ærtæ Narty*), runs through all Narts’ legends (Shanaev 1873a: 14; Abaev 1939: 13, 29f., 41ff.). Each of these three clans was characterized by its own peculiarities, which determined its advantages in relation to the other families. According to one of the Digor versions of the epic, the *Borætæ* (*Boryætæ*) “were rich in cattle, the *Alægatæ* were strong in mind. The *Æxsærtagkatæ* were brave and strong men” (Tuganov 1925: 373 f.). Such a summary characterization of the three Nart clans is perfectly confirmed by the material of Ossetian Nart legends.

The *Æxsærtagkatæ* were famous for their strength and bravery, and it was to this family that the most famous Narts belonged – *Æxsar*, *Æxsærtæg*, *Uryzmæg*, *Xamyc*, *Soslan* (*Sozryko*), *Batraz*. ... The *Æxsærtagkatæ* are characterized as “a small but powerful family, strong in their bravery”, which, although inferior in numbers to the *Borætæ*, “surpassed them in courage and often made them (the *Borætæ*) see hard days”. As one legend says, the *Æxsærtagkatæ* possess such power among the Narts that “the sky itself dares not rumble for fear of them”. Only representatives of their kind led the military campaigns (*balc*) and raids (*stær*) of the Narts, and they were the leaders in repelling attacks of external enemies. The *Æxsærtagkatæ* had the decisive word when internal issues of society were discussed at the Narts’ *nyxas* (Gardanti/Dzagurov 1927: 5, 42, 54). In other words, Ossetian Nart legends clearly show that the *Æxsærtagkatæ*, who were the leading family of the Narts, represented a kind of military aristocracy of Nart society, a layer of professional warriors from among whom tribal leaders and military commanders were nominated.

It is quite indicative that within the Nart society the *Æxsærtagkatæ* clan is usually referred to as Narts properly speaking, i.e. “warriors”: “Only the Narts, who were the offspring of Wryryzmæg spoke the Xatiæg language” (Salagaeva 1961: 1/234). “For the Narts and the *Borætæ* a hard year came”. “The *Borætæ* said: “The Nart youth went on a campaign, somewhere they confronted (enemies) stronger than them, and perished. Only one old man (Wryryzmæg) was left of them, let us kill him and take their property” (Tibilov 1936: 172, 179). “The Narts were a small family. And when they became even smaller, the *Borætæ* plotted to exterminate them”. “When the *Borætæ* decided to exterminate the Nart family, they said, “Let us make a feast, invite Wryryzmæg and kill him”. “The Narts and the *Borætæ* can no longer live together. But we – the Narts and the *Borætæ* – still have a joint cauldron, the *ardamonga*”. “Know, that I am of the Nart family” (Batraz’s words at the feast). This is also evidenced by

the etymology of the name of the clan, which goes back to the eponym of the ancestor *Æxsærtagkatæ*, derived from the name *Æxsar/t/a*. In Ossetian *axsar* means “strength”, “bravery”, “heroism” and is a regular phonetic development of Indo-Iranian (Sanskrit) *kṣatra-* meaning “might” and “military function” carried by the *kṣatriya* caste (Abaev 1935: 74f.; Dumézil 1986: 460; Salagaeva 1961: 1/239ff.).

It seems that there is a certain historical connection between the role of the *Æxsærtagkatæ* in the Nart society and the realities (including the social structure) of medieval Alania. Thus, according to Georgian sources, the ruling family of the “Ossetian kingdom” in the middle of the 13th century was nobody else but the *Æxsærtagkatæ* (Georgian “Axsarpakaini – Axsartagiani”). After the defeat of the Ilkhans by the troops of the Golden Horde led by Khan Berke in the North Caucasus in the mid-60s of the 13th century, military groups of Ossetians who fought as part of the Ilkhan troops were forced to emigrate to Georgia headed by their queen, the heir to the throne Parejan and his younger brother Bagatar. Parejan and Bagatar *Æxsærtagkatæ* played a prominent role in political events in East Georgia in the late 13th–early 14th centuries (Кс 11: 294ff., 305). The identity of the ruling Nart family and the reigning family of Ossetia in the 13th century can hardly be accidental. In our opinion, this coincidence reflected in Ossetian Nart legends devaluates P. K. Kozaev’s hypothesis identifying the *Æxsærtagkatæ* with the Alanorses (Kozaev 1985: 69).

The second of the three leading Nart families, the *Borætæ*, was famous for its wealth and high numbers (“two clans stood out among the great Nart: *Borætæ* and *Æxsærtagkatæ*. *Borætæ* were a big clan”). The elder of this clan was Bora or Borafarnug, i. e. Bora, endowed with *farn* i. e. wealth, happiness, heavenly grace. As noted by J. Dumézil, the name of this clan “defies a clear interpretation, but the distinguishing characteristic of the *Borætæ* is wealth”. The *Borætæ* were almost constantly in conflict with the *Æxsærtagkatæ* clan, and the theme of their eternal conflict runs through Nart stories of the Ossetians, such as “*Borætæ* and *Æxsærtagkatæ*”, “On the struggle of Nart clans of *Æxsærtagkatæ* and *Borætæ*”, “*Soslan* and *Wyryzmæg*”, “*Old Wyryzmæg* and *Batraz*” (Miller 1881: 71ff.; Dzagurov 1925: 38ff., 81ff.; Gardanti/Dzagurov 1927: 3, 42ff.; Tibilov 1936: 172ff.; Dumézil 1986: 458ff.).

Apparently, this conflict is a reflection of the real contradictions that existed between the tribal nobility (and the upper layer of the society in general) and the bulk of the ordinary population, represented by farmers and herders. The tales give full reason to associate the *Borætæ* family with the economic function of the Nart society. The identification of the *Borætæ* with the *Dandarii*, based, in particular, on the erroneous assumption that in the Ossetian language

“dana” allegedly meant not only ‘water’ but also ‘horse’ (Kozaev 1985: 68), is more than problematic.

The third leading family among the Narts was that of the Alægatæ. Their “big house”, also called “the house of Ardamongæ” (*Ardamongæ xædzar*), was the venue for “annual gatherings” (*afæzy æmbyrd*) or “feasts of glory” (*cyty kuwd*) of the Narts, recalling the victory feasts of the Scythians described by Herodotus (IV, 66). “The house of the Alægatæ was rich, they say, and the Narts used to gather at their house”. “Wryzmæg was at that time by the Narts, by the Alægatæ”. In the story “How Sozryko brought the beautiful Azauxan from the realm of the dead to become his wife” Batraz answers the question of where the Nart youth are: “They are by the upper ones (the Narts) at the annual meeting” (*Wæla wællægtægtæm afædzy æmbyrdy sty*). It was the Alægatæ who were called the upper ones because of their place of residence in the Nart village. “The Narts made the feast *afæzy æmbyrd*, *cyty kwyvd*. All the Nart youth gathered in the house of the Alægatæ”.

The Alægatæ were also the guardians of the marvelous Nart bowl *Wacamongæ* or *Nartamongæ* (literally “indicator of Wac, Nart”). “The Alægatæ made preparations: all what God had created of drink and edibles they had. Then they invited the Narts (...). Then the Alægatæ (i.e., members of the Alægatæ family, Y. G.) brought out *Nartamongæ*” (Shanaev 1873a: 5f.; Dzagurov 1925: 35, 72; Salagaeva 1961: 1/133, 311).

Unlike the Borætæ and the Æxsærtagkatæ, the Alægatæ do not take part in any clashes within the Nart society, although it was at a feast in their house that an attempt was made to kill the old Wryzmæg (however, it were the Borætæ who organized the murder bid). The Alægatæ are not mentioned among the participants of the Nart campaigns, the *balc*. The prerogative of organizing the “annual meetings” or “feasts of glory” of the Narts as well as the possession of the magic cup of *Wacamongæ* (*Nartamongæ*) indicate that within the Nart society the Alægatæ played the role of a priestly caste or “intellectual elite” (a kind of “clever” next to “rich” and “warriors”, as defined by J. Dumézil). J. Dumézil’s opinion that the heavenly smith Kurd-Alægion probably belonged to this clan is confirmed by the data of the Svan Nart legends, according to which the smith of the Narts comes from the Alikovs, i.e. Alagovs – Alagat (“Alikov Devetil the smith”). Apparently, this is also hinted at in Balkar tales, in one of which we find “the blacksmith Alaugan (i.e. Alægion, belonging to the Alægatæ’s clan. – Y. G.) Debetov” (Tul’chinskij 1903: 300; Dzidziguri 1961: 58, 101; Salagaeva 1961: 1/300; Dumézil 1986: 466, n. 1).

The social function of the Alægatæ clan may not be as clear and definite as that of the Æxsærtagkatæ and even the Borætæ, and this can be partly

explained by the fact that the concepts of “wealth” and “militancy” seem, under certain military and economic conditions, simpler and less changing than religion. Nevertheless, Ossetian Nart legends leave no doubt that the Alægatæ fulfilled the role of priests in the Nart society. Of particular importance in this respect is their role as guardians of the Wacamongæ (Nartamongæ) cup, by which the Narts swore and from which the most famous of them (primarily Batraz and Soslan) were honoured to drink, as well as in the organization of the Nart assemblies and feasts of glory.

Citing Curtius Rufus about the Scythians who made “libation to the gods from a cup”, G. Dumézil noted that this was “the first (i.e. religious) function as opposed to agricultural wealth or war”. Pointing to the relationship of the Ossetian word *kuvd* ‘feast’, which also means ‘prayer’, to the verb *kuvyn* ‘pray’, G. Dumézil wrote that for the Ossetians, as well as for the Scythians, libation to the gods was “the highest sacred action, as feasts of this kind are the most important religious ceremony in the public and private life”. In his opinion, it is evident from the clan name Alægatæ that in the olden times they were regarded as the most high-ranking of the Narts, as *alæg* phonetically regularly goes back to *aryaka*, derived from the ancient Iranian *arya* ‘Aryan’ (Dumézil 1986: 466).

V. I. Abaev ascribes to the name Alægatæ a West Caucasian origin; the basis for this conclusion is the presence in West Adyge tales of the name Aladžuko, which he associates with the lexeme *læg* ‘man’, attributed to the Caucasian substratum in Ossetic (Abaev 1949: 315; idem 1958–89: 1/44f., 11/19ff.). The solution of this question is largely connected to the problem of the origin of the word *læg*, which goes beyond the Caucasus and already has a fairly extensive literature dedicated to it (Bielmeier 1978: 180ff.; Chirikba 1980: 138ff.; Klimov 1985: 18ff.). Without going into detail, we should note that, in view of the foreignness of this lexeme in the Nakh-Dagestan languages and the recessive-social character of the corresponding root in Abkhazian and Abazi, the proposed “Caucasian” origin of the word *læg* is anything but indisputable. Again, if we assume that this word evolved from an ethnic term to a social one, we come to the conclusion that the term for ‘slave, serf’ in Caucasian languages should go back to Ossetian (Scytho-Alanian) *læg* ‘man’, and not vice versa (Abaev 1959: 25; Bokarev 1959: 22; Abdullaev/Mikailov 1971: 22f.; Abdullaev 1972: 346ff.; Abaev 1958–89: 11/20f.).

The attempt to justify the “Caucasian” origin of the term “lag” by referring to Strabo, who placed the Legs and Gels on the territory of Dagestan, is refuted by the clear indication of the author about their belonging to the Scythian tribes, as well as by the information of Pliny (VI, 48) and Claudius Ptolemy (XI, 7, 1; XI, 8, 1). As for the connection of the name Alægatæ with the root *læg*,

the question naturally arises, how to explain the absence of the initial “a” in Ossetian *læg*, being characteristic of the Abkhazian form, and its presence in the name *Alægataë*. Obviously, Ossetian *læg* had to precede the appearance of the clan name *Alægataë*, but against this background the possible connection of the latter to the root *lag* ‘man’ looks very problematic.

Based on a probable three-functional division of the Narts, the connection of the name *Alægataë* with the Indo-Iranian *aryaka-*, which exactly corresponds to the functional role of the named family, seems more reasonable. This conclusion goes well with the view that the names of the three clans of the Narts “doivent être de même origine” (Dumézil 1986: 466, n. 1). Ossetian Nart legends and the data from antique authors do not give any ground for the assertions that “the Siraks are nobody else but *Alægataë*”, whereas the latter are claimed to be “sons of Syrdon” according to a genealogical legend (Kozaev 1985: 69). In fact, Syrdon has no genealogical relationship to the *Alægataë* both in the Ossetian epic and in other national versions in which his name appears.

Thus, Ossetian Nart legends clearly testify to the division of the Narts into three families or clans (the *Æxsærtagkataë*, the *Borætæ* and the *Alægataë*), corresponding to the division of the Scythians into three social groups with clearly defined functional duties. As regards the designations of the three main Nart clans, it is probably not superfluous to mention that the surnames *Alægataë* and *Borætæ-Burataë* still exist among Ossetians, as well as a number of other Nart-related surnames (Khamitsaevs, Bytsenovs, Gatagonovs), while the *Æxsærtagkataë*, as noted above, are recorded in written sources from as early as the 13th century.

Along with the abovementioned clans, Nart stories also mention other families belonging to the Narts, who are however not included into the three main clans. These are, for example, the *Acatæ* family, to which the famous Narts’ singer *Acamaz* belongs, the *Albegataë*, whose representative *Totraz* was cunningly defeated by *Soslan* or *Sozryko*, the *Astæ* (*Asovs*) clan, etc.

As E. A. Grantovskij points out, only three main Scythian social groups – the military aristocracy, the priesthood and the ordinary community members – “were institutionalized in the cultic organization and the rituals of the Indo-European community”, although there were also other groups of the population, mostly with limited rights and dependent on others (Grantovskij 1970: 348; Novosel’tsev 1980: 105).

Similarly, the above families do not constitute a part of the “three Narts” clans (*ærtæ Narty*), they remain outside the three “quarters” (*sõh*) of the Nart village, never participate in the annual gatherings and the feasts of glory in the *Alægataë* house. In particular, this situation is clearly manifested in one of the variants of the *Totraz’* tale, in which the widow of *Albega*, unable to fulfil

Sozryko's demand for a warrior from each courtyard, says: "Sozryko and the Narts are strong and powerful, they do what they want. I am a poor woman, a lonely and defenseless widow! I have no one but my girl and my child Totraz in the cradle. As a fine the Narts will have to take my only daughter as a slave (*iwar wacairag*)" (Dzagurov 1925: 101). The opposition of the Albegatæ family to the Narts, represented in this case by the Æxsærtagkatæ led by Sozryko, is quite obvious.

Of certain interest is also the structure of the Nart society in the South Ossetian tales. This issue is all the more worth considering, because, according to J. Dumézil, the "tripartite structure has disappeared among the South Ossetians: The Alagata are hardly mentioned any more, and the other two clans have merged" (Dumézil 1986: 467). Proving his postulate, G. Dumézil refers to the book *Narty. Ėpos osetinskogo naroda* (Moscow, 1957), which is a Russian translation of a legendary in verse prepared and published by the South Ossetian Research Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR in 1942 in Stalinir (now Tskhinval). However, the tales included in it cannot be considered as an epic of the South Ossetians, as it was based on materials presented by B. Andiev, who inherited them from his father, a well-known storyteller, a resident of the Kurtata gorge of North Ossetia (Tuganov 1946: 171, 185 f.). Thus, this collection can be tentatively called "Andiev's version of the Ossetian Nart epic", regardless of whether the material included in it is the result of individual poetic processing,¹ or a heritage preserved in its primitive purity, which has disappeared from the memory of other narrators (Meletinskij 1957: 43, n. 1).

The Nart legends of South Ossetians have been published mainly in two collections (Tibilov 1929; Tibilov 1936). There are no significant differences between their content and the previously published tales of the North Ossetians. In principle, this conclusion, applies to the three-functional scheme too, although with some reservations. Thus, for instance, the clan of the Æxsærtagkatæ, as compared to the Borætæ and the Alægatæ, is mentioned in the South Ossetian tales very rarely. This can be explained primarily by the fact that instead of the name of the Æxsærtagkatæ clan, narrators usually use the term "Narts" (*Nart, Nartæ*): "Batraz got on his horse and rode to the Narts, to Wyrzymæg"; "The Narts went on a campaign". The Borætæ said: "The Nart youth went on a campaign (...). Let's make a feast and kill Wyrzymæg (...) in the big house of the Alægatæ"; "For the Narts and the Borætæ a hard year has come" (Tibilov 1936: 59, 170, 172f., 179). The attribution of Sozryko, Soslan,

1 According to E. M. Meletinsky, a conversation with B. F. Andiev in 1956 led him to "the firm conviction that what we have before us is an individual poetic processing of the folk epic".

Batraz and Wyrzymæg to the Borætæ family in some deviating variants, which appears also in some North Ossetian variants (Dzagurov 1925: 81ff.; Tibilov 1936: 127ff., 139), does not change the situation in general.

The division of the Narts into three main clans is not found in other national versions of the epic. However, in some of them its traces can be identified with greater or lesser degree of fullness. This is primarily characteristic of the Karachay-Balkar tales that show a special affinity to the Ossetian ones, which is quite natural, given the presence of a strong Alanian substratum in the Karachay-Balkar language. Thus, in Balkar tales the head of the Narts is Uryzmek-Oryuzmek, who belongs to the family of the Skhurtukovs, i.e. the Akhsartagovs (= Æxsærtagkatæ), whose wife and sister was the prophesying Satanoy. Before their raids, the Narts always gathered at Uryzmek and from there set off under his guidance. Similarly, Balkar tales know the Alægatæ under the name of Alygovs (Alyglar) and Aligate in the same role of organizers of Nart feasts, in whose house the magical barrel *aguna* was kept, the twin of the Ossetian cauldron Ardamongæ and the bowl Wacamongæ. The Borætæ family does not appear in the Karachay-Balkar tales, but they mention the “senior Nart Borai”, whose name was apparently an eponym for the Borætæ family (Urusbiev 1881: 6, 13f., 16, 31ff.; Alejnikov 1883: 147; D’yačkov-Tarasov 1898: 84; Tul’činskij 1903: 297).

Under the name of the Ellig and the Alligov, in whose house the Narts gathered for their feasts, the Alægatæ are also known in Kabardian tales; however, the name of the Akhsartagov does not appear in them, although in the literary adaptation of the tales by V. Gattsuk, “foreign Narts” – the brothers Shogen and Khamish Ashnartuko – are mentioned, also called “sons and descendants of Askhnart” (Atazhukin 1871: 62; Lopatinskij 1891: 25, 32f.; Gattsuk 1906: 144of.). Since the Kabardin Askhnartuko is a calque of the Ossetian Æxsærtagkatæ (Miller 1881: 65, 72f.), it can be assumed that it was under this name that the latter were known to the Kabardians, although the role of the named heroes in their tales was reduced to almost nothing. Nevertheless, in some Adyghe tales Orzemej (= Wyrzymæg) or Orzemes is called “the head of the Narts” and *pshi-tamada*, i.e. prince-tamada (chief of the feast). As for the Borætæ family, it is unknown as such in the Kabardian epic, but here too there are references to Borazh, i.e. “old Bora”, which is apparently an eponym for this clan (Gadagat’ 1967: 277ff.; Kardangushev 1969: 11/95ff.).

Abkhazian and Vainakh (Ingush) Nart legends do not know the division of the Narts into separate clans. According to Abkhaz variants, the Narts were one big family, whose head and ancestor was old Khmysh (Khamysh), from Ossetian Xamyc (in some Abkhaz variants Xamyc also appears as Satana’s husband). It can be assumed that “Narts” in Abkhazian tales primarily mean

representatives of the *Æxsærtagkatæ* family: Xamyc (Khamysh), Batraz (Patraz-Tsvitsv), Satana (Sataney), Aræxcæu (Erchkhou), Sozryko (Sasrykva), Gunda (Agunda), etc.

In Ingush tales, the Narts are synonymous with the name Orstkhoj-Orkhustoi (with variants), which has been convincingly compared with the name of the *Æxsærtagkatæ* clan. Attempts to question this connection and to explain the ethnonym Orstkhoi from Vainakh or “proto-North Caucasian” (Él'murzaev 1968: 91; Ardzinba 1985: 147f.) lack serious grounds and are purely formal in nature. Proof of the genetic connection between the Ingush “Orstkhoi” and the Ossetian “*Æxsærtagkatæ*” is provided not only by the phonetic proximity of the terms (Dumézil 1976: 184 f.; Abaev 1935: 75 f.; Mal'sagov/Oshaev 1963: 22, n. 1), but also, and above all, by the identity of the names of the protagonists of the Nart-Orstkhoi and the Ossetian *Æxsærtagkatæ*: Uruzman (Uruzmanak) – Wryzmæg, Seli Sata – Satan, Soska Solsa – Soslan (son of Sosag), Khamchi Pataraz – Batraz (son of Xamyc), Achamza – Atsamaz, Batig Shirtga – Syrdon (son of Batag), etc. It should be added that, according to Ingush tales, the Nart-Orstkhoi were natives of the Saniban Gorge of North Ossetia. The name of the Nart-Orstkhoi is inseparable from the ethnonym of the Orstkhoi – Karabulaki, whose lineage among the Vainakhs numbers about 13–14 generations and who retained a certain ethnic identity even in the last century. Along with a series of separate Ossetian-Vainakh parallels,² these facts suggest that the Nart-Orstkhoits were a group of Alan-Ossetians who settled in the territory of the Vainakh and eventually dissolved among them. The penetration of Alans into the Armkhi Valley and their stay there is fully confirmed by archaeological data (Kobychev 1985: 27f.; Vinogradov 1972: 32 f.; Vinogradov 1985: 18ff.; Dautova 1975: 114).

Thus, Ossetian Nart legends clearly trace the division of the Narts into three families or clans with a certain social function inherent with each of them. Traces of this division can also be identified in other national versions of the epic. Taking into account that the three-functional division found its full completion in the Ossetian epic and recognizing the genetic link between the Ossetians and the Scythians, it can be argued that it is an echo of the three-functional division of the Scythians. The three-functional division is probably connected with the “three glorious and expensive treasures left by the ancestors” mentioned in Ossetian tales. In some versions these are three pieces of cloth, in others – three cups. At the meeting of the Narts, where the issue of who was the best among them was decided, these treasures were

2 For more details, see Gaglojti 1989a: 135ff.

given to Batraz. He was recognized as the bravest and most courageous, the most temperate in eating and drinking, and the most noble towards women" (Salagaeva 1961: 1/254ff.). In another version, three honorary golden cups (*nuazæn*) are awarded to the house that has the most valiant husband (warrior), a good hostess and "generous" bread and salt for guests (i.e. features of the three social functions are present). G. Dumézil compares these "treasures" with the golden objects of the Scythian legend of Herodotus. In his opinion, this tale is a continuation "sinon la tradition même attestée par Hérodote, du moins une variante toute voisine" (Dumézil 1986: 491), explaining how Batraz became the owner of three "treasures", each of which "is associated with one of the three Indo-Iranian functions" (see also Abaev 1939: 28ff.).

The Nart legends are not the only sphere of Ossetian ethnic culture in which traces of the triple division of society can be traced. It was also reflected in genealogical legends, in the social structure of Ossetians in the later Middle Ages, in judicial practice, language and table customs. In North and South Ossetia there was a widespread legend about the origin of Ossetians from the sons of the legendary Os-Bagatar (in this way Ossetian rulers and military leaders were called in the Middle Ages). Georgian sources know under this name three actual historical figures who lived respectively in the 5th, 9th and 13–14th centuries (КС I: 154f., 261; КС II: 251, 305, 316f.). There are several variants of the legend, known from publications by Russian, Georgian and foreign authors of the 19th century; all of them are based on Ossetian legends. According to most variants, the sons of Os-Bagatar were Æghuz, Cærazon, Sidæmon, Kusægon and C'æxil. At the same time, C'æxil, according to some data, came from a concubine, while according to others he was "brought in from outside" (*ærkænæggag*), a fact which explains his dependent position (Haksthausen 1857: 11/105; Pfaff 1871a: 192; Pfaff 1872a: 152f.; Leontovich 1883: 11/18f.; Uvarova 1887: 45; Zichy 1897: 1/74; Tibilov 1936: 317 ff.).

In the later medieval period, the C'æxiltæ, according to folklore and historical data, were considered a branch of the Tsarazonov, and in Georgian sources, such as Vakhushti Bagrationi, even replaced the Tsarazonovs (VB 1904: 138), i.e. in fact we are talking here about four clans – the Aghuzovs, the Tsarazonovs, the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs. According to the *adats* of Caucasian highlanders collected by F. I. Leontovich, it were these four families who made up the *wazdanlag* (i. e. noble) class of the Alagiri Gorge (Leontovich 1883: 11/18).

According to Z. N. Vaneev, the historical core in this legend is the existence of ancient clans that traced their origin to the above-mentioned sons of Os-Bagatar (Vaneev 1956: 5ff.). The analysis of the legend and the comparison with written and folklore sources indicates that in respect of territory

it is connected primarily with the Alagiri Gorge (Bzarov 1987: 11ff.), which was the most ancient place of settlement of the Ossetians. It was from there that most of the Ossetian clans of both North and South Ossetia eventually expanded. However, the role of the named clans in the north (Alagiri Gorge) and in the south of Ossetia (Kudar and Dzhava Gorges and upper reaches of the Lesser Liakhva) was not the same. In the Alagiri Gorge the Tsarazonovs, the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs played the main role, while in South Ossetia it were the Aguzovs, the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs.

In other words, while the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs were well known both in the north and in the south of Ossetia, the Tsarazonovs were considered one of the three leading clans in the Alagiri Gorge, and the Aghuzovs played a similar role in the Dzhava and Kudar Gorges. Consequently, it can be assumed that as a result of historical development the descendants of Os-Bagatar settled in the north and in the south in three large patronymic clans. Apparently, this is why in some variants of the legend about Os-Bagatar, probably the later ones, as well as in historical sources only three brothers are mentioned. For example, according to E. de Zichy, the Alagirians included Zar-Ason, Sidamon and Kousagon, who, according to legends, descended from the three sons of Ossi-Bagatur (an Ossetian hero), then Zakhu-Ton (apparently a distorted C'æxilon, Y. G.) and Agou-Saron" (Zichy 1897: 1/74).

E. de Zichy visited only North Ossetia, which explains why the Æghuzatæ (Aguzarovs), who no longer played a significant role in the Alagiri Gorge, dropped out of the genealogical scheme of the legend, and the C'æxiltæ (C'æxilon) were not included as full members in most North Caucasian variants. At the same time, the South Ossetian variants name the following three brothers: Sidæmon, K'usæg and Æghuz, i.e. Æghuz replaces Cærazon in this list.

Both in North and South Ossetia, the following respective characteristics of the three clans ascending to the sons of Os-Bagatar have been preserved: "the militancy of the Aghuzovs (*Æqwyzai axsar*), the abundance of the Sidamonovs (*Sidæmoni bira*) and the glory of the Kusagonovs (*K'usægoni kad*)".³ In some versions of the legend, the notion of glory is associated with the Sidamonovs, and "abundance and plenty" with the Kusagonovs, which, however, does not change the essence of the social characteristics of the three clans. The latter is confirmed by the South Ossetian legend about each of the three ancestors receiving a certain object at the division: Sidæmon received a golden cloth,

3 As noted by V. B. Pfaff (1872a: 153), whose informant was Grigory Sanakoev, a teacher of the Dzhava school, Ossetians often uttered the following proverb when giving treats: "I wish you plenty – like Sidæmon, honour – like K'usæg, and strength – like Æghuz" (see also Salagaeva 1961: 1/153).

Æghuz got a golden sword, and K'usæg was given a golden ball (or bowl). "Thus the family name of Sidæmon multiplied spread as long as the cloth was long, and occupied the whole country. Æghuz got the sword, so courage and bravery went to his family name. The ball went to K'usæg and fame went to his family name" (Tibilov 1936: 317, 346; Vaneev 1956: 6). It is not difficult to guess that we deal here with the social characteristics and functions of three South Ossetian clans, which are represented by the objects given to the brothers.

According to V. I. Abaev, the distribution of the treasures between the three brothers "corresponds to the three social functions in the understanding of G. Dumézil: the ball or orb symbolizes supreme power, the sword symbolizes the military function, and the cloth symbolizes wealth" (Abaev 1958–89: 111/103, n. 1). In this respect, the given data adjoin with the Scythian legend about the three-functional division of society, and the objects delivered to the brothers in the Ossetian folktales are quite comparable to both the golden objects of the Scythian legend that fell from the sky and to the "three precious treasures of the ancestors" of the Ossetian Nart legends. The probability of such a parallel seems to be supported by the fact that the legend also mentions a fourth character – C'æxil, who is "brought in", i.e., stands on a lower social level, and does not participate in the division. In this connection one cannot help noting that the bulk of the free Scythian divided into three social groups is clearly contrasted with other strata of the population, i. e. the underprivileged, dependent and slaves, which, however, were not formed into a separate estate or caste.

The social characteristics of the three clans as well as the correlation of the objects received by the brothers with the social functions seem to be confirmed both by the etymology of some names and by historical data. According to V. B. Pfaff, K'usæg was bequeathed a bowl (Ossetian *k'us*), from which he allegedly got his name (Pfaff 1874: 74). As V. I. Abaev notes, the folk etymology "appears to be on the right track" this once, because the meaning of this legend is that the family of the Kusagonovs fulfilled "a cult-related function; in ancient times this family supplied the priests" (Abaev 1982: 115f.). In favour of this interpretation, one can also cite "the glory of the Kusagonovs" mentioned in many versions of the legend. According to Z. N. Vaneev, he heard in South Ossetia the expression "the glory of Khubulovs" (Vaneev 1956: 6), which, given that the Khubulovs belong to the stock of Kusagonovs, also supports the above statement.

Here, however, one should take into account that in the published versions of the Os-Bagatar story the Kusagonov family name is given mainly in the form of Qusæg, derived from the verb *qūsyn* 'to hear, listen', and less often Kusæg from *kusæg* 'worker' (Bzarov 1987: 20; Gutnov/Tmenov 1987: 43).

This variation in the name of the same family is probably due to the discrepancies in the versions of the tale regarding the social function of the family, because, as noted above, some of them associate “honour” and “glory” with the Kusagonovs, while others associate with them “abundance” and “numerousness”, i.e. the first and third social functions. Be it as it may, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of V. B. Pfaff’s report about the origin of the Kusagonov family name from the designation of the bowl *k’us* bequeathed to their ancestor.

The fact that it were the Kusagonovs, as E. G. Pchelina noted, who fulfilled the duties of arbitrators for the other tribes of Os-Bagatar’s descendants, listening to all their litigations, also attracts attention. The “supreme court” of Wallajyr-Madizan was located in K’usægon Dagom and its decisions were irrefutable for Ossetians. Based on the above, we should probably agree that initially, at least in the Alagiri Gorge, the first, i.e. sacral and legal function was associated with the Kusagonovs. This can be confirmed by an interesting fact noted by R. S. Bzarov concerning the quantitative ratio between the three main clans of the Alagirsky Gorge, according to which in the mid-19th century the Kusagonovs numbered about 560 souls, the Tsarazonovs about 840 and the Sidamonovs over two thousand (Bzarov 1987: 20, 22).⁴

This ratio seems to correspond (in general terms) to the proportional division of the population between priests, warriors and the bulk of cattle breeders and farmers in the Indo-Iranian tri-functional scheme. It is here, in all probability, that the name K’usægon – Qusægon in the meaning ‘heeding, listening’ finds its explanation, which, taking into account the tertiary functions of the K’usægon family, fully agrees with the first social function of this clan. The form Kusægon, influenced by *kusæg* ‘worker’, could have originated both from K’usægon, apparently the original, and from Qusægon, at a time when neither of these forms, especially the first one, was not etymologically transparent any more.

The social function of the descendants of Os-Bagatar can be traced even more convincingly on the basis of the etymological analysis of such family names as Cærazontæ and Æghuzatæ. According to V. I. Abaev, they originate in Latin “Caesar” and “Augustus” respectively, i. e. traditional names of Roman emperors, to whom some Ossetian rulers traced their legendary lineage. He considers this pretentious genealogy as a reminiscence of the distant past when the Alanian association was the most significant force in the North Caucasus (Abaev 1982: 117f.). Consequently, the etymology of the family names

4 According to V. B. Pfaff, the Sidamonovs made up the majority in South Ossetia (Pfaff 1872a: 153).

Cærazontæ and Æghuzatæ also suggests that they belonged to “royal” clans who claimed a special role in Alania.

V. I. Abaev’s opinion goes well with folklore and historical sources. For example, an Ossetian proverb says that the Æghuzatæ, with whom the notion of military valour was associated, “never had much land, as they fought more with the sword” (*Æghwyzatæn zæxx biræ nikwy wyd, wymæn æmæ fylðær kardæj xæcydysty*). This proverb in a slightly modified form (“Aghusovs have no land, they were engaged exclusively in military service”) is also quoted by V. B. Pfaff in his description of his journey to South Ossetia (Pfaff 1872a: 153). South Ossetian folklore has preserved a number of vivid examples of military campaigns of representatives of this family, confirmed by historical sources.

According to Georgian chronicles, in the 17th century Iaguzashvilebi (Gvritishvili 1961: 165; Gvasalia 1983: 27) were mentioned as a separate military unit within the Upper Kartli province (*sadrosho*) along with such large feudal estates as Amilakhvari, Abashidze, Palavandishvili, Machabeli, Pavlenishvili, Kherkheulidze and others. The name of this clan is undoubtedly a calque of the Ossetian family name of the Aguzovs – Æghwyzatæ. Along with such a regular phonetic feature as the transfer of the initial Ossetian “æ” in the name Æghwyzatæ (Æghuzatæ) by the Georgian “ia” (compare, for example: Ossetian Æxsar and Georgian Iaxsari), it is very indicative that the Georgian variant of this name is equipped not only with the patronymic formant *-shvili* ‘son’, but also with the plural indicator *-ebi*, which is not typical for Georgian surnames with the ending *-shvili*. To all appearances, both this feature and the Georgian variant Iaguzashvilebi adequately reflect the form and essence of the Ossetian name of late medieval Æghwyzatæ, which included not only related surnames of the Gagloevs, Sanakoevs, Gabaraevs, Galavanovs and Vaneevs, who formed the “ethnic” basis of the Aghuzovs, but also the Abaevs, Dzantiev, Pliev, Tomaevs, Khanikaevs, Shavlokhovs and a number of other surnames of the Dzhava Gorge. It seems that this heterogeneity of the Aghuzovs is clearly reflected in the plural ending of the surname Iaguzashvilebi. The same surname in the form of Ialguzashvili is mentioned among the noble (Aznaurian) surnames of Eastern Georgia. Such coincidence of folklore and historical data is rather telling.⁵

5 Folklore and historical data concerning the Æghuzatæ family do not allow us to agree with the opinion expressed by some authors that the Aguz “may be a personification of the lowest stratum of the medieval Wallağyr communards”. The attempt to rely on V. I. Abaev to prove the origin of the name Alguz from *agwyzæg* ‘helpless’ is also unsuccessful (Gutnov/Tmenov 1987: 42, 46), not to mention that V. I. Abaev gives a completely different etymology of the family name Æghuzatæ (Abaev 1958–89: 1/121; idem, 1982: 118f.).

As for the Cærazontæ family, whose settlement centre was the village of Nuzal, its role in the history of Ossetia is even greater. Suffice it to say that the famous Soslan David, husband and co-emperor of the Georgian queen Tamara (late 12th–early 13th century), who was later erroneously attributed to the Bagratids (Gaglojti 1969: 120ff.; Togoshvili 1981: 102ff.), belonged to this family. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of the eponym of this family both in the recorded social characteristics of the three surnames and in the list of brothers who received the paternal inheritance. This is explained mainly by the fact that the mentioned variants are mainly originating in South Ossetia, where the Cærazontæ family was poorly represented and did not play any significant role. As already noted, the Sidæmontæ and the K'usægontæ, with whom folk legends associate the concepts of “honour / fame” and “abundance”, i.e. the first (ritual) and the third (economic) functions, were approximately equally represented in both parts of Central Ossetia, while the Cærazontæ dominated mainly in the north and the Æghuzatæ (with the second function attributed to them) in the south.

Consequently, the Cærazontæ and the Aguzata, who appropriated the ambitious names of alleged descendants of Caesar and August respectively, clearly duplicated each other in fulfilling the same social function, but in different regions of the country. Referring to the relationship between these families, V. I. Abaev argues that it is difficult to say, whether they were two branches of a single ancient noble lineage or two rival independent dynasties (Abaev 1982: 123). However, taking into account their common origin indicated by folklore data and the identity of their social functions, the first assumption is more probable. In this regard, it is worth noting that the patron of both the Tsarazonta and the Æghuzatæ (represented by the the Gagloitæ family) was Mykalgabyr, who combined not only the functions but also the names of the archangels Michael and Gabriel, the first of whom was considered the leader of the heavenly host.

Thus, folklore and historical sources dating back to the late Middle Ages record the existence of three leading clans in the Alagiri Gorge (in the north) and in the Java Gorge (in the south), respectively: 1) The Tsarazonovs, the Sidamonovs, the Kusagonovs and 2) the Aghuzovs, the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs. With each of them folk tradition associated one of the three social functions of society – military, cult or economic. Of course, in the epoch under consideration we cannot speak about a real division of the population of Central Ossetia on the basis of class-familial principle and even less about the fulfilment of a certain function by each of these families. Suffice it to say that some part of the Sidæmontæ family, with whom tradition associates the notion of “abundance” or “glory”, having migrated together with a

military retinue to the southern slopes of the Main Caucasus range, demonstrated high military activity and gave rise to the Ksani and then the Aragva aristavs (Pfaff 1874: 9; Dzhnanashvili 1897: 193; Pchelina 1934: 92, 101, n. 38 et al.), a fact which is reflected, in particular, in the family name Sidamon-Eristavi. Consequently, we can only speak here about the reflection of such a division in the consciousness of the people, which can be regarded as a very distant reminiscence of a still more distant past.

It is indicative that traces of the class and caste division that once existed among Ossetians are recorded in the part of Ossetia where feudal relations were less developed. It is well known that in North Ossetia the Alagiri Gorge was considered as the most “democratic” where feudal relations were only just beginning. According to the norms of Ossetian customary law, the Alagiri Gorge consisted of two social strata – the *wæzdan* (Cærazontæ, Sidæmontæ, Æghuzatæ and K’usægontæ) and the *færssaglæg*, but there were no real relations of dependence between them and, what is most remarkable, the bulk of the population was made up of those families who considered themselves as *Wæzdan*, i.e. “nobles” (Leontovich 1883: 11/18).

It should be noted that the memory of the origin of the largest Alagiri families from Os-Bagatar and their triple division persisted even at the beginning of the 20th century, and was clearly realized by the Alagiri people themselves. This is evidenced by recordings of polemics that took place at the beginning of the century on the pages of the newspaper “Kavkaz” on the issue of estates in Ossetia; regardless of the attitude of the participants of the discussion to the essence of the issue, the reality of existence of the noble clans of Tsarazonovs, Sidamonovs and Kusagonovs was not questioned by anyone (ПРКОО-1: 11/187, 194, 221, 224).

As for South Ossetians, feudal relations did not even begin to emerge among them. Only some families of the Aghuzovs retained the title of *Wæzdan*, but in reality, it did not entail any class privileges or advantages (Vaneev 1956: 91). However, the traditional attribution of a specific social function to certain clans is to be explained by the reminiscence of the distant past in this case too.

With the triple division of society that once existed among the ancestors of the Ossetians the three-stage arbitration court should probably be connected, which still existed in Ossetia as lately as the first half of the 19th century. According to K. Koch, in the Javka Gorge of South Ossetia in case of mutual desire for reconciliation of two warring parties the following procedure was practiced. Each of the warring parties chose three judges. Two of them (one from each side) studied the case in question and presented their proposals on the matter. “They are called Alhuson”. The other two judges, called Sitamon, were obliged to examine the propositions made by their colleagues and to

pronounce a judgement on their fairness, and, if the parties agreed, to confirm the verdict. But the matter was not yet finally decided, as the last two judges (again, one from each side), whom K. Koch called the Kussagon, had to confirm the correctness of the judgement of their colleagues. "If the Kussagon decided that justice had been violated somewhere, they cancelled the previous decision", after which the case was re-examined with a new set of judges (Koch 1842–43: 11/109f.).

As can be seen from K. Koch's report, it is essentially a court of three instances. It is noteworthy that all pairs of judges were chosen from the same three families – the Aghuzovs, the Sidamonovs and the Kusagonovs, to each of which the folk tradition attributed a certain social function. It is clear that by the time of the events described by the author (the 30-s of the 19th century), they no longer had any real power associated with their position in society. According to K. Koch, none of the warring parties could be forced to fulfil the verdict in case of a disagreement with the decision taken. However, the very fact that judges of all three "instances" belonged to the Aghuzov, Sidamonov and Kusagonov families, who, according to South Ossetians, represented power, honour and abundance, is very significant. It seems to be connected with the three-functional division of the ancient Ossetian society and is also a reminiscence of this division.

Traces of the existence of the tripartite division among the ancestors of the Ossetians can also be found in the language. We have already paid attention to the Ossetian proverb *mægwyr læg – wærdonǵyn*, which means literally "a poor man is the owner of a cart" (Gutiev 1976: 103; Gaglojti 1967: 93). Considering the origin and semantics of the proverb, it should be noted that in the mouths of Ossetians of the period of Mongol-Tatar invasions this expression must have sounded more than strange. The fact is that as a result of these invasions and especially after Tamerlane's campaigns Ossetians, who had been living in the North Caucasian plain, were forced to hide in deep cramps of the Central Caucasus where the use of the cart was extremely limited.

Up until the incorporation of Ossetia into Russia and the beginning of the resettlement of the Ossetians to the plains, the only means of travelling long distances in the mountains was pack transport (Kalojev 1971: 126 f.), about which there are direct eyewitness accounts. Thus, for example, the Russian officer A. Janovskij, who visited mountainous Ossetia in the 30-s of the 19th century, wrote that the inhabitants there "do not have carts, they usually ride on horseback and carry heavy loads on packs" (Janovskij 1836: 180). According to A. Haksthausen, the fenced yard of an Ossetian family contains sledges and firewood, but "there are no carts here" (Haksthausen 1857: 11/81). In the plain part of South Ossetia, the appearance of the cart dates back to the second half

of the 19th century (Chursin 1925: 22). Therefore, the possession of a cart could not be an indicator of poverty, even after the widespread use of cart transport after the resettlement of highlanders to the plain and the construction of roads in the mountains.

At the same time, the name cart in Ossetian (*wærdon*) is of very ancient origin, as evidenced by the fact that this word belongs to the main vocabulary of the language, as well as the names of cart in Abkhazian (*awardyn*) and Ingush (*wardta*) languages (Abaev 1949: 54, 313 f.; Genko 1930: 715). All these considerations suggest that the origin and semantics of the above Ossetian proverb must be connected with another epoch and other social relations, when the main territory of settlement of the Ossetian ancestors was the steppe areas of the North Caucasus and the Northern Black Sea coast.

In the scholia to Aristophanes' comedy "The Birds" an ancient author notes that in winter, due to its harshness, the Scythians put their property "on wagons and leave for another country. He who does not have a wagon there is considered dishonourable among them (Scythians)" (Latyshev 1890–1906: 1/353). To this testimony the report of the famous ancient Greek lyricist Pindar (522–442 BC) adjoins, in which a certain Straton wandering among the Scythian nomads is concerned, who "does not have a house which can be carried on a cart" (Latyshev 1890–1906: 1/326). Thus, the Ossetian expression "a poor man is the owner of a cart" can be compared with Pindar's testimony.

As it is evident from the data of Lucian of Samosata (2nd century AD), who gives specific information on the division of the Scythians into three social groups, the common Scythians, who did not belong to the royal lineage and to the "wearers of felt caps" (*πιλοφορικῶί*), i.e. representatives of the "priestly" stratum, were called "eight-legged", as they were "owners of a pair of oxen and one cart" (Latyshev 1890–1906: 1/543).

The designation of the lower stratum of the Scythian society by a special term shows that the possession of at least one cart and a pair of oxen was the most characteristic feature of this social group, a kind of attribute of belonging to the free stratum of the Scythian society. The absence of such a cart with oxen, which constituted a vital necessity in nomadic and semi-nomadic life, excluded the concerned family from the environment of the free Scythians, who belonged to one of the three constituted social groups. Apparently, these perceptions and social relations can explain the origin of the Ossetian proverb under consideration, which nowadays sounds like an anachronism.

Comparing it with a Scythian or Scythian-period expression (and explaining its origin through the conditions of Scythian life) may seem a bit strange, taking into account the long time interval between the Scythians and the modern Ossetians. Yet this example is by no means isolated. Antique authors have

preserved several variants of the Scythians' famous answer to the Persian king Darius' proposal to consider themselves as his subjects or to enter into a battle with him (Herodotus, IV, 126). According to Plutarch's version, the Scythians "replied to the Persian king Darius that they wished him to weep". As per Plutarch, this proverb "refers to those who express bad wishes to someone in a curt manner" (Latyshev 1890–1906: I/861). Apparently, it is a translation from Scythian, as evidenced by the existence of a similar idiomatic expression in Ossetian, namely: *kæwinag fæwæd dæ sær* ("let your head be mourned"). This expression is found in lamentations over the deceased, and it is also used as a curse, wishing somebody to die.

Other Ossetian expressions find their explanation in the realities of Scythian life described by Herodotus (IV, 68–69) and other antique authors, such as Clearchus of Soli (Life Descriptions, IV): *synzzyzyn arty fæsu3* – "my you burn in a fire of thorns", *fynzæftyd fæw* – "may you remain noseless", *æyærcçag fæw* – "may you have to share", etc.

Some traditional table customs of Ossetians are also of certain interest, as they seem again to be related to the triple division. The fact is that an obligatory attribute of an Ossetian feast (*kuvd*) is that the head, shoulder blade and neck of a sacrificial animal together with three pies are placed in front of three elders who preside over the table (Miller 1882: 265). If we take into account that the head is considered a symbol of supreme power, the shoulder blade (still) serves for divination about the future, and the neck acts as a symbol of support and material strength, the conclusion that this table custom reflects the three-functional division of the ancient Ossetian society would not be far-fetched. By the way, it should be noted that, according to our knowledge, such a custom is not found among other Caucasian peoples.

The custom of baking three triples of prayer pies for the "prayer feast" (*Gomiaty kwyvud*) recorded in Digoria may also belong here. The first three of these pies were dedicated to God, the second, consisting of triangular pies (*ærtæ zyxon, savsættæ*) to the patron saint of warriors and men Wastyrgý. The informant could not say for sure to whom the last three were dedicated, but in any case, the dedication of the first two triples of prayer cakes to the Almighty and the patron of warriors is quite indicative.

Thus, the above material suggests that the memory of the three-functional social division that once existed among the ancestors of the Ossetians has been preserved in the Nart stories, historical legends, judicial practice as well as in the Ossetian language. Thus, the question naturally arises to what extent the Ossetian materials help to shed light on the solution of the main question of the Scythian three-functional division: Was this division a reality in Herodotus' epoch or did it represent only an ideal model of the division of

society? It seems that such a wide range of spheres of Ossetian ethnic culture, in which this triad is reflected, testifies to the reality of such a division among Herodotus' Scythians and, perhaps, even among the Sarmatians.

It is quite likely that the materials of Ossetian ethnography cannot serve as a decisive argument in answering this question. However, given the continuity of the Ossetians' connection with the Scythians and such a wide spread of vestiges of the three-functional division in the Ossetian ethnic culture, these vestiges can hardly be explained only by reflecting ideas about the ideal model of society. Besides, one cannot pass by the fact that E. A. Grantovskij's arguments about the reality of the three-functional social division among the Scythians, which are based on a meticulous analysis of the data of ancient authors, are fully confirmed by the Ossetian material, as well as by many ethnographic features of the Scythian society (E. A. Grantovskij, D. S. Raevskij, V. B. Kovalevskaya). Accordingly, the model of the three-functional division of society preserved in the Ossetian ethnic culture should be put in connection with the division of the Scythians into three social groups.

To the Etymology of the South Ossetian Toponym *K'wydar*

Yuri Dzitssojty

1 Semantics and Usage of the Toponym *K'wydar*

The origin of the toponym *K'wydar* has already been discussed in scientific literature, however, in our opinion, none of the etymologies proposed for it can be recognized as satisfactory. But before we proceed to a review of the existing etymologies and then move to the etymological analysis proper, it is necessary to answer a number of linguistic and extra-linguistic questions related to the use of the toponym *K'wydar* in dialects of the Ossetian language.

In South Ossetia the toponym *K'wydar* (or *K'wydargom* || *K'wydary kom* 'Kudar gorge') is assigned to a relatively small gorge in the north-west of the country (Bjazyrty 1959–62: III/240, 306; Tskhovrebova 1979: 82, 121). In North Ossetian vernaculars only the form *K'wydar*, meaning 'South Ossetia', is known. It is quite indicative that in the work of a North Ossetian historian of the beginning of the last century, the name *K'wydar* covers the territory of Ossetian settlements of Gori and Dusheti Regions of the former Tiflis Province of the Russian Empire (Kokiev 1926: 23). However, the Kudar Gorge was administratively part of the Kutaisi province of the same empire. Thus, the toponym *K'wydar*, according to the ideas of North and South Ossetians, covers different territories of South Ossetia. But the matter is not limited to this.

As our field studies show, in North Ossetia also the Naro-Mamison basin (*Twalgom*, *Mamysony kom*) adjacent to South Ossetia is also known under the name of *K'wydar*. As a reason for attributing *Twalgom* to Kudar, our informants point to the fact that the inhabitants of this region speak "another language" (*ændæx ævzag*), i.e., "another dialect".¹ This information is also confirmed by the report of V. Perevalenko, a mid-19th century author, who named *Kvemobozhi* village as belonging to the Kudar Gorge (ПРКОО-1 1/87). The villages of *Kvemo-Boja* and *Didi-Boja* are also mentioned as part of South

1 Traditionally there was only one term in the Ossetian language for language and dialect – *ævzag* 'language'. The terms *dialekt*, *nyxasuzdæxt* 'dialect', *k'wymon nyxas* 'vernacular, subdialect' appeared only in the 20th century.

Ossetia by the 18th century traveller I. Guldenstedt. As Prof. G. S. Akhvediani believed, these villages are situated in the Kudar gorge, while one of them corresponds to the toponym *Bozha*, marked on a map of South Ossetia, compiled in 1900 (Akhvediani 1960: 67, 75). However, according to the toponymist Z. D. Tskhovrebova, there are no villages with such names in the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia, and the toponym *Bozha* on the mentioned map is localised not in South but in North Ossetia (Tskhovrebova 1979: 117, 120). Indeed, in the Mamison Gorge of North Ossetia, adjacent to the Kudar Gorge, we can find the toponyms *Æddag Bodzo*, *Bodzo* and *Fallag Bodzo* (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/222, 226, 265), with which the toponym (*Kvemo*) *Bozha* should be compared.

When localising these villages in the Kudar Region, V. Perevalenko meant not the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia, but the adjacent Mamison Gorge of North Ossetia. Consequently, according to V. Perevalenko the Mamison Gorge also bore the name *Kudar*. It is not excluded that in the past the name *K'wydar* was also applied to the Kasar Gorge of North Ossetia. Thus, in a Digor song we can find the following words: *Wællag Iri sær K'udar æj* "Above the Alagir (Gorge) there is (the region of) Kudar" (Salagaeva 1961: 11/609). If we take into account that in the past *Alagirskoe Gorge* was the name of the part of North Ossetia which is situated between the villages of Tæmisk'y and Buron (Twyty 1999: 66; cf. Bzarov 1987: 11, 13f.; idem, 1988: 19), we can assume that the Kasar Gorge, starting immediately after Buron, was part of (the region of) Kudar. This assumption goes well with the following words of the prince Vakhushti: "Also Dvaletia is divided into gorges, and the gorges are called as follows: Kasris-xevi, Zramaga, Žgele, Nara, Zrogoi and Zaxa" (VB 1904: 137f.).² In another place Vakhushti writes: "To the west of Valagiri³ or Paikomi the gorge of Kasris-xeoba follows, which even now is called Dvaleti" (Ibid: 145 f.). As we will see below, medieval speakers of the Kudar vernacular are known to the Georgians as *dval-n-i*, and the territory on which they reside as *Dval-et-i* (called by themselves *tval*). Hence, the folklore terminus *K'wydar* can be regarded as being a synonyme of the historical *Dvaleti*.

With all this the question arises, which of these meanings of the toponym *K'wydar* is primary and which is secondary? In other words, are we dealing with a narrowing of the original semantics of this toponym in South Ossetian dialects or, on the contrary, with its expansion in dialects of North Ossetia?

The first of these assumptions seems a priori the more probable, and this for two reasons. Firstly, in the Mamison Gorge of North Ossetia people speak

2 The Ossetian originals of these names are: *Qasaragom*, *Zæremæg*, *Zg'il*, *Nar*, *Zrug*, *Zaqa*.

3 Oss. *Wællagyr* 'Alagir'. Vaxushti is inaccurate in this case: the Kasar Gorge is to the south, not west of the Alagir Gorge.

a special Ossetian dialect, which is closely related to the *Kudar* (or *Dzhava*) dialect of South Ossetia (Tibilov 1988: 26, 68; Bekoev 1985: 170f.; Dzattiaty 2002: 160). This dialect, as well as the name *K'wydar*, could not have been transferred from the south of Ossetia to its north, as the main wave of migration was from north to south. Therefore, the speakers of the *Kudar* dialect in Mamison must be considered a remnant of the former *Kudar* population.

Secondly, for the North Ossetians to transfer the name of one of the south Ossetian gorges to South Ossetia as a whole, it would have been necessary that this gorge was better known to them than other South Ossetian gorges. However, the majority of the population of North Ossetia is not even aware of the existence of the *Kudar Gorge*. If in search of a name for South Ossetia, people from the north of the country had to choose the name of one of the South Ossetian gorges, they would certainly have taken *Twalgom*, which covers the entire Naro-Mamison basin.

In this connection it is interesting to note that in medieval Georgian sources South Ossetia is known exactly as “*Twalia*” (Georgian *Dvaleti*), while Miller called the *Kudar* dialect of the Ossetian language “*Twali*” (Miller 1882: 30f.).⁴ Therefore, the appearance of the name *K'wydar* in North Ossetia, as well as the use of this toponym for South Ossetia as a whole, is the result of some other processes, and very ancient ones at that.

Thus, we can give a preliminary answer to the question posed above: Probably, in South Ossetia a narrowing of the original semantics of the toponym *K'wydar* took place, whereas the old meaning preserved in the North Ossetian vernaculars.

It is quite symptomatic that the solution of the task at hand takes us beyond the limits of linguistics and closely adjoins us to the problem of the ethnic history of South and Central Ossetia. In particular, we will have to investigate not only the appearance of the toponym *K'wydar* in North Ossetia, but also the question of the historical correlation of the toponyms *K'wydar* and *Twal (gom)*. It is also obvious that the origin of the toponym *K'wydar* must be closely related to the question of the formation of the central and southern dialects of the Ossetian language, which is very important for Ossetian dialectology.

The next query, which requires a preliminary answer, is related to the ethnonym *K'wydar* ‘Kudarians’ that exists in parallel with the toponym *K'wydar* (cf. also derivatives like *k'wydajrag* ‘Kudarians’ and the secondary plural form *k'wydajregtæ* ‘Kudarians’). As in the case of the toponym *K'wydar*, the

4 This dialect is also known under the Georgianised name “*Dvali*” in the works of G. S. Akhvediani and D. G. Bekoev.

ethnonym in question has different meanings in South and North Ossetia. This can be clearly seen, for example, from ethnographic material collected by N. G. Volkova: “The territory inhabited by the Kudars is imagined by Ossetians from different regions in very different ways. Thus, flatland Ossetians⁵ sometimes refer to ‘Kudars’ as to the Ossetian population inhabiting the mountains beyond Buron, i.e. to ‘Twals’, and beyond Roki and Mamison Passes. The Twals in their turn consider the Ossetians of South Ossetia and the Trusovsky Gorge to be ‘Kudars’. The population of *Urs-Twalta* (Belaya Tualta)⁶ calls ‘Kudars’ only the inhabitants of the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia <...>. Under the name of *kudajrag* South Ossetians are also known to the Digorians and the Trusovians. Moreover, among the latter there is also another name for Ossetians living beyond the Krestovy Pass (oss. *Bidarta*) – *zimyr* – which, from their point of view, is a synonym of the word *kudajrag* <...>. The Kudarians call themselves *iron*, and when communicating with Irons – *kudajrag* and *twallag* <...>. The *twallag* people living from the Trusovs beyond the Zakkafstasag pass call them *tersikom* and *kudajrag*, but the Trusovs do not count themselves as Kudars” (Volkova 1973: 117f.).⁷

It should be added that, according to our own observations, the inhabitants of the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia do not call themselves Kudars either. They consider themselves Irons. But the Irons of North Ossetia, who use only this self-designation, do not apply it neither to the Digorians nor to the Tuals, let alone to the South Ossetians (Miller 1887: 109). Digorians also do not extend the designation *iron* to the South Ossetians.

It seems that the ethnonym *iron* has arrived to Central and South Ossetia relatively recently, apparently as a result of the resettlement of large groups of northern Irons from North Ossetia. Such a massive exodus of Irons from the north could have occurred only as a result of serious historical cataclysms, which, given the historical data, could have been either the Tatar-Mongol invasion of the North Caucasus or the invasion of Tamerlane that followed it.

These events were echoed in a report of the 18th century Georgian historian and geographer Vakhushti Bagrationi: “After the campaign of Genghis Khan,

5 They mean the North Ossetians.

6 The name of a province in South Ossetia.

7 According to a kind report by Z. P. Dzhabiev, South Ossetians call Truso people *æxsæjnag twal* ‘middle Tualians’. Vaxushti Bagrationi (early 18th century) reports: “The Truso gorge <...> belongs to Dvaleti” (Vaxushti Bagrationi: 138). The following observation by T. B. Goniashvili is also interesting: “Ossetic *tual*, as well as *dvali* of Georgian sources, is rendered in Chechen-Ingush as *tursxuo* (metathesis from *trusxuo*) ‘inhabitant of the Truso Gorge’” (Goniashvili 1977: 63).

Botokhakan (Batu Khan, *Y. D.*) defeated (the Ossetians) and devastated (their country), the Ossetians went inside the Caucasus <...>. After the devastation of Ovsetia (= Ossetia, *Y. D.*) and their (the Ossetians') entry into the Caucasus, Ovsetia began to be called Circassia, or Kabardo,⁸ and the land in the mountains of the Caucasus was called by the name of those (Ossetians) who entered there, i.e. Ovsetia" (VB 1904: 138).

The Ossetian-Ovses who moved to the interior of the Caucasus are the same people who brought the self-designation *iron* to South Ossetia (Akhvlediani 1960: 69). Consequently, before their resettlement in Central and South Ossetia the Ossetians living there had another self-designation. But which? As it can be seen from the Georgian sources, in the Middle Ages South Ossetians called themselves Twals. It is therefore clear that after the resettlement the ethnonym *iron* replaced the self-designation *twal* on the entire territory of South Ossetia with the exception of the remote outlying province *Urs-Twaltæ*.

The change of the self-designation went unnoticed by the Irons in North Ossetia, who transferred to the new inhabitants of South Ossetia the name of the Twals, who preceded them. Something similar happened in the North Caucasus, in Balkaria, where at about the same time the Alanian population, known by their self-designation *asy*, was replaced by Turkic people. However, the neighbouring Ossetians transferred to the Turks the name *asy*, which in modern Ossetian language has taken on the meaning of 'Balkars'.

But if the ethnonym *twal* is the historical self-designation of South Ossetians, how did it correlate with the ethnonym *K'wydar*, which, to all appearances, was also the name of the same medieval South Ossetians?

This question is inextricably linked with another one: What is primary when comparing the ethnonym *K'wydar* with the toponym of the same name, and what is secondary? In other words, does the toponym go back to the ethnonym or vice versa? The fact is that the Ossetian language knows both variants of development. Thus, on the one hand, the mentioned ethnonym *asy* 'Ases' became the name of a gorge: *Asy* 'the area where the Ases live, Balkaria'. On the other hand, the name of the river and the gorge *Čysan* in South Ossetia turned into the name of an ethnographic group of Ossetians, the Chysans, dwelling in this gorge.⁹

8 The land emptied on the plane was eventually occupied by Adyghe (Kabardino-Circassian) tribes.

9 Abaev 1949: 495; see also: Kaloiev 1971: 63. Contrary to B. A. Alborov (1930: 258) the Chisanians have nothing to do with the Dachans (or Rachans) of the "Armenian Geography".

We believe that the toponym *K'wydar* is primary and the ethnonym *K'wydar* is its derivative. Consequently, one can assume that in the time of the Alans the South Ossetians were known to the North Ossetians both as “Twals” (by their self-designation *twal*) and as “Kudars”, i.e. “inhabitants of the Kudar Region”. Whereby the latter was an external designation which emerged in the North Ossetian environment.

There are quite a number of arguments testifying to the primacy of the toponym *K'wydar* and the secondary character of the corresponding ethnonym. The most significant are the following:

- The toponym *K'wydar* in the form *K'udaro* is repeatedly mentioned by Vakhushti Bagrationi, as the name of the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia (VB 1904: 82, 146, 147, 216, 217, 218; VB 1976: 101, 276).
- At the same time Vakhushti never uses the word “Kudar” as an ethnonym, but considers the inhabitants of the Kudar Gorge as Twals: “the inhabitants of the Big Liakhva, Little Liakhva, Ksnis-Khevi (Chisan Gorge, *Y. D.*) and Kudaro are also Dvals” (VB 1904: 147).
- Moreover, in the toponymy of Ossetia there is a significant number of toponyms ending in *-ar* (see below), while there is not a single original Ossetian ethnonym with the same ending.

Thus, medieval South Ossetia (or a part of it) was called *K'wydar*, and the Ossetians who inhabited it were known to the neighbouring Georgians and North Ossetians as Twals (Osset. *twal*, Georgian *dvalni*).

However, the northern Ossetians used also another name – *k'wydar*, deriving from the corresponding geographical name. Georgians, who knew about the existence of the region called *K'wydar* from South Ossetians, used this term in its South Ossetian meaning: “region in the north-west of South Ossetia”. In this way, the narrowing of the original semantics of the toponym in question must have taken place long before the 18th century; even, to be more precisely (as we will see below) long before the Middle Ages.

2 The Toponym *K'wydar* and the “Ethnonym” *Kowdētḱ*

The following description of the ethnic composition of the population of the northern and southern slopes of the Central Caucasus is preserved in the “Armenian Geography” (Ašxarhac'uyc') of the 7th century: “The peoples in Sarmatia are distributed as follows, starting from the west and heading eastwards: first, the tribes of the Alans, Aštigors, with them in the south live the Kheburi, Kowdētḱ, as well as the Argvels, Margvels and Skumias, i.e. the

Takuyrs. Behind the Digors in the Ardoz region of the Caucasus Mountains the Alans live <...>. In the same mountains, after the Ardoz people, the tribes of Račan (variant reading: Dačan), (Pinj), Dvals, (Xons), Ckhums, Ovsurs, Canars <...> live” (Gabrielyan 1984: 14f.; Gabrielyan 1985: 17).¹⁰

G. Kokiev was the first to compare the Kudets of the “Armenian Geography” with the Ossetian Kudars (Kokiev 1926: 23f.). If this comparison be correct, it would provide us with reliable grounds for the localisation of the medieval Kudars in the Kudar Gorge of South Ossetia. Therefore, it is necessary to dwell briefly on the latest interpretations of the above Armenian passage.

The translation by R. A. Gabrielyan is based on the reconstruction of the original Armenian text by S. T. Eremyan (Eremyan 1970: 400ff.). In the newly edited, commented translation by A. Alemany (Alemany 2000: 282) this passage reads as follows: “And in Sarmatia are to be found, starting from East to West, first the people of the Aš-Digor Alans, and to the South their neighbours the Xebowrk’, the K’owdetk’, the Argvël – who are the Margvël – and the Skiwnnik’ – (who are) the T’akoyr”. Most modern scholars have accepted the identification of the “ethnonym” *kowdētk’* with the *K’wydar* region, localising it between the Rachin (*Račan*) and the Twal (*Dval*) (Eremyan 1970: 406; Gabrielyan 1985: 47; Hewsen 1992: 115, n. 58; Kuznetsov 1992: 182; Bliev/Bzarov 2000: 94; Alemany 2000: 283).

This identification is also adhered to by Yu. S. Gaglojti, the author of a special study on Alans and Ossetians which is based on information from the *Ašxarhac’oyc’* (Gaglojti 1966). In Gaglojti’s work the Argvël or the Margvël are linked to the western Georgian region Argveti or Margveti, and the T’akoyr – to the Georgian region Takueri (Gaglojti 1966: 191f.; Gabrielyan 1985: 47). As for the Kheburians, they are compared with the Georgian tribe of Rachin-Gebians, otherwise called “Glola-Kheburians” (Gaglojti 1966: 192).¹¹ Gaglojti proceeds: “The Kheburns, Argvels and Takuiris being lokated to the south of the Digors suggest that the Kutetes (var. Kudetes), mentioned by the Geography together with them, should also be sought on the southern mountain slopes.

10 Cf. the translation of this passage by Hewsen (1992: 55): “There are many [peoples] in Sarmatia beginning from east to west thus: first the nation of the *Aš-Tigor* Alans on the south. Dwelling with them are the *Xēburk’*, *K’ut’ētk’*, *Argwel*, *Mardoyl*, *T’akoyr* and Alans. Next are the *Dik’orin* in the *Ardoz* country [lying] in the Caucasus Mountains from which flows the River Armn which, running north into the vast steppes, joins the Etil. In the same mountains, after the Ardozian people, dwell the *Dajank’*, *Dualk’*, *Cēxoyk’*, *P’urk’*, and *Canark’*...”.

11 The identification of the Kheburians with one of the Dagestani tribes living in the upper reaches of the Koyso River basin, adopted by R. A. Gabrielyan (1985: 47), is extremely doubtful.

This is proved, in particular, by the Geography mentioning among the 24 regions of Iberia also that of Kuditi, whose similarity to the above Kutetes-Kudetes cannot but catch the eye" (ibid.).

Unfortunately, the state of the Armenian source does not allow for final conclusions. Different paleographically acceptable corrections permit different readings and interpretations of the onomastics in this document (cf. such variants of reading as *dačan* vs. *račan*). Thus, a recent study by K. Zuckerman, containing a new commented translation of the passage in question, draws attention, as it radically revises the localisation and identification of the above tribes. In particular, the Kheburs are identified with the Brukhs and placed in the north-western Caucasus, the Kutetes are identified with the Goths and placed next to the Kheburs-Brukhs, etc. (Zuckerman 2003: 144ff.). I do not undertake to judge the correctness of these identifications. However, one cannot ignore the fact that the French researcher carefully ignored the comparison of the Kudetes with the Kudars.

On the other hand, the Kheburs cannot be separated from the Rachin-Gebans. In Kartlis Tskhovreba the army of the Rachins, who arrived at the court of Queen Tamar, is mentioned in direct connection with the army of their nearest neighbours, the Margvels and the Takuir: *rača-taķuer-margueli* (Кс II: 63ff.). In another place the corresponding toponyms are mentioned side by side: "*Ra ča, Taķueri and Argueti*" (Кс II: 49). All this contradicts Zuckerman's hypothesis.

Since no convincing arguments were given to contradict the identification of the "ethnonym" *kowdētk'* with the toponym *K'wydar*, this identification remains in force. This means, firstly, that in the 7th century, judging by the toponymic environment, the Kudar Region was located where it is situated today, namely in the north-west of South Ossetia. Consequently, until the Middle Ages this toponym was used in the meaning of 'South Ossetia'. Secondly, we can make a first step towards its etymology, because the form *kowd-ēt-k'* contains the Armenian plural ending *-k'* and the Georgian topoformant *-et-*. What conclusion can we make from this?

Zuckerman (2003: 147) is right in assuming that one of those who informed the author of the "Armenian Geography" about the population of the Caucasus could have been a Georgian.¹² This assumption, in addition to the form **K'udeti*, is sustained by the form *Dual-k'*, corresponding to Georgian *dvali*, not to Ossetian *twal*. It is also supported by the form **Awsur-k'*, reconstructed by

12 The fact that the toponymy of Ossetia presented in the "Armenian Geography" had arrived to Armenia through Georgian mediation was already noted by Prof. B. A. Alborov (Alborov 1930: 258).

S. T. Eremyan, which goes back to the ancient Georgian name of the Ossetians *ovs-i*, enlarged by the Georgian suffix *-ur-*.

All this means that in the present case we are not dealing with an ethnonym, but with a toponym, the initial form of which was **K'ud-et-i*. In translation from Georgian this toponym signifies 'Land of the *Kuds*'. So, the medieval Ossetian source of Georgian **K'ud-et-i* could mean something of the same kind. This allows us to divide the analysed Ossetian toponym into *K'wyd-ar*, the first part of which is an ethnonym and the second a kind of formant. Does the etymological analysis of the Ossetian toponym support such an interpretation?

3 Review of the Existing Etymologies of the Toponym *K'wydar*

The first etymology of the toponym we are interested in goes back to traditional storytellers. And although it is of no scientific value, we mention it because this folk etymology, firstly, tries to explain the origin of the toponym *K'wydar* and not the ethnonym associated with it, a fact, which one more time testifies to the primacy of the toponym. Besides, the storytellers' interpretation suggests that in the minds of speakers of Ossetian the toponym in question has been recognised as morphologically indecomposable and thus needed to be "explained". Consequently, we are confronted with one of the oldest toponyms of South Ossetia, whose morphological structure becomes clear only after the application of an etymological analysis.

One of the variants of the folk etymology of the toponym *K'wydar* was recorded in 1883 by Miller in South Ossetia. It reads: "Tamar Dedopali (Queen Tamara, *Y. D.*) was childless. She lived on the mountain Bursabdzei.¹³ From this mountain she travelled to Imeretia,¹⁴ telling her maid: "Do not give the keys to anyone". When Tamara had left, her maid could not resist, opened the door with the keys left to her and from there (from the room) flew out the morning star and sat in the sky. After that the sky covered with clouds and it began to snow heavily. Seeing this, Tamara went back and when she reached Oni,¹⁵ the snow was above her horse's shoulder blades. That is why the town of Oni (*Weni*) is called in this way.¹⁶ From there she travelled to Kudar

13 A mountain in South Ossetia, also known as: *Burxox* or *Xurbadeny xox*.

14 A province in western Georgia.

15 The name of a town in western Georgia, on the road from South Ossetia to Imeretia.

16 The convergence of the Georgian oikonym with the Ossetian word *wæn* 'scapular bone' is based on folk etymology.

(K'wydar), where her horse died. Therefore, this place is called Kudar <...>" (Miller 1887: 174f.).¹⁷

Most probably, Miller misunderstood the essence of the "etymology" provided by the last passage and annotated the toponym *K'wydar* in the following way: "*K'wydar* means a stump and is applied in an ironical way to a deceased person" (Miller 1887: 178). Indeed, in Ossetian the word *k'wydyr* (but not *K'wydar*) means 'stump' and is sometimes used in the sense of 'dead man'. However, this was not what the narrator had in mind. He rather thought about the Georgian word *mḵvdari* 'dead'. This circumstance was correctly pointed out by Prof. Megreliдзе, who characterised the given "etymology" as untenable (Megreliдзе 1960: 111). Certainly, if the toponym *K'wydar* was indeed derived from the Georgian word *mḵvdari*, then the respective gorge has been called **Mḵvdaro* in Georgian, and not *K'udaro*. At the same time, it is quite obvious that the latter form goes back to Ossetian *K'wydar*, and more precisely to Old Ossetic **K'udar* (see below).

In the Kudar Gorge we have heard another legend,¹⁸ according to which in ancient times Georgian princes committed there a bloody massacre, after which the Ossetians called this area *Kwyd ran*, i. e. 'Place of weeping', and from this combination the toponym *K'wydar* would have eventually derived. Be it as it may, the invalidity of the given folk etymology is beyond doubt.

Turning now to academic etymologies, we will see that in their majority they are rather comparisons and not etymologies in the strictly scientific sense of the word.

The first attempt of such a comparison, as already noted above, belongs to G. Kokiev. Another comparison of this sort was proposed by Prof. Alborov. In developing the hypothesis of the Ossetian Nart epic originating in Asia Minor, he came to the conclusion that tribes from these places also took an active part in the ethnogenesis of the Ossetians. Such a conclusion was made on the basis of a number of rather dubious and obviously erroneous etymologies, which only a few people engaged in Ossetian studies will nowadays remember. Thus, among other etymologies we find a comparison of the toponym *K'wydar* with the Assyrian-Vanish toponym *Kidari* (Alborov 1930: 281). However, this comparison cannot be accepted for both historical and phonetic reasons.

The next most recent etymology of the toponym in question belongs to A. T. Agnaev, who compared *K'wydar* with the Pamir (Bartang) toponym *Kudar*, the name of a river and a gorge (Agnaev 1959: 88). Without a reference

17 Variants of this legend were recorded at the beginning of the last century (Dzhykkajty 1989: 30ff.).

18 Informant Ælborty Gedevan, town of Kwaisa.

to Agnaev this comparison was repeated by V. Khugaev, who additionally proposed the division of the word into *K'wy* + *dar*, with Persian *kuh* 'mountain' in the first part and *dar* 'door' in the second part (Khugaev 1966: 72). However, the connection of the toponym *K'wydar* with Persian *kuh* + *dar* must be rejected for a number of reasons. First, as it was already mentioned, the association of the toponym *K'wydar* with Old Georgian **K'ud-et-i* clearly shows that we are dealing with a root *K'wyd-* and a suffix *-ar*, a fact which makes a division **K'wy-dar* unacceptable. Second, as for now no Persian influence was noted in the language of South Ossetians. Third, the initial abruptive phoneme remains unexplained. Fourth, as we have already seen above, the original meaning of the toponym *K'wydar* is quite wide and not limited to a single gorge. Thus, a meaning like "Gate of Mountains" seems unsuitable.

For the same reasons one should reject the connection with the Pamir toponym *Kudar*,¹⁹ which in this case contains the Persian word *dar* 'valley' and not *dar* 'door, gate'. It is indicative that Agnaev himself later rejected this comparison, proposing another one, which in my opinion is even less convincing. Here Agnaev proceeds from the premise that in the case of *K'wydar* we are dealing with an ethnonym, and not a toponym (Agnaev 1992a: 4). However, this assumption shows ignorance not only of Georgian language (see above), but also of the Ossetian material, which unambiguously points to the primacy of the toponym *K'wydar*. Interestingly, thirty years before the appearance of this "new" etymology, the same author (see above) explained the toponym, not the ethnonym **k'wydar*. What is the reason for such a radical change in the scholar's attitude to the name under investigation?

As so often everything is rather simple. According to Agnaev's new etymology the name in question is connected with a Scythian ethnonym, which is mentioned by Herodotus. This ethnonym, *katiar*, consists, according to Agnaev, of the Iranian base *kata-* 'dugout', the infix *-i-* and the base of the Ossetic verb *ar-yn* 'find' (Agnaev 1992: 3).²⁰ This etymology raises too many questions. Let us start with the fact that Scythian *katiari*, as established by a number of authorities in Iranian studies (Christensen, Dumézil, Raevskij, etc.), is not an ethnonym in a proper sense, but the Scythian name of a social group, that of ordinary community members. Moreover, Agnaev takes as a base Herodotus' transmission of the Scythian word. Taking into account the regularities in the transmission of Scythian words by means of the Greek script, Dumézil proposed to reconstruct its Scythian original form either as **hu-čahra-* 'having

19 Cf. also the name of the Oroshor kishlak *Gudara* (Dodykhudoev 1975: 10).

20 The connecting vowel *-i-* (in the *kat-i-ar* partition) can be an interfix, but not an infix.

good pastures' or as **gau-čahr-ja-* 'having pastures for cattle' (Dumézil 1961–62: 201f.). The latter reconstruction is also accepted by A. Christol (Christol 1989: 8; cf. Raevskij 1977: 69f.). As we can see none of both etymons would lead to Ossetian *K'wydar*.

But even if the Greek transcription of the Scythian word (*Κατίαροι*) would represent the original Scythian pronunciation, it would be very difficult to derive Ossetian *K'wydar* from the form *katiar*. Moreover, Iranian *kata-* is in Ossetian language represented by *kæt* 'stable' (Abaev 1958–89: 1/590) and there is no reason to believe that the same base could also give a non-regular form like *k'wyd-*.

There are also other attempts of the etymological analysis of the toponym in question. Thus, T. A. Guriev suggested the presence of the Caucasian plurality indicator *-ar*, which can also be found ethnonym *dygur* 'Digorians' (Guriev 1963: 91). Indeed, Caucasian languages do have the plural suffix *-ar*, cf. Abkh., Lezg. and Tabas. *-ar*, Chechen. *-(h)ar*, Batsb., Arch. *-or*, Svan. *-är*, etc. (Chirikba 1985: 95f.). Moreover, the suffix *-ar* (with the variant *-al*) is noted in Georgian toponymy (Bedoshvili 1972: 123), which is, however, hardly related to the above suffix. The Caucasian suffix *-ar* could well left a trace in the toponymy of Ossetia and, would, actually, be quite appropriate as part of the composition of *k'wydar*. However, assuming this suffix to be the second part of this toponym, it would be necessary to find a satisfactory explanation for the root *k'wyd-* in the Caucasian context. Unfortunately, T. A. Guriev left this root unexplained. Nor did he mention numerous Ossetian toponyms containing the suffix *-ar*, whose roots have clear Ossetian or Iranian etymology (see below). All this testifies against a foreign origin of the suffix *-ar*.

In a relatively recent article N. G. Dzhusojty touches upon the question of the origin of the toponym in question. Also he identifies a component *-ar*, which he compares, like T. A. Guriev, but without any reference to him, with the ending *-ur* in the ethnonym *dygur*. However, N. G. Dzhusojty, unlike T. A. Guriev, assigns the separated element *-ar* / *-ur* to the ethnonym "Arii", which, he, in turn, assigns to the Iranian prototype **vara-* (*vara-*) (Dzhusojty 1995). Unfortunately, the Dzhusojty's etymological attempt contradicts the data of historical phonetics of the Ossetian language and does not take into account the scientifically accepted etymology of the ethnonym "Aryan", which in all known Indo-Iranian languages derives from **arja-* or **ārja-* (Bartholomae 1904: 198; Abaev 1958: 113ff.; Benveniste 1969: 1/100f., 363, 368ff.; Dumézil 1986a: 233ff.; ES1J: 1/222ff.). Actually, there is not a single Indo-Iranian language in which the ethnonym we are interested in, had occurred in the form **ar*, i.e. without the element *-i* (*-i*). This is important, because the Old Iranian combination **ri* (*ri*)

regularly yields *l(l)* in Ossetic. Thus, if we remain within the historical phonetics of the Ossetian language, the Ossetian combination *-ar* cannot go back to the Iranian **arja-* ‘Aryan’.

It is true that in some Scythian-Sarmatian dialects the combination **rj* had other variants of development. Thus, Harmatta established that the Iranian base **arja-*, in addition to the reflex *al-*, also gave the reflexes *ar-ġ-*, *ir-*, *il-* (Harmatta 1970: 77ff.). But these forms too could not result in Ossetian *ar*. As for the etymology of the Aryan base **arja-*, it is confidently attributed to Indo-European **arjō-* (Gamkrelidze/Ivanov 1984: 11/755; ES1J: 1/222), and has certainly no relation to the Iranian **uāra-*.

Finally, Kozaev derives the ethnonym **k'wydar* from the name of the Huns-Kydarites (Kozaev 2000: 130f.). However, the author is not interested in either the historical or the linguistic aspect of this comparison. Not to mention, that the etymology centred on the ethnonym **k'wydar* (and not to the toponym *K'wydar*) is obviously erroneous.

4 Suffix *-ar* in Ossetic

As can be seen from the comparison of the toponym *K'wydar* with the “ethnonym” *kowdētk*, the former allows for the parsing into *K'wyd-ar*, where the component *-ar* is a suffix. The suffix is no more productive in the modern Ossetic, but, as the analysis shows, it is widely represented in the onomastic and the appellative lexicon of the Ossetian language. Let us first consider the data from toponymy.

In addition to being the second element of *K'wydar*, the suffix *-ar* is found in a number of other toponyms, including *Æmġ-ar*, the gorge *K'as-ar-a*,²¹ the village *Džim-ar-a*,²² the pasture *Xupp-ar-a*, *Dzam-ar-as* (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/61), *Madz-ar*, *Malx-aræ-jy qæd*, *Mæc'-ar-aw-džyn*, *Kol-ar*, *Gæt-ar*, *Mælj-ar*,

21 The topoformant *-aq* is often joined with the suffix *-a*, which was separated by Miller e. g. in the word *k'asara* ‘customs house’ (Miller 1882: 114), derived from the toponym *K'asara*.

22 The connection of the toponym *Džimara* with the Arabic word *ġumar* ‘top, crown, heart’ (Lavrov 1980: 212) is very doubtful. In the form *Gimara* this oikonym is placed among Georgian toponyms coming from *-aga* (Aphridonidze/Makalatia 1980: 51). However, this village, located in the Kazbek region of Georgia, is inhabited exclusively by Ossetians, and the oikonym *Gimara* is the name of an Ossetian, not Mokhevian (contrary to Aphridonidze and Makalatia), settlement. Moreover, the form *Gimara* reflects the Old Ossetian pronunciation, which was in use until the end of the 19th century.

Sul-ar-tæ, *Tatx-ar-a*, *Qap-ar-a* (all in North Ossetia).²³ Herewith also the following names of settlements in South Ossetia belong: *Biq-ar*,²⁴ *Č'et-ar*²⁵ and possibly *C'un-ar*. Cf. also the name of the *Qas-ar-ag* gorge at the source of the Terek River and the oronym *Qud-ar-ty xox* 'Qudarta mountain' in the Qud Gorge of South Ossetia (now administratively part of the Dusheti district of Georgia).

The legitimacy of identifying the component *-ar* in the above toponyms is confirmed by the presence of parallel roots in Ossetian toponymy and anthroponymy. Thus, the toponym *K'as-ag-a* is inseparable from the name of K'as(a) Gorge, i. e. *K'as-a-gom*, in North Ossetia (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/116). The toponym *Žam-ar-as* is connected, on the one hand, with *Žam-a*, *Žam-a-gom* 'Dzam(a) gorge', *Žam-ur-a*, and, on the other hand, with *Žam-as* in South Ossetia (Bedzhyzaty 1958: 347).²⁶ The latter toponym is especially characteristic, as it contains the same non-productive suffix *-as* as *Žamaras* and *Č'imas*. The only difference between *Žam-ar-as* and *Žam-as* is the formant *-ar* present in the former.

The toponym *Æmġ-ar* is inseparable from *Æmġ-on*, which is found in the epic geography of the Ossetian Nartian epic (Khamitsaeva/Bjazzyrov 1989–91: 1/258). The *-on* element in the latter is a well-known Ossetian suffix. By detaching the formant *-ag* from the oikonym *C'unar* we obtain at the root *C'un-*, which is difficult to separate from the following Ossetian toponyms: *C'on*, *C'on-yx-za*, *C'on-ġuz*, *Us-c'on-tæ*, *C'un-yx-a*. The name of the *Maž-ar* mowing plot in North Ossetia is hardly separable from the family name *Maž-a-tæ* 'Madzaevs' on the one hand, and from the toponyms *Mažaty zæxxytæ* 'the lands of the Madzaevs' and *Maž-a-skæ* on the other hand. The latter toponym contains the unproductive topoformant *-sk-* widespread in the toponymy of North Ossetia (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/157, 158, 347). In the first part of the toponym *Mæc'-ar-aw-žyn* A. D. Tsagaeva rightly sees the Ossetian word *mæc'* 'bast' (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/91, 158). This example is especially indicative, because the formant *-ag* is surrounded, on the one hand, by the Ossetian base (*mæc'*)

23 The toponym *Qap-ar-i*, noted in the Erzo-Tianeti region of Georgia (Kakheti) (Bedoshvili 1972: 123) may also be relevant here.

24 In the collection (Aphridonidze/Makalatia 1980: 167) this toponym is given among Georgian (!) oikonoms coming from *-qar*.

25 In the distorted form *Četari* this toponym is recorded among Georgian (!) oikonoms coming from *-tar* (Aphridonidze/Makalatia 1980: 161).

26 In Kakheti the toponym *Žamaura* is known, which in one document of the 14th century occurs in the form *Žimiti*. Gvasalia derives the former from Georgian *žma* 'brother', and the latter from its Mingrelian counterpart *žima* (Gvasalia 1983: 167). Do these toponyms have a connection with Ossetian?

and, on the other hand, by two productive Ossetian formants (-*aw-žyn*). The first part of the toponym *Tatx-ag-a* is identified with Oss. (Dig.) *tatxa* 'garden bed' (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/96 f.). The same word in the toponymy of Digoria is also found with other formants: *Tatxa-tæ*, *Tatxa-wat* (Tsagaeva 1971–75: 11/358). Finally, the *Qud-ag-tæ* component in the oronym *Qudarty hoh* is undoubtedly derived from the toponym *Qud* – the name of the gorge in which the named mountain is located.²⁷

As we can see, the non-productive suffix *-ar* can be combined both with the living Ossetian words (*mæc'*, *tatxa*) and with the roots whose origin is unclear (*Æmğ-*, *K'as-*, *Maž-*, *Žam-*, *Qud*, *C'un-*). The first group of examples testifies to the Ossetian origin of the suffix *-ar*. This conclusion is not contradicted by the second group, in which the roots of unclear origin find exact parallels among similarly sounding toponyms of Ossetia. It is important to emphasise that in a number of cases the root of uncertain origin is combined either with a living Ossetian word (*K'as-a-gom*) or with an Ossetian suffix (*Æmğ-op*, *Maža-tæ*).

On the other hand, suffix *-ar* is sometimes combined with other productive (*-ar-tæ*, *-ar-aw-žyn*, *-aræ-ŷy*) or non-productive (*-ar-a*, *-ar-as*) Ossetic affixes, a fact which also does not contradict the assumption of the original Ossetian character of suffix *-ar*. Of particular interest to us are toponyms with the component *-ar*, the roots of which are assonant with Ossetian anthroponyms. Above we have already cited one of such correspondences: the toponym *Mažar* is in phonetical agreement not only with the toponym *Mažaskæ*, but also with the family name *Mažatæ*, as well as with the patronymic toponym *Mažaty zækhkhytæ* 'lands of the Madzaevs'. This circumstance unambiguously testifies that the toponym *Mažar* is used as the basis of the family name *Mažatæ*. On the other hand, the toponym *Žim-ar-a* can also be compared with the oikonym *Žim-i* and the oronym *Žim-i-gom* 'Dzhim(i) Gorge' in North Ossetia, as well as with the family name *Žim-i-tæ* 'Dzhimievs'. Similarly, the toponyms *Kol-ar* and

27 The same relationship exists between the oronym *Lesari*, the name of a mountain in Mtiuletia Khornauli 1983: 116), neighbouring South Ossetia to the east, and the oronym *Res*, the name of a mountain on the border between North and South Ossetia. Given the solid Ossetic layer in the toponymy of Mtiuletia (Dzitstsojty 1998: 119ff.), one can speculate about the Ossetic origin of the oronym *Lesari*. The Ossetic language does not tolerate the meeting of two "r" in one word and usually dissimilates the first of them into "l" (see below). Thus, the old form of the Georgian oronym could be **Resari*, which should be divided into **Res-ar-i*, where the component **Res-* is related to the Ossetian oronym *Res*, and *-ar* is the suffix at issue.

Mælg̃-ar (from **Mærg̃-ar*)²⁸ can be compared with the family names *Kol-o-tæ*²⁹ and *Mærg̃-i-tæ*, and the toponym *Gæt-ar* with the anthroponym *Gæt-æg*.

Thus, it looks like that the toponyms *Madzar*, *Žimara*, *Kolar*, etc. were clan settlements of the Madzaevs, Dzhimievs, Koloevs, Margievs and Gataevs respectively. In other words, it suggests itself that the suffix *-ar* gave to the toponyms, in which it occurred, the meaning of belonging of this or that geographical object (a meadow, a mowing plot, a settlement, etc.) to a subject (a clan or an individual) whose name acts as the derivative basis of the given toponym.

This conclusion goes well with a result of the research by the Ossetian toponymist Z. D. Tskhovrebova, which she kindly shared with us. It concerns the name of the village *Sælbjar* in the Leningori district of South Ossetia,³⁰ which in the past, as Z. D. Tskhovrebova believes, was inhabited by representatives of the family *Sælbītæ* “Salbiyevs”. Currently, the Salbiyevs do not longer live in South Ossetia, for they moved to North Ossetia a long time ago. But in the village of Dzalisi in the Dusheti district of Georgia, which is neighbouring the Leningori district of South Ossetia, one finds the surname *Salbišvili* (i.e. the same *Sælbītæ* “Salbievs”), which, as Tskhovrebova correctly notes, must be connected to the members of the Salbiev clan who left from *Salbjär* sometime in the past. Hence, *Sælbjar* is to be explained as “(the place of residence / settlement) of the Salbievs”.³¹

Let us now turn to the traces of the suffix *-ar* in other categories of Ossetian onomastics. As Z. G. Isaeva noted, the suffix *-ar* is also present in Ossetian anthroponymy (Isaeva 1986: 52). However, some of the anthroponyms, in which she discerns this suffix, are in fact borrowings from other languages. The most interesting in her material is the Digor name *Žular*. By separating the suffix *-ar*, we arrive to the root *Žul-*, which, in our opinion, should also be recognised in the Digor woman’s name *Žul-e*, derived from the Digor word *i-žul-un* ‘to rejoice, be cheerful’.

To the material cited by Isaeva I would like to add one more significant example. According to a legend, the ancestor of the *Muz-a-tæ* family in South Ossetia bore the name *Muz-ar* (Bjazyrty 1959–62: III/237ff.). Besides, the common Ossetian surname *Æg̃wyz-a-tæ* is also known in North Ossetia in the form

28 For the dissimilation of “r – r” > “l – r”, which is natural for Ossetic, see (Abaev 1965: 36).

29 Cf. also the oikonym *Kolot* in South Ossetia.

30 In official sources this oikonym is found in the Georgianised form *Salbieri* (*Aphridonidze/Makalatia* 1980: 169; see Tskhovrebova 2003: 43). A further distortion of the Ossetian oikonym is the Georgian form *Sarbieli* (*Gvasalia* 1983: 77).

31 That the *Sælbītæ* really moved out of *Salbjär* village (Chisan Gorge) is also suggested by the fact that they had close relatives (*ærvadælbītæ*) in the Chisan (*Četojtæ* “Chetoevs”) and Kud (*Rubajtæ* “Rubaevs”) gorges of South Ossetia.

of *Æġwyz-ar-tæ*. Further, along with the very rare woman's name *Gwyb-ar* and the surname *Gub-ar-tæ*, the surname *Gwyb-e-tæ* and the man's name *Gwyb-e* are also known in Ossetian anthroponymy.

Additional material can be extracted from the comparison of Ossetian family names collected in the work of Z. D. Gaglojty, cf. *Bit-e-tæ* || *Bit-ar-tæ*, *Dud-aj-tæ* || *Dud-i-a-tæ* || *Dud-ar-a-tæ*, *Suġ-a-tæ* || *Suġ-ar-tæ*, *Tum-ap-tæ* || *Tum-ar-a-tæ*, *Fatz-a-tæ* || *Fatz-ar-tæ* (Gaglojty 1990: 11, 16, 29, 31, 32). There is also a very interesting Ossetian (Digor) saying: *Saġæes Saġæsaræmæ kinzi ærcudæj* 'Sorrow married Sadness'. Here the name of the personified 'Sorrow', *Saġæes-ar-æ*, is formed by means of the suffix *-ar* (the Digor variant of which is *-aræ*) from the name of his 'wife', the personified 'Sadness, thought, anxiety' (*Saġæes*).

Not to be omitted is also the theonym *Buzumar*, the name of the son of the patron saint of livestock *Falvara* (XIF: 170; Salagaeva 1961: 11/449) with the variant form *Žuzumar* (K'ubalty 1978: 174; Salagaeva 1961: 11/56). The same name has other variants, which enables us to distinguish the suffix *-ar* in the first two ones, cf. *Guzuna* (Maliti 1973: 82 f.; Khamitsaeva 1992: 104, 105) and *Buzuna* (Khamitsaeva, op. cit.: 61).³² This anthroponymic material is valuable, because it testifies against the assumption that the suffix *-ar* implies plurality. In fact, the comparison of the name *Muzar* with the family name *Muzatæ*, where the former is the name of one person, and the latter of a collective, clearly shows that the suffix at issue has no grammatical meaning of plurality. This conclusion is also confirmed by the names *Gwybar*, *Žular*, etc.

Let us now turn to the appellative lexicon of the Ossetic language. Once Miller discerned the suffix *-ar* in such Ossetic words as *xæzar*, *caġar*, *xussar*, *xælar*, *xalsar*, *fidar*, *xabar* (Miller 1882: 111f.). Later it turned out that the words *xælar* and *xabar* are borrowings, and the words *caġar*, *xussar*, *xalsar* and *fidar* have a completely different morphological structure. Only in the word *xæzar* 'house' the suffix *-ar* can, in our opinion, be recognised. Abaev cites several etymologies of the word *xæzar*, none of which he considers to be reliable (Abaev 1958–89: IV/16of.). At the same time, he writes: "It is tempting to see in the first part of the word an echo of the well-known Iranian *kata*- 'house'" (Abaev 1958–89: IV/160). However, Iranian **kata-* in Ossetic could only result in **kæd* || *kæt*. To yield the voiced affricata *ʒ* in Ossetic, Iranian **t* must be followed by the phoneme **i(i)*, cf. Ossetic *yssæʒ* 'twenty' from Old Iranian **uinsati-* (Abaev 1958–89: IV/277). The presence of the same phoneme can also explain the transition of **k-* to *x-*, cf. Oss. *xæfs* 'frog' from Old Iranian **kasjapa-* (Abaev 1958–89: IV/162f.).

32 Whether the same suffix is contained in the name of the giant *Muk-ag-a* || *Nok-ag* in the Ossetian Nartian epic, we do not venture to judge.

Thus, if we assume Old Iranian base **kat-ja-* for Ossetic *xæʒ(ar)*, it is easy to explain both the form and the meaning of the Ossetic word. The suffix **-ja-* has the meaning of possession. Hence, the original meaning of the root *xæʒ-* could have been “having to do with a house”, i.e. probably ‘extension’. The suffix *-ar* should have been attached to this root at a later stage.

Another example of the use of the suffix *-ar* in the appellative lexicon of the Ossetian language is seen by E. A. Grantovskij in the word *ældar* ‘lord, prince’. Having rejected all the existing etymologies of this word, he proposed to see in the root *æld-* (from the earlier form **ærd-*) Old Iranian **arz-* (> **ard-*), cf. Av. *arəzah-* ‘battle, battle row’ (Grantovskij 1970: 215).

The suffix *-ar* is also evident in the word *sænar* ‘fuel from animal dung, prepared in the form of compacted blocks’. For the first part of this word Abaev suggested a quite convincing etymology going back to Saka *sani* ‘excrement’. About the remaining part he writes: “The formation of (*-ar*) is not quite clear”, and with some hesitation ascribes it to Ossetic *art* ‘fire’ (Abaev 1958–89: III/68). However, nothing prevents us from seeing in this part of the word the suffix *-ar*.

Oss. (Dig.) *k'oxar* ‘oar’ was analysed by Abaev as a compound consisting of *k'ox* ‘arm’ and *arm* ‘hand’ (Abaev 1958–89: I/637f.). It is quite possible that the suffix *-ar* should also be seen in this word, and the formation as a whole had the meaning ‘relating to the arm’.

In the first part of the word *k'wybar* ‘lump, small lump’ Èdel'man sees Old Iranian **kaup-* (Èdel'man 1986: 137). In the part *-ar* that remains unexplained we can again see the suffix of our interest.

Abaev divides the word *tæssar* ‘turn, slope, oblique, running aslant’ into *tæs-sar*, where the first part is connected with the verb *tasyn* ‘to bend’, and the second part is a formant found in the word *xussar* ‘southern slope’ (Abaev 1958–89: III/281). This etymology does not carry much conviction, however. If one admits the final element of this word being the suffix *-ar*, the component *tæss-* can be regarded as continuing Old Iranian **tars-*, cf. Pashto *tərs* ‘sloping’. For the assimilation **-rs-* > *-ss-* cf. *hæssyn* ‘to carry’ from **karš-*, as well as the toponym *Qossa* next to *Qorsa* (Tsagaeva 1971–75: II/175, 203).

As can be seen from these examples, the suffix *-ar* can also be identified in some items of the appellative lexicon of the Ossetian language, while in most cases it was attached to bases of native Iranian origin (*xæʒar*, *ældar*, *sænar*, *k'wybar*, *tæssar*) and only in one case to a base of Caucasian origin (*k'oxar*). This may mean, firstly, that the suffix *-ar* is originally Iranian, and secondly, that it was productive in the Caucasian period of the history of the Ossetian language. Consequently, we have the right to look for an Iranian etymology for the suffix *-ar*. Such an etymology exists and it belongs to E. A. Grantovskij.

While considering the etymology of Oss. *ældar* ‘lord’, Grantovskij suggested the element *-ar* deriving from the Old Iranian suffix **-āra* (Grantovskij 1970:

215). In another place the same scholar noted that Old Iranian **-āra*, represented in Iranian names from ancient West Asia, is a variant of the Common Iranian (and Common Indo-European) adjectival suffix **-ra*, whose another variant is *-ara* (Grantovskij 1970: 122f., 215, 247).

Already in Proto-Indo-European the suffix **-ro-* (> Iranian **-ra-*) is also found in the form **-ero-* (Meillet 1938: 229), which in Old Iranian could only yield **-ara*. In Old Indian (Vedic) the same suffix is also represented by several variants, about which T. Ya. Elizarenkova writes: “This small series of suffixes with *-r-* as a reference element has corresponding variants with *-l-*, which were little used in R[ig]V[eda] and spread gradually, further forming an independent series: *-la-*, *-lā-*, *-ala-*, *-āla-*, *-ila-*, *-ula-*, *-vala-*” (Elizarenkova 1982: 152). Consequently, the variants of the Indo-European suffix **-ro-*, which are of interest for us, could have emerged at least in Indo-Iranian period.

As can be seen from the onomastics of the Iranian peoples of West Asia, the suffix **-āra* was often attached to the same bases as the suffix **-ka* (Grantovskij 1970: 122f., 257). Quite a similar phenomenon is observed in Ossetic, where next to the toponym *Gæt-ar* we find the anthroponym *Gæt-æg* (see above), with the suffix *-æg* going back to Iranian **-ka*.

For variants of the Iranian suffix *-ra* || *-ara* || *-āra*, cf. the quite similar series of variants of two other Iranian suffixes: *-ka* || *-aka* || *-āka* and *-na* || *-ana* || *-āna*. Already in Proto-Indo-European the suffix **-no-* (> Iranian **-na-*) is found in the form **-eno-* || **ono-* (Meillet 1922: 226f.). It is interesting that all three variants of the last two triads are reflected in Ossetic: *-g(-k)* || *-æg* || *-ag* and *-n* || *-æn* || *-on(-an)*. It is also curious that the first members of these triads, i. e. *-g(-k)* and *-n*, are unproductive in Modern Ossetic (Abaev 1949: 573f.; Abaev 1958–89: 1/498, 11/125f.), while the last two members, *-æg* || *-ag* and *-æn* || *-on* are productive. This suggests that also reflexes of all three variants of the Iranian suffix *-ra* || *-ara* || *-āra* should be present in Ossetic.

In fact, in Ossetic we find not only the unproductive suffix *-ar*, but also the unproductive suffix *-r*, discernable, for example, in the words such as *bazyr* ‘wing’ from Iranian **bāzu-ra*, *syrx* ‘red’ from Iranian **sux-ra*, *swar* ‘mineral spring’ from Iranian(?) **srāua-ra* etc. (Miller 1882: 111; Miller 1903: 88; Abaev 1958–89: 111/179). It should be especially noted that next to Oss. *bazyr* ‘wing’ we find *bazyg* ‘hand’, which contains the same Iranian base, but with the suffix *-ka*: **bāzu-ka* (Abaev 1958–89: 1/242). Thus, we have another case of the accretion of the suffixes *-ra* and *-ka* on the same Iranian base.

The expected completeness of correspondences suggests that traces of the variant **-ara*, whose reflex in Ossetian can only have the form *-ær*, should also be found. Our expectations are justified this time too: the non-productive suffix *-ær* was first isolated by Miller (Miller 1882: 112). However, Abaev did

not dare to follow Miller, and in those cases where this element should clearly be regarded as an independent affix, he confined himself to the following remarks: “the formant *-ær* is not known” (Abaev 1958–89: I/630), “the suffix *-ær* is not recognised in Ossetian” (Abaev 1958–89: IV/231). However, this suffix is clearly recognised both in the appellative (*æhsævæær, k'æbæær, k'æsæær*) and onomastic lexicon of Ossetian: *Gul-ær, K'ox-ær-y byn, Lwar* (< **Raw-ær*), *Mul-ær, Twar* (< **Taw-ær*), *Sos-ær-an*.

Thus, all the above triads of suffixes are represented in Ossetic, and the reflexes of the first triad (*-ra* || *-ara* || *-āra*) are unproductive. Based on the above, the conclusion suggests itself that the basis of the toponym *K'wydar* is also Iranian. However, before proceeding to the substantiation of this conjecture it is necessary to answer one more question. It has been noted above that the Iranian triad of suffixes *-ra* || *-ara* || *-āra* is reflected in the anthroponymy of Iranian peoples. But, since in this paper we are interested in a completely different category of onomastics, we should find out whether this triad of suffixes was used to form toponyms. Fortunately, we can give a positive answer to this question. Let us consider a few examples.

According to O. Semerényi (see below), the name of the region *Skudra* in the western part of Scythia, known to us from Old Persian inscriptions, contains the suffix *-ra*. The Old Russian regional and tribal name *Sěverŕ* is explained on the basis of Scythian-Sarmatian dialects as a formation from the appellative **s(ġ)āva-* ‘black’ (Toporov/Trubachev 1962: 226) with the suffix *-erŕ*, reflecting the Iranian suffix *-ra* (Orel/Osipova 1989: 146). The hydronym *Tuskor* || *Tuskar* || *Tuskar* in the Upper Dnieper region supposedly derives “from Iranian **tusk-* ‘empty’ with the suffix *-ara*” (Toporov/Trubachev 1962: 227). The component **tusk-* can also be explained another way – as the etymon of modern Ossetian *tysk'a* | *tusk'a* ‘boar’, i. e. *Tuskar* – ‘Boar (river)’. The same suffix can be seen in a number of other hydronyms from the Upper Dnieper, the etymology of which is considered unclear. The hydronyms *Xarabra* || *Xarabr* (a tributary of the Seim) and *Xorabra* || *Xorobra* || *Xrabra* (a tributary of the Ros', a tributary of the Dnieper) are generally considered obscure, but the component *xar* || *xor* is presumably connected with Iranian *har-* ‘flow’ (Toporov/Trubachev 1962: 227f.).³³ If that is the case, we deal here with the Iranian composite **har-āpa-* ‘flowing water’, amplified by the suffix *-ra*. Pseudo-Scylax of Carianda (§81, see Shipley 2001: 39, 72) reports a similar hydronym without the suffix in Ancient Transcaucasia: it is the river name *Χιρόβος* (< **har-āpa-*) within the country

33 The Iranian basis **har-* ‘to flow’ can also be seen in such hydronyms of Western Scythia as: 1) *Ἀράβης* – a tributary of the Istra, flowing through Thrace and the land of the Thracian Krobis (Herodotus IV, 49) – from Iran. **har-dān-* ‘flowing water’; 2) *Ἄραπος* (see below).

of Kolkhs (Dzitstsojty 2003: 194f.). The reconstructed **har-āpa-* corresponds exactly to the Prussian hydronym *Sar-ape*, Lithuanian-Polish hydronym *Szar-upa* (see Georgiev 1958a: 106).

According to Herodotus (IV, 48), one of the Danube tributaries bore the name *Νάπαρις*, which Georgiev identifies as Scythian. Etymologically it is connected with the Avestan word *napta-* ‘wet’ (from IE **snep-*, s. Georgiev 1958: 255). By detaching the Greek suffix *-ις*, the remaining element *-ar* can be connected with the topoformant at issue: Iranian **hnap-ara* > Scyth. **nap-ar-*. In the immediate neighbourhood of Naparis Herodotus (IV, 48) mentions another tributary of the Ister, the *Arar* (Ἄραρος), whose name can be explained as Iranian **har-ara*, lit. ‘flowing, streaming’. Another tributary of the Ister was called *Αὔρας* (Herodotus IV, 49). It can be attributed to the Scythian prototype **au-ra-*, based on Old Iranian **au-* ‘flow’ (see ES1J: 1/256). The hydronym *Avras* also means ‘flowing’.

The Berezan River was known to Ovid under the (Sarmatian?) name *Sagaris*, and to Pliny under the name *Saggarius*. Abaev explains this hydronym as “(river,) where deer (*sag*) are found (*ar*)” (Abaev 1949: 154, 180). Without disputing the etymology of the first part, we would rather connect the second part with our suffix. In this case the etymological meaning of the hydronym would be ‘Deer (river)’ (cf. above *Tuskar* ‘Wild Boar river’).

In the European part of Russia the hydronyms *Uda*, *Udy*, *Udych*, *Udra* are known, connected with the Iranian (Scythian) base **auda-* : *uda-* ‘spring, source, water’ (Georgiev 1958: 260; Dzitstsojty 2003: 199f.). The component *-ra* in the latter is our suffix.

The topoformant *-ar* can also be identified in the Alanian toponym *Cadaar(i)*, the name of the district in Western Alania, from where the ancestors of the Georgian family Tsereteli originate. The toponym is based on the Ossetic appellative *cad* ‘lake’ (Kuznetsov 1992: 191).

To summarise, we note that the unproductive suffix *-r* || *-ær* || *-ag* can certainly be traced in Ossetic, which goes back to the Iranian adjective suffix *-ra* || *-ara* || *-āra*. It is especially important for our topic that traces of this suffix are found in the toponymy and hydronymy of Scythia and Alania.³⁴ In all cases of the use of this suffix in toponymy, the producing base has quite reliable Iranian etymology. Thus, the base of the toponym *K'wyd-ag* may also be of Iranian origin. We can make a preliminary idea about its meaning. For this purpose, one should take into account that in those cases when an Ossetian toponym containing the suffix *-ag* is etymologically transparent, its derivative base most

34 The formant *-ar* in the Sogdian toponymy of Tajikistan: *Khunar*, *Sotar*, *Nimtar*, *Metar*, etc., which is unclear in origin, is also apparently related to this (Khromov 1969: 97).

often turns out to be either a proper name (*Gætar*) or the base of a family name (*Kolar*, *Mælġar*, etc.) and means “place of residence (of a given family group)”. Consequently, the base of the toponym *K'wydar* could have similar semantics, meaning something “place of residence of the *K'uds*”. But who are these “*K'uds*”?

There is a plural form next to the above group of the toponyms deriving from family names: *Kolar* – *Kolotæ*, *Mælġar* – *Mærġitæ* etc. The last members of these pairs refer to the inhabitants of the territories designated by their first members. Hence, we can assume that in the past another similar pair could exist: *K'wydar* – **K'wydatæ*, where the second member of the pair was the name of the group that lived in the area of *K'wydar*. Thus, our attention is drawn to the family name *K'wydatæ* “*Kudævs*”, which was found only in one Ossetian song (Salagaeva 1961: 11/612). However, the absence of the surname *K'wydatæ* in the dictionary of Ossetian family names (Gaglojty 1990), testifies to the fact that we are most likely facing a patronymic formed relatively recently from the proper name **K'wyda*. Consequently, even if this anthroponym is related to the toponym in question, it is only by the origin of the root. In other words, the toponym *K'wydar* cannot be derived from the anthroponym **K'wyda* and cannot mean “the place of residence of *K'ud* (and his family)”. Toponyms derived from family names with the suffix *-ar* are usually oikononyms.

The toponym *K'wydar*, on the other hand, is the name of both the gorge and the whole of South Ossetia. Consequently, it must be based on the name of a collective that constituted a more significant part of the society than a patronymic or even a family (clan). Such a collective could be an ethnos or some part of it and, therefore, the toponym in question hides a lost ethnonym. This conjecture finds confirmation in the above “ethnonym” *kudet*.

There is no doubt that the toponym **K'udeti* passed through Georgian mediation. The suffix *-et-* is a widespread topoformant throughout Georgia. In microtoponyms formed with this formant, the derivative base can be both the base of a family name and a proper name. But in the names of relatively large geographical regions, such as the **K'udeti* region according to the Armenian Geography, and especially in regions inhabited by ethnic groups different from Georgians, the derivational base is in the vast majority of cases an ethnonym, cf. Georgian *Somxeti* ‘Armenia’ from *somexi* ‘Armenian’, *Oseti* ‘Ossetia’ from *osi* ‘Ossetian’ etc. Hence, the toponym **K'udeti* could be formed from the ethnonym **k'ud-* and mean “(country or region) inhabited by *K'uds*”.

Thus, Ossetian suffix *-ar* and Georgian suffix *-et-* appear to be synonymous and allow exactly the same interpretation of the toponym *K'wydar*. It follows that Georgians, being neighbours of ancient South Ossetians, took the Ossetian name of the territory occupied by South Ossetians (*K'wydar*) and, knowing the

meaning of the then still productive suffix *-ar*, replaced it with their own, functionally identical topoformant (*K'wydar* > **K'udeti*). Similar partial borrowings occurred also later, as e. g. with the toponym *Afghanistan*, which took the form *Avġan-et-i* in Georgian. Hence, one should really look for an ethnonym in the basis of the toponym *K'wydar*. But what kind of ethnonym?

5 Initial *k'*- in Ossetic

In order to avoid accidental and strained comparisons, it is necessary to restore an etymon that does not contradict the norms of the historical phonetics of Ossetic. If the toponym *K'wydar* is indeed of indigenous Ossetic origin, the most difficult to explain is the initial phoneme *k'*. As for the other phonemes of the base *K'wyd-* (we do not touch upon the etymology of the suffix already), there are no problems in their historical interpretation, so let us start with them.

The vowel *y*, before which the plosive is labialised, according to the general opinion of specialists, goes back to the Old Ossetian phoneme **u* and coincides with Digorian *u*, which in turn goes back to Iranian **u*. In this case, the Digor dialect preserved an archaic feature of the Alanian language. Consequently, the Digor form *K'udar* coincides with the Alanian form. It is this Alanian form that underlies the Georgian *K'udaro* and the "Armenian" *Kowdēt'k'*. From the modern Ossetian form *K'wydar* in Georgian one would expect **K'w(i)darō*, cf. Old Georgian *grdemli* borrowed from Old Ossetic **kurd* 'blacksmith' (already in the poem by Shota Rustaveli, 12th c.), *gurdemli* 'anvil, blacksmith's hammer', and from the later Ossetian form *kwyrd* – modern Georgian forms *kwrdemli* 'anvil', *kvirdemli*, *kvrdemli* 'hard' (first in the lexicon by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, 18th c., see Andronikashvili 1966: 64, 68, 71, 84f.). Cf. also Georgian (Rachin) *gvinoli* 'part of the plough' from Oss. *gwyjnon*, *gwinon* 'upper part of the plough' (Akhvlediani 1960: 138f.; Andronikashvili 1966: 83).

The Ossetic phoneme *d* goes back to both Iranian **d* and Iranian **t*, standing in a sonorous environment. It remains to find out the origin of the initial phoneme.

Iranian languages do not have abrupt phonemes *k', p', t', c', č'*. Their presence in modern Ossetic is explained by the influence of neighbouring Caucasian languages (Miller 1882: 68ff.; Thordarson 1989: 462 f.). Initially, abruptives occurred exclusively in loanwords, but over time they penetrated into the inherited part of the Ossetic vocabulary, especially in words with expressive meaning (see below). In every native Ossetic word containing an abruptive phoneme, the latter requires a special explanation, as does the phoneme *k'* in

the base of *K'wyd-*. It has been established that the phoneme *k'* appeared in place of the Iranian **k* in the following cases:

- a) for semantic reason, when it is necessary to emphasise the expressive character of a word (Abaev 1949: 522ff.);
- b) for phonetic reasons, when Iranian **k* is preceded by Iranian **s* (i. e. Iranian **sk* > Osset. *sk'*, see Miller 1882: 71; Miller 1903: 27; Abaev 1949: 524; Bielmeier 1977: 35f.; Ėdel'man 1986: 137; Thordarson 1989: 462);
- c) for reasons still unclear, **g* which had resulted from Iranian **k* in a sonorant environment already in Alanian, sporadically turned into the abruptive *k'*.

Which of these variants of development should be assumed in the toponym in question? The first variant of development should be excluded immediately, because the toponym *K'wydar* has no expressive meaning.

As for the last possibility (through the stage of Alanian **g*), it has to be excluded for the following reasons. Firstly, this variant of the evolution of Iranian **k* was sporadic. Secondly, where it took place, we often find parallel use of two forms, one of which has the consonant *g* and the other *k'*. This testifies to the young age of this transition: cf. e. g. Ossetian *syžyt* || *sigit, sik'it* 'land' from Iranian. **sikita-* (Abaev 1958–89: III/187).

It is indicative that those Ossetic loanwords in the neighbour languages, which in Ossetic itself have *k'* from intervocalic **g*, are represented with the Alanic *g* and not with the modern *k'*. Thus, Oss. *dærk'* 'heifer, year-old goat' (from Iranian **dāraka-*) is rendered in Svan as *darg* (Abaev 1958–89: I/358, 655), which points to the Alanic form **dārg* or **dārg*. Oss. *zæk'ten* 'pressed dung used as fuel' (from Iranian **sakapa-*) is related to Balkar *səgən* 'id.' (Abaev 1958–89: I/392), which suggests Alanic **sägän*. Oss. *sundak'te* 'woollen thread' is formed from *sun-tagæ* (Abaev 1958–89: III/169), the second component of which is in free use. The word *sundak'te* in Alanian time was assimilated into the Abazi language, where we find *šəndag* 'thick thread (linen, hemp, woolen)'. Thus, the transition of Alan. **g* > Osset. *k'* occurred too late, and the toponym *K'wydar*, recorded in the Armenian Geography of the 7th century AD in the form *Kowdētēk'*, cannot go back to the pro-form **Gudar*.

The possibility remains that the phoneme *k'* in the toponym in question ascends to the Iranian group **sk-*. This possibility is quite realistic, especially if we take into account that in the initial group *sk'* the sibilant is sometimes lost. Iranian development **sk-* > Osset. *k'* was first described by Abaev on two examples. The first of them is provided by Oss. *č'il* || *k'elæ* 'rim, edge, back part of the leg' and *sč'il* || *sk'elæ* 'fold, heel', which, according to Abaev, are etymologically related, reflecting the Iranian archetype **skairja-* (Abaev 1958–89: I/632f., III/124f.). The second example is less obvious. Oss. (Iron) *č'ityn, č'icyn*

‘to wake up, become conscious’ is inseparable from Oss. (Digor) *æsk’etun* with the same meaning, but the Iron form derives from **kaiθ-*, and the Digor form from **us-kaiθ-* (Abaev 1958–89: 1/634). But in this case the abruptive phoneme of the Iron form remains unexplained. It would be more correct to proceed from the Iranian prototype **us-kaiθ-*, which is common for both dialects, assuming the loss of the sibilant for the Iron form.

Two more examples illustrating the development of **sk-* > Oss. *k’-*, belong to the borrowed lexicon. The word *k’abaz* ‘limb; branch, offshoot’, according to Bailey, is connected with Gr. *σχάπος*, Lat. *scopa* ‘small branch’ (Bailey 1980: 242). The word *k’ardiw* ‘precipice’, according to Abaev, is related to Lith. *skardis* ‘precipice, precipitous shore’ (Abaev 1995: 17).³⁵

However, the instances of the considered phonetic development are not limited to the above examples. Thus, Oss. *k’wymbil* ‘cleaned wool’ (as opposed to untreated wool, called *qwyn*) has not received a satisfactory etymology (Abaev 1958–89: 1/649). We propose to see in the component *-il* a suffix, about which see Abaev 1965: 80f.; Bielman 1977: 47. The remaining part *k’wymb-* should be connected with the Iranian verb **skaub-* ‘to pull wool apart with the hands, to rub, whip wool with a ray’, whose reflexes are represented in East Iranian languages, with the accretion of the prefix **aυa-* or **υi-* and the nasal infix: Shugn. *wiškamb-*, Rush. *šikamb-*, Khuf. *šikam-*, Yazg. *šām(b)-*, Ishk. *uškymb-* (Édel’man 1987: 265, 278; Édel’man 1990: 96, 100).

Oss. *č’ep* (*kænyn*) ‘to cut off, hew off, chop off, cut’ (old form – **k’ep*) has not received a satisfactory etymology either. Abaev considers it onomatopoeic (Abaev 1949: 523), while Tedeeva tries to connect it with Georgian *kep’-va* ‘to cut off, cut down’ (Tedeeva 1983: 189). Since, however, the Georgian word itself could have been borrowed from Ossetic, it seems possible to link Old Ossetian **k’ep* with Old Iranian **skaip-*, reflexes of which in various Iranian languages mean ‘to tear, crack’ etc.

Thus, the historical phonetics of the Ossetian language allows us to reconstruct the etymon of the base *K’wyd-* in two forms: either **skuda-* or **skuta-*. Since from the previous analysis we also know that this base could be an ethnonym, our attention is immediately drawn to the self-name of the Scythians, reconstructed as **skuda-(ta-)*, with variants **škuda-(ta-)*, **skuḍa-(ta-)*, **škuḍa-(ta-)*. Let us turn to the works dealing with etymology of the ethnonym “Scythian”.

35 However, the Ossetic word can be derived from Iranian **skarda-*, IE **skordo-s*, **skordi-s* ‘steep bank, precipice’, or from the derivative from the same Indo-European base of the Illyrian element *Σκάρδ-*, *Scord-* in names of mountains, about which see Georgiev 1958a: 44.

6 Toponym *K'wydar* and Ethnonym “Scythian”

The self-designation of the Scythians was reconstructed on the basis of the forms of the ethnonym “Scythian” in various ancient languages, which include:

a) Assyrian, in which the name of the Scythians and their country occurs in the following forms: *aškuzai*, *askuzāi*, *ašguzi*, *asguzi* or *iškuzāi*. These forms can only reflect Scythian **skuḏa-* / **škuḏa-* ‘Scythian’. The addition of the protetic *a-/i-*, as well as the voicing *k > g* occurred already in Assyrian (D’jakonov 1956: 242f.; Grantovskij 1970: 73, 87; Frye 1963: 68; Szemerényi 1980: 7; Witczak 1992: 53).

b) Hebrew, in which the name of the Scythians *aškenaz*, found in the Old Testament, is the result of an inaccurate reading of the ethnonym **škwz* (**aškuz*) in correspondence, since the signs for *w* and *n* in the Hebrew script are similar. The reconstructed Hebrew **škwz* (**aškuz*) also goes back to the Scythian self-designation **skuḏa-* (D’jakonov 1956: 242, 243, 246; Szemerényi 1980: 7; Witczak 1992: 53).

c) Ancient Greek, in which the ethnonym *Σκύθαι* ‘Scythians’ also reflects the Scythian form **skuḏa-*. The voiced interdental spirant, whose presence in the self-name of the Scythians is undoubted, at the time of the borrowing of this ethnonym into Greek did not yet emerge in this language (the letter *δ* designated dental plosive), therefore it was replaced by the corresponding voiceless interdental spirant *θ*. From Greek the name Scythians was literarily borrowed into all European languages (D’jakonov 1956: 243; Szemerényi 1980: 16f.; Witczak 1992: 53).³⁶

d) The “Skolot” dialect of the Scythian language, in which, according to Herodotus (IV, 6), the self-name of the Scythians sounded as *Σκόλοτοι*, and was derived allegedly from the name of a king. Although Herodotus does not give his name, in another place (IV, 76 and 78–80) he mentions a Scythian king named *Σκύλης*, a fact which makes one assume that Herodotus or his informant meant exactly this king when talking about *Σκόλοτοι*. However, it has now been established that not the ethnonym *Σκόλοτοι* is derived from the name *Σκύλης*, but on the contrary – the name of the king goes back to the same base as the corresponding ethnonym, i. e. a dialectal form of the Scythian self-designation **skula-ta-* (or **škula-ta-*), reflecting the transition *-d- (-ḏ-) > l*, characteristic of the dialect of the dominating Scythian tribe, as well as of some East Iranian languages such as Pashto and Munji. The final *-τοι* hides the plural indicator

36 The etymology of Gr. *Σκύθαι* was proposed by Szemerényi in 1947 in a work written in Hungarian and repeated in 1951 in English (Szemerényi 1980: 17, n. 35). Later, independently of him, D’jakonov also suggested the reconstruction *Σκύθαι* < **skuḏa-* / **škuḏa-*.

in Scythian and some other East Iranian languages. Consequently, the form **skula-ta-* recorded by Herodotus suggests the older Common Scythian form **skuda-ta-* (D'jakonov 1956: 243; D'jakonov 1981: 99; Grantovskij 1960: 20; Grantovskij 1970: 89f., 175; Szemerényi 1980: 21f.; Cornillot 1981; Raevskij 1985: 216; Dudko 1988: 169; Witczak 1992: 52f.).

Taking into account that the ethnonym *Skolotoi* has received various etymological interpretations in the scientific literature, let us dwell a bit more on the transition *d > l* in a part of the Scythian dialects. A vivid evidence of this transition is the word Παράλαται, which, according to Herodotus (IV, 6), was the name of the reigning Scythian dynasty. This word has long been compared with the Avestan *paraḍāta-*, the name of the most ancient kings, literally meaning 'pre-established' (Miller 1887: 127; Abaev 1949: 175f.). However, the Greek letter Λ in the word Παράλαται is not a distortion of the letter Δ, as Miller believed (ibid.), but testifies to the abovementioned phonetic phenomenon (Grantovskij 1970: 90; Szemerényi 1980: 22; Raevskij 1977: 67; Raevskij 1985: 216; Witczak 1992: 52).

The transition *d > l* can also be illustrated by other examples. The name of the Scythian king Skolopitus (Scyth. **Skula-pitā*) in the first part contains the ethnonym 'Scythian' and means either 'the father of the Scythians' (Grantovskij 1970: 90; Szemerényi 1980: 22; Raevskij 1985: 216) or 'whose father is a Scythian' (Bogolyubov 1987: 36). The name of the Scythian king Πάλακος (Scyth. **Pālak(a)*) is derived from **Pāḍaka*, and this form finds a parallel in the Scythian name from Olbia, Παδαγος, as well as in the Middle Persian name *Pāḍay* (from *pāḍ* 'leg') (Grantovskij 1970: 175). The name of the Scythian king Σαύλιος goes back to Common Iranian **saudīa-* '(ritually) pure' (Kullanda/Raevskij 2004: 93).³⁷

Taking into account the above transition, two Scythian glosses in Hesychius also find a satisfactory Iranian etymology. Scyth. μελύγιον 'a drink prepared on honey' is attributed to Iranian **madu-* 'honey' + suffix *-wya-* (Witczak 1992: 53, 58), and Scyth. **maglu* 'swan' (Hes.: ἄγλυ) to Iranian **madgu-* (cf. New

37 Having correctly noted the presence in the names of the Scythian kings of the phoneme *l* going back to the all-Iranian **d*, Kullanda and Raevskij unreasonably extended this phenomenon to the Scythian language as a whole. Thus, they excluded the possibility of the presence of the phoneme *d*, deriving from Iranian **d* in Scythian (Kullanda/Raevskij 2004: 91, 94 f.). However, if we go beyond the anthroponymic material, we can find facts refuting this thesis, such as the Scythian toponym *Skudra* (see below) and Scyth. *dānu-* 'river' (Abaev 1979a: 285f.). Consequently, Grantovskij was right in assuming *l < *d* only for the Skolotian dialect of the Scythian language.

Persian *māy* 'waterfowl', Sanskrit *madgú* 'id.', see Witczak 1992: 53; cf. Christol 1989: 16).³⁸

One can also compare the name of the Celtic tribe Galatai, mentioned in the neighbourhood of the Sarmatians, which, according to Christol, goes back to the Scythian **gada-ta*, where *ta* is the plural marker in Scythian, and the base **gada-* is etymologically related either to Avestan *gaḍā* 'club, stick' (hence, the Galatians are 'bearers of clubs?'), or to Avestan *gaḍa* 'bandit, robber' (Christol 1989: 19).

Thus, the form **skula-ta-* recorded by Herodotus is indeed a dialectal variant of the common Scythian self-designation **skuda-ta-*. The name of the people *Kulūtāḥ* in Old Indian (Mayrhofer 1956–80: I/241) probably goes back to the dialectal form **skula-ta-*.

e) Ancient Persian, in which Western Scythia and its inhabitants are known as *Skudra*. This toponym was compared by Tomaschek with the ethnonym *Σκόλοτοι*, without elaborating on the phonetic side of the question (Tomaschek 1883: 227). Despite this comparison, the toponym *Skudra* was for a long time considered to be the name of the Persian province of Thrace and Macedonia (Kent 1950: 210). Only in 1980 Szemerényi managed to prove that the toponym *Skudra* consists of the Scythian self-designation *skuda-* and suffix *-ra*, which was discussed in detail above (Szemerényi 1980: 21, 23ff.). This toponym is especially important for our analysis, as it contains both components of the toponym *K'wydar*. The only difference is that in the Ossetian toponym the suffix *-ra* is presented in the variant *-āra*, and, therefore, reflects the etymon **Skudāra*.

Thus, the analysis based on a thorough consideration of the data of historical phonetics and morphology of Ossetian led us to the conclusion that the toponym *K'wydar* (Old Ossetian **Skudāra*), as well as the Scythian toponym *Skudra*, literally means "Scythian (region/land)". By analogy with the Scythian language, where the name of the Scythians themselves (**skuda-ta-*) existed next to the toponym *Skud-ra* denoting the territory inhabited by them, we can assume that in the past next to Ossetian *K'wydar* a tribal name **k'wydatae* 'Scythians' existed. The comparison of the above Ossetian toponyms containing the suffix *-ar* with the corresponding family names coming from *-tae* testifies to the same. The tradition of naming the occupied territory with a word

38 The predecessor of Ossetian was not among those dialects which had *l* developed from **d*. Cf., however, Oss. *mæŋq* | *malq* 'peacock(?)', considered a variation to the word *marǰ* 'bird' (Abaev 1958–89: II/89). Is it not simpler to see here a borrowing from the unattested Skolot/Scythian **malgu-* 'swan', which is a transitional stage from Old Iranian **madgu-* to the attested form *(m)aglu*?

derived from the self-designation of a patronymic, clan or tribe, which was established by the Scythians in their ancestral homeland, was retained by the Scythian-Sarmatian tribes in the Caucasus until recently.

7 Toponym *K'wydar* and Some Issues of Ethnic History of South Ossetia

As can be seen from our analysis, the remote ancestors of the South Ossetians were Scythians, not Sarmatians or other Eastern Iranian tribes. Can this conclusion be confirmed by any other data? And if so, why the ethnonym “Scythian” was not retained in Ossetic next to its derivative *K'wydar* *‘Scythia’?

In 1990, when we first presented our theses on the etymology of the toponym *K'wydar*, we were clear about the connection between our etymology and one very curious phonetic feature of the Kudar dialect. In contrast to all other Ossetic dialects and vernaculars, the Kudar dialect, judging by written monuments of the 19th century, was a č-dialect and only at the beginning of the last century it became a š-dialect as a result of the spirantisation of hissing affricates.

There were attempts to interpret Old Kudar phonemes č and ž, opposing Common Ossetic *c* and *z*, as resulting from a dialectal, i. e. secondary, development. However, taking into account that in Common Iranian even in the epoch immediately preceding its disintegration into Eastern and Western branches there were only hissing affricates, but no corresponding whistling ones, it has long been suggested that Old Kudar č, ž may directly continue Old Iranian *č, *j (Harmatta 1970: 75f.). Considering that only in the East Iranian language area just before (or even after) its disintegration into the northern and southern subgroups did the *c* | *z* isogloss appear, which covered not all languages of the East Iranian subgroup, and taking into account that all Ossetian dialects except Kudar participate in the *c* | *z* isogloss, we must conclude that the break between Proto-Kudar, on the one hand, and Proto-Iron and Proto-Digor, on the other, could have occurred as early as in the historical homeland of the East Iranian tribes.

Based on the data of linguistic geography, it should be assumed that the *c* | *z* isogloss, being an innovation, affected only the centre of the area, while the periphery retained the archaism (č, j). Taking into account that of all conceivable ancestors of Ossetians in the epoch after the division of the Eastern Iranian branch into northern and southern subgroups only Sarmato-Massaget tribes continued to be in contact with the other Iranian languages of the Eastern group, and that the Scythian dialects were far on the outskirts of this

area, we should conclude that it were the Sarmatian and Massagetic tribes, along with the ancestors of Khorezmians, Saks, Afghans and the Pamir peoples (except Yazgulami), who developed the $c | \zeta$ isogloss. Consequently, the ancestors of Ossetian-Ironians and Ossetian-Digorians should be sought among the Sarmato-Massaget tribes. The Scythian dialects, on the one hand, and the ancestors of the Sogdian (and the related Yagnobi), Munji (and the related Yidga) and Yazgulam languages, on the other hand, being on the two opposite margins of the East Iranian area, did not take part in this isogloss. It follows that the ancestor of the Kudar dialect can be related only to the Cimmero-Scythian, but not to the Sarmato-Massagetic tribes.

In a preliminary publication in the Ossetian journal *Fidiwæg* (1990) we only mentioned the possibility of the above interpretation of the discussed phonetic feature of the Kudar dialect, but did not give a detailed presentation of our concept, promising to return to this issue in another paper. Unfortunately, the military aggression of Georgia against South Ossetia (1991–1992) prevented us from fulfilling our promise in a short time frame. Only in 1994 we managed to publish theses (Dzitstsojty 1994: 58f.) and four years later a detailed version of the history of the Kudar dialect (Dzitstsojty 1998a: 181ff.). In the meantime an article by Gershevich (1992) appeared, whose conclusions fully coincided with ours.

Recognising Kudar \check{c} , ζ as direct reflexes of the corresponding Iranian phonemes, and taking into account that there are no more significant divergences in the field of phonetics between Kudar, on the one hand, and Iron and Digor dialects of the Ossetian language, on the other hand, Gershevich drew the reader's attention to Herodotus' report (IV, 117) that the Sarmatians had been speaking the same Scythian language, but with errors from long ago. Since this assessment goes back to the Scythians themselves, and the folk assessment of dialectal and colloquial differences is based, as a rule, on divergences in the field of phonetics and not of grammar and lexicon, it should be assumed that some phonetic innovation appeared in the Sarmatian language, which was perceived by their Scythian kin as an erroneous pronunciation. This innovation could include the replacement of \check{c} with c by the Sarmatians.

In addition, Gershevich drew attention to the following. The Kurdish verb $\check{c}u$ - 'to go' is closer in form to the modern Kudarian $\check{c}u$ 'id.' than to its supposed Median prototype $*\check{y}u$ -. The form of the Kurdish verb has always raised questions among scholars, to which there is still no satisfactory answer. Having speculated that the appearance of the Kurdish form may be a result of the Scythian influence on Proto-Kurdish in the epoch of the Scythian campaigns in West Asia (7th century BC), Gershevich came to the conclusion that the Scythians, like the Ossetians-Kudarians, spoke a " $\check{c}u$ -ing" dialect. On this basis,

the Kudar dialect is recognized as a descendant of Scythian, and the Iron dialect of Sarmatian (Gershevitch 1992: 165ff.).

The Scythian settlement in the mountains of the Central Caucasus and, in particular, in the territory of South Ossetia is confirmed by archaeological data (Tekhov 1980). On the map of Scythian archaeological monuments of Transcaucasia (7th–6th cc. BC) compiled by Pogrebova, the territory of South Ossetia up to the Kura River in the south and the Aragva River in the east, as well as the territory of the modern Georgian province of Racha adjoining South Ossetia in the west, is designated as “the zone of the most intensive distribution of elements of Scythian material culture” (Pogrebova 1984: 43).

This is also confirmed by Strabo (1st c. BC–1st c. AD), whose report was repeatedly commented on in scholarly literature. Describing modern Iberia, Strabo (XI, 3, 3) reported: “The mountainous country (i.e. the mountainous part of Iberia, *Y. D.*), on the contrary, is occupied by commoners and warriors living according to the customs of Scythians and Sarmatians, whose neighbours and relatives they are”. South Ossetia, as well as the mountainous part of modern Eastern Georgia was part of mountainous Iberia.

Thus, the basis of the ethnogenesis of the South Ossetians-Kudars was laid by the Scythian tribes *škuda-* || *skuda-* in the 7th century BC. It was they who called their country “Scythian (land/region)” – **Skudāra* (> *K'wydar*). This name was originally applied to the whole territory of the Scythian settlement in the Central Caucasus, and in this sense it is still used today by the North Ossetians. But later the original Scythian population of South Ossetia mixed with the tribes of the Sarmato-Alanian (and Massagetian?) circle that moved from the North Caucasus. This kind of resettlement was permanent, but we believe that there were two main waves.

As a result of the mixing of the Scythians with some Sarmatian tribe, the Scythian language of South Ossetia converged with both the Iron and Digor dialects, retaining some important features of its phonetics, morphology and lexicon. One of the important results of this mixing was the change of the self-designation of the ancient Scythians: instead of the auto-ethnonym **skuda-tä* ‘Scythian(s)’ the ethnonym *twal(tæ)* ‘Twal(s)’ started to be used. Consequently, the Twals were one of the Sarmato-Alanian or Massaget tribes that moved to the territory of South Ossetia in ancient times. The most significant wave of settlers, who brought with them a new self-designation, could have appeared in South Ossetia in the 4th–3rd centuries BC in connection with the invasion of the Sarmatians both into the European Scythia and to the North Caucasus.³⁹

39 The traces of the defunct Scythian self-designation can be seen in the name of the settlement *K'udoti* in the Tskaltubo district of Imereti in Western Georgia (about this oikonym

As a result of the same migration and subsequent processes of tribal mixing, the toponym “Scythia” (*K'wydar*) in South Ossetia itself was retained only in one gorge, apparently because it was here that the Scythians managed to maintain their position, resisting assimilation with the Sarmatians. This is the picture that the author of “Armenian Geography” or his Georgian informant as well as Vakhushti Bagrationi catches in South Ossetia. The difference is that over the past thousand years the inhabitants of the Kudar Gorge have linguistically and ethnically completely converged with the Twals, so Vakhushti knows only Twals in the Kudar Gorge.

It also follows from the above that the ethnonym *twal* was not the original self-designation of the medieval inhabitants of South Ossetia, as it seems to modern scholars who rely solely on written sources. Nor was it Caucasian in origin, otherwise the distinctive feature of the Kudar dialect would be the presence of a “Caucasian superstratum” in it. Before their resettlement in South Ossetia, the Twals were an Iranian tribe (of the Sarmatian or Massagetian circle), as evidenced by the Indo-European (Iranian) etymology of the ethnonym *twal* (Paxalina 2002: 103ff.). After resettlement they became the dominant tribe in South Ossetia, having adopted some features of their speech from the preceding Scythian population, which are not lost even by the modern speakers of the Kudar dialect.

In the 13th–14th centuries, under the pressure from the Tatar-Mongol and then Timur hordes, another powerful wave of settlers from the North Caucasus rushed into South Ossetia, bringing with them the self-designation *ir(on)*, as well as the Iron dialect, which became dominant in the eastern part of South Ossetia (the Twal and Chisan dialects). The ethnonym *twal* suffered the same fate as **k'wydatae*: it narrowed its semantics and came to be used in the sense of “inhabitant of the north-east of South Ossetia”.

These are brief conclusions arising from the etymology of the toponym *K'wydar*. Given the insufficient coverage of the Scythian-Sarmatian period of the history of South Ossetia in written sources, our suggestions can be further adjusted, but the main assumption, as it seems to us, will not change: the toponym *K'wydar* in the archaizing translation means “Scythian (land/region)”.

see (Aphridonidze/Makalatia 1980: 107). If our conjecture is correct, the transmission of Kudar long *a* through *o* in Georgian draws attention. Ossetian *a* is very deep, but in the Kvaissi dialect of the Kudar dialect, whose main area of distribution is the Kudar Gorge, it is especially deep, close to *o*. In this regard, it should be noted that the ethnonym *as*, which penetrated into Old Georgian, apparently through the mediation of the Old Kudar, took the form *ovsi* || *osi*. Consequently, the ancient inhabitants of the village *K'udoti* (< **k'udatae*) could be Scythian Kudarians who had migrated from South Ossetia.

Ossetian Issue in the Commentaries on Herodotus' Report about Exampaeus and the Cauldron of Ariant

Konstantin Kochiev

Within the vast heritage of the ancient tradition about the tribes of the Scythian-Sarmatian circle, Herodotus' Scythian Logos occupies a special place as the main written source containing information about the religion and mythological ideas of the Iranian-speaking population of the Northern Black Sea region. Naturally, those chapters of Book IV of his "History", in which legends about the origin of the Scythian tribe and stories about Scythian deities and religious rites are transmitted, were subjected to a thorough comprehensive analysis by several generations of specialists.

Herodotus' information was compared with the data of related traditions, archaeological and ethnographic materials, folklore data, and was subjected to linguistic analysis. All this together allows us to present a picture of the worldview of the Scythian tribes with a sufficiently high degree of reliability, although not in full, which is primarily due to Herodotus' reticence in what concerns this subject.

However, it seems that the reconstruction of the ideological views of the Scythians can be significantly supplemented by considering the data of Herodotus' Scythian Logos in the light of the Ossetian tradition. In the present work we intend to illustrate the possibilities given by this approach, already successfully tested in the works by Vs. F. Miller, G. Dumézil, D. S. Raevskij, E. A. Grantovskij and other researchers, as applied to the Scythian legend about consecration of a huge bronze cauldron by the King Aryantas in Exampaeus, transmitted by Herodotus (IV, 52, 81).

1 Herodotus' Account

Describing the sights of the Scythian country, Herodotus tells about a huge cauldron shown to him in the area of Exampaeus, which by a Scythian legend was associated with the name of King Ariantas: "For their king, whose name was Ariantas, desiring to know the census of the Scythians, commanded every

Scythian to bring him the point from an arrow, threatening death to all who did not. So a vast number of arrow-heads were brought, and he decided to make and leave a memorial out of them; and he made of these this bronze vessel, and set it up in this country Exampaeus" (IV, 81).

Above Herodotus mentions Exampaeus in his description of Hypanis (IV, 52), reporting that at a distance of four days' voyage from the mouth of the Hypanis a bitter spring flows into it, "so bitter that although its volume is small its admixture taints the Hypanis, one of the few great rivers of the world. This spring is on the border between the farming Scythians and the Alazones; the name of it and of the place where it rises is in Scythian Exampaeus; in the Greek tongue, Sacred Ways".

It is worth noting that Herodotus' report about the cauldron of Ariantas should be considered among the most reliable places of the Scythian Logos, experts point to it as the most important of Herodotus' evidence of autopsy in Scythia. As D. A. Shcheglov notes, "Herodotus describes in detail the copper cauldron of the Scythian king Ariantas in the area of Exampaeus on the middle reaches of the Hypanis (Southern Bug). He twice directly indicates that he saw this cauldron in person (IV, 81.2–4), and when describing the legend connected with the cauldron of Ariantas, he refers to the words of local inhabitants. It is also indicative that the story about Ariantas' cauldron is given by Herodotus at the very end of the narrative part of the Scythian logos and, in fact, is not connected with the preceding narrative in any way, being a kind of post scriptum. Most likely, this is due to the fact that this information was obtained by Herodotus himself, who mechanically joined it to the general description of the Scythians, borrowed from other sources" (Shcheglov 1999).

2 Research Experience

Attempts to interpret Herodotus' message about the cauldron of king Ariant in Exampaea have been made repeatedly. As early as 1909 Kiessling suggested that there was a Scythian sanctuary in Exampaeus, which follows from the very name 'Ἐξάμπαϊος transmitted by Herodotus in a Grecized form, but undoubtedly having a Scythian origin (Kiessling 1909: 1551). Zhebelev, supporting this opinion, noted that the location of such a vessel probably indicates the existence of a Scythian sanctuary in Exampaeus. According to him, Herodotus visited Exampaea, where he personally saw Ariantas' cauldron, and "Herodotus was probably attracted to Exampaea by curiosity to see the huge copper vessel mentioned above" (Zhebelev 1953: 37f. and n. 2, 339). Grakov assumed that the Exampaeus tract was probably a place of some assemblies of the whole

Scythian people, and perhaps it was here that the all-Scythian celebration, about which Herodotus tells (VI, 5–7), was held. Grakov regards the collection of spearheads by Ariantas as an attempt to tax (Grakov 1968: 102, 112).

Dumézil, in connection with the cauldron of Ariantas, considered the information of the Nart epic: “In the Narts’ tales of the Ossetians a magic cauldron also appears. Is it not a memory of ancient ritual cauldrons?” And further: “Is this huge bronze vessel of the Scythians or other analogies prototypes of the huge and marvellous cauldron of the Narts? In any case, there is no doubt about its cultic purpose: the Scythian king ‘dedicates’ the vessel to the area called ‘Sacred Ways’ and located near the bitter waters, whose magical and sinister glory has been brought to our days in folklore, if one recognizes in the bitter spring of Herodotus a certain tributary of the Bug, the ancient Hypanis, called Mertvovod” (Dumézil 1976: 46f.).

Analyzing Herodotus’ report about the feast connected with the Scythian sacred gold, Raevskij considers the finding of Ariantas’ cauldron in the Exampaeus area as an indication that this feast was held in Exampaeus, noting that “The size of the vessel leaves no doubt about its ritual purpose, and its origin (...) indicates the all-Scythian character of this shrine” (Raevskij 1977: 114). In his opinion, the Scythian festival was connected with the solar cult, marked the beginning of a new time cycle and a new solar year, which correlates with the data of other ancient Indo-European traditions. In many of them, the spring festival was tied to the vernal equinox and included a fire ritual. The content of the ritual was determined by the idea of the necessity of annual renewal of the world through actions reproducing the sacred act of the first creation. The tour of the sacred area by a man acting as a sacral deputy of the Scythian king, who embodied the image of the solar hero Colaksais, as well as the sacred marriage of the “king” with the goddess of fire Tabiti, which were part of the festive ritual, were intended to ensure the renewal of the cosmic order.

At the same time, Raevskij, considering Herodotus’ report that Scythia is a quadrangle, regards it as a reflection of the mythological model of the organized world, and Exampaeus as the sacral centre of this quadrangle: “According to Herodotus, the tract of Exampaeus is thus located in the geometric centre of this quadrangle. This circumstance is hardly accidental. It has already been noted above that the quadrangular Scythia is a reflection of the idea of an organized universe. In the ordered world, according to archaic ideas, it is the centre of the world, through which the axis mundi passes, and where the act of creation took place at the beginning of the world, which led to the creation of an ordered cosmos, that possesses the maximum of sacredness ...”.

It is indicative that Herodotus himself interprets the name Exampaeus as ‘Sacred Paths’. The sacral properties of the centre of the world are determined first of all by the fact that it is through it that the shortest path runs, “connecting

the earth and man with Heaven and the Creator". It is the "centre of the world" that is usually the site of a feast that reproduces in ritual the events of the "beginning of the world". Therefore, we have every reason to believe that the Scythian feast took place exactly in the tract of Exampaeus, and the data reported by Herodotus about the location of this tract are largely conventional, as they are subordinated not to the real geography, but to the concept of the quadrangular configuration of the world and its centre" (Raevskij 1977: 114). The translation of the Scythian name of Exampaeus given by Herodotus, Ἱραὶ ὁδοί – 'Sacred Ways' (IV, 52) – together with the report about the dedication by Ariantas of his famous cauldron is considered by Raevskij as a significant confirmation that this area was a cult centre of Scythia.

There is still no satisfactory explanation of the Scythian name of Exampaeus in the literature. According to Miller, this word defies interpretation (Miller 1887: 132). The etymologies proposed in the literature ignore – fully or partially – the Herodotus translation. Müllenhoff, believing that ε at the beginning of the word Ἐξάμπαϊος has a privative meaning, assumed that the first half of the word can be understood as 'unharmful', 'undamaged', while the second part was attributed to an Iranian word with the meaning 'path, way' (Müllenhoff 1867: 554; idem, 1870–1908: III/104f.). Vasmer considers all the proposed etymologies unsatisfactory (Vasmer 1923: 13). Trubachev interprets the Scythian name Exampaeus as 'unsuitable water' from Old Indian *a* 'not' -*ksama* 'suitable' -*paya* 'water, liquid' (Trubachev 1977: 19). Grantovskij and Raevskij point out that exactly the same interpretation is possible on the basis of Iranian: **a-xšama-paya* with the usual rendering of Iranian *xš* through ξ (Grantovskij/Raevskij 1984: 57). Witczak explains Ἐξάμπαϊος from Indo-Iranian **Yakšām pathayas* literally 'paths of the Yakshas'; in his opinion the final component (-παῖος = ὁδοί 'paths') represents Scythian nom. pl. **pāyah* from *pāy* (< **pahi*) 'path', cf. Scr. *pathi*-tj., pl. *pathayas*, Old Persian *paθi* 'path' (Witczak 1992: 58).

In connection with the Herodotus' interpretation of Scythian Ἐξάμπαϊος 'sacred paths', the special role of the concept of 'path' in the Indo-Iranian worldview attracts attention. A comprehensive analysis of the semantic field of the notion of 'path, road' in the Rīgveda, undertaken by Elizarenkova, has revealed many shades of meanings for *pāth-*, including, besides the literal meaning, also abstract, metaphorical and symbolic ones. Typical, for example, is the expression *ṛtasya pāth-* 'the path of universal law (*ṛtá*)'. In the Rīgveda hymns, *pāth-* is primarily the path that leads to the gods and along which the gods follow – *devayana-*. The symbolism of the 'path' manifests itself in different ways in the Vedic texts (Elizarenkova 1999: 72ff.). The notion of 'path' is also quite significant for Ossetic, where it correlates with various spheres of the abstract. Raevskij, speaking about the possible cult role of Exampaeus as

a place of all-Scythian celebrations connected with the veneration of sacred gold that fell from heaven, shows that in accordance with Herodotus' Scythian logos, Exampaeus is localized in the geometrical centre of "quadrangular Scythia", which in turn is a reflection of the idea of an organized universe. In the ordered world, according to archaic ideas, the centre possesses the maximum sacredness, because through it the axis of the world passes, the shortest path connecting the earth and man with Heaven and the Creator (Raevskij 1977: 92).

All these facts, as well as a number of successful interpretations of Scythian words given by Herodotus and other ancient authors on the basis of their Greek translations, suggests parsing the name of Exampaeus on the basis of its explanation by Herodotus. However, none of the proposed explanations fully satisfies Herodotus' explanation of the Scythian name of Exampaeus as 'sacred ways' (Ἱραὶ ὁδοί). As a matter of fact, the difficulty is only in explaining the first component, since there is no reason to reject the etymology of Müllenhoff and Witczak for the second. The way to solve the problem of interpretation of the first part of the toponym in question lies through the analysis of possible correspondences of Greek Ἱραί in Scythian and its close languages.

The search for acceptable Iranian correspondences for the first part, for which the meaning 'sacred' is assumed, prompts us to turn to the consideration of Scythian notions of 'sacred'. In another passage, Herodotus, just as in his report about Exampaeus, refers to Scythian sacred things, namely, to the sacred gold of the Scythian kings. According to a Scythian legend cited by Herodotus, golden objects fell from the sky onto the Scythian land to the face of the sons of the first Scythian king Targitaos: a plough with a yoke, a double-edged axe and a bowl. When the eldest and the middle brothers had tried to approach and take the treasures, the gold burst into flames. Only when the youngest, Colaksais, had approached the gold did the flames go out and he took the gold to himself. After that the older brothers handed over all royal power to the younger one (IV, 5).

Thus, the sacred gold of the Scythians, the possession of which determines the right to kingship, is associated with fire. At the same time, the institution of royal power by the Scythians was connected with the cult of fire, as it is clearly shown by Raevskij (1977: 87ff.). Therefore, the message of Herodotus that "when the Scythians will swear their mightiest oath, it is by the king's hearth that they are accustomed to swear" (IV, 68) deserves special attention. It can be assumed that Colaksais could take the treasure without harming himself just because the blazing sacred gold and the royal power have the same nature.

In Valerius Flaccus' poem "Argonautica", among other chiefs, Colax (= Κολαξαῖς of Herodotus) is mentioned as leader of a troop with insignia associated with the fiery element (fires, sparkling lightning, golden-red wings, s.

Grantovskij 1960: 6). The name Colaksais (**Xvar-xšaya* 'Sun-King') represents heavenly fire (Abaev 1949: 243), thus belonging to the same ideosemantic field.

The ideas about the nature of royal power are reflected in the term denoting it, which goes back to the root **xša(y)*- 'to shine, burn, blaze'. From this root, numerous terms for the highest degrees of social hierarchy are formed in various Iranian languages, e.g., Old Persian *xšayaθiya*, Avestan *xšaya* 'prince', Sogdian *axšewan* 'ruler', Parthian *axšend* 'prince', etc. In Ossetic, a derivative of *xša(y)*- is the social term *æxsin* 'mistress' (Abaev 1958–89: IV/243). For other terms etymologically related to *xša(y)*- the semantic field of 'fire' and 'sun' is also evident, e.g. *æxsidaf* 'fire stick', *æxsidæn* 'burning coal, spark', *æxsidgæ* 'burning, flaming, ardent, blazing', *æxsid* 'dawn'. In verbal usage it occurs with the verb *suzyn* 'to burn'. In Iranian languages **xša(y)*- is contaminated with the base *xšaud-* 'to melt, to be liquid' (av. *xšaudah* 'water stream, liquid').

The supreme goddess of the Scythians, whose investiture rites largely coincide with the rituals of the festival of cosmic renewal, was Tabiti. Dumézil explains her name as 'the Warming' and compares her with the wife of the Nart Soslan, the divine daughter of the Sun *Wacyruxs* (Dumézil 1990: 98ff.). Another possible translation of Tabiti's name, suggested by Widengren, is 'the Flaming' (Widengren 1965: 158; s. also Raevskij 1977: 92). The Scythian ruler Idanthyrus calls Hestia-Tabiti 'Queen of the Scythians':

Idanthyrus the Scythian king replied: "It is like this with me, Persian: I never ran from any man before out of fear, and I am not running from you now; I am not doing any differently now than I am used to doing in time of peace, too. As to why I do not fight with you at once, I will tell you why. We Scythians have no towns or cultivated land, out of fear for which, that the one might be taken or the other wasted, we would engage you sooner in battle. But if all you want is to come to that quickly, we have the graves of our fathers. Come on, find these and try to destroy them: you shall know then whether we will fight you for the graves or whether we will not fight. Until then, unless we have reason, we will not engage with you. As to fighting, enough; as to masters, I acknowledge Zeus my forefather and Hestia queen of the Scythians only. As for you, instead of gifts of earth and water I shall send such as ought to come to you; and for your boast that you are my master, I say 'Weep!'" Such is the proverbial "Scythian speech".

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The special role of the semantic series 'fire', 'light', 'sun', 'gold' in the religious ideas of Iranian peoples of antiquity is well known (Raevskij 1977: 91f.). In

Ossetian ritual speech the epithet *rūxs* (Digor *rox*s) ‘light, bright, luminous’ is often attached to the names of saints, e. g. *Roxs izædtæ* ‘bright angels’, *ruxs Alardy* ‘bright Alardy’. The name of the daughter of the Sun in Ossetian mythology is *Wacyruxs*, literally ‘the light of *wac* (holiness, divinity), *divina lux*’ (Abaev 1958–89: II/435ff., IV/26ff., 32). The ideosemantic transition ‘fire, light’ > ‘purity’ > ‘holiness’ is manifold in Ossetic and other Iranian languages. Thus, Old Iranian **sauk-*: *suk-* yields in Ossetic *sužyn* ‘burn, kindle’, *sužag* ‘burning, bitter’ and *syğdæg* ‘pure, holy’. It can therefore be assumed that Exampaeus, as a place considered to be the centre of Scythia, i.e. the projection of the Scythian mythological picture of the world in general, and associated with the legend of the Scythian sacred gold falling from the sky, as well as with the ideas of the sacral nature of the power of the Scythian kings, which in their turn were connected with brilliance, light, fire, sun, etc. (cf. *Yima xšaeta* – ‘Yima the shining’), could well receive a name, one of the components of which was a term to denote the category of ‘sacred’, in this case **xša(y)-*.

Thus, the reconstruction of the Scythian name Exampaeus is possible in the form **xša(y)-(a)m(a)-pāyah* ‘sacred ways’, with a low-productive suffix of indefinite meaning *-ama* > *-m*; cf. Avestan *hao-ma* ‘Hom’ (from *hu-* ‘to squeeze’), *gar-ma* ‘warm’ (cf. Ossetic *qarm/ğarm*), *tax-ma* ‘vigorous’, Ossetic *wærm* ‘pit, cellar’ < **war* ‘to close’ etc.



The etymological explanation of the name of Exampaeus can be considered as an additional argument in favour of the hypothesis that Exampaeus was an important cult centre connected with the legend of the “sacred gold” of the Scythians, and where, in all probability, the annual festival, about which Herodotus tells, was held. But what could have been the cult role of the legendary cauldron of Ariantas in this connection? What, apart from the desire to immortalize his name, prompted the Scythian ruler to order manufacturing and consecrating this vessel, amazing evidence of the high level of metallurgical technique of the Scythian masters, in Exampaeus? Have the heirs of the Scythian tradition preserved in their historical memory the recollections of this kind of a miracle of the Scythian steppes?

It has already been mentioned above that the Ariantas’ cauldron (χαλκίον) has been compared by researchers with some artefacts mentioned in the Nart stories. These artefacts are quite numerous, and their characteristics are essential for possible reconstruction of the ritual role of the giant vessel in Exampaeus. The Abkhazian version of the Nart epic speaks about a sacred jug Vadzamakät that held six hundred ordinary Nart jugs used for water, a curious

quantitative coincidence with Herodotus' information about the cauldron of Ariantas that held six hundred amphorae. This cauldron had an amazing property: no matter how much wine one scooped from it, it did not diminish. Besides, the wine of Vadzamakät had a special power: after drinking it, the Narts became even more powerful (Dumézil 1990: 179ff.). Dumézil compares the name of this cauldron with the name of the sacred bowl *Wacamongæ* of the Ossetian Nart epic (Dumézil 1990: 180f.). The Abkhazian epic mentions a huge copper cauldron *Nart'aa rk'uab du* "for a hundred people" in the "Narts' big house" (Inal-Ipa 1977: 48).

The Balkar epic speaks of a miraculous cauldron suspended on a sacred chain in the house of Alik (Lipkin 1969: 92). Another place describes a magic cauldron kept in the house of the Alagata family, which does not need to be filled with meat, one only needs to pour water over it and put it on the fire – it will be filled with meat of forty bulls; the well-being of the Narts' family is associated with this cauldron:

And while in the house of Alagata.
In the house of the eldest of the Narta clan,
On a holy chain the cauldron hangs chained,
The tribe of the glorious Narts will be strong. (Alieva 1983: 427)

The belonging of the wonderful cauldron to the *Alagatæ* clan is of special interest in connection with the functional characteristics of the Narts *Aligatæ-Alægatæ*. The attribution of the miraculous cauldron to the clan associated with the priestly function allows us to raise the question of its ritual-symbolic role.

In Ossetian texts, the marvellous cauldron of the Narts is also well known, although it is not directly associated with the Alagatas. In particular, the marvellous *narty ag* – 'the cauldron of the Narts' is mentioned (Kajtmazov 1889: 14ff.); in another text, a huge cauldron of the Borata family – *Boræty cæggīnag* (Salagaeva 2007: 1/85). However, apparently, in this text we encounter a substitution of the clan name of the owners of the cauldron, as it also speaks of the ceremonial house of the Borata family, which is usually associated with the Alagatas.

Another cauldron of the Ossetian Narts is called *cæggīnag-Erdamongæ* (Salagaeva 2007: 1/212) 'ard ('oath') pointer'. Another text speaks of a huge cauldron with a marvellous property: "a drink once brewed in it lasts for seven years, and then every day, no matter how much you drink, the cauldron becomes fuller and fuller. If the brewed beer is used to moisten the forehead of a new-born baby, the child does not need the mother's breast for a year.

This cauldron was the treasure of the Nart ancestors, which was taken away from them by force, and Wastyrgy and Marguz undertook a long journey to return this treasure (Gazzaev 1949: 65of.). In a variant of the tale the theft of a gold-lined cauldron is described, which was stored by a wide river. Warziati compared the motif of a huge cauldron by a wide river with the cauldron of Ariantas, noting that Exampaeus is localized in the interfluvium of the Dnieper and the Southern Bug (ancient Hypanis), two large rivers of the South Russian steppes (Warziati 1995a: 172).

Recent studies on the semiotics of the traditional culture of Turkic peoples have noted the role of the cauldron as one of the central object symbols. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the analysis of huge folklore and ethnographic material can be correlated with the facts of the Ossetian tradition, taking into account a certain typological similarity of various cultural traditions of the Eurasian steppes and the established facts of interaction between these cultures over a long period of time.

According to a group of researchers, “the cauldron was one of the links in the chain of isomorphic and isofunctional loci: the centre of the clan territory – dwelling – hearth – cauldron. Its median position could be described not only by spatial but also by temporal coordinates. This, in particular, was manifested in the designation of the period of the longest summer days among the Tuvans of the Mongun-Taiga region – *chalypcha tip turar*. The term comes from the name of a small cast-iron boiler *chalypcha tash*. (...) In summer time the sun shone through the smoke hole directly into the boiler. It thus corresponded with summer, midday, zenith, the point of maximum balance in nature” (L’vova et al. 1988: 139). Along with the dwelling and the hearth, the cauldron was the most important indicator of space reclamation (op cit.: 140). Immutability, inexhaustibility of the “grace” filling the cauldron was a prerequisite for an abundant family life. According to mythopoetic ideas, it was the basis of happiness (*yrys*) and success of a person (op cit.: 144). The cauldron was used in fortune-telling at the horse leash, which in turn was considered the symbol of the “world axis”, and as a ritual object served the purpose of establishing a connection between the worlds (op cit. 1988: 141f.).

Of particular interest is the symbolic complex from the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasevi in Turkestan, which was the headquarters of the Kazakh khans, which consisted of a huge, human-sized cauldron, with attached banners with tails of horse hair, symbolizing the unification of the Kazakh tribes. This cauldron has already been compared with the copper vessel of the king Ariantas in Exampaeus (Galiev 1987: 78). It is also worth noting the Turkmen legend about the leader and legendary ancestor of the Salyr tribe, who had the nickname Kazan, which he received because he had a huge cauldron (Gundogdyev 1996: 29).

Ossetian ethnographic materials contain a series of informative data concerning the role of the 'full vessel' in cult and ritual. These data can be considered from the viewpoint of partitioning of space through symbolic objects, and thus are directly relevant to our topic. The ritual role of the cauldron, bowl and other vessels is assumed as synonymous (Raevskij 1977: 76). It is known in particular that in some Ossetian sanctuaries a bowl filled with a drink (usually beer) was kept from holiday to holiday, during the year, and then the priest predicted by the amount of liquid or by the shape of the foam on its surface what the harvest would look like and what the future would bring for the country in general (Baraqty 1992: 115).

The vessel with a drink also appears in connection with the founding of a settlement and in building rituals. The legend about the foundation of the South Ossetian village of *K'usk'ytæ* tells about two brothers, Tuga and Kortia, who, looking for a place to settle, found a sanctuary in the area they had chosen, in the wall niche (*k'usk*) of which a bowl full of beer stood. Tuga drank the beer and put the bowl back, but on the second day the bowl was miraculously full again. He drank from it a second time, and on the third morning there was again beer foaming in the bowl. This time another brother claimed the right to drink from the bowl, but Tuga insisted on drinking beer from the miraculous bowl a third time. On the fourth day the cup was no longer full. A village was founded on this spot (Bjazyrty 1959–62: 111/119f.).

In South Ossetia, when choosing a place to build a house, a clay jug with milk poured halfway into it was buried on the site of the proposed construction. After a month the level of liquid in the jug was checked; if it decreased, the place was considered unfavourable for construction, if the volume of liquid increased, the place was considered lucky (Pchelina 1930: 10). Similar divinations were known among the Eastern Slavs (Bajburin 1983).

In connection with the role of Exampaeus as the main cult centre of Scythia and the location of the cauldron of Ariantas as one of the Scythian shrines, the tribal division of the Scythians is of special interest. Raevskij notes that according to Herodotus Exampaeus was located in the territory of the Scythian tribes Alizons (Alazons) and Callipides, to which he attributes the first Dumézil's social function and considers them as tribes of "priests" (Raevskij 1977: 156f.). Trubachev believes that the name Alizons (Alazons) was given by the Black Sea Indo-Aryans to their nearest foreign neighbours and means "another clan": Old Indian **ali-jana* (Trubachev 1979: 36f.). However, Grantovskij and Raevskij rightly point out the possibility of Iranian interpretation of this ethnonym, assuming here the components *zana*, attached to family and clan groups, tribe, nation, and *ala-*, *ali* < *arya-*. Besides, interpreting the name of Ἀλιζῶνες / Ἀλαζόνες is complicated by confusion with the Asia Minor ethnonym Ἀλιζῶνες (Grantovskij/Raevskij 1984: 56f.).

The name and supposed functional characteristics of the Alizons suggest a comparison with the Alagats (*Alægataë*) of the Ossetian Nart epic. The Alagats are confidently identified as bearers of the first function: in the “Great House” of the Alagats various ritual and cultic activities were performed, all public meetings and feasts of the Narts were held, including those called *afæzy æmbyrd, cyty kwyvd* ‘annual meeting, feast of glory’, which “recall in memory similar victorious feasts of the Scythians reported by Herodotus (iv, 66)” (Gaglojti 1989: 14).

The name of the Alagata family derives from the name of their ancestor Alag, which goes back to Old Iranian **āryaka* < **arya* ‘Aryan’. The assignment of this name to the Alagata priestly caste can be explained through the definition of *ārya* in ancient Indian texts as a religious figure – ‘one who offers sacrifices’, ‘one who squeezes or prepares soma’, ‘one who chants or praises the gods’ (Dumézil 1986a: 236; Dzitstsojty 1992: 11). The name of the Nart family Alagatas finds correspondences in other national versions of Narts’ stories of a number of Caucasian peoples: the Aligate of the Balkar epic, the Alejker (Alijevs) of the Adyghe epic, and the Alikanovs of the Svan epic. At the same time, the generic name *Alytæ* is known in Ossetian texts, the first component of which Bailey connects with *Alæ-* in *Alægataë* (Bailey 1980: 241). In turn, the etymon of the name *Alytæ* must have had the form **āryata*, which finds correspondence in the Sarmatian ethnonym *Areatas*, which J. Harmatta explains from **ary* ‘Aryan’ (Harmatta 1970: 77; Dzitstsojty 1992: 22).

The archaic trifunctional scheme of social organization was preserved not only in Ossetian Narts’ tales, but also in their social life up to the mid-19th century. In the Alagir Gorge, a kind of reserve of Ossetian antiquity, a legend of descent from the mythical Ossetian ethnarch Os-Bagatar was carefully handed down from generation to generation. According to it, from the three sons of Os-Bagatar the three *wæzdan* (noble) clans of Alagir descend: *K’usægontæ*, *Cæræzontæ* and *Sidæmontæ*. The tradition assigned a certain functional role to each of these tribes: *K’usægontæ* were the judges and embodied the priestly function, *Cæræzontæ* were considered unrivalled warriors, and *Sidæmontæ* were distinguished by their great number and wealth, in full accordance with the ancient scheme.

There are many legends connected with the ancient cauldrons in Ossetia, but the most remarkable is the legend of the miraculous cauldron of the “priests and judges” *K’usægontæ*, which literally resembles in detail the motif of the Narts’ cauldron, likewise preserved by the clan, associated with the religious and legal function. The legend says that when Os-Bagatar’s sons divided their father’s inheritance, *K’usæg(on)*, the ancestor of the *K’usægontæ* clan, received a cauldron which, like the Nart cauldrons, had a miraculous property:

its contents never diminished. This ancient cauldron was kept in the sanctuary of *Miǰdaw*, the main cult centre of the *K'usægontæ* clan. It was placed in a special building at the sanctuary called *ʒagdaræn* (from *ʒag* 'full' and *daræn* 'storehouse', s. Baraqtıy 1992: 113). In other versions of the legend about Os-Bagatar's inheritance, a golden bowl or a golden ball appears as K'usægön's share; it is emphasized that the object delivered to K'usægön symbolized glory; at the same time, the clan *K'usægontæ* is associated with the first social function according to Dumézil.

Abaev argues that "the distribution of treasures among the three brothers corresponds to three social functions according to Dumézil (...): the ball ('orb') symbolizes supreme power, the sword symbolizes military activity, and the cloth symbolizes wealth" (Abaev 1958–89: 111/103). In another work, he pays special attention to the name of the clan-ancestor: "The family name K'usægön is popularly interpreted as derived from *k'us* 'bowl': according to an ethnogenetic legend, the ancestor of this surname inherited a bowl from which he got the name K'usæg. This time folk etymology was apparently on the right track. According to the well-known theory of G. Dumézil, the bowl in the mythology and folklore of the Indo-European peoples, in particular in the legend of the origin of the Scythians told by Herodotus, has a certain symbolic meaning: it is a symbol of the first social function, the cultic one. The meaning of this legend is, therefore, that the family name of Kusagonovs represented a cult function, from its environment were recruited in ancient times priests, clergymen" (Abaev 1982: 115f.). In connection with the socio-functional characteristics of the *K'usægontæ* clan, researchers draw attention to its special role in the traditional Ossetian court system: in North Ossetia, the "supreme" court of the Alagiri Gorge, *Madizæn*, was located in the K'usægön village of Dagom, and the decisions of this court were unquestionable; the K'usægön clan was also the highest court of the South Ossetians (Bzarov 1987: 20f., 24ff.; Gagloiti 1989: 23f., 28).

As a matter of fact, the presence of a cauldron at the sanctuary and a particularly reverent attitude to this object is not a specific feature of the cult complex *Miǰdaw*. Huge Ossetian cauldrons for brewing beer have been repeatedly compared to the cauldron of Aryantas (Dumézil 1976: 46f., Kuznetsov 1993: 162f.; Warziati 1995: 172). These cauldrons were used in traditional Ossetian life until recently, and a wide range of beliefs were associated with them. Pfaff wrote: "Beer is brewed in large copper cauldrons, which are available at every significant *ʒwar* (sanctuary, *K. K.*), in specially arranged booths (...) Beer cauldrons of large *ʒwars*, for example, in Dzvıgis-dzwar or Rekom are huge and sometimes have inscriptions in Georgian. Such cauldrons are gifts of Georgian pretenders to the throne who seek help from the mountaineers" (Pfaff 1872:

131). It is curious that “pretenders to the throne” donated cauldrons to Ossetian sanctuaries, as if remembering the dedication of a huge cauldron by Ariantas to the main Scythian sanctuary.

As regards the traditional Ossetian notions about the connection between brewing cauldrons and the sacred, an entertaining comment by the ethnographer G. Kokiev is of interest: “Ossetians considered brewing cauldrons sacred and believed that all sorts of insults to brew pots did not go unpunished. In confirmation of their belief Ossetians of Dargavs village told me the following case. Mansurovs had a two-storied house. Cattle were kept in the lower floor, where also a family brewing boiler was placed in a special compartment. The Mansurovs married their son, and the newly-weds were put in the room above the boiler. The young couple had no children. The parents were very upset. They went to the local witch doctor. The witch doctor listened to the old people and said that the young couple were punished with infertility for their lack of respect for the sacred family cauldron. “It is necessary, the witch doctor said, to transfer the young marrieds to another room, and to the cauldron you must **bring a sacrifice** (emphasis added, *K. K.*)”. The young couple were transferred to the room of the old men, and the old men to the room of the young couple, and the newly-weds had offspring” (Kokiev, manuscript: 110).

One of the names of Nart’s cauldrons contains a significant indication of the ideological notions that made the cauldron motif particularly important in the Ossetian tradition, as well as in the preceding one. Attention is drawn in particular to *Ærdamongæ cæǵǵīnag*, lit. ‘the truth-pointing cauldron’. If a truthful story about the outstanding feats of the Narts’ heroes was narrated in the presence of this cauldron, it boiled over without fire, testifying to the truth of the story. There were quarrels between the Narts for the right of possession of the miraculous cauldron, which was their common treasure. Finally, it was decided that it “would go to the one who would make the water boil in it with three words” (Salagaeva 2007: 1/213). Ju. S. Gagloiti drew attention to similar motifs in Abkhazian and Balkar tales about the Narts (Gagloiti 2000: 15f.). It should also be noted a parallel to this motif in the Irish epic tale of Cormac’s journey to the Other World, where a pig in a cauldron could not be boiled “until a truth were uttered for each quarter of it”. In the same tale a golden cup is told of that breaks into three pieces if three lies be told under it, and becomes whole again if three words of truth are uttered (Rhys/Rhys 1961: 311). Cormac’s golden cup was already compared by V. I. Abaev with the motif of a miraculous cup in the Narts’ tales of Ossetians (Abaev 1990: 43).

The cauldron *Ærdamongæ cæǵǵīnag* is similar in its purpose to the bowl *Wacamongæ* / *Nartamongæ* / *Amongæ*, which holds such a significant place in Ossetian Nart stories. The similar characteristics of these two objects in

many texts should be noted here. Sometimes *Ærdamongæ* is a “cup”, the honour of drinking from which was given for special distinctions, which reminds of Herodotus' report (IV, 66) about the Scythian custom of honouring distinguished warriors with a goblet of wine at a special festival, which was pointed out by Miller (1882: 162f.; s. also Dumézil 1990: 163). In connection with the twoness of these objects, it should be pointed out that Herodotus also speaks not only about the goblets from which the distinguished Scythians drank, but also about the crater with wine, which was prepared by the “nomarch”, just as the Narts' epic speaks about a huge cauldron, from which, apparently, the drink was drawn, and about the cup, from which the heroes drank it.

The famous cauldron of the Narts was kept in the ceremonial house *Ærdamongæ xæzar* ‘House of *Ærdamongæ*’, which in other texts is called *Narty styr xæzar* ‘Great House of the Narts’, *Ælægaty dynǵyr xæzar* ‘Great House of the Alagats’. This house with a similar name appears in other national versions of the epic. In Adyghe texts, the house of the *Aledzhkher* (Aligov) family or the house of Aledzh is described as ‘white and long’ (Tambiev 1896: 263). Dzitstsoity connects this characteristic with the role of white in the colour symbolism of the ancient Indo-Iranians, where it “corresponds exactly to the first function, the representatives of which in the epic are the Alagata” (Dzitstsojty 1992: 14f.).

The role of the Alagata house in the life of Narts' society is very prominent. Here Narts' feasts take place, the ceremonial drinking from the cup of *Amongæ* is arranged, the Narts gather here to settle all important affairs and disputes, and honours are paid to the most courageous and magnanimous of them. Finally, the ancient custom prescribed killing of old men is carried out here (Dumézil 1990: 163). In short, the purpose of the Alagat-Aligovs' house is connected primarily with the activities belonging to the sphere of the first function (religious rituals, court procedures, making the most important decisions, etc.). The miraculous vessels, i. e. the cauldron *Ærdamongæ cæǵǵīnag* and the bowl *Wac-* or *Nart-Amongæ*, belong to this functional sphere.

The term *ard*, included in the name *ærdamongæ*, is associated in Ossetic with the notion of ‘oath’. The expression *ard xæryn* ‘to swear’, with *xæryn* ‘to eat’, is often understood literally as ‘to eat an oath’, referring to real actions during the oath rite, when the object sworn by (Abaev 1958: 61 f.) is eaten. However, the absence of the use of the word *xæryn* with other terms for ‘oath’ (*somy*, *waxæ*) suggests connecting *xæryn* in the combination *ard xæryn* with the homonymic Iranian root **xvar-* ‘to swear’, i. e. **swer-*, English *swear*, German *schwören* (Perikhanian 1973: 545; Abaev 1958–89: IV/183). *Ard xæryn* ‘to swear’ has a more solemn sound in comparison with *somy kæryn* ‘id.’ (Abaev 1958–89: III/133); the *somy* oath was not accompanied with a special ceremonial.

In the past, the importance of the oath in the Ossetian traditional system of legal proceedings was enormous. “In legal life of Ossetians the oath – *ard* – occupies one of the most prominent places among those actions, whose totality constitutes Ossetian customary law” (Shanaev 1873: 1 = Shanaev 1992: 119), so wrote in the early 70s of the 19th century a famous talented and active folklorist and researcher of Ossetian ethnography Dzhantemir Shanaev, who, while still a student of the law faculty of Odessa University, dedicated a special ethnographic essay to this institution of the traditional Ossetian law.

The Ossetians resorted to oaths in legal practice when, in the absence of evidence, the innocence of the defendant or of the accused was doubted, in order to give “him a means of judicial defense, a means of acquittal at trial, which, due to the sanctity of the oath in the popular consciousness, at the same time, indirectly, served as a means of exposing the truth” (Shanaev 1873: 3f. = Shanaev 1992: 121). The procedure of taking an oath had different forms, depending on the type of offence and its gravity (Shanaev 1873: 14ff. = Shanaev 1992: 130ff.; Kovalevskij 1886: 11/255ff.; Gatiev 1876: 76ff.). Thus, the “oath of land” was taken in extremely important cases and on issues not only of a land nature; the one who violated such an oath, as well as his family, was indelibly disgraced. Those who violated the oath of land (*zæxxæjard*) had no right to arrange *ziw* ‘assistance in agricultural work rendered by fellow-villagers to poor or disabled members of community’ (Pchelina 1930: 9, 47, n. 5). This circumstance seems significant considering the ritual character of *ziw* (work on Sunday and Monday, i.e. days when work in one’s household was forbidden, a ritual feast at the end of work, etc.). Perhaps it is connected with the idea of the ritual uncleanness of the oath-breaker. A person who was suspected of false swearing lost all respect in the eyes of society. The Ossetians felt mystical horror before breaking an oath, which can be explained not only by ethical norms and moral notions in traditional Ossetian culture. There are many phraseological clichés, such as *Ard basættyn mælaet u* ‘to break an oath is tantamount to death’, *Ardfælivæg xwycawæj ælgyst u* ‘the oath breaker is cursed by god’ (Gwyt’iaty 1976: 20). False oath (*mængard*) according to Ossetian beliefs brought terrible punishment from the higher powers, and not only on the oath-breaker himself; the punishment could also fall on those who were simply in contact with him (Shanaev 1873: 13 = Shanaev 1992: 129). This circumstance reinforces the opinion of D. S. Raevskij that in Scythia a false oath by royal sacred fires (Herodotus, iv, 68) was severely punished, because it not only caused illness of the king, but also jeopardized the well-being of the whole society (Raevskij 1977: 163).

Another form of oath in traditional Ossetian legal practice was a purification oath at the shrine (*zuar*), in which the suspect, accompanied by his co-jurors, the swearer and witnesses, after a week of ritual purification, went to the *zuar*,

dressed in white clothes, with his head uncovered, and holding a stick in his hand extended in the direction of the *zuar*, pronounced an oath in the name of the saint. After this, the swearer would throw the stick towards the *zuar*, and all those present would hurriedly leave the place where the oath had been taken and go home. After this, for fear that a false oath might bring punishment from the saint, people avoided meeting the oath-bearer for a long time, and he himself took refuge in a secluded place, not returning home for a fortnight or more (Shanaev 1873: 13 = Shanaev 1992: 129). The aforementioned co-surrogates took part in the swearing-in procedure by the decision of the arbitral tribunal in especially important cases. They were appointed from among the relatives of the oath taker; as a rule, they were persons who had a reputation of honest and respectable people.¹ Kovalevskij (1886: 11/296) cites an ancient Ossetian legal term for these co-jurors or sureties: *ærdamongæ*. The fact that the name of the Nart cauldron coincides with this legal term, contributes to explanation of the role of the cauldron from the Great House of the Narts.

The curse formulas *ard baxæræg wæ makwy racæwæd* 'that no oath-taker ever comes out of you' and *ard xæryny karmæ wæ maki fæccææd* (Kodzati 2000: 207) 'that none of you live to the age of an oath-taker' recorded in Ossetian phraseology suggests that in the past an age limit for acquiring the right of taking oath existed, and testifies to a special significance of this right for the social status of a person.

The concept of *ard* is associated not only with the judicial oath, but also with the 'oath' in its other forms, such as the military oath, the oath of cessation of blood feud or twinning, etc. In all these cases, the oath was associated with the notion of *ard*, and the ritual of these oaths, albeit varied, included a number of stereotyped actions dating back to antiquity. Dumézil notes: "The oath rites of the Scythians and Ossetians are as similar as the time interval and the difference of civilizations allow" (Dumézil 1976: 47). Herodotus describes the Scythian oath rite as follows: "As for giving sworn pledges to those who are to receive them, this is the Scythian way: they take blood from the parties to the agreement by making a little cut in the body with an awl or a knife, and pour it mixed with wine into a big earthenware bowl, into which they then dip a scimitar and arrows and an axe and a javelin; and when this is done those swearing the agreement, and the most honorable of their followers, drink the blood after solemn curses" (IV, 70). Lucian describes a somewhat simplified version

1 Participation of co-jurors or guarantors in the Ossetian procedure of taking oath finds a parallel in Herodotus' report about oath taking among Scythians (IV, 70), where in addition to the jurors the worthiest of the attendants take part in the ritual (for a commentary on Herodotus' report on the oath, see Grantovskij 1980: 150).

of the oath at the rite of fraternization, in which the cup contains only the blood of both fraternizers, and before drinking, each of them dips the tip of his sword into it (Toxarides, XXXVII). The Ossetians' oath ritual of fraternization reveals surprising similarity to the oath ritual attested among Scythians. "The Ossetians have the following ritual of fraternization: they fill a cup with vodka or wine, throw a coin in it and drink each of them three times, swearing loyalty to each other. The oaths, for example, are as follows: 'Let this become poison for me! Let this money turn against me if I do not love you like a brother!' or 'I swear allegiance to this silver, this gold ...' and thus money is considered by Ossetians as something sacred, having the power to punish. After making a vow, G. Shanaev says, the coin remains with the younger of the two brothers. Thus, these two rituals are similar. Only with the passage of centuries bloodshed stopped, and the metal evidence of the vow has changed somewhat: the cups are no longer loaded with weapons, whose anger one was afraid of, now it is coins. The sign of the times ..." (Dumézil 1976: 47f.; Shanaev 1876: 22, n. 2).

However, in Ossetia, even in the recent past, weapons figured in the oath ritual, and not only in connection with twinning. V. S. Tolstoj tells that in the old days the following ritual was performed to conclude an oath of twinning: "Two warriors went to Rekom (a sanctuary in the Tsei Gorge, which enjoyed special reverence, *K. K.*), took an arrow from each quiver, mixed them, one was broken in half and both pieces were left in the walls of Rekom. This obliged to defend each other in battle with selflessness, and in case of death of one twin, the other must carry the body out of the battle and bury it" (Tolstoj 1875: 267). According to E. Barakova, when performing the rite of reconciliation of blood brothers, which is also a kind of sworn agreement, the blood brothers came to the sanctuary of *Miǵdaw*, where they broke the arrows in half and left them in the sanctuary as a sign or pledge of reconciliation (Baraqty 1992: 113). The symbolism of arrows in this rite can be interpreted in the light of the story of the death of Akhsar and Akhsartag² from the Ossetian Narts' epic. Calling the higher powers as witnesses, i.e. appealing to the *ard*, one of the twins shoots an arrow into the sky, which, having risen to the sky and returned back, is supposed to fulfil the judgement (Kajtmazov 1889: 8).

Raevskij, commenting on the episode with the Scythians' "gifts" to Darius (Herodotus IV, 127 and 131–132), where five arrows appear among the "gifts", points to the wide distribution of rituals with arrows used to express the idea of modelling the spatial structure in a number of archaic traditions. The meaning of these rituals, which included shooting arrows by the king on the four sides

2 In the original: Akhsnart and Akhsnartag.

of the world, “was determined by a specific task: it was necessary to express not only the structure of space, but also the idea of its absolute protection from all sides” (Raevskij 1985: 66f.). There are numerous indications of the role of arrows in the rites of protective magic, where they again act as allegorical means of expressing the idea of structuring and marking the protected space (Akishev 1984: 44). According to Akishev, the fortune-telling sticks, *færsæn fat* (lit. ‘fortune-telling arrow’), used by Ossetian diviners *dæsnytæ* (in sets of four), could be connected with the same circle of cosmological ideas (Akishev 1984: 45).

In the Iranian tradition, the idea of structured space is closely connected with the concept of *arta*. In the Avesta, the motif of the arrow is again found in connection with the *arta* (Av. *aša-*), namely, in Yasht 13, 99 and 19, 83–85. The ancient tradition (Herodotus IV, 36; Lycurgus 86, etc.) preserved a myth (probably of Scythian origin) about the Hyperborean (or Scythian) Abaris, who saved the world from a terrible plague and wandered “with an arrow in his hand” (Dumézil 1976: 62, n. 12). The arrow of Abaris in the context of his feat is quite correlated with the role of the arrow as an attribute of the *arta*.

The object symbolism of the arrow as an *arta*-tool seems to explain the role of the bow and arrows as investiture attributes and the correlation of these weapons with the idea of the sacral nature of royal power among the peoples of the Indo-Iranian circle (Raevskij 1977a: 81ff.; Raevskij 1981: 44ff.). Cf. Pomponius Mela’s account of the royal Scythians: “the Basilids are descended from Hercules and Echidna, their character is regal, their weapons are only arrows” (*De Horographia* II, 10).

Ossetic phraseology provides rich material for a fairly clear definition of the semantics of *ard* in Ossetic and outside the field of ‘oaths’ in the modern sense. On the one hand, *ard* can be interpreted in connection with moral and ethical views: the word *ænwæard* ‘dishonourable (person)’ (lit. ‘deprived of *ard*’)³ stands in a synonymic row with *fydæġdaw* ‘(a person) of bad behaviour’ (cf. a Scythian personal name with the opposite meaning Αρδαγδαχος, s. Abaev 1949: 152), *ænwæwænk* ‘unreliable’ (Khubetsova 1977: 70). At the same time, *ard* in the formulas *xwycawy ard*, *zæxxy ard*, *adæmy ard* acts as some quality inherent in the subject. In expressions like *ard dæ bajjæfæt* ‘that *ard* may befall you’, *ard dæ fædyl æftyd fæwæd* ‘let *ard* pursue you’; *ard dæ k’onajy bacyd* ‘*ard* has entered your hearth’; *ard dæ xæzary* ‘*ard* in your house’; *ard dæ fænyčy* ‘*ard* in your ashes’ the word *ard* is understood to mean ‘curse’ or ‘formidable magical power’ (Kodzati 2000: 214).

3 Cf. Sanskrit *anṛta* ‘disorderliness as deprivation of *ṛta*’, s. Toporov 1988: 384.

Here, the rather general notion of “magic power” is directly adjacent to the semantic field of Old Iranian *arta-* and Old Indian *ṛta-*, namely to the idea of ‘truth, order, universal law’, which is associated with the normal state of things, and the violation of which threatens incalculable disasters. Ossetian folklore contains many didactic stories about heavenly punishment falling on a perjurer. Of particular interest are materials on the traditional Ossetian juridical practice, where he who has taken an oath (*ard*) turns for a certain period of time into an untouchable, direct communication with whom may bring terrible misfortune if he has sworn falsely (Shanaev 1873: 12f. = Shanaev 1992: 129). Violation of the oath, ‘lie’ as ‘not-truth’ led to the violation of this world order; in the Avesta the departure of the *xvarənah* from the lying Yima is associated with the destruction of harmony, the reign of chaos, etc. (Akishev 1984: 102). Herodotus tells about a Scythian belief according to which it was customary to associate the illness of the king with a false oath by the royal fires (IV, 68).

As the latest research shows, notions such as ‘oath’, ‘curse’, ‘truth’, ‘contract’ according to archaic beliefs belong to a single semantic complex. The range of concepts covered by the terms *ard/arta/ṛta* can be regarded as a variant of this complex. Cases of polysemy, when one and the same word is associated with two different semantic fields that do not overlap in modern consciousness, are quite common, cf. English *swear* or Russian *клясться* ‘take oath, vow’ vs. *клясть, проклинать* ‘curse’. Such words characterize the denoted act as ‘cursing, profanity, swearing’ in some contexts, and as ‘a sacred act of oath, a solemn commitment to fulfil by action what was formulated in verbal or any other sign form’ in the other.

However, it would be incorrect to consider them as homonyms. The connection of these meanings in archaic consciousness was direct, immediate and natural, and should be regarded as inherent. The origins of the ‘ritual-oath’ are connected with the instinct to protect one’s ‘living space’, which is embedded in the behavioural program of biological species. ‘Oath’ is a verbal version of ‘ritual’ in the biological sense. At the same time, a characteristic feature of ritual acts is their simultaneous orientation towards ‘own’ and ‘alien’ addressees, which determines a positive or negative interpretation of the ritual act. In ritual thinking such meanings coexist inseparably. At the linguistic level, a connection between the concepts of ‘own’ and ‘enclosed space’ is reconstructed, which is explained through the notions of ‘boundary’, ‘barrier’, and ‘prohibition’. Ritual thinking, subdividing space into one’s own, alien and neutral, connects the oath both with the centre and the border of one’s territory. At the same time, ritual thinking is characterized by the unity of space and time. Material symbols marking the world space symbolize both the space of

this world and the time of the events taking place in this space, especially the 'circle of events' (Monich 2000: 72ff.).



Thus, according to ancient beliefs, the sacred cauldron as a material symbol was connected with order, stability, embodied the idea of abundance conditioned by the cosmic order. Let us cite a definition related to the ancient Indian tradition, but quite applicable also to the ancient Iranian/Scythian: "According to Vedic mythological ideas, to the ideal cosmos such a state of the Vedic microcosm corresponds, which is characterized by a maximum of benefits of the most diverse nature: from poetic inspiration and complete safety from enemies to herds of cattle and other riches (brave army, numerous offspring, large harvest, etc.) (...) The elementary cosmogonic act (...) entails precisely this kind of transformation at the level of life of Vedic man" (Ogibenin 1967: 129).

Archaic mythopoetic notions of space-time defined the cosmos in opposition to chaos as a finite continuum, with its finiteness determined by its structural nature. Overcoming the temporal finitude of the cosmos was associated with cyclicity and carried out through ritual, which reproduced or modelled the act of the original creation. The structuring of space was done through ritual and the use of a set of object symbols marking the centre and the sides of the world. Various elements were used for structuring, which were part of the repeatedly duplicated systems of symbolic classifications projected onto society and the universe.

The cauldron in the ritually actualized mythopoetic beliefs was associated with the centre and represented an image of the mastered space. The vessel with the ritual drink in the Scythian/Ossetian ritual acts as one of the means of modelling the world and correlates with the notion of *arta/ard* 'cosmic order', 'harmony'.⁴ The huge cauldron made of arrowheads at the command of the Scythian king and called to embody cosmic order, stability and prosperity can be represented as an embodiment or image of *arta*, the symbolism of which is emphasized by the material used to make the cauldron. Akishev, considering the ritual-symbolic role of the arrow in Indo-Iranian, Slavic and Turkic

4 If we assume that the cauldron at Exampaeus had a name also connected with the term *ard*, as in the case of *Ærdamongæ* of the Ossetian Narts tales, the question arises whether the Herodotus legend about the collection of arrowheads by Ariantas is not to be explained by an attempt at a pseudo-etymological interpretation of the name of the cauldron through the Greek ἄρδις 'arrowhead'?

cosmogonic myths, regards the cauldron of Ariantas, cast from arrowheads and installed in the sacred centre of Scythia, as a sacral cosmogram (Akishev 1984: 45). In connection with the cosmological symbolism of the cauldron, the Ossetian New Year ritual song attracts attention, in which the picture of the ideal well-being of the house (which was interpreted by the mythological consciousness as a projection of the universe) is depicted as follows (s. Salagaeva 2007: 11/300):

<i>Womæ wælarvæj sædcigon ræxiswağd</i>	There is a chain from heaven descended
<i>Woj wæle min cupparğosug agæ'vard</i>	There is a cauldron with four ears hanging from it.
<i>Woj xurfi min boræ nælfus fusævgærst,</i>	There is a lamb carcass in it " <i>boræ nælfus</i> "
<i>Woj buni min sagi siwæj ciren art.</i>	Beneath him, a fire of antlers blazes.

It is also worth noting a report by Makharbeg Tuganov, an outstanding collector and connoisseur of Ossetian antiquity, according to whom one of the central rites of the New Year's cycle in Ossetia in ancient times was the dance *næرتون simd* ('the *simd* of Narts'), in which adult men of the entire district aged 30 to 40, i.e. in the prime of life, took part. The dancers formed a three-rowed circle, inside which huge cauldrons stood, where meat and festive beer were boiled (Tuganov 1977: 71). The performance of this ritual dance was given great importance; it was believed that those who performed the *simd* received God's favour (Warziati 1995a: 174).⁵ It is worth recalling that, according to Raevskij, the Scythian feast in Exampaeus, where the cauldron of Aryantas was kept, was also timed to the New Year.

The description of the "archetypal" cauldron from the New Year's song as "four-eared" attracts attention. The *Wacamongæ* bowl is similarly characterized in the epic tale: *Alægatæ raxastoj æmbyrdmæ cypærqusyg nomzyd Wacamongæ* (Gazzaev 1949: 175) "*Alægatæ* brought out to the assembly the glorious four-ear *Wacamongæ*", and in another text "a large four-ear *amongæ*" (Shanaev 1871: 6; Dumézil 1986: 464).⁶ This characteristic is probably motivated by the

5 The name of this dance ultimately derives from Arabic *samā'* 'dervish dance' (Abaev 1958–89: 111/107ff.).

6 In the notes Dzh. Shanaev explains "This is a Nart's congratulatory bowl; it is kept at the Alagate family, which usually hosts all public folk gatherings, feasts, treats, etc. (...) This word (*Nartamonge*) is also used without the first word (*amonge*) (ibid., note 10).

ancient fourfold division of space through the allocation of the four sides of the world, and testifies to homomorphism of the Narts' cauldron and the universe. Similar characteristics of the earthly and heavenly worlds are also found in the old Indo-Iranian traditions. Thus, in the Rigveda (10, 58, 3) the circle of the earth is called *čaturbhr̥ṣṭi* 'four-cornered' and *čaturśṅgo* 'four-horned'. In the Avesta, where the sky has the epithet *čatruyaōša* 'four-horned', it is both rounded and square (Akishev 1984: 19f.).

A special significance could be attached to collecting the material for the cauldron from the whole Scythian people, i. e. in a hoard, which should have increased the magical effect of the ritual symbol thus produced. Bajburin, considering the ritual symbolism of the gathering motif, believes that it could be caused by the intention to present society at a critical moment in the most complete form. In this case, "the sphere of 'one's own' becomes somewhat condensed, compacted, i. e. acquires those qualities that must be extended to the rest of the world" (Bajburin 1993: 188). In the Ossetian tradition, barley for brewing ritual beer intended for especially important festivals was collected from each family of the village in the way of hoarding (*k'usbar*), to which special significance was apparently attached: the grain collected from all members of the community was supposed to multiply the ritual value (significance) of the sacrificial drink and, accordingly, the impact of the festive rites.

It is appropriate to compare the cauldron of Ariantas, cast from arrowheads, with the Ossetian legends about a cauldron made of copper coins (Bliev 1961: 83; Warziati 1984: 149, n. 41; Kokiev 1989: 51), just as arrows were replaced with silver coins in the oath ritual. Let us also point to the parable cited by Plutarch about the Scythian king Skilurus, who, before his death, gathered all his numerous sons, and, giving each one an arrow, offered to break the shaft, which they did without difficulty. Then Skilurus ordered to put all 80 arrows together. It proved impossible to break them. "If you stick together like these arrows", said the king, "you will be strong and invincible, but if there is no strong union between you, you will be easily defeated" (Latyshev 1890–1906: 1/496).

The *Ærdamongæ* cauldron can be considered a reflection of the ideas associated with the sacred Scythian cauldron in the Narts' epic. The connection between the concept of inexhaustible magical abundance, prosperity, power and well-being in all its manifestations being a "consequence" of the central cross-linking archaic concept of the ancient Ossetian tradition i. e. *arta* 'Truth' and 'Justice', and the idea of an interrelation between the oath and the 'world order' is reflected in Ossetian legends about magical eternally full cauldrons or other vessels placed in shrines where oaths were taken, with arrows being guarantee of their inviolability and serving as a symbol of divine justice (*ard*), protecting the agreement and punishing the oath-breaker.

Christianity and the Alans of the North Caucasus

Alan Twallagov

According to the Church tradition, the spread of the Christian faith among the Alans began in the 40-s of the 1st c. AD with the preaching activities of the Apostle Andrew, which covered the areas adjacent to the Black Sea. Relevant information of unequal completeness appears from the 3rd century in the works of Origen, Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop Dorotheus of Tyre, Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus, Bishop Hippolytus, Bishop Saphronius, Praxeis, Nikita David of Paphlagon, Arsenius of Kerkyra, Patriarch Nicephorus Kallistos, Hieromonk Epiphanius of Jerusalem and others. The latter himself travelled through the legendary places of the sermon and compiled the “Walks of Andrew”, which was a compendium of the legends that existed before him and formed the basis of the Georgian and Slavonic versions. An abridged and somewhat revised account of Epiphanius’ work was produced by Simeon the Metaphrastus and was included into the Greek Menology. The journey of St. Andrew is narrated in the Russian Orthodox Synaxarion. Coptic literature testifies to the long-lasting missionary activity. In Georgia, reports about him are noted in the *Kartlis Cxovreba* and by George Mtatsmindeli. The Abkhazians and Ossetians have preserved legends about the Apostle’s visit to their lands. Similar legends existed all along the Black Sea coast, and many towns and localities had churches in honour of the Apostle and kept icons with his image.

Historians are critical as regards the veracity of apocryphal stories, in view of a relatively late age of the known versions and the impossibility of their scientific verification. In the 4th century, Movses Khorenatsi, noting the paucity of information about Christian preaching, wrote that nothing reliable is known about Simon, who was given Persia by lot, and some people tell about a certain Andrew who was martyred in Veriospora. Given the good knowledge in Armenia about the affairs of its North Caucasian neighbours, such an acknowledgment is quite revealing. It was noted that the creation of the Georgian version of the “Voyages” was aimed at proving the right to autocephaly of the Georgian Church. Legends about St. Andrew’s journey through the lands of Russia also occur.

For all the complexity of scientific analysis of the known reports, we should acknowledge their focus on localizing the legendary events within the real geography and linking them to already known Christian centres. The Apostle’s

route lay through Iberia to Susania (Svanetia), and from there to Salania (Alania) and the city of Fust, Abasgia (North-West Abkhazia) and Great Sebastopolis, Zikhia, Upper Sugdea and the Bosporus. The Alanian toponym Fust was cautiously identified with the ancient settlement Rim-gora on the river Podkumok (Kuznetsov 1993: 30). The fortress Fusta/Pusta is mentioned in the beginning of the second half of the 7th c. in connection with the imprisonment of Anastasius Apocrisarius. It is located in the Kodori Gorge on the southern slope of the Caucasus Range (Doguzov 1992: 18f.). Perhaps, its name is etymologically connected with Svan. *pust* 'lord/owner' (Adyg. 'prince'). The route of the journey itself suggests that it is dealt with Alania on the Kuban, where the centre of the Alanian diocese was later located. Fust (Russ. *Fistgrad*) cannot be regarded as its capital, probably being a well-known border fortress. Some "autonomy" in the perception of Alania and Fusta in the sources themselves is indicative in this respect: "... went to Salania and to the city of Fusta ... where the Ivirs, and Susa, and Fusta, and Alans live". Probably, it is meant the original belonging of Fusta to Svanetia as the stake of the local ruler, as well as its subsequent transfer in the same capacity to the Alans. The Alans could have laid it down, and the name was given by the local population.

Both in the original version of the *Kartlis Cxovreba* and in its Armenian version, as well as in the *Lives of Saints* by Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, compiled in the 11th century, there is no information about Andria Motsikuli's (Andrew the Apostle) visit to Alania (Ovseti), which clearly contradicts the Christian tradition recorded, for example, in the 5th century by Epiphanius of Cyprus. There is a desire of the Georgian side not only to claim autocephaly, but also to assert its priority in spreading Christianity, spiritual and political leadership among the Alans, as its written sources will tell us. However, in the later (the early 18th century) addition by the commission of the "learned men" under auspices of Beri Egnatashvili, who were creating a unified corpus of annals, the visit of St. Andrew to Ovseti and to its city Fostapor/Postapor/Bospor is mentioned. Of all the proposed identifications of the Alanian city, the most reasonable is Bosporus (Gaglojti 2007: 24, 119f.; Twallagov 1995: 60ff.).

Perhaps the appearance of the Ossetic Bosporus in the Georgian source was, on the one hand, a logical reflection of the actual situation in the Crimean state in the past, and on the other hand, in line with the previous policy, left aside the history of North Caucasian Alania. An assumption that under "the Ossetic city" Nicopsia (Novo-Mikhailovskoye, Tsandripsh) was meant is unacceptable, since the Apostle's visit to Nicopsia is referred to as a separate act. However, the report about the Alanian settlement area reaching the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea is quite natural, and it could have suggested the idea of coming to Ovseti along this route (Twallagov 1995: 61). To the above information

we should add data of Abu-l-Fid of the 14th century about the city of Alans on the seashore to the east of the Abkhazians. The medieval Arabic source *Adja'ib ad-dunya* mentions the city of Alania between Abkhaz and the country of Kipchaks. In the 12th century, al-Idrisi locates the lands and cities of Alania on the seashore. Procopius of Caesarea in the 6th century tells about Emperor Justinian's war in the country of the Abasgs, which was "transferred" to Ovsetia in the 11th century by Dzhuansher Dzhuansheriani. In the 7th century the Zikhahorion estate is known, the residence of the ruler of the Alania region Gregory, the name of which suggests incorporation of part of the Zikhs into Alania and their proximity to the known Alanian centres of the Kuban region (Kuznetsov 1992: 10). This fact is also important, because it is connected with the establishment of the Zikh diocese in this period, which included Bosporus, Kherson and Nikopsis.

There is information about a manuscript of 1750 from the monastery of David Garedzhi, transcribed by the Ossetic monk Isikh, which tells about the election of disciples Simon Kananeli (i. e. the Canaanite or Zealot) and Matata by the apostle Andrew. Matata was put in the place of Judas and ordained as a priest in Ovseti, where he remained forever (Chichinadze 1993: 51f). Unfortunately, it is not possible to specify this message, as well as the mentioning of the Scythian disciples of St. Andrew, Enen, Nirin and Pina, and the evidence of Georgian sources that Matthew (one of the seventy), who preached in Persia and Media, knowing death approaching, withdrew to Ovseti, where he was buried. Besides, the recognition by the official Church of the activities of St. Andrew in Alania is at odds with the need to raise the question of recognizing the Alanian (Ossetic) Church as apostolic. In this connection it should be noted that in a conversation between the Abbot of the Athos Iberian Monastery in Greece George Mtatsmindeli and the Patriarch Theodosius of Antioch the latter questioned the right of the Georgian Church to autocephaly on the basis of the fact that none of the twelve apostles preached on Georgian soil (Gedeon 1992: 16f.; Adzhindzhal 2000: 85f.).

In connection with the problem of St. Andrew's missionary activity in Ossetia, it is interesting to recall the "Scythian" lot of the Apostle, first mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea. The development of the "Scythian legend" is noted in the lists of apostles and disciples, the earliest being Pseudo-Epiphanius. Its source is considered to be a list related to the version of Pseudo-Hippolytus, which formed the basis of the mixed lists. It indicates preaching among "Scythians, Sogdians and Saks", which reflects the tendency to expand the field of activity to all Iranian-speaking nomadic peoples related to the Scythians. Thus, the Sarmatians appear in place of the Saks in the Escorial manuscript of the *Vita* of the monk Epiphanius (Vinogradov 1999: 307). From

this point of view, it is quite logical that Alans appear among the peoples covered by the sermon. In the 5th century *Martyrdom of the Sukiasians* and *Martyrdom of the Voskians* were created in Armenia, narrating about the baptism of noble Alans. The former was subjected to major revisions over time. A Georgian translation was made of “Martyrdom of St. Sukiasians”, apparently preserving the lost part of the original. Later in their *Histories of Armenia* Lazar Parpetsi, Jovhannes Draskhanakertsi and Bishop Wakhtanes reproduce the above information. By so doing, the latter refers to Movses Khorenatsi, who, however, narrated only the story of marriage of the Alanian princess Satenik after the invasion of the Alans into Armenia, whereas the subsequent history of baptism of her Alanian “relatives” is narrated only in the mentioned hagiographic works. Movses Khorenatsi and Movses Kagankatvatsi tell that these 17–18 noble Alans led by the co-regent Barakadr came to Satenik and became disciples of the Voskian hermit monks who had been baptized by Apostle Thaddeus who preached in Armenia. The nobles were baptized and secluded themselves on the mountain Sukavet/Sukav (Dzhrabashkh), having taken the name of Sukiasians.

In 44 years after the death of Satenik’s father, King Shapuh, Didianos reigned over the Alans. Having learnt about the hermits from a certain Scuer, he sent a detachment of Barlaki warriors with the mission to either convert the apostates or kill them. The steadfastness of the Sukiasians in the Christian faith was the cause of their agonizing deaths. Only the two youngest hermits managed to survive. St. Gregory, having learnt about such a glorious feat for the faith, erected a chapel at the place of death of the Sukiasians. According to Georgian sources, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine built a luxurious church here in the early 4th century, a fact which testifies not only to the recognition of the martyrs as true Christians and the respect they enjoyed in the Armenian church (Gabrielyan 1989: 59), but also to the widespread knowledge of the fate of the hermits. Subsequently, the ruler of the baptized Alans was canonized by the Georgian Church, which established his feast on 15 (28) April (Chichinadze 1993: 53f.). The attempt to declare the Sukiasians as Georgian nobles who were in the service of the Albanian king (Dzhioev 1992: 101ff.) is an obvious fabrication.

The history of the Alanian monks is associated with the period after the adoption of Christianity by Armenia in 301 under Tiridates III (Kuznetsov 1992: 47; Kuznetsov 2002: 28). But the sources known to us do not speak about such a state of affairs (Gutnov 1992: 139ff.). Everything testifies to the domination of pagan traditions in the country and at the ruling court. Although Artashes was interested in the new doctrine, there is no evidence of his and Satenik’s acceptance of Christianity. Satenik feared that she would be suspected of

sympathizing with the actions of her “kinsmen”, so relations between them were soured. Her adult children show open hostility to the Sukiasians precisely because of their acceptance of an alien creed. In the Christian tradition, the events are linked to the time of the activity of Judas, a disciple of the Apostle Thaddeus, who, according to Movses Khorenatsi, was killed by the Armenian king Sanatruk in the 1st century.

Perhaps, the history of the Sukiasians reflected the first experience of the Christian mission in Armenia, due to the exile of 11 thousand Christians there by the Roman Emperor Trajan (Jatsenko 1993: 83ff.). As for the unexpected linking by Jovhannes Draskhanakertzi of the lifetime of the Sukiasians with the reign of Khosrow, who died in 287, one should not forget about the well-known contamination of different events in Armenian sources. Jovhannes Draskhanakertzi determines the baptism of the Alans in 43 years after the death of Thaddeus, and the Persian influence on the historiographic tradition manifests itself in the direct confusion of Alans and Persians in other Armenian sources. Attention is drawn to the story of Faustos Buzand (*History of Armenia*) about the struggle after the death of Tiridates III of the Armenian king Khosrov Kotak with his cousin, the king of the North Caucasian Alans-Maskuts Sanatruk/Sanesan, which goes back to the mentioned story about the murder of the apostle Thaddeus by the Armenian Sanatruk (Artamonov 1962: 34). According to the “Martyrdom of Voskian”, the Armenian king Vagharsh built the town of Vagharshakert on the burial place of two Sukiasians who escaped death. In reality, the city of Vagharshapat was built by Vagharsh I (1[3]17–140/3 AD), and the city of Vagharshavan by Vagharsh II (80–90-s of the 2nd c. AD).

The history of baptized Alans in Armenia correlates with the Alanian campaigns in Transcaucasia in 72 and 135 AD and the activity of Christian missionaries, which allows us to date the time of the hermits’ activity from about the 80-s of the 1st c. AD to 135. The assumed connection of the Sukiasyan monks with the Alans imprisoned in the Suren monastery under the abbot Lazar Parpetsi in the 5th century, which ascends to the 11th century author Stepanos Taronetsi or Asokhik (Kuznetsov 1978: 31f.; Kuznetsov 2002: 28), is not confirmed. Information about the baptism of some Alans in the 1st century appears simultaneously in Byzantine and Armenian tradition in the 5th century, probably depending on the history of the development of the Eastern Christian Church itself. It is interesting that in the Armenian epic *David of Sasun* a message about the “cross of Patraz” appears, which is associated with the story of Satenik. Perhaps, we are dealing with an echo of the history of baptism of Alans in Armenia. The memorable records of Armenian manuscripts mention the existence in the early 15th century, apparently near Khizan, of a monastery of the holy “sign/cross of Alan”.

The emergence of the Alans among the highest Iberian nobility and the spread of archaeological innovations are associated with the consequences of the campaign of 135 AD. These facts are comparable to the observations about the capture of the Iberian capital Mtskheta by certain Uzhiks, who are also reported to have established their state in its area and supposedly considered as Ases (Osses, Ossetians), i.e. Alans. This pagan warlike people appears to be connected with early Christianity: in Georgian Christian tradition they are known among the listeners of the apostolic sermon in Jerusalem. When Rabbi Elioz of the Georgian Jews brought the chiton of the Lord to Georgia from Jerusalem, the chief of his guard was a representative of the Uzhiks, Longioz Karsneli. Judging by his nickname, he was from Karsaani, a locality south of Mtskheta bearing a “Scythian” name (Gaglojti 2007: 30, 137). However, the proposed solution needs further study.

In 301, owing to the ascetic activity of St. Gregory, Armenia was baptized, although perhaps the baptism took place later, around 314–316, which corresponds to the data of the Anonymous included in the 7th century work of Sebeos (some researchers, on the contrary, assume a slightly earlier date). Besides, the Arabic version of Agathangelos (a translation of the 8th–9th cc. Greek *Life of Gregory*) refers to the simultaneous baptism of the king and nobility of Alania by Thomas of Satala, who began preaching in Albania in 315, to the destruction of pagan temples and the establishment of Christian churches by St. Gregory, to the preparation and dispatch of priests to different peoples, including the Alans. However, it is noted that under “Alans” the Albanians may be hidden, because the kings of Armenia, Iberia, Lazica and Albania were baptized on the Euphrates, and Thomas was sent to Albania (Malakhov 1992: 140). Indeed, the Arabic version raises some questions that cannot simply be dismissed by reference to the Greek original. It should be noted that the baptism took place in 301. In the list of peoples and rulers under the care of St. Gregory, “Alans” are united with Georgians, Lazs and Abkhazians, and bishops were sent besides Armenia and Georgia to the “Alans” and to the country of D-r-z-k-y-t, i.e. to the Durdzuks of the Central Caucasus. The ethnic environment seems to go better with the Alans than with the Albanians.

The baptism of Ossetia in 280 AD was also attributed to St. Nina, who may have been a Cappadocian. She was said to have visited the country three times. This happened after she had baptized the Georgian king Mirian, who had once defeated the Ovs people (i. e. the Ossetians) in retaliation for their raid on Georgia, and then ordered Nina and bishop John to baptize the North Caucasian peoples, including the Ovses, by force. This is how their kings were baptized, whose images are depicted on the walls of one of the temples in Mtskheta (Chichinadze 1993: 48ff.). According to *Kartlis Cxovreba* and *Mokcevai Kartlisai*, in 283, during the absence of the king Mirian, the kings of the Ovses,

Perosh and Kavtia, invaded Kartli through the Caucasus. In response, Mirian crossed into Ovseti by roundabout ways, defeated it, reached Khazaria, and returned by the Dvaleti road. Having accepted Christianity, he sent St. Nina and bishop Yovin or priest Yakov with an *eristav* (chieftain) by force to baptize the mountaineers, a mission which mostly failed. Only his son succeeded in converting most of the Caucasians to Christianity. Movses Khorenatsi alone said that Nina preached, among other places, at the Alan Gate and at the limits of the Maskuts. The mentioning of the Alan Gate allows admitting the Alans having been baptized, not, however, their main North Caucasian population, but the mountaineers to the south of the Main Caucasian Ridge, who, moreover, mostly evaded baptism. Movses Khorenatsi names Agatangehos as the source of his information, which is not confirmed.

Georgian sources suggest that St. Nina arrived in Kartli before 301 or 314/316 AD, because the paganism of Somkheti (Armenia) is noted. However, the internal chronology of the related events contradicts historical facts. The Byzantine emperor Constantine accepted Christianity shortly before his death in 337. The Georgian data relate his baptism to 310/311 AD, which cannot be true, because it was allowed to freely profess Christianity only in 313 by the Treaty of Milan. Nina arrives in pagan Armenia in 319, where her Christian companions are martyred via Tiridates III, who in fact had already made the Christian religion official in his country (perhaps that is why the massacre is motivated by rejected love). Nina appears in Georgia in 324/325. She begins preaching 4 years later and converts Queen Nana and King Mirian to Christianity in 330/331. After mentioning her preaching to the highlanders, there is record of the baptism of some of them by Tiridates III, who had long ruled the Christians, and died in 330. As for Perosh and Kavtia, 50 years after the campaign they could well not be alive. The clash with Georgia took place long before the mission of St. Nina, and her appearance in Alania is not confirmed. The roundabout route of Mirian could lead to Kuban, which makes the veracity of the Georgian information doubtful.

In 335–336, Grigoris, grandson of St. Gregory, the 15-year-old bishop of Iberia and Albania, went on a Christian mission to the country of the Alan-Maskuts in the North-Eastern Caucasus (Movses Khorenatsi, Faustos Buzand, *The Lives and Martyrdom of the Sons and Grandsons of St. Gregory, Blessed Patriarchs Aristakes, Vrtanes, Iusik, and Grigoris*, Thomas Artsruni, Stepanos Taronetsi, Movses Kagankatvatsi). At first, his preaching aroused some interest among the tribesmen of the Arshakid Sanesan, who ruled over thirteen other nations. But then his warriors accused him of acting in favour of the Armenian king and trying to deprive them of a source of income at the expense of military booty. Grigoris was tied to the tail of a horse and led down the shore of the Caspian Sea to the steppe of Vatnean (Mugan).

In the time of Diocletian (284–305) and Maximian (286–305), the Greek Orentius was exiled to the Caucasus with six “brothers” who served in the Roman army in Thrace. According to Georgian tradition, the “brother” St. Kvirikos/Kyriakos died in Ovseti in the place of Zipaneos. However, according to Church tradition, the Christians were exiled to Abkhazia, but died while still on the way there, and only the body of Longinus was dumped near Pityus (modern Pitsunda).

On the basis of the evidence by Socrates, Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom about Christianity among the Sauromats, it was claimed sometimes that Christianity was spread among the Alans already in the 4th century. However, these evidences, even if one accepts “Savromats” being the Sarmatian-Alanian population of the Azov region, are too vague, cannot be checked or enable us to conclude whether such a phenomenon was of large scale. It should be noted that Bishop Asterius of Amasya (*Praise for the Holy Martyr Phocas*) reported about the dedication of his crown and armour to the god by the ruler of the “Scythians” from those places. Perhaps the famous “Scythian legend” about the Apostle Andrew can explain these testimonies.

In 485 AD, Armenian Marzban Vahan Mamikonian arrived with an ambassadorial mission to the Hons (so-called Caucasian Huns) and their allies of the North-East Caucasus. He reached a treaty of alliance and “took an oath of Christianity” (Eliše, *On Vardan and the Armenian War*). Probably, among the allies of the Hons there were also Alans-Massagetes, who could also accept the “oath of Christianity”. For the 5th century, Stepanos Taronetsi (*General History*) and Kirakos Gandzaketsi (*History of Armenia*) mention the imprisonment of Alans in the Suren monastery, a fact which may suggest adoption of monasticism by some Alans.

In the 6th century, Zacharias Ritor reports the arrival in the Hun country (in the Kuban region) of the Armenian bishop Kardost with seven priests, who, receiving support from Byzantium, carried out Christian mission, having translated the scriptures and liturgical books into the Hun language. After 14 years Kardost was succeeded by the Armenian bishop Macarius, who built a brick church there. It is believed that among the “Huns” there could be Alans, which is the reason for the Syriac evidence of written language among the Alans (8th–9th cc. addition to the 5th–6th cc. *Book of Nations and Regions* by Andronicus, and *Civil History*). Procopius of Caesarea considered the Alans and Abasgians (ancestors of the Abkhazians) to be Christians and friends of the Romans. It is the Alans of the Kuban region, who are meant, ruled by the king Saros(d)iy (name or title “Head of the Os”). He acted as an invariable ally of Byzantium, a fact which explains the perception of the Alans as “friends of the Romaeans”. “Christians” they could be for the reason noted by Zacharias Ritor, unless it was only about the Abasgians. Movses Kagankatvatsi reports

about the preaching of Hun bishop Yunan at the Maskuts in the 6th century. Georgian sources report the sending of David Garezh's disciples for Christian preaching in Dvaleti.

In 662, Maximus the Confessor was exiled to the Caucasus with his disciples Anastasius the Apokrisiarius and Anastasius the Monk. Anastasius Apokrisiarius changed several places of his imprisonment. At the end, he was placed in the fortress of Fusta/Pusta, whence he was transferred to Schemarium and finally to the fortress of Tusume, situated on the border with Apsilia, near Abasgians, at the very foot of the Caucasus Mountains, in the land of the Alans, 5 miles from the estate of Zikhahorion, the residence of the Christ-loving patrician and ruler of this region of Alania. Gregory, abbot of the monastery of John the Baptist (Betapapeos), delivered the posthumous letter of Anastasius the Apokrisiarius to Theodosius of Gangra in Jerusalem through his disciple Theodore. The Greek documents and their Georgian copies by George Mtatsmindeli were translated into Russian in slightly different ways and interpreted correspondingly.

Schemarius was identified with Khumara in Kuban or Ukhimeriy in Lazica, on the border with the Alans. The fortress of Fusta, as we know, was supposed to stand on the Alanian frontier. Some remoteness of the fortress, noted earlier, may have been determined by its location on the land of the Bruchs, who lived between the Abasgians and the Alans (Procopius of Caesarea). According to different readings, Zikhahorion is defined as and Schemarius and Tusume are identified with the residence of either an Alanian or a Laz ruler. It is also unclear what is meant under Theodore's receiving a letter in Lazica, but from an Alanian abbot. However, the fortress of Tusume being located on the territory of the Alans, facing the southern side of the western tip of the Caucasus, implies an involvement of Alania in the Christian history of that time. Somewhere here an Alanian monastery must have functioned and the residence Zikhahorion of the Christian ruler was located, which is difficult to identify with a religious centre or the Zikh diocese.

According to the *Kartlis Cxovreba*, the Sixth Ecumenical Council in the 7th century subordinated many Transcaucasian lands, as well as Ovseti and Cherkessia, to the Mtskheta patriarchate. The Catholicos of Georgia crowned kings and consecrated pastors of all lands from the Black Sea to Derbent. Attention was drawn to the geographical and political inconsistencies of this message and the impossibility of its confirmation. Apparently, we are dealing with a late political declaration of the ruling circles of Georgia about its past primacy. John Sabanidze in *Martyrdom of Abo Tbileli* (786) tells about the flight of Abo and the *eristav* Nerse from the Arabs through Daryal to Khazaria, where many villages and towns adhered to the Christian faith. Here Abo was baptized

by local presbyters. The fact that in that period Alania fell into dependence on Khazaria suggests that some Alans belonged to the Christian community too.

Among the peoples who supported the revolt of Thomas the Slav in 821–823 against Emperor Michael II in the Asia Minor femes, Joseph Genesius notes the North Caucasian Alans, supporters of the Manichaean heresy. However, there is also an opinion of confusing the Alans with the Albanians. The Byzantine *Life of Theodore of Ephesus* tells of the baptism on the bank of the Tigris of the son of the Abbasid ruler Mutawakkil al-Muwayyad, the ruler of Syria, who died in 886. Three young Alanian servants, called in the Old Russian translation Yasiyas, were baptized with him. A miniature depicting the king receiving a blessing from the bishop and three beardless and naked young men standing knee-deep in water has also been preserved. It is believed (Malakhov 1992: 136ff.) that it is about the North Caucasian Alans who served the Arab Caliphs. About 860 the Caspian Gate in the Caucasus was visited by Constantine the Philosopher, the creator of the Slavonic writing, also known under his monk-name Cyril. Here he participated in a debate on faith, outargued and baptized 200 people.

According to al-Masudi's account of the early 10th century, the Alans converted to Christianity at the advent of Islam during the reign of the Abbasids (750–945). In the same century Abu al-Qasim states that the Alanian ruler adopted Christianity in the first century of the Abbasid reign. The beginning of active Christian mission in Alania is attributed to the period of the first patriarchate of Nicholas the Mystic (901–907), indicating that Nicholas the Mystic, together with the archbishop of Alania, was guilty of scheming and was arrested. After his imprisonment he wrote in 912 to his envoys to Alania. The Alania metropolis is mentioned in the *Statute* of Leo VI the Wise, who died in 912. We know that after the return of the preachers, apparently in 914, Nicholas the Mystic ordained Peter as archbishop of Alania. Then he wrote a letter to the new ascendant to the throne king of Abkhazia George II (915/916–959/960), in which he asked to assist the new spiritual shepherd of the neighbouring people. In another letter he thanks for his help and assistance in baptizing the ruler of Alania and his entourage.

In addition, the preacher Euthymius, who had participated in the first embassy, was sent to Alania in 916 with monks, and Peter was warned by Nicholas the Mystic against possible disagreements with him. It is interesting that if in his first letters Nicholas the Mystic urges to be patient in attracting the upper class of the state to Christianity with greater persistence towards the commoners, then later there are instructions to observe the rules more strictly, although indulgences to the rulers are still allowed. In Ibn Rusta's *Kitāb al-A'lāq al-Nafīsa* ("Book of Gems"), written in 903–913, it is said that the king

of the Alans was “a Christian at heart”, while all his people remained pagan. On this basis it is assumed that at that time the ruler of Alania had already converted to Christianity. However, we can only speak about the favourable reception of the first sermon of Byzantine missionaries by the Alanian upper class. According to another translation, the king of Alania was a Christian, while the majority of his people remained pagans.

In the 10th century, the *Ḥudūd al-Ālam* already notes the ruler’s adherence to Christianity, and the population is divided into Christians and pagans. The wording of the written address “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” of the Byzantine emperor to the Alanian ruler, noted by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, suggests that in the middle of the 10th century the Alanian king was a Christian. The 8th–9th centuries were a period of political subordination of the Alans to the Khazar Khaganate, although the western Alans had great freedom in their affairs. Besides, the Alans acted together with the Khazars in the framework of the Khazar-Byzantine alliance, continuing their policy of the period of Persian-Byzantine wars. The tradition of friendly relations of Alans with Byzantium was even deeper. From the letter of the Khazar ruler Joseph to the Spanish dignitary Hasdai ibn-Shaprut we know that in the middle of the 10th century the Alans continued to pay tribute to the Khazars. However, soon Alans finally gained their freedom. The Khazars, and under their influence some part of the Alans, professed Judaism (*Cambridge Document*). The more indicative is the transition of the Alans to Christianity, which took a progressive character, corresponding to the political strengthening of the Alans. First of all, it took place in Western Alania, which was in long-term friendly relations with Byzantium. In the 11th century, Gardizi reports about the numerous Christian people Tulas, located near the Kuban. Ibn Rusta and the *Ḥudūd al-Ālam* reported about this people in the 10th century. In the next century the Alans are mentioned among the Christian peoples by al-Marwazi.

Of course, this process did not go smoothly. According to the anonymous *Cambridge document* (913/914), at the call of the Byzantine emperor, an allied coalition, which included the king of the Ases, attacked the Khazar king Benjamin. But the king of the Alans, some of whom professed Judaism, defeated them. Unfortunately, it is impossible to check the reliability of the data in other sources. Perhaps the king of the Ases was that “Christian at heart”, unless it was his Alanian opponent. The “Cambridge Document” and al-Masudi further report that during the reign of the Khazar king Aaron, the Byzantine emperor Roman I Lekapenos (920–944) incited the king of Alans to an anti-Khazar campaign, which had no success. After 932, Alans were forced to renounce Christianity and to send out the bishops and priests who were

sent to them. Some researchers believe that the campaign of the Alans against the Khazars was caused by their conversion in Christianity. Soon the Alans, however, officially returned to Christianity. Some echoes of the re-enforcement of Christianity in Alania are reportedly preserved in the Ossetic folklore (Dziccojty 1992: 44f.; Warziati 1989a: 84f.; Twallagov 2000: 217ff.). In the second half of the 10th century the Alania diocese raised its status from an archbishopric to a metropolis (the first known metropolitan Theodore is mentioned in the Senty inscription of 965). However, the status of this metropolis is somewhat unusual, since we still do not know the bishoprics subordinate to it.

The official adoption of Christianity by the king and his inner circle took place in the second period of the reign of Nicholas the Mystic (912–925). In 913/914 the Alanian king was already inclined to convert, becoming a “Christian in heart”, but still remained loyal to the Jewish Khazaria (Ibn Rusta, “Cambridge Document”). It could not take place before the patriarch’s request for assistance to the mission by the Abkhazian king George II, who ascended to the throne in 915/916. It is unlikely that the Alanian king could have been baptized by a simple missionary. The appointment of Peter as archbishop of Alania could signify the nomination of a suitable person. Peter was in Alania in 914–918. In 916, at the same time when the request to George II was sent, a participant of the first mission Euthymius was assigned to help him, probably in view of the approaching decisive hour. The baptism should have taken place between 916 and 918 (according to the logic of events, in 916/917). In 922 Nicholas the Mystic was already threatening the Bulgarian king Simeon with an invasion of the Hungarians, Pechenegs and Alans, whose confidence could be determined by the spiritual initiation of their ruler.

In the 11th century, al-Bekri referred to the king of Alania as to a Christian and to the majority of his people as to pagans. Under ‘Alania’ was meant a state in three days journey from Serir (Avaria), i.e. one including the eastern Alania. The *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* places Alans on the territory from the Black Sea to Serir, a fact which allows us to regard the Christianization of the Alans as a general process of religious life of this huge realm. They appear further to be listed among the Christian peoples by al-Marwazi. In fragments of notitia No. 10 of the end of the 10th–beginning of the 11th cc. the Alanian metropolis is not referred to in the main body of the text, but is mentioned in the scholia. By 1032–1039 it ranks 61st. Its metropolitan Eustratius was a monk, which apparently testifies to the continuation of missionary activity. The residence of the metropolitans was in the Lower Arkhyz. Al-Idrisi mentioned the land of Alans, who professed Nestorianism, near the Asia Minor town of Eneon. The North Caucasian Alans are listed among the Christian peoples in the commentaries to one of the

oldest Muslim maps attached to the 11th century work of Ibn Haukal. Nikiphor Vasilaki wrote about the adherence of the Caucasian Alans to the teachings of Christ in the 12th century.

Between 1084 and 1105 the centre of the Alanian metropolis moved to Soteriopolis in Lazica, and the Alanian metropolitan began to combine the duties of metropolitan and archbishop (Malakhov 1992a: 154). The commentaries to the Fifth Rule of St. Apostles by the Patriarch of Antioch Theodore Valsamon (1186–1203) refer to the report of the metropolitan of Alania that priests in his country always entered into a forbidden marriage. As follows from the 1225 epistle by the appointed Alanian bishop Theodore, the matter of spiritual enlightenment of the Alans was complicated by the rivalry between the empires of Trebizond and Nicaea. In January 1223 Theodore was sent from Nicea to the Alanian metropolis by patriarch Hermann II, who sought to restore and strengthen the position of Orthodoxy among various peoples. In a letter to the cardinals in 1232 Hermann II noted that among the other great peoples the Alans were in all things similar in faith to the Greeks. Theodore reported to have met a very deplorable state of the flock in the metropolis. The Alans did not know the true Christian faith, the church was ruled by random and incompetent people, who were most concerned with their own enrichment. Before him there had been three bishops. A relative of the last of them, a native of Lazica, declared himself bishop, travelled all over the country and ordained priests himself. When he had learnt of Theodore's arrival, he hastily fled. Theodore made every possible effort to rectify the situation, although because of the shortage of candidates he was forced to re-ordain some former priests, which was forbidden by the cathedral decrees. It is believed that Theodore himself was an Alan, but the grounds for such a conclusion are rather tentative.

A year before Theodore's appearance, Alania experienced the first sensitive blow by a Mongol detachment. According to Ibn al-Asir, the Alans professed Christianity, although some experts consider this translation incorrect. Abu-l-Fida has preserved for us the 13th century testimony of Ibn Said about the Christianity of the Alans and Ases.

In 1238 the Mongol conquest began, which led to the subjugation of the entire steppe part of the state and its actual fall. Apparently, in 1237 a Dominican monk Julian spent six months among the Alans. He noted the strife among the Alans, whom he described as a mixture of pagans and Christians poorly educated in the faith and revering but Sunday and the cross. The people feared the Mongols, who were rumoured to be somewhere nearby. After the defeat in 1238, forty thousand Cumans of Kotyan Khan moved to Hungary together with ten thousand North Caucasian Alans-Ases ruled by Kachar

Ogala, who professed Orthodoxy. The name of Kachar Ogala reminds the name of the leader of the Ases Kachir-ukule, who together with the chief of the Kipchaks Bachman had been resisting the Mongols for a long time, but finally was captured and executed (Rashid-ad-Din, *Collection of Annals*). It is not excluded that in fact, the leader of the Ases left with his tribesmen to Hungary, and Rashid-ad-Din confused him with the chief of the Ases Idzhis, captured together with the leaders of the Kipchaks Bachman and Circassians Tukbash. Perhaps the last attempt of the Alans (according to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, one third of the army was recruited at the Alan Gate) to preserve their religion and state was their coming down on the side of the faith-tolerant Hulaguids against the Dzhuchids in 1263 (*Kartlis Cxovreba*, Rashid ad-Din, Ibn Said, Marco Polo), which ended in a brutal defeat.

In 1245, Pope Innocent IV sent the monk Plano Carpini to Karakorum. The emissary noted the presence of many Christians in Ornas (Urgench), including the Alans. This information is confirmed by Plano Carpini's companion, known as Franciscan friar Benedict the Pole, as well as by C. de Bridia, who spoke with Plano Carpini's retinue. Apparently, these Alans were natives of the North Caucasus. Juwayni and Rashid ad-Din mention the favour of the Mongol emperor Guiuk (1246–1248) towards Christians, among whom the clergymen of the country of As are named. In 1253, the Franciscan monk Guillaume de Rubrouck visited the people of Alan-As, who continued to consider themselves Christians, used Greek letters, had Greek priests and honoured any Christian. The Christianity of the As people and their acceptance of any Christian is reported by Roger Bacon. Such a disposition, as well as the political situation of that time, did not probably create obstacles for a Catholic mission among the Alans. It is not without reason that the breviary of Innocent IV to the Minorite brothers of 1245 and 1253 suggests Catholic propaganda among many peoples, including the Alans. Guillaume de Rubrouck noted in 1254 that many Christians in Karakorum, including the Alans, had not had communion for a long time because the Nestorians did not allow them into their churches, requiring them being rebaptized. Christian Alans in the service of the Mongols were also noted in 1274 by Marco Polo.

Given these circumstances and the loss of contact with the Orthodox centre, it is worth mentioning the story of the thirty thousand Alans who went to China to serve the Mongol emperors. In a letter of the Franciscan Peregrinus, it was reported that John Monte Corvino, Archbishop of Hanbalik (1307–1328), preached to these Alans. After his death in 1333, Pope John XXII appointed Niccolo as his successor, but we know nothing of the new pastor's activities. In 1336 Emperor Toghon Temür and five Alanian princes sent an embassy to Rome, which included an Alan Togai. The new Pope Benedict XII in 1338 sent

five monks led by John Marignoli to the Alans. After John Marignoli's return in 1353, Pope Innocent VI asked the General Assembly of the canons of Assisi to prepare a new expedition. But the devastation of the Order by plague in 1348 did not allow sending a new expedition until the end of 1369. Perhaps, for the Alans who went to China, the Christian faith for a long time served as an ethnic marker.

In the 30-s of the 14th century, Jona Valensi, who enjoyed the patronage of Uzbek Khan, preached Catholicism among the Yases and other peoples of the Black Sea region. At this time Catholic bishoprics appeared in the North Caucasus. In a letter of Pope John XXII from 1329 Alans-Christians in Samarkand are mentioned. In the same Pope's 1330 address to Uzbek Khan Bishop Thomas Mancazole of Semiskat is recommended as a man who had called many converts, including among the Alans of the Caucasus. Some evidence about the Christianity by the Caucasian Alans in his 1329 and 1333 communications with the Alan prince Millen is provided, who apparently was converted to Catholicism due to the efforts of Roman missionaries (Kulakovskij 2000: 179). In the late 14th century, Johannes de Galonfontibus noted that the Dominicans and Franciscans converted many of the peoples of the Caucasus, including the Dvals, Alans and Ases, and had many colonies in the region. In the early 15th century John Schiltberger mentioned the mountainous country of Julat, which had many Christians and its own bishopric. Their priests belonged to the Carmelite order. It is not excluded that it was about Upper Julat, located near the modern village of Elkhotovo in North Ossetia. It is interesting that Josaphat Barbaro, describing the 1487 campaign of Sheikh-Khaydar, noted that there were many Catholic Christians in the province of Elokhtsi near the river Terkh in the Caucasus Mountains. Dominican Archbishop John III of Sultaniye in 1404 mentioned Ases and Alans among many Christians of the "Great Tatarstan". In the mountains on the borders of Georgia he knew Dvals, Alans, Ases and other peoples. The Dominicans and Franciscans converted many in this land.

According to Abulfede, the Alans and Ases remained Christians. In the late 14th century, the population of the semi-independent state, founded by Nogai Khan on the North-Western Black Sea coast, also included the North Caucasian Alans. Under his son Jeck, in 1300 the Alans secretly sent embassies to the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II, applying for his service. Eventually 10 to 16 thousand Alans (half of them were warriors) with their "leader" were resettled in Thrace (Nikifor Grigora, George Pachimer). The mediator in the negotiations was Metropolitan Luke of Vicina, a fact which suggests the petitioners' being Orthodox Christians.

During the patriarchate of John Vekk (1275–1282), the Alania metropolis was united with that of Zikhia, forming a single diocese that existed until about 1317. The devastation of Alania and Zikhia by the Mongols led to the migration of the local population. Theognost, the bishop of the Sarai Metropolis, which was part of the Russian Metropolis, complained to the patriarch about the influx of Christian refugees, primarily Alans and Zikhs, into his domain. This issue was discussed in 1276 at a council in Constantinople. The patriarch decided that the bishop of Sarai should have authority over them, which was withdrawn from the hands of the pastors of the abandoned regions.

Metropolitan and hierarch of Alania and Soteriopolis Laurentius complained to Patriarch Isidor (1347–1350) and to the Synod that the appointment of a special bishop to the Soteriopolis church under the previous patriarch John XIV Kalekas had broken the already established unification of the dominions. The Synod decided to reunite the Alanian metropolis and the Soteriopolis bishopric to protect “the interests of the Alans and for the sake of the spiritual benefit of this great people”. In 1347, the new Metropolitan Simeon travelled to his metropolis.

In 1346, a plague epidemic raged here (*Kholmogorskaya Chronicle*), which caused a great loss of life and considerable material damage. Simeon, backed by the Alanian population of the Lower Don, dismissed local priests from their posts, depriving them of their income. Those appealed against the actions to Patriarch Isidore, and the synodic court recognized their rightness. However, Simeon received a patent (*jarlyk*) in the Horde and, returning to the metropolis between 1350–1353, arbitrarily chirotonized bishops to Sarai and to the Caucasian metropolis. Interesting is Simeon’s intervention in the affairs of the Caucasian Metropolis, which appeared in the late 13th century probably on the territory of the present-day Balkaria. Thus, we deal with the aggravating weakening of the influence of the Alanian metropolis among the local population, which required the establishment of a separate church structure. From the 14th century the bishopric of Akhokhia is also mentioned, whose location has recently been identified with the area of Nalchik.

As for the Alans, they, according to the testimony of Laonikos Chalkokondyles (mid. 15th century), were still following Christian beliefs. In 1395 Timur crushed the Ases in the region of Elbrus, whom Yezdi (“Book of Victories”) calls infidels. According to Nizam-ad-Din Shami, churches were also destroyed. John Galonifontibus mentions Alans and Ases among Christian peoples in the end of 14th century. At the beginning of the 15th century Johannes Schiltberger pointed out that in the language of the Ases Orthodox divine services were performed, at the same time noting the presence of a Catholic bishopric in

the country of Julad. As late as the 16th century, the Alans were referred to as Christians. Mahmud ibn Wali considered the population of the land of Ases to be mostly Christian. Arcangelo Lamberti also classed the Alans as Christians, but noted their life without laws. Vakhushti Bagrationi (1696–1757) in his *Geography of the Kingdom of Georgia* indicated that the Alans who had fallen into paganism were once Christians.

By the end of the 14th century, the Alanian metropolitan moved to the city of Trebizond. In 1391 the great provisor of Trebizond church Theodore Panaretos received the right to rule and govern in the holy churches, including Alania and the archbishopric of Stavropol (Soteriopolis). The Alania cathedra probably loses its position in Alania itself. Iosaphat Barbaro wrote in 1436 that the Alan-As people, who professed Christianity, were destroyed and expelled by the Mongols. Around the middle of the 15th century the centre of the Alanian metropolis moved to Sebastia (Asia Minor), where it existed, apparently, until the end of the 16th century. In May 1590 the archbishop of Alania Pachomius put his signature under the letter of the Constantinople patriarch Jeremiah and the entire Ecumenical Council on the establishment of the patriarchate in Russia. Consequently, the metropolis, which lost its connection with Soteriopolis, was downgraded to the category of archbishopric. With the establishment of patriarchy in Russia, the lands of the former Alanian metropolis entered the sphere of influence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The adoption of the Orthodox Christianity by the Alans, especially by the ruling elite, contributed to the development of interstate relations, in which inter-dynastic marriages played a significant role. In particular, names of Alanian princesses, found in dedicatory inscriptions in Georgian churches testify to special relations, which connected the church with the daughters of Alanian kings who married Georgian rulers. Thus, an icon of the Mother of God with the prayer of Borena, a sister of the Alan king Dorgulel “the Great” and the second wife of the Georgian king Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072), was discovered in the Church of the Saviour in the village of Lendjeri, Svaneti. In the Church of the Archangels in the village of Pkhotreri, an icon with an inscription containing the name Burdukhan, Alan princess and the wife of Giorgi III, king of Georgia (r. 1156–1184), mother of Queen Tamar, was noted. The 15th c. chronicle *Zegli eristavta* (f. 3v, l. 6) reports that an Alanian princess Shirdi raised the dignity of the Largvis monastery and introduced new utensils for the church service (Meskhia 1954: 348; Gaglojti 2007: 62). Researchers also drew attention to the marriage unions between Russian princes and daughters of the Alan-As nobility. Thus, Vladimir Monomakh’s son Yaropolk, as a result of the expedition to the Don and Donets in 1116, brought to himself as a wife the daughter of

the As prince (*Russian Primary Chronicle, Troitskaja Chronicle*), named Elena. Vsevolod III the Big Nest (r. 1176–1212) married the As princess Maria, who made much effort to help the Orthodox Church and at the end of her life took the monastic vows. After her death she was canonized. Maria's sister married the Chernigov prince Mstislav. However, objections against the assumed Alanian origin of wives of Russian princes have recently been expressed in scientific literature.

The tendency of medieval Georgian sources to attribute priority in the spread of Christianity in Ovseti and to emphasize the spiritual subordination of the local population to Georgian rulers has been noted above. However, these statements are not confirmed. At the same time, an active Georgian influence on the nearest lands inhabited by Alans is quite tangible. In the 11th–13th centuries small churches of typical Georgian architecture appeared on the territory of modern Ossetia (villages of Tli, Khozitikau, Regakh, Zrug, Dzivgis and others). Later painting of the Nuzal chapel was done by an Ossetian Vola Tliag, who was obviously educated in the Georgian tradition. In 1314 another Ossetian, Nikoloz Dvali, was stoned to death in Damascus for propaganda of Christianity. Later he was canonized. Ivan and Joseph Dvali were engaged in copying ancient books and creating book miniatures on the Holy Mountain. In general, the influence of Christian traditions from Georgia can be traced in the eastern part of ancient Alania within the limits of Tualgom in the upper reaches of the Ardon River and the mountain zone of modern Kabardino-Balkaria. Attempts to prove the opposite carry no conviction (Vinogradov 1990: 55ff.; Kuznetsov 1992: 116f.; Malakhov 1992a: 165ff.).

In the late 11th–early 12th cc. Byzantium hosted an Alanian ruler named Rosmik/Romisk (Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*), whose patron saint, significantly, was considered to be St. Andrew. The magister Constantine Alan is also known. His father could be the famous ruler Dorgulel, who bore the Christian name Gabriel. A certain Alan bore the title of magister under Emperor Nikephoros III Votaniates and was considered his relative (apparently from the side of the mother of Maria of Alania, abovementioned Borena, Dorgulel's sister). Among the close friends of the Duke of Illyria George Monomakh Alan Johannes is known. According to the Georgian tradition, the Alanian rulers belonged to the dynasty of the Ephremids, who were regarded as the younger branch of the Georgian Bagratids. However, such an interpretation was caused by the fact of interruption of the Georgian line in the history of Georgian rulers after the accession of Queen Tamara, whose mother was Burdukhan, the daughter of the Ovs (Alanian) king (see above), and who herself married the Ovs prince David-Soslan (Togoshvili 1990: 10ff.). Such interpretation, in fact, has

no historical substantiation. Georgian sources preserve information about St. Christodul, “called Ossetian”, who lived in the 12th century. The information about the ethnic origin of St. Christodul needs additional verification.

Scholars have repeatedly noted echoes of Christian religion in Ossetic traditions, beliefs and folklore. The folklore tradition of Ossetians’ eastern neighbours, the Nakh, is also indicative in this case. In the Nart epic of the latter, Narts (= Alans) were Christians. The Ingush legends about Mago, who personified the historical Alans and came from the Tartup area (Ossetia), trace the motif of the hero’s conversion in Christianity, the attribute of which is the *de-zhei* – a sacred book, probably the Psalter. The cycle of tales about Mago is connected with the sanctuaries of Magi-erda and Tumgoi-erda. According to an Ingush legend, the sanctuary of Tkhaba-erda (in honour of St. Thomas) was built on the place where the prophet Mahomed (Mohammad) buried his Koran. A Christian sheikh recognized this and built a church here, and then the Christian king himself settled at the same place. His Christians were *devi, mida*, i.e. belonged to an Iranian-speaking people, which could only be Alans. In mountainous Ingushetia, there are about 11 known toponyms with the element *jerda*. According to Ingush legends about Barkhoi-Kant, a Christian king named Yerda from the country of Yerda in the Tarskaya Valley (Ossetia), once appeared in the mountainous Assinov Basin. The location of the country and the name of the king (from Ossetic *ard* ‘oath’) testify to their Alanian origin. Near Olgeti village there is a sanctuary Itaz-jerda, in whose designation the name of the Alanian ruler Itaz can be seen (Dalgat 1972: 343; Vinogradov/Baranichenko 1983: 91ff.; Alborov 1979: 81f.; Vinogradov 1985: 13, 16f.).

Archaeological evidence of the spread of Christianity in Alania suggests a significantly later date than the tradition. However, they are close in time to those written testimonies that were created synchronously with the described events and on the basis of personal observations. A stone cross with a Greek inscription from the vicinity of Kislovodsk and images of crosses on the walls of five catacombs in the burial ground Peschanyi near Nalchik are attributed to the 8th century. In the 8th–9th centuries the first signs of transition of the Alanian population of the Kuban region to Christianity appear (Kuznetsov 1992: 312 f.; Narozhnyj/Sokov 1998: 26ff.). A wide spread of elements of Christian culture cannot be observed until the 10th century, primarily in the Western Alania, where a diocesan centre – the Lower Arkhyz ancient settlement – is most prominent. Church buildings begin to be erected, the earliest of which are notable for the large size and stylistic influence of Byzantium and Georgia, probably through Abkhazian mediation, which intensified after Abkhazia became part of Georgia in 980. Apparently, we deal with the initial stage of the establishment of a new religious order that needed the art of foreign masters

for making its presence visible. On the wall of the Zelenchuk temple an image of St. Nicholas, the “patron saint of Aspe”, was found. It is indicative that Nikkola is considered one of the most revered saints among the Digor-Ossetians.

Two or three decades later, temples Nos. 2 and 6 at the Ilyichevskiy settlement were purposefully destroyed, and blocks of the church buildings were used in the pagan cemetery in Gamovskaya gully. The explanation of what happened corresponds to the forced rejection of Christianity by the Alans after the defeat from the Khazars in 932. From the 2nd half of the 10th century the construction of large temples practically ceased and small one-nave churches appeared *en masse*, a phenomenon which testifies to the intensive spread of Christianity in the Alanian environment at that time. On the other hand, the appearance of such churches in the Caucasus mountains corresponds to the traditional beliefs of the local population, according to which it was prohibited for mere mortals to enter the sanctuary. Probably, we deal here with a more large-scale involvement of the Alanian population into Christianity with allowances made for their traditions. These may have predetermined the building of churches on the sites of earlier pagan sanctuaries, as was the case with the construction of the Sentin Temple, two chapels near the village of Ilyich or later Rekom. Similar explanation may be given to the pagan sanctifying of the cemetery land when burying Christian proselytes. It is indicative that from the 8th century the Alans have pagan sanctuaries, a fact which testifies to a shift away from the ancient traditions not to erect sanctuaries to their gods (Ammianus Marcellinus). It is assumed that the Kyafar tomb of the 11th century belonged to the famous Alanian ruler Dorgulel (see above). The time of his reign is the period of the greatest power of Alania and strengthening of the Christian traditions in it. It is not surprising, therefore, that the walls of the tomb bear images of Christian characters. At the same time, other images continue the pagan tradition, testifying to its great vitality (Kaminskij/Kaminskaja 1996: 175; Kuznetsov 1977: 157; Kuznetsov 1990: 22f.; Kuznetsov 1993a: 179; Kuznetsov 1988; Okhon'ko 1994: 3ff.; Markovin 1996: 184; Lozhkin 1984: 53).

Numerous Christian burials have been recorded on the territory of Alania, containing Greek inscriptions of tombstones, as well as one famous Alanian inscription written in Greek script (so called Zelenchuk Inscription), stone and bronze crosses, reminding of the veneration of the symbol of faith by the Alans (Julian, Josophatos Barbaro), body crosses, cult objects and church vestments, anthropomorphic statues with crosses, etc. Finds of Russian crosses-folders (encolpions) in church No. 6 of the Nizhnij Arkhyz ancient settlement of this period and a stone cross of 1041 near the village of Pregradnoe, which testify to Alan-Russian ties, are especially noted (Kuznetsov 1992: 205f.). The

assumption that the find of a rare type of Russian crosses testify to the missionary activity of the Tmutarakan church among Alans (Golovanova 1993: 30) seems, however, unconvincing. A detailed enumeration of all the items is simply impossible within the framework of the article. They testify to the spread of Christianity in the Alanian environment in the 10th–12th centuries, although the synchronous presence of numerous pagan monuments located directly next to the Christian ones does not allow us to consider the process of Christianization as all-around.

Perhaps two of the most important material finds should be cited to supplement our information about the history of Christianity among the Alans. In 1992, a Greek Old Testament lectionary or prophetologion, copied in 1275, was discovered in the library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. In its margins were inscribed abbreviated titles, partly in Greek and partly with Greek letters in the Alanian language, the predecessor of the modern Ossetic. These inscriptions date back to the 14th or 15th century and were made by the hand of its Alanian owner (Engberg/Lubotsky 2003: 41ff.). A Greek inscription of 965 was found on the wall of the Senty Church, reporting its dedication in the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas, *exousiocrator* (sovereign) of Alans David and *exousiocratorissa* Maria (Beletskij/Vinogradov 2005: 130ff.).

By the end of the 12th–beginning of the 13th century, the process of disintegration of the Alanian state took effect, which went in parallel with the weakening of the Christian influence. Urban centres declined. In the period of the Mongol conquests, in which the anti-Christian orientation grew with time, the Alans ultimately lost control over the flat part of their state, and depopulation of Alania reached enormous proportions. The remnants of the Alans were concentrated in the mountains of the Central Caucasus. Against this background, a renaissance of pagan traditions took place here. Many Christian churches (Rekom, Dzivgis, Regakh, Guli, Yus-dzuar, etc.) turned into pagan temples. Probably at that time, Georgian Christian borrowings appeared due to the close contacts with neighbouring Georgia, which remained in the bosom of Christianity. But this was a period not of development but of dying of Christianity in the Alanian environment. A Georgian manuscript psalter found in Zaramag, judging by research materials, got to Ossetia in the 17th century, but it was incomprehensible to the Ossetians who used it for divination at their own discretion. By the end of the 16th c. the Alanian metropolis itself disappeared. Among the last evidences of Christianity in the former lands of Alania we should mention data on 15th century Gospel pages and church books in Greek from Chegem, Greek inscriptions of 1557 and 1581.

The circumstances and reasons that determined such a course of the history of Christianity in Alania were, apparently, quite diverse and have not yet been

fully comprehended by researchers. Some data from written sources remain disputable as to the adequacy of their testimonies to real historical facts. Thus, the tales of apostolic activity and the first examples of baptism of Alans by Georgian and Armenian missionaries seem to have been caused by the desire of the interested parties to highlight their spiritual and political prerogatives. An exception is the story of the baptism of the Sukiasians, but it is related to a small group of Alans who were separated from their homeland by fate. The encounters of the main Alanian population with the new doctrine and with its promotion are quite probable, but did not have far-reaching consequences.

The adoption of the monotheistic Christian religion often proceeded in parallel with the process of formation of a unified state organism. In the first centuries AD, when the Sarmatians and Alans were dominated by tribal nobility, the institution of a second king appeared, responsible for military and partly civil administration. At the beginning of the 4th century the military leaders of the Alans assumed judicial functions. According to some researchers, by the 5th century the position of the landowning servicemen among the Alans strengthened, who became increasingly isolated from the rest of the population in the process of expanding territory and mixing with the local population, which led to the development of the territorial principle of military formation. The participation of Alans in the Persian-Byzantine wars from the 6th century completed the process.

The formation of pre-state associations among the Alans proceeded in parallel in the North-Western and Central Caucasus, but in the former region it was most accelerated. The Sarmatian and Alanian associations that had long been here, got into fairly intensive ethnic, political, cultural and economic communication with the autochthonous settled population and with the Greek policies, a process which led to their rapid incorporation into new, more progressive forms of socio-economic relations. Turkic peoples penetrated here too. It is the ethnic heterogeneity of the population that is considered to have accelerated the spread of Christianity (Avdienko 1979: 102ff.). The Western Alans continued their consolidation. Probably, therefore, after the conclusion of the peace with Romaeans in 433 Attila's and Bleda's Huns began to subdue the tribe of Sorosgians (Σορόσγοι, Priscus, Exc. 1.1), whose ethnonym is close to the name Sarosia. We do not know any information about the successful fulfilment of the plan.

In the 6th century, Alania experienced a demographic explosion, which significantly intensified social processes. A dense network of fortified settlements was formed. In the middle of this century, Byzantium and barbarian lands were struck by a terrible plague (Procopius of Caesarea). It is in this plague that the final cause of the social upheaval, prepared by the whole

course of development of the Alanian society, is assumed. In the eyes of the ancient population, tribal leaders and first kings served as the embodiment of health. Therefore, an Alanian king could pay with his life for the calamity of the plague, which was taken advantage of by Sarosius, who removed the tribal aristocracy from power. He created a powerful association covering the upper Kuban, Pyatigorie ("Five-Mountains Area", the region of Beshtau) and the present-day Balkaria, laying down a strict system of defensive settlements leading to the main straits (Gutnov 1993: 39ff.). The latter observation suggests that the plague affected an insignificant part of the Alanian population. This assumption is also confirmed by archaeological materials from the Kislovodsk Basin. However, a social upheaval was thus given rise to. The preservation of the bulk of the population allowed a large-scale settlement of the foothill and mountainous areas.

It were the Alans of Sarosia, together with the Abkhazians, who were called "friends of Christians and Greeks". If earlier the Christian Church did not have the necessary resources to include such remote territories in its sphere of influence, now the situation changed. In 558 Abkhazia, which traditionally was in friendly relations with Alania and subsequently took an active part in its conversion in Christianity, was baptized. If the "friendship with Christians" was brought to a logical end by Abkhazians, the same could have been the case with the Alans. In any case, Alans were quite favourable to the new religion, an attitude which was largely preconditioned by the traditional ties of the western Alans. Thereby an accelerated evolution of their society was reached and an access to the world political, cultural and economic space was realized. The Christian religion determined the accession to the world history, whose centre was then Byzantium.

Thus, the history of the western Alans predetermined their accession to the Christian values. The experience of their own statehood, which remained strong enough in the 8th century, led to the impossibility of a significant rooting of Judaism after the incorporation into the Khazar Khaganate. On the contrary, the experience of joining a monotheistic religion should have ultimately contributed to the conversion to Christianity in the course of achieving independence. Islam, which the Arabs carried with them, could not succeed. The western Alans usually remained aloof from the theatre of military operations of the Arab-Byzantine wars of the 7th–8th centuries. The eastern Alans were more dependent on the Khazars than on the periodically appearing Arabs, whose raids brought only devastation and woe to their homeland. The Arabs did not have enough strength to gain a foothold in the region for a long time and to adopt a policy of encouraging the local nobility, as was the case, for

example, in Dagestan. In the process of struggle for expansion of territory and confrontation with Arab aggression, which ended in the 9th century, consolidation of eastern Alans took place, and in the 8th century they formed the “state of Irkhan” (*Derbent-name*). Here also a network of fortified settlements appears, whereas in the 6th century Zacharias Rhetor noted only five Alanian cities. At that time close allied relations with Khazaria and firm opposition to any Arab influence were established. Of course, it cannot be excluded that some representatives of Alans may have converted to Islam, but there is no evidence of any large-scale spread of this religion in Alania.

Three Muslim tombstones of the 11th century were found in the masonry of the churches of the Lower Arkhyz settlement. They hardly testify to religious confrontation, apparently belonging to foreigners (merchants?), whose religion was, at best, indifferent to the local population. Ibn Haukal in the 11th century noted the presence of Muslim communities, including in the country of the Alans. In *Aja'ib ad-dunya* of the late 12th–early 13th cc. there are records about many Muslims in the town of “Alaniya”, located between Abkhazians and Kipchaks, i.e. in western Alania. Archaeology does not confirm this report. Apparently, it is again about merchants. Ibn Battuta reports about Muslim Ases in Saray, the capital of the Golden Horde, in 1333. The conversion of some Alans to Islam during their subjugation to the Mongols could have been caused by the new conditions of their existence. However, it cannot be excluded that it were the Alans and Ases, who had long been living east of the Caspian Sea and were known to al-Biruni. Some researchers compare them with the Muslim people *al-arsiya*, who, according to al-Masudi, once lived in Khorezm, but because of famine and plague went to serve the Khazars. Recently, it was proposed on the basis of archaeological materials to take into account the possibility of adoption of Islam by a part of the Alans of Upper Julat from the middle of the 13th century (Fidarov 2004: 16ff.).

The close allied relations of the western Alans with Byzantium continued in the early 8th century, as evidenced by the history of Itaz/Itaxis, whose Alanian lieges enjoyed great freedom in their political decisions without the interference of the Khazars. In the 7th c. Anastasius Apokrisiarius testifies to the flight of the ruler of the Alans to the Abkhazians, his return with their help and a new flight. It is noted that “Itaxis” is a title close to the Iranian “Pitiakhsh”, which allows us to regard him as a “second king”. It turns out that after the social upheaval of “Sarosia”, there is a return to dual power with the participation of “Itaxis”. Perhaps, the situation of the mid-6th century, which was very favourable and maximally used by the “second king”, was still somewhat ahead of the real development of the Western Alanian society, and the institution

of the first king had a strong enough position that allowed it to struggle and revive. The struggle at the top continued in the 9th century, as evidenced by the history of Bibiluri.

Finally, by the end of the 9th–early 10th centuries, a strong royal power was established in Alania. Georgian and Arabic sources name two titles of the Alan king (*bakatar* and *kerkundezh*), confirming the final victory of the “second king” in the struggle. They also testify to the intensive creation of numerous cities, fortresses and settlements, which is confirmed archaeologically. Researchers note the influence of the progress of agricultural tools on the evolution of the social order. Perhaps, at that time the cult of Wastyrdzhi, influenced by the Christian image of St. George, began to grow stronger among the military class. It is associated with the widespread use of amulets in the form of a horseman in the 7th–9th centuries.

What calls attention to itself is the fact that in the war of 913/914 the king of the Alans and the king of the Ases opposed each other. It is believed that the Ases were bearers of the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture, and their defeat is associated with its demise. But the Alan-As population continued to exist later, having its tribal nobility (*Hypatian Chronicle*), but not a common king. The source does not single out such a total defeat of the Ases among the participants of the coalition. The prince Svyatoslav could strike the Saltovo-Mayatsk population in 965 (*Russian Primary Chronicle*). The bulk of the Alan-As population of the Saltovo-Mayatsk culture appears as a result of the migration of the Alans in the middle of the 8th century from the Central Ciscaucasia. The assumed reasons for the migration are multiple: internal socio-economic development of society, Arab-Khazar wars, advancement of Bulgars, plague, struggle against Zoroastrianism. At any rate, it could hardly have happened without contribution from the side of the Khazars. The resettlement was reported by a lost Georgian chronicle (Kuznetsov 1992: 161f.). It is likely that later the Alan-Ases returned to their ancestral homeland in the Central Ciscaucasia.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus and the wall inscription in the Senty Church note the presence in Alania of the *exusiocrator* of the Alans and the archons of the Ases, whose possessions were located near the Daryal. Probably, they were originally the rulers of Alans and Ases, who united the Alanian lands of the North-Western and Central Ciscaucasia under their rule. Then the “king of the Ases” fell into vassal dependence on the “king of the Alans”, which led to the creation of a single state, as evidenced by written sources that speak of a single Alania ruled by a king who was still only a “Christian at heart”. Its territory began just beyond the limits of the kingdom of Serir. The war of 913/914 could be the starting point of the formation of such a state. The daughter of the ruler of the Ases could be a hostage of Emperor Constantine Monomakh,

as the position of Dorgulel does not allow to consider her a daughter of the supreme Alanian ruler. The wife of Dorgulel could be another woman from a sort of the ruler of Ases, the daughter of which sister married the famous byzantine warrior and martyr Theodoros Gabras. Accordingly, the unification of Alania was strengthened by dynastic marriages within the state. The spread of Christianity among the Alans went hand in hand with this process.

The defeat in the war of 932 led to a temporary official renunciation of Christianity, which did not last long due to the weakening of Khazaria, which was not able to limitlessly command the Alans, and after the campaign of the Russes in 965 finally collapsed. Christianity begins to cover the Alanian population more and more, although it does not achieve a decisive victory over paganism, as evidenced by written and archaeological sources. It is believed that the long-lasting appointment of monks to the leadership of the Alanian metropolis was caused by the missionary nature of the activity, reflecting the great difficulties in the conversion. As Abaev rightly pointed out (Abaev 1958–89: III/45), the Ossetic *sauǵyn/saugin* ‘priest’ indicates that originally it was black-robed monks who were the first Christian missionaries in Alania.

The flourishing of the centralized Alanian state under Dorgulel in the 11th century was then followed by an era of growing fragmentation and infighting, accompanied by a socio-economic crisis. The life at urban centres, including the Lower Arkhyz settlement, faded (Kuznetsov 1993a: 246f.), thus weakening the basis of the new faith. In the first third of the 13th century, Yakut reports that the Alans have no known large settlement. Probably, the presence of the nomadic Kipchaks increased, who did not adhere to the pro-Byzantine orientation and were not inclined to Christianity in their bulk, a process which complicated the internal political situation and strengthened the role of the nomadic element. There was a disintegration of the state union into separate domains with their own “kings” and “rulers” (Leontius Mroveli, Juansher, *Life of David the Builder, King of Kings*). Probably, the strengthening of the ancient tribal nobility during the period of feudalization should have had a primary impact here. Striving to defend the independence of their own power, they had to appeal to the history, laws and traditions of the past, i.e. to the times of unlimited domination of paganism. The bloody confrontation of separate Alanian lands, led by their rulers (Julian), was on the rise. It is this side of the Alan life that was apparently meant by Bishop Theodore, who noted the predilection for murder among the Alans.

The bishop left a rather vivid description of the deplorable state of Christianity among the Alans, who could be classified as Orthodox only officially and very conditionally. The priests themselves are also depicted as absolutely incapable. Bishop Theodore records the openly profiteering nature of the

activities of some of the priests. For the whole period of the existence of the Alanian metropolis we do not know a single Alanian metropolitan. Perhaps, only the baptized Alanian nobility supplied some Christian priests, if we take into account the evidence of marriages of priests forbidden by Constantinople and appeals for patience regarding non-canonical marriages of the Alanian nobility. The church organization itself was very weak. The situation was aggravated by the transfer of the centre of the Alanian metropolis at the turn of the 11th–12th centuries outside the state. Such actions could have been caused by objective difficulties, unless they were simply pursuing selfish goals. In any case, they do not correspond to the ideals of Christian asceticism. In 1204 Constantinople was captured by the Crusaders, and until 1261 the difficult period of Byzantine decentralization continued, which objectively weakened the cause of Christian enlightenment among the Alans. The rivalry between Byzantium and Trebizond, which emerged in these years, also had a rather negative effect.

In 1238, there was a massive invasion of the Alanian lands by Mongols. Many cultural centres collapsed, material and human resources were destroyed. Among other things, the church was struck. For example, Church No. 5 at the Ilyichevsk settlement was destroyed. Tens of thousands of Alans who left for Hungary and China were forced to leave their homeland forever. Moreover, it is they who were long committed to Christianity, having a large number of nobles in their ranks, and the bearers of supreme power at their head. The exodus of the most predisposed to monarchy and Christianity mass of the population took place. In the 4th quarter of the 13th century, probably due to the devastation of lands and lower incomes, the Zikh and Alanian metropolises were united, which was accompanied by the departure of the Christian population to the Sarai metropolis.

In 1346 a plague epidemic began to rage. In 1394–1395, under the banner of the fight against the infidels, the final defeat was inflicted on the Alans, whose remnants were permanently locked up in the mountains. The last hope for the restoration of statehood and Christianity was destroyed. In the south, the Alanian nobility was quickly integrated into Georgian society. The rest of the Alanian population was divided along gorge lines, which in time led to a further degradation and formation of “traditional Ossetic societies”. Under such conditions paganism, which had never lost its positions significantly, was revived again, while the influence of the Georgian church remained rather superficial. The Alanian metropolis, which had long been estranged from its flock, was increasingly losing ties with it, apparently without making the necessary efforts to overcome this situation.

It is indicative that Catholic ministers travelled to the Alans in China in the late 13th century, and John Marignoli travelled through Constantinople itself. Some archaeological monuments also testify to the presence of Catholic influence in the North Caucasus (Chechenov 1987: 87ff.). We have already talked about Catholic preaching among the Alans. It is known that after the meeting of the Synod in Constantinople on 3 May 1280 about the union with the Latins a schism started in a number of Orthodox church domains, one of the instigators of which was Patriarch John XI Bekkos himself. After that, the Catholic Church, which had already earlier turned its attention to the Alanian population, took advantage of the conclusion of the union and intensified its work among the Orthodox flock. One of the consequences of this split could be the reduction of the Orthodox parish and redistribution of the North Caucasian pulpits. In 1365 Constantinople was blockaded by the Turkish army, and in 1373 John V Palaeologos recognized himself as a vassal of Sultan Murad, which forever interrupted the spiritual connection with Alania.

The Scythian World and the Nart Epic

Ludwig Chibirov

Until the mid-20th century, almost no one in the scholarly world doubted that the Nart epic was fundamentally Ossetian, and that it was brought to the Caucasus by Scytho-Alan tribes, and that its existence by the neighbouring Caucasian peoples was a consequence of cultural borrowing, which culminated in the formation of national versions of the Nart epic by Adyghs and Abkhazians.

Among others, this point of view was suggested and defended by outstanding scholars of the 20th century, V. I. Abaev and, especially, G. Dumézil. I cannot name anyone who would have reached their scholarly level, who would have eclipsed their authority with his works on the mythology and folklore of the peoples of the Caucasus. According to Abaev, “in the field of study of the Caucasian languages and peoples in Turkey no one had such merits as Dumézil” (Abaev apud Dumézil 1976: 271f.), and it was just through this research that he became interested in the Ossetian epic and was engaged in it throughout his scholarly activity.

In the middle of the 20th century, when the knowledge of scholars about the national versions of the Nart epic began to be enriched with new legends and the Adyghe and Abkhazian centres of the formation of the epic were recognized, a common point of view at the Sukhumi Nartological conference was found. According to it, the Nart epic is “a single Pan-Caucasian monument of ancient epic poetry”, and “the historical roots uniting the Nart stories of all national versions should be sought in the main factors of Caucasian commonality, such as: genetic kinship of the peoples of the Caucasus, the role of a common substratum, similar conditions of material social existence, close spiritual communication between these peoples during their long historical development” (Petrosyan 1969: 8).

However, having considered this insufficient, some of our colleagues (A. M. Gadagatl, Z. Y. and M. A. Kumakhovs and others) went further, trying to prove that the creators of the epic about the Narts were only the ancestors of the Adyghes, and that the Adyghe culture is the most ancient (Petrosyan 1969: 9). In a word, the Scythian-Sarmatian roots of the epic are denied, and it is claimed that the epic is the brainchild of the Caucasian peoples, and Alans-Ossetians as an alien element only adopted it from their neighbours.

Is it really so or is G. Dumézil right? Dumézil, whose conclusion on this issue sounds like a verdict: “C’est chez les Ossètes, et sans doute déjà en partie chez leurs lointains ancêtres, que le noyau de l’épopée, ses principaux personnages, se sont formés. Je sais, en publiant ce jugement, que je peine mes amis tcherkesses et abkhaz, mais *magis amica ueritas*: en son fond, l’épopée narte est ossète” (Dumézil 1986: 453). This conclusion was not met with serious objections among Nartologists. Moreover, it is supported by a number of other Western scholars: H. W. Bailey, G. Charachidzé, J. Grisward, A. Christol, Ch. Vielle and others.

It is known that an epic, being an oral folk art, cannot fully copy the historical reality. Millennia have passed since the real existence of the ancient world, and therefore, naturally, only ruins and separate fragments of that remote epoch have reached our days. In some cases, these relics remain silent witnesses of past epochs, while in others, with the help of linguistic or folklore sources, they are revived and made to speak by historians. The Scytho-Sarmatian world, chronologically distant from the modern era by almost three thousand years, certainly belongs to the latter case. It was in the Nart epic that much of what ancient authors wrote about the life and manners of the Scythians was mirrored.

Scytho-Ossetian ethno-cultural parallels are a very broad topic. In this paper it is narrowed down to the Scytho-Nartian parallels. It has long been established that the Scythians are ethnogenetic ancestors of the Ossetians. This discovery was made with the help and mediation of two crucial components: language and epic. The importance of language, the crucial ethnic factor, is extremely great. But in this particular case we are interested only in the Nart epic of Ossetians. There is a solid literature about its enduring significance. We can safely say that if our people had not had this pearl of folk art, perhaps the question of ethnogenesis of Ossetians would still be debatable. The images, motifs and plots of the Ossetian folk epic about the Nart heroes echo legends and customs of the Scythians and, therefore, not only the language but also the epic connects Ossetians with the Scythian-Sarmatian world. By the medium of talented storytellers who had phenomenal memory, people transmitted their heroic legends throughout years and centuries up to and including the beginning of the 20th century. They were passed on to the ancestors of Ossetians from the Sarmatians, and the Sarmatians took them from the Scythians. One cannot but agree with G. Dumézil when he writes: “The customs of Scytho-Sarmatians described by Herodotus and the manners attributed to Ossetian Narts in the legends coincide in many features with convincing accuracy” (Dumézil 1976: 8f.). Thus, both in the language and in the epic the Sarmato-Alanian and Scythian strata do not differ much from each

other. Miller's famous saying should be understood in this sense: "Whether we take a Sarmatian (Scythian) of Herodotus' time, an Alanian of Ammianus Marcellinus' time or an Ossetian of the recent past, all of them have familiar features" (Miller 1882a: 196).

The literature about the ethnographic parallels between the Iranian world and the Nart epic has recently been enriched by new works. Among them, Dumézil's books *Mythe et épopée* (1968) and *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour* (1978) should be singled out. Of great scholarly interest is Ch. Vielle's work *Le mytho-cycle héroïque dans l'aire indo-européenne. Correspondances et transformations helléno-aryennes* (1996). New studies of the national authors (Ju. S. Gagloiti, E. B. Sattsaeve, A. A. Twallagov, A. V. Darchieva) have been published. Besides, solid monographs by West-European scholars (H. Reid, Sc. Littleton and L. Malcore) have appeared, testifying to the wide spread of the Nart epic in Western Europe and the influence it had on the formation of legends about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The current paper aims at providing a generalized, concentrated look at the parallels from the Nart epic to the Scythians, and through them to European, Iranian and Indo-Iranian antiquities, taking into account new research on the problem.

Let us now turn to the consideration of the specific material, which shall substantiate the opinion expressed.

1 Legends about the Origin of the Scythians and the Narts

Several versions of legends about the origin of the Scythians have survived to our days. According to Herodotus, the first to appear on the Scythian land was a man named Targitaos, whose parents were the supreme god, the celestial Zeus, and the daughter of the river Borysthenes.

Like Targitaos, who was born from the union of Heaven and Water, the heroine of the epic Satana was born from the marriage of the celestial Wastyrġy and the daughter of the lord of the underwater kingdom Donbetyr, Dzerassæ. The ancestor of the Scythians had the appearance of a half-virgin, half-snake. From the Kul-Oba barrow, a Scythian snake-headed virgin goddess was extracted, whose upper part of the body was human and the lower part was snake-like. This motif is preserved in folk legends. One of them, "Son of Aldar", mentions three extraordinary creatures with human torsos and serpentine tails instead of legs (PPKOO-1: VI/181).

Targitaos had three sons: Lipoksais (Λιπόξαις), Arpoksais (Ἀρπόξαις) and Kolaksais (Κολάξαις). From them, respectively, came the Scythian tribes:

Avkhats, Katiars, Trasprians and kings (Paralatai, see Herodotus IV, 5–6). Accordingly, the Narts' society was divided into three clans: *Æhsærtæggatæ*, *Borataæ* and *Alægatæ*. The Scythian legend of Targitaos underwent a corresponding refraction in the Nart epic of the Ossetians. According to one legend, the ancestor of the Narts, Wærxæg, is found in a pair combination: Wærxæg and Tarxæg (Bjazyrty 1973: 82). Through a comparison of this relic of Scythian onomastics with the names of the Georgian king Gorgasal and of the legendary ancestor of the Caucasian peoples Targamos, as well as with the Old Iranian onomastics, the Nartologist Dzitstsojty proved the kinship of the terms and established that originally Wærxæg was an epithet of Targitaos (Dzitstsojty 1992: 248f.). El'nickij also wrote about the identity of the names Targitaos and Targamos. Both scholars came to the conclusion that in deep antiquity some fragments of the Scytho-Ossetian epic penetrated into the ancient Georgian mythology (El'nickij 1977: 177).

Herodotus (IV, 5) wrote: "As the Scythians claim, their tribe is the youngest of all the tribes". In the view of many narrators of the Ossetian Nart epic, the Narts are a young people. The legend about the origin of the Narts tells us that God primarily created the *Wadmeritæ* on earth; possessing incredible strength, huge in stature, they could not fit in the gorges, and the earth could not hold them. So he destroyed them and after 300 years created the *Kambadatæ*. They repeated their predecessors, but were incredibly small. Because of this, God destroyed them and 300 years later created the *Gameritæ*. They, again, were too strong and too big. Thus, God destroyed them too and 300 years later created the *Guameritæ*. As not adapted to life, God destroyed them as well and created the giants (*Wajgwytæ*). The latter turned out to be stupid, cruel rapists with wrong body structure (several heads, one eye). After destroying them too, the god created the Narts 300 years later: they proved successful in height and strength and were adapted to life on earth (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: III/659f.). Thus, there is a complete identity of legends about the origin of Scythians and Ossetians.

2 Territory of Settlement

The Scythians were a steppe people. Herodotus and other ancient authors repeatedly mention the vast steppe expanses of Scythia. They used these expanses to defeat the outnumbering Persians.

Like the Scythians, the steppe and sea are the arena of the Narts' exploits and adventures. The steppe wind blows in the legends, one can hear in them

the breath of vast plains, herds of deer, innumerable flocks of horses ... Herodotus repeatedly recalls the harsh winter in the land of the Scythians. The Narts experience the cold season as well. Their coldest month is called *sælaen mæy* (December) – the month of freezing. Herodotus: in the country of the Scythians and Savromats there were neither forests nor trees. They used animal bones to make fire. The country of the Narts is a treeless plain overgrown with thorny bushes. In the legends, the events unfold in the steppe expanses. The Scythians neighbour the sea, are inseparably connected with it, have wide outlets to it and are engaged in seafaring. The Narts' infinite lands also bordered the sea and the edge of the Narts' land was the edge of the inhabited land in general. The Narts are not only closely connected with the sea, but are related to the sea-deity Donbettyr, and his daughter Dzerassæ became the ancestor of the Narts. The rich seafaring vocabulary of Narts' stories is striking. The Narts dwelled on the seashore and, naturally, were also engaged in seafaring.

3 The World Tree

The model of the universe in the Scythian culture was investigated by D. S. Raevsky, who took the artistic symbolism of the golden Scythian pectoral from the Tolstaya Mogila as a basis. This is also evidenced by the Scythian burial mounds, which are considered by scholars to be semantically identical with the world mountain (tree) (Twallagov 2001: 53). This model could be transferred over time to real objects, which, one way or another, became familiar to them. The image of the world mountain (centre) reminds of the altar of Ares built of brushwood. The sword stuck in the centre is a symbol of the *axis mundi* passing through this centre and connecting the upper and lower zones of the universe (Darchiev 2008: 53).

The Scythians represented the world space in three zones: the earth (on which the Scythians and other peoples lived); the sky being the dwelling place of gods and celestials; the water space and the underworld (dwelling places of demonic beings).

In the Narts' stories, the earth is the centre of the universe. The Narts penetrate all parts of it, ascend to the heavens, banquet with the gods, enter the underworld. And the most sacred places in the epic are mountain peaks. Satana with her honey cakes climbs to the summit of Waza-mountain and prays there. Æfsatī resides on the top of the mountain Adai-xox, Wacilla on the top of Tbau-xox, etc. The image of the world tree in the Nart epic is most vividly represented in the famous story of the golden apple of the Narts. The Narts' tree Aza is linked to this image. According to Y. S. Gaglojty, "in the name

of the Aza-tree (Azan) the Nart epic preserved in a transformed form a vague memory of some 'sacred' tree that played an important role in ritual rites of the Indo-Iranians, and the word Aza (Azan) itself goes back to the ancient Iranian **aizma*. Apparently, the creators of the Nart epic did not realize the real meaning of the 'sacred' tree, which was used by Indo-Iranians as a fuel, endowed it with supernatural properties and placed it in the afterlife" (Gaglojti 2010: 354).

4 Tri-functional Division

No matter who and no matter how biased one may view Dumézil's works, his theory of the trifunctionality of Indo-European peoples (and not only) is firmly embedded in science. Dumézil successfully applied his theory of the tripartite social division to the Indo-European world, in particular, to the Scythians and their descendants. Targitaos, the ancestor of the Scythians, had three sons: Kolaksais (warfare), Lipoksais (priesthood) and Arpoksais (farming and cattle breeding). During the reign of Targitaos' sons, golden objects fell on the Scythian land: a plough with a yoke, an axe and a bowl. The yoke with the plough was associated with agriculture and cattle breeding, the axe with military power, and the bowl was given cultic significance.

The purpose of gold gifts can be judged from the response of the Transcaspian Scythians to Alexander the Great: "We have been given gifts by the god – a yoke, a plough, a spear and a bowl. We give fruits obtained with the help of bulls' labour to our friends, together with them we make libations to the gods from the cup, we strike enemies from afar with an arrow and from near with a spear" (El'nickij 1977: 179f.).

The Narts' society was clearly divided into three clans. The *Æxsærtægatæ* were known not for wealth, but for military valour: all famous Narts descended from them. The *Boratæ* were distinguished not by bravery, but by their wealth. The *Alægatæ* fulfil the role of priests. They are not rich, do not take part in campaigns, but all feasts take place at their place; they also keep the cup of *Wacamongæ*.

Traces of the triple social division were also preserved in the Iranian world. In particular, the enmity between Iran and Turan resembles to a certain extent the feud between *Æxsærtægatæ* and *Boratæ*. In both epics the feuding parties are linked by close kinship. Yet another parallel: Yima, the ancestor of kings according to the Avesta, received from Ahuramazda a coulter (plough). On the Scythian land the golden plough was dropped from the sky. The plough was given to the Narts by the celestial smith Kurdalægōn.

5 Fire

The Scythians regarded fire as a reviving, healing and purifying force. They honoured not only the heavenly fire, but also the fire of the hearth as its parcel. It was personified by the goddess Tabiti, who had a high status. The cult of fire can be clearly traced in the tribes of the forest-steppe Scythia, in the funeral ritual of the Saka and Savromat tribes (Guljaev 2005: 306), Sarmatians and Alans.

The Nart epic comprises stories, according to which Narts are born from the fire that appeared between heaven and earth. In some legends, babies born are declared children of the Sun (Twallagov 2001: 80).

6 Wryzmæg and Satana

Satana's birth is miraculous. Her father is the celestial god Wastyrǵy, her mother is Dzerassæ, the daughter of the lord of the water kingdom Donbetyr. In the image of Satana and her mother we see echoes of ancient Iranian myths about the goddess of water and fertility Ardisura Anahita.

In the *Shahnameh* there are images remotely reminding of the Narts' Satana (Sattsæv 2008: 29ff.) together with reminiscent motifs. Satana's unnamed son lives with his mother's kin in the underwater world, Donbetyr. Wryzmæg, unaware of this, inadvertently kills his son. Rustam kills his son Sukhrab, who was also brought up by the relatives of his mother Tahmina in Turan (Sattsæv 2008: 31f.). Wryzmæg and Satana saved the Narts from starvation: using their reserves, Satana organized a glorious feast that lasted for a fortnight. Similarly, Faridun's mother, Faranak, generously gifted and fed the Iranian people (Sattsæv 2008: 30f.). In this story, both women act as stock keepers and distributors, which is characteristic of the early social forms of matriarchy. The Narts threw Satana into the lake of hell. Soslan, having learnt about it, returned home and saved her. The *Shahnameh* mentions the deep lake Chīchast (Av. *Čaēčasta*). Zoroastrians prayed to God to give them luck to capture the Turanian enemies and execute them at this mysterious lake (Sattsæv 2008: 44f.).

Ancient forms of incest between close relatives (in the downward line: father-daughter, mother-son) were respected in Iran and even encouraged by the Zoroastrian religion. The Scythians and other Iranian tribes had similar forms of marriage in ancient times. The most vivid motif, an echo of an ancient custom in the Nart epic is the marriage of a sister and brother – Satana and Wryzmæg, and the marriage of Dzerassæ, the mother of Æxsar and Æxsærtæg, to her grandfather – Wærxæg (Libedinskij 1981: 40f.). This custom

remained in the Nart epic as a vestige from the era before the division of the Aryan tribes.

In a famous Scythian legend, Heracles was caught in the Scythian country by cold and bad weather. Having wrapped himself up, he fell asleep. At that time, his harnessed horses (he had let them graze) miraculously disappeared. In search of horses he came to the country of Gilea, where in a cave he found the Echidna – half-maiden, half-snake (the upper part of her body was female, and the lower part was snake-like). When asked if she had seen the horses, the snake-woman said that she had the horses, but she would not give them back until Heracles had an intercourse with her. Then Heracles, in order to return the horses, united with this woman (Herodotus IV, 8–9).

There is a similar plot in the Ossetian Nart epic. A Nart man Bay lost his herd (flock of horses). From the summit of Waz he began to look at the surroundings, and in the field Kum he saw a black circle. When he arrived at the place, he saw: a huge buffalo snake surrounded his cattle and horses. The snake offered the choice to Bay: “I will return your herds and flocks, but in exchange you must give up to me your new-born son”. Bay gave his son, the buffalo snake turned into the daughter of a khan, whom his son Batyr married. The parallelism between the female snake and the Echidna is manifest. Bay seeks herds and finds them with the snake-woman. Heracles seeks horses and finds them by the Echidna. In a Nart-tale (PPKOO-1: VI/19off.), a huge snake (which at the end of the tale turns out to be a girl) asks a Nart called Bay for a son and the Echidna asks Heracles to marry her. In the Scythian legend the half-woman, half-snake herself provokes the ancient hero for cohabitation. And in the marriage of Satana and Wryzmæg it is the female who seduces. In love Satana achieves her own, as the Echidna gains Heracles by a trick. Dzerassæ’s meeting with the Nart Æxsar, as well as their subsequent marriage, was also, in fact, ultimately caused by her initiative.

In summary: Heracles is the son of Zeus, and Wryzmæg is the head of the race (not less deserving of Zeus’ name); Heracles copulates with the Echidna, and Wryzmæg with Donbetyr’s granddaughter, Satana.

7 Soslán

Of great interest are the parallels related to Soslán, the outstanding hero of the epic, the richest with stories and the most popular figure.

Scythians made fur coats, cloaks, and mops from the scalps of enemies killed in battle. The method of scalping was as follows: an incision was made on the head near the ears, then the hair was grabbed and the head was shaken out of its skin.

Many Scythians stripped all the skin off an enemy corpse, stretched it on planks and then carried it with them on their horses.

Soslan did the same in the Narts' society. Soslan killed a man and skinned him, thus making a whole coat for himself from human scalps. In another legend, girls sew a collar for a fur coat from the scalps of murdered men. In the third, Soslan brings the scalps to the women and tells them to make him a fur coat. The women are in despair, for they recognize the victim: one as her father, the second as her brother and the third as her husband. This archaic custom inherent in nomadic tribes is one of the vivid proofs of the deep antiquity of the Narts' society (Sattsaeu 2008: 46). This motif is not preserved in the Persian epic.

The Alans, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, boast of nothing so much as ornamenting their horses by hanging the severed heads on them. According to Grantovskij, this custom is a link between the Scythian data and the Ossetian epic about the Narts (Grantovskij 1981: 73). Scalping is also found in Balkar and Vainakh legends. This is nothing but the proof of "the existence of two national versions of the same epic motif, which is an echo of the Scytho-Alanian custom of scalping enemies" (Gaglojti 2010: 365).

The ancient Indian sacred texts (Brahmanas) of the Rigveda cycle contain details of the visit of the living to the underworld. There was the lord of the dead, the god Varuna, who was in charge of the torments of hell. Thinking his son Bhrigu too presumptuous, Varuna takes away his breath and allows him to visit hell. Pictures unfold before Bhrigu's eyes which may be called "edifying encounters". The hero cannot comprehend them and turns to his father for clarification. Nart Soslan goes to the Land of the Dead in search of the leaves of the Aza tree. And he had "edifying meetings" and those to whom he could turn for explanations. So, the comparisons are apt.

The god Varuna takes away Bhrigu's breath and enables him to visit hell. Nart Soslan, having obtained permission from Barastyr, goes to the Land of the Dead in search of the leaves of Az. Before Bhrigu's eyes unfold spectacles that can be called "edifying encounters". Soslan travels through the Land of the Dead and sees people in very different positions and circumstances. Bhrigu cannot make sense of the pictures he sees and turns to his father for clarification. Soslan cannot solve some "edifying encounters" and turns to his late wife Bedoxa for explanation (Libedinskij 1981: 164ff.; Dumézil 1976: 78f.). As Dumézil correctly noted, "the parallelism of these two 'Divine Comedies' is so undoubted that the question arises whether both are not based on the same ancient moral-teaching Aryan legend, preserved in India and the Caucasus" (ibid: 79).

Of keen interest is also the comparative analysis of Soslan's image with the Greek-Scythian Heracles and Rama, the hero of the ancient Indian epics

Ramayana and Mahabharata, the seventh descent (*avatāra*) of Vishnu to earth. The correspondences in the motifs and plots associated with these images can be summarized as follows (Vielle 1996: 168ff.):

1. Rama opened up new spaces by his exploits. He broke the bow of Shiva, which none of the pretenders to the hand of the princess had been able to bend before him. Heracles confronts giants, wins victories over monsters, cleanses the earth of them. Diodorus of Sicily in his commentaries on Heracles expressed the idea of purifying and civilizing the space formerly occupied by the monster. Heracles is endowed with the features of a cultural hero. Soslan is also a type of civilizing cultural hero. Through his victories over giants and monsters, he gains new pastures for the Narts.
2. Rama and Heracles correspond to Soslan in their concern for people and in their basic characteristics. Soslan asks to be put in the grave alive in order to be able to do the Narts a favour if necessary. Soslan is a saviour (he saved a starving child kidnapped by an eagle), he is a knight, he does good deeds. Rama and Heracles are favorites of the gods; the gods patronize them. Soslan is a true hero who serves the gods, their assistant. At one of the feasts, he serves them, and the gods are so pleased with him that each bestows a valuable gift on him.
3. Rama and Heracles have a passion for travelling, choosing difficult routes, sometimes to wild frontiers. Soslan left the Nart village early to see the world. He performs extraordinary feats far from the inhabited world. In one legend, he wandered for seven years, maintaining close ties with the animal kingdom. Soslan is constantly on campaigns and in battles. In doing so, he shows great cruelty to the enemy, up to disfiguring, mutilating him. He is capable of mistakes, weaknesses, commits three grave crimes.
4. The main weapon of Rama and Hercules is the bow. Soslan's main tool as a hunter is a bow. The bow was given to him by a mysterious man from Gum. The best confirmation of his divinity is Soslan's bow (*Soslani ænduræ*) – that is how Ossetians still call the rainbow.
5. Rama and Heracles are dressed in furs (animal skins), human skin, supplemented with scalps of giants. Soslan is also dressed in a coat made of scalps, often wearing a coat made of wolf skins.
6. Rama and Heracles are of divine origin: Rama is an incarnation of the Hindu supreme deity; Heracles is the son of the all-powerful Zeus. Soslan, too, has a divine origin. Satana's seducer, i. e. Soslan's father, was Wastyrgý, who had adopted the form and image of a shepherd.
7. Rama makes peace with his rivals, enters into a contract sometime after the death of the antelope Marichi. In turn, Heracles is reconciled with Artemis after hunting a doe. Soslan goes hunting, spots a marvellous deer, and pursues it. But as soon as he takes aim, the deer falls: Soslan is

outdone by another hunter. The quarrel between the hunters ends with reconciliation.

8. Rama marries the princess Sita and undergoes the marriage ordeal for her sake. Heracles accomplishes twelve feats and becomes immortal. Immortality makes it possible for him to reunite with his immortal spouse. Heracles accidentally lit a fire: "When the fire burst into flames and the flames engulfed Heracles, a cloud descended from the sky and carried him with thunder to Olympus, where he was accepted into the immortal host" (Zajtsev 1988: 281f.). Soslan does not look for easy ways to accomplish his feats: he enters his grave alive and from there continues to act, coming to the call of the Narts in critically dangerous situations. Soslan marries the daughter of the Sun after experiencing incredible difficulties.
9. Rama, like Heracles, is synonymous with strength, power. Soslan is a mighty hero, a seeker of glory, who defeats giants incomparably more powerful and strong. In some legends, having defeated all of them, he goes to seek the answer to the question: is there anyone in the world stronger than him?
10. The culprit of Heracles' death is the sister and consort of Zeus, the Olympic goddess Hera. The culprit of Soslan's death is another daughter of the Sun.

All the above parallels leave no doubt that with his basic characteristics Soslan corresponds to the heroes Heracles and Rama. What has been said can be substantiated on other levels of comparison as well (Dumézil 1985: 115ff.). In ancient Indian (Aryan) society, Indra committed three sins: possessing a married woman; winning an unfair fight; killing a Brahman relative. One of the characters of the Arthurian legends, Guinn, kidnapped by force Guitir's wife; captured noble chieftains in an unjust battle; committed a sacrilegious crime (made the son of Nuiton, killed by him, eat his father's heart). The Nart Soslan is sinful too: he demands Totraz's sister to become his bondmaid; he wins a treacherous victory over Totraz; he tramples his mother's dishes with the hoofs of his horse.

8 Soslan – Further Parallels

According to a legend transmitted by (Pseudo-)Plutarch, Mithra wanted a son, but, hating women, he left his seed on a rock, which conceived a son from him named Diorphos (Dumézil 1976: 71). Rustam's father Zal calls the bird Simurgh to help him at his birth. The bird orders to cut the mother's side and take out

the baby through this cut (Sattsæev 2008: 32f.). Soslan is born of stone. A certain shepherd, excited by the beauty of Satan, whom he could not approach because of the wide and swift river that separated them, emitted his seed, and it flew over the waves and struck the stone on which Satana was sitting. She carries the stone to her home, and after a certain period of time calls the Nart blacksmith Kurdalægön, who breaks the stone and takes out the child. Soslan makes a journey to the netherworld. It is not found in *Shahnameh*, but in the Middle Persian literature of religious content there is “The Book of Arda Wirāz”. The holy man Arda Wirāz undertakes a journey to the netherworld, which coincides in many respects with Soslan’s journey (*ibid*: 48f.).

The name of the rainbow in the *Shahnameh* is Rustam’s Bow, and in the Nart epic it is Soslan’s Bow. Soslan is given gifts by the celestials for the Narts. The functions of the Nart celestials in the *Shahnameh* are performed by the First Dynasty, which consisted of 10 kings, who possessed the features of mythological characters. Here there is a consistent development of one and the same ancient Iranian plot. Soslan dies as a result of the revenge of a beautiful woman, the daughter of the Sun, and Siavush perishes as a result of the revenge of the beautiful Sudaba (plot similarity). Siavush’s death occurs at the hands of the scoundrel Garui, and Soslan’s – from the Wheel of Balsag. Soslan drove the hungry cattle of the Narts to the lands of the giant Mukar on the shore of the Black Sea in a fierce winter: the Narts were deathly afraid of entering the giant’s lands. Soslan fought the giant. With great difficulty he managed to defeat Mukar and to return the herd to the Nart village. Similar country in *Shahnameh* is called Mazanderan: none of the rulers went to war to this beautiful land. Only thanks to Rustam the Iranian troops and the ruler escaped death. Both heroes, however strong they are, do not succeed without cunning and sorcery, without the help of others to gain the upper hand over the enemy (*ibid*: 44f.).

The parallels between Soslan and Cu Chullain, one of the main characters of Irish sagas, are interesting. The goddess Morrigen, rejected by Cu Chullain, takes revenge on him by bewitching his chariot before the fatal battle. Soslan’s death occurs as a result of a collision with the Balsag Wheel, which was sent against him by the daughter of the Sun whom he had rejected, the sister of his own wife Agundæ.

Birds fly to Cu Chullain and Soslan to drink blood. Both of them make a journey to the netherworld (Dumézil 1990: 95f.).

The story of Soslan’s perish finds parallels in medieval Western Europe. Here, the feast of the Sun was arranged, symbolized by a huge burning wheel. In Lorraine it was rolled down from the top of a hill, and it had to roll down and go into the Moselle River. The rite, known throughout Western Europe,

was held on the days of the summer solstice. The counterpart of the sun-wheel in the Nart epic is the Wheel of Balsag. It is a cogged wheel of enormous size, engulfed in flames. On its way it turns to ashes the trees that prevent it from running. It rolls through forests and valleys all the way to the Black Sea, where it falls into the water, as the sun-wheel in Lorraine fell into the Moselle River.

The ancient Greeks laid siege to Troy and succeeded by resorting to a stratagem involving a wooden horse with a troop of warriors climbing inside. Soslan besieges the fortress of Gori, but cannot succeed. In the end, he wins by cunning, lying inside a specially stabbed and gutted bull (Libedinskij 1981: 205f.). The second example, confirming the first one, is from the Abkhazian Nart epic. Patraz says: "Wrap me in a cow skin and throw me into the fortress" (Ossetian: "Tie me to an arrow and shoot me"). The two variants, i.e., both the Trojan horse and the bull skin, are nothing but folklore echoes of ancient shamanic practice.

There is much in common in the images of Soslan and the knight Gawain of the Arthurian cycle. Gawain's power grows from dawn to noon and disappears at sunset. He also travelled to the netherworld; he is endowed with the traits of magic. Like Gawain, in fighting his enemies, Soslan gains victories while the Sun is at its zenith, and he makes a journey to the Land of the Dead. Soslan is endowed with magical properties: he is a sorcerer.

The image of Soslan can also be compared with Apollo. The solar deity of the Scythians is transmitted by Herodotus in the Greek form as Apollo, the Olympic god, son of Zeus and Leto. This god has a solar nature, which is, however, compounded by archaic and chthonic features. Soslan is also a solar deity: he triumphs necessarily at noon and he is the husband of the daughter of the Sun. Soslan's grave is located near the village of Matsuta. The Digorians celebrate him at the beginning of the third decade of June, when the summer solstice occurs.

Batraz. The image of Batraz, the second most important hero of the Nart epic, allows us to draw many parallels with Ares, Arthur, Lancelot and other famous mythological characters.

Every year, the Scythians of one district brought 150 bundles of brushwood and piled them on top of each other. At the top they arranged a quadrangular platform, three sides of which were steep, and the fourth had access. On each such hill there was an ancient iron sword. This was the idol of Ares, to whom sacrifices were made every year (Herodotus IV, 62). Enraged at the Narts, Batraz demanded that they prepare 100 wagons of charcoal for him, get 24 pairs of blacksmith's bellows, set up a huge forge with a hearth and start blowing. Batraz, whose body was made of steel, made himself white-hot. Then he threw himself into the sea, hardened himself and returned to slay the Narts.

According to another version, Batraz told the Narts to gather thorns, formed of them a huge mountain, and climbed it.

Essentially, Ares is a weapon: it is a case of a deity personified by or merging with its weapon. Batraz is also a hero-weapon, an arrow-god, a sword-god. Batraz and his sword are one and the same. The best proof of this is that Batraz could only die in this world when his sword is thrown into the sea. A special study by ethnologist A. V. Darchiev is focused on the cult of Ares and, in general, to the Scythian military cult and its traces in the Ossetian Nart epic. His conclusion is that the cult of Ares has ancient Indo-Iranian origins (Darchiev 2008: 55). The name of Batraz' grandfather, *Æxsar*, is also associated with the sword. *Æxsar* was known, above all, as the owner of a sword forged from a piece of celestial ore that fell from the sky: it is still called *æxsargard* (sword of *Æxsar*). The above parallels between the Arthurian and Batraz' legends are so transparent that it is unlikely that this similarity can be explained by mere coincidence.

Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table spend whole periods of their lives by the lakes, or are even brought up there. In the same way, for many Narts, the underwater kingdom of Donbetyr is almost their home. "In many ways", Reid points out, "Batraz is Arthur *in extremis* ... Not only is he brought up by the divine woman underwater, but she gives him his sword, too, just happens to Lancelot" (Reid 2001: 220).

Very similar are also the stories of the hardening of Arthur and Batraz. Arthur orders his faithful companion to throw his sword Excalibur into the lake. Twice Griflet tries to deceive Arthur by throwing his own sword into the lake and then the scabbard of Arthur's sword. The king, who possesses secret knowledge, does not allow himself to be deceived. Then Griflet throws Arthur's sword into the lake and sees: a hand appeared from the lake, grabbed Excalibur, shook it three or four times, then disappeared. This is how the finale of Arthur's life is described. And here is a motif from the Nart epic, which also shows the mystical connection of the sword with its master. Batraz ordered the Narts to throw his sword into the sea, for the hero could not die until his sword was thrown into the sea. The Narts could not move the sword and decided to deceive him that the sword had already been thrown into the sea. Batraz, not believing, asked them: what miracles occurred when the sword fell into the waves. "None", they answered confusedly. "Then my sword was not thrown into the sea, otherwise you would have seen miracles", was Batraz' reply. When the Narts, having harnessed thousands of draught animals, brought the sword to the sea and threw it, the waves immediately rose, a hurricane began, the sea boiled, then became red with blood. When the astonished Narts ran to Batraz and told him what they had seen, he lost his breath.

And, finally, the word Escalibur (from *caliburn*) is derived from the Latin word for steel. It comes from a Greek word derived from the name of a famous tribe of Khalib smiths, the name of a part of the Sarmatians who lived in the Caucasus. "So", concludes Reid, "the name of Arthur's very own magic sword is linked directly to the greatest sword-makers of Sarmatia" (ibid: 221). A comparative study of the main characters of the Arthurian cycle of legends and the Nart epic (Arthur-Batraz) was undertaken by J. Grisward. The author found multiple correspondences between the epic of the island Celts and the Ossetian one, which turned out to be so precise and striking that they cannot be accidental (Dumézil 1990: 11). Grisward managed to draw a convincing parallel between the Nart Batraz and the hero of Irish Sagas Cu Chullain (the conception of Cu Chullain and Batraz, the birth of Batraz and Cu Chullain's vats of water, the childhood of the heroes, Batraz' exploits and Cu Chullain's adventures, Cu Chullain's and Batraz' tricks etc.). These correspondences are explained by Grisward as a common heritage rather than borrowing (Grisward 1969: 289ff.).

Close mythological parallels are also observed in the images of Batraz and Indra. Batraz is the "sword hero", closely associated with thunder and lightning, wind and whirlwinds. The thunder-like theophany is repeated throughout his life. Evidence of his closeness to thunder is that among the Narts he is the only one who uses his body as a projectile. Indra is a formidable god of war and lord of lightning. His mother did not want to bring him into the world. Indra spent in the mother's womb "thousands of months and many autumns" (RV IV.18.4). Batraz was not delivered by his mother, his foetus having been transferred to the back of his father, the Nart Xæmyc.

With one of the central Shahnameh figures, Rustam, Batraz has his unusual birth in common. Rustam was taken out of his mother's womb with a knife. The infant turned out to be a giant, as mighty as an elephant, and could barely be fed by ten nurses (Sattsaev 2008: 20, 55f.). We have already mentioned above Batraz' miraculous birth and his extraordinary strength. Similarities can be traced in the stories of Batraz' seizure of the fortress of Gori and the capture of the ogre's abodes by Rustam (both enterprises required great effort and ingenuity). Rustam vows to avenge his enemies for the death of Siavush. Like him, Batraz avenges his father's blood by threatening to force Satana to tell him the truth. And what is characteristic: both Rustam and Batraz take revenge on those also, who were indirectly responsible for the deaths of Siavush and Xæmyc. Rustam, bleeding to death, manages to kill his enemy Shagad. Batraz manages to destroy a considerable number of celestials and Narts even after his death. The motif of god-fighting is also similar in the two epic heroes compared. Also, Rustam leaves his native Sistan at the moment of danger and comes to the defence of Iranians. Batraz stays in the sky at Kurdalægon and comes down to earth when the Narts need protection and help.

There are also motifs that unite Batraz with other heroes of *Shahnameh*. Thus, many of them are brought up in their mothers' families (traces of matriarchy). Batraz spends his childhood at sea, at the home of his relatives. The similarity is genetic in nature. Faridun fights the foreign king, tyrant Zahhak and frees two beautiful sisters. Fulfilling Akula's order, Batraz rescued his grandfather and two beautiful girls (daughters of the Sun and the Moon) from the clutches of Kandzargas. A striking similarity, dating back to the times of Iranian unity (*ibid*: 64f.).

9 Syrdon

There is much in common between him and Ahriman, the *alter ego* of the supreme deity of Iran, Ohrmazd. However, Ahriman does only evil and never comes to the aid of the Iranians. In contrast, Syrdon, though a werewolf, can do good deeds, saving the Narts.

At Indra's wish, the secret place where the cows were sheltered was discovered by the dog Sarama. The secret dwelling place of Syrdon was discovered by Xæmyc with the help of Syrdon's dog. He spotted it and caught it by the rope. But the dog did not run to Syrdon's house, he did not want to give away his master. And only after Xæmyc had beaten it half to death, the dog ran to Syrdon's secret house (Libedinskij 1981: 215ff.).

Dumézil draws very interesting parallels between Loki (Scandinavian sagas) and Syrdon. All the features of Loki are found in Syrdon and all the features of Syrdon in Loki: the fact that the "useful" beginning in both images coexists with the "harmful" and that the great crime and the great punishment constitute the outcome of their lives (Dumézil 1976: 127ff.). Alain Christol's work "Syrdon and Odysseus" contains quite a number of common elements in the images of the compared characters: "an unknown father, or paternal branch belonging to a low social class; the importance of the maternal line, which is characterized by cunning and magic; living on the edge of the inhabited world in a secret dwelling; the ability to reincarnate into other people or animals; the dual attitude of the other heroes towards him, both positive, when he helps to avoid danger, and negative, when he builds intrigues that can either make them look ridiculous or endanger their lives" (Christol 2003: 157f.).

10 Acæmæz

The central figure of one of the small cycles of the Ossetian Nart epic is Acæmæz. Sattsæv made interesting observations comparing Acæmæz with

Faridun, one of the heroes of *Shahnameh*. Acæmæz finds out from his mother the secret of his father's death, after which he takes cruel revenge on the murderer; he bleeds to death, but he is miraculously saved by his enemy's wife, who fell in love with him. Faridun also elicits the information about his father's death from his mother and then takes dire revenge on the murderer Zahhak. The plot motif of revenge in the Nart epic and *Shahnameh* is so similar that one can see common plot roots dating back to the time of Iranian unity (Sattsæv 2008: 80).

11 Belief in the Afterlife

The Scythians regarded the afterlife as a continuation of the earthly life. Therefore, when sending the deceased on his last journey, they provided him with everything he needed like his precious weapons, household items etc. The Narts retained the same idea of the afterlife. Dying, the Nart Soslan demanded that he be shown all his burial clothes made of "precious silk". He even demanded that they put these clothes on him and put him in the coffin alive. Soslan's journey to the Land of the Dead testifies to the same. With the permission of Barastyr (the lord of the netherworld), the dead could visit the earthly world, which many of them took advantage of.

The corpse of the king was embalmed by the Scythians and exposed in a funeral chariot to all the formerly subject nations. At the end of the ceremony, he was buried in a grave and a mound was poured as high as possible. "Other Scythians, when they die, are taken by their relatives on wagons to their friends for 40 days and then buried" (Herodotus IV, 71–73). The Narts decided to bury the boy Alimbek of the *Atsatæ* family, who died at the hands of Sozryko, in an unusual cemetery where the most glorious and honourable elders were buried. Consequently, the noble Narts were buried separately and barrows were built for them.

Not only close relatives, but also all acquaintances took a lively part in mourning the deceased among Scythians. Herodotus writes: "They cut off a piece of their ear, cut off the hair on their head in a circle, make a circular cut on their hand, scratch their forehead and nose and pierce their left hand with arrows" (Herodotus IV, 71). The legend "Soslan's Death" tells about the Narts mourning for the dying Soslan: the men scratch their faces and cheeks out of grief, the women tear their hair (Libedinskij 1981: 191).

According to Herodotus, the corpses of horses were placed around the tomb of a Scythian king to accompany him to the afterlife. They were strangled, gutted, cleaned and stuffed with chaff, sewn up; then they were placed on stakes

(Herodotus IV, 72). In order to get out of the Land of the Dead, Soslan is advised by Syrdon to find the best horse in the herd, slaughter it and cleanse it of its entrails. Soslan found such a horse, who advised him: "As soon as I am dead, you quickly but carefully skin me and stuff it with straw. Then sit on horseback of my effigy ...". On such a dead horse stuffed with straw, Soslan tried to get out of the Land of the Dead, but shot by devils, the stuffed horse was burnt (Libedinskij 1981: 182).

The rite of dedicating a horse was known throughout the Indo-Iranian world. But perhaps the Scythians surpassed all the others. They sacrificed a horse to all solar and other deities, as well as to the people of the highest social ranks. The Scythian royal burial mounds are astonishing with an untold number of horse burials.

Broken chariots were found in the burials of the Scythians and Sarmatians. They used two halves of the wheel to reinforce stuffed horses around the burials of Scythian kings. The Scythians closed the entrance to their burial places with the wheel from the wagons. When Soslan died, Batraz dug up the grave, took out the wheel of Balsag, split it into two parts and brought it to Soslan's grave. He stuck it in the ground as a monument (Libedinskij 1981: 19, 193).

Military valour. Right hand. Herodotus wrote: "Out of every hundred captives, one man is condemned to be sacrificed, not in the same way as cattle, but according to a different rite ... the right shoulders and arms of the stabbed victims are cut off and thrown into the air" (Herodotus IV, 62). Herodotus' report is confirmed by archaeology. A Sarmatian gold fibula from the turn of the AD was found in Kuban region (Zubrovsky barrow). It bears a moustached male head, and to the left is a severed right hand with a forearm (Jatsenko 1992: 78).

After cutting off the head of his father's murderer, Sajnæg-ældar, the nart Batraz cut off his right hand and took it with him so that the Narts would believe him. But the Narts did not bury anyone with the mutilated body, and Satana asked Batraz to take it back. Batraz went to the house of Sajnæg-ældar. "Batraz entered, paid the honours befitting a dead man, and laid the severed hand on his breast, saying: "May the earth rejoice in your ashes! You killed my father, and I avenged him, and the vengeance is done. Here is thy hand!" (Libedinskij 1981: 290). This motif is also present in the legend of Totraz. Having obtained a permission to leave temporarily the netherworld, he defeated Soslan and cut off his right hand. There are also incantations on this theme in the epic. Soslan says: "Let the Narts eat my right hand" (Libedinskij 1981: 164). Having shot a game, a Narts' hunter would give his right shoulder blade to the first person he met. The motive of cutting off the right arm is found in Ossetian folk legends.

It is known from the annals of history that women warriors lived in Asia Minor and on the shores of the Sea of Azov. While plundering in the Scythian

domains, they mixed with them and from their marriage came the Sarmatians (Savromats). The Sarmatians had many female warriors. There are also burials of women warriors with weapons. They were horsewomen; they had no right breast. The custom of burning of the right breast is ascribed to Savromats and Amazons by the ancient authors Hippocrates, Strabo, Diodorus of Sicily. As Flavius of Syracuse reported, among the captured Sarmatians taken by Romans, there were ten women disguised in men's clothes. This is vividly reflected in the Nart epic. Batraz threatened Satana: if she would not tell him who had killed his father, he would burn her chest (Abaev 1945: 16). The Andian versions of Nart legends contain a story about a brave daughter of Dargafsar who gathered a detachment of girls and successfully fought against the Wajyg giants. The maidens fight in men's clothes (Tuganov 1977: 134ff.). In the story "The Death of Barkhun, son of Noz" we read:

The arrow and sword are familiar to the maidens of steel.
 Everyone shot a bow without missing a shot,
 Preparing tirelessly for battle,
 They were inspired by the future vengeance. (Abaev et al. 1957: 40)

The cup of honour played an important role in Scythian mythology and religion. Bronze cups were found in Scythian burials. Among the golden gifts that fell on the Scythians' land there was a golden cup. "... Once a year each governor of a province brews a bowl of wine in his own province, which those Scythians who have slain enemies drink; those who have not achieved this do not taste this wine but sit apart dishonored; and this they consider a very great disgrace; but as many as have slain not one but many enemies have two cups apiece and drink out of both" (Herodotus IV, 66). The Sarmatians and Alans have preserved this custom.

The cup of the Narts called *Wacamongæ* ("the pointer") had a miraculous property: it is honoured to those who tell a true story about their exploits. Who does not lie, the cup itself miraculously rises to his lips. The most frequent recipient of this honour was the Nart Batraz (Libedinskij 1981: 267f.). Something similar is preserved in Balkar legends. In the Ossetian Nart legends, the most honoured guests received an glass of honour (*nuazæn*) from the hands of Satana and other hosts.

The search for parallels takes us back to antiquity. Dumézil noted that "in the cults of Indo-Iranians sacred drinks, and, therefore, cups and goblets, play a paramount role" (Dumézil 1976: 46). Researchers draw a parallel with Iranian mythology: the magic cup of Jamshid, which manifests its properties only on the holiday Nowruz (Sattsæev 2008: 61f.). The bowl of the Narts of *Wacamongæ* had a religious status. It was kept at the family of sages and

priests – Alagataē. “In world folklore the motif of the miraculous cup is often found, but numerous parallels mostly do not go back to common genetic roots. As for Ossetian-Iranian parallels, the similarity is clearly genetic in nature. Its roots can go back to the times of Indo-European community. In the epics of many Indo-European peoples, the miraculous cup often fulfilled almost the same functions as in the Nart epic and the *Shahnameh*” (ibid: 63).

The functions of the cup in Arthurian legends and Nart stories are very similar. “It has often been surmised that this cup originally served Christ and the apostles at the Last Supper. ... Since the Grail and its accompanying sacred weapons are only tolerated by the infallible in chastity, any unworthy person who approaches the shrine is punished with wounds and ailments, but can expect deliverance from the same holy thing” (Averintsev 1988: 317). Although Wacamongæ is not related to Christianity, the hero also fights for possession of the sacred cup at feasts. In both traditions this honour is bestowed only on the most flawless, the hero without blemish. The cup is the “determiner” of valour and heroism, the exposé of lies and the evaluator of the degree and quality of the Narts’ deeds. Wacamongæ is like a lie detector: its appearance at the speaker’s lips is considered confirmation of a truthful story. Wacamongæ does not move when Soslan and Xæmyc speak. And Lancelot is denied possession of the Grail (because of his unwise association with Guinevere).

The Scythians had several ways to perform the rite of sworn brotherhood. Two Scythians, performing the rite, mixed their own blood into a bowl of wine. Sword, arrows, axe and spear were dipped into the cup. After swearing an oath (to protect each other in battle, without sparing themselves), those about to become sworn brothers drank from this cup a mixture of wine and blood (Herodotus IV, 70). It was believed that human blood had mystical powers, strengthening the deepest bonds of brotherhood.

Another way to swear brotherhood by the Scythians was as follows. They cut their fingers, collected the dripping blood into a cup and, having exposed the points of their swords, both of them, holding each other, drank from it. And, finally, the third way: the sworn brothers filled a glass with drinks, threw silver coins into it, and each drank from the glass three times, swearing allegiance.

The concept of sworn brotherhood occurs in the Nart epic quite frequently. Acæmæz’ father Acæ died in a duel with the kidnapper of his sworn brother’s wife Nasran-ældar (Dzagurov 1925: 3ff.). Wryzmæg’s twin was Wærp-ældar (Shanaev 1876: 22, nn. 1, 2). Legends and epic preserved the memory of more complicated ceremonies of twinning: mixing the blood of both participants in a glass, solemn oath over the fire (Abaev 1949: 571), touching the chest, etc.

The Scythians rewarded with cruel taunts the one who died of accidental diseases. When a Scythian reached the age of 60, he was taken outside the gate and killed, or thrown off a bridge. According to Consultus Fortunatianus (*Ars*

rhetorica 1.14), a Scythian in Athens threw his 60-year-old father off a bridge and was accused of patricide. He replied that he had done it according to the custom of his tribe (Latyshev 1890–1906: 1/387). Ritual murder of old men was committed by the Massagetae and Issedones (Herodotus IV, 26). There is a similar plot motif in the Persian epic *Shahnameh*; a demon (*dīv*) tries to incite Zahhak to kill his elderly father.

When the old man reached the age of 60, the Narts held a last feast in his honour, after which they put him in a basket of brushwood and rolled him off a cliff. The aged, helpless Wryzmæg asks the Narts to make a large strong chest, put him in the chest and throw him into the sea. According to Sattsæv, “the roots of the story of contempt for old age and natural death should be sought in the Scythians or even in the Aryans. On the Caucasian soil, this custom disappears among the Ossetians and is preserved only in the epic” (Sattsæv 2008: 39).

Cauldron. The Scythian king Ariantes, wishing to know the number of the population, collected one arrowhead from each of them and ordered to make a huge copper vessel with a capacity of 600 amphorae, which was placed in an area called “Sacred Ways” near the altar of Ares. According to Herodotus, the Scythians cooked sacrificial animals in huge cauldrons (Herodotus IV, 81).

The story “Wastyrǵy and the Noseless Marguz” also speaks about the presence of a huge cauldron among the Narts. From the top of the mountain Wastyrǵy saw something huge on the earth, which he mistook for the sun. “This is not the sun”, Marguz answers him, “this is a copper cauldron, but such a cauldron that a drink once brewed in it lasts for seven years, and therefore every day no matter how much you drink, the cauldron becomes fuller and fuller ... The treasure of our ancestors was this big cauldron, but the Donbettys took it away from us by force” (Libedinskij/Kulov 1948: 474).

The horse, a domestic animal of huge importance, played an exceptionally large role in the mythology of the Indo-Iranian peoples and in the Nart epic. The horse appeared in the life of Indo-Iranians in ancient times, in their ancestral homeland. Its cult spread to their descendants, including the Scythians. A Scythian who did not have a horse lost his authority in the society. The Scythians periodically organized horse races (for long and short distances).

There are many illustrations in the legends about the high importance of the horse in the life of a Nart. Nart’s races attracted a huge mass of people, and it was a wonderful spectacle. According to the epic, the gods also competed with the Narts at the races. Little Totraz and Acæmæz went straight from their cradles to the stables, found their fathers’ horses and prepared them to fight their enemies. The first goal in daring attacks was to steal horses.

In Indo-European mythology, the horse is a celestial phenomenon, it is a deity equal to the angels. Ares' horses have parents: Boreas, i. e. the deity of the north wind, and the goddess Erinys. The ancestor of the Scythians was the daughter of the Dnieper, an echidna, a half-snake, half-maiden. Like her, the Nart Dzerassæ (patroness of waters, vegetation and fertility) was the daughter of Donbettyr, the lord of waters. The foal born to Dzerassæ from her marriage to Wastyrgý became the ancestor of horses and at the same time the companion of Wryzymæg, the head of the Narts.

Winged (magic) horse is a common Indo-European mythological image. In Greek myths it is represented primarily by Pegasus, the son of the Gorgon Medusa and Poseidon. Besides, Sun god Helios crosses the sky sitting on a golden quadriga driven by winged horses (e. g. calyx-crater No. 1867,0508.1133 of the British Museum):



The image of a winged horse, popular among the Scythians, is recorded on the Chertomlyk vase and on gold plates from the Bolshaya Bliznitsa and Kul-Oba barrows. The winged heavenly horse is widely represented in Tajik folklore (Kuz'mina 1985: 40) and, finally, in the Nart legends. "The sons of Telberd have winged horses, and they fly between heaven and earth" (Libedinskij 1981: 122f.). The horses rush their riders above the clouds, and their strength is equal to the

storm. Nart Xamyc' horse, white as a swan, flies through the air like a kite, out-running the wind. Soslan's three-year-old horse flies like a bird between heaven and earth. Wacilla sits on a fiery chariot pulled by fiery winged horses. "Dzyla's son went to the attic, found there a dry horsehide, shook it three times, as the sorceress showed him, prayed to God, and in a flash the hide turned into a winged horse" (ibid: 345).

In the epic, winged horses fly across the sky like birds. The Scythian mythology was characterized by the notion of a horse-bird. The likening of a horse to a bird is recorded in the inventory of the Kul-Oba and Bolshaya Bliznitsa burial mounds. Among the items discovered by archaeologists in the tombs of the Saks and Sarmatians there are items depicting eagle-headed horses.

The Iranians often associated the horse with the sun as its attribute or as a solar symbol. The horse was considered the best sacrificial animal for gods. Its role in the cosmogony of the Scythians, both the western (those of Herodotus) and the eastern (Saka of Achaemenids), was very significant. The Massagetae considered the sun alone as a god and sacrificed horses to it. The best illustration of the connection between the horse and the sun in the Nart epic is the presence of a special breed of horses: *Xury bæxtæ* (horses of the sun).

The Indo-Europeans, including the Scythians, always had white (silver) horses dedicated to the gods. A white horse was sacrificed to the king. The Avesta refers to the king riding on a chariot drawn by white horses. The best horses of the Narts are always white in colour. Wryzmæg's horse *Ærfæn* is white. In some tales the same name is attributed to a celestial. As a rule, a white horse was dedicated to the deceased.

Archaeologists found images of three-legged horses in Pazyryk (Altay mountains), as well as in the Don region. Quite often the horse Wastyrǵy is depicted as three-legged (Libedinskij/Kulov 1948: 15f.). Many peoples associated three-legged horses with the water element. The mythical horse swims like a fish. A water horse, sometimes winged, dwells in waters. In the Nart epic there are horses with fish tails. This is a special breed belonging to the deity of sunlight. Narts' heroes perform their feats on such horses.

Horses are in many respects human-like. Indra's horse bears the epithet "dragon-killer" and tramples down serpents. According to the description of Pliny the Younger, a Scythian leader died in one battle. When the enemy approached his dead rival to take his weapons from him, the horse clobbered him with its hooves. Scythian antiquities preserve images: a rider striking a boar, fighting a lion, etc. Mythical horses have human qualities: they can talk, advise, think. Scythian horses, outwardly unsightly, seem slow, but they do not know fatigue, they are enduring and defeat outwardly taller, more attractive horses. In Narts' legends, the horse acts on a par with the hero, equal to him in

strength and imagination. Sozryko's horse is clever. Wyrzymæg's horse talks. Xæmyc' horse, white as a swan, flies through the air like a kite, outrunning the wind. Soslan's three-year-old horse flies between heaven and earth. Batraz' horse tramples on enemies and gives good advice. The horse participates in battles with its rider, talks to him, and in case of death takes him home. The horse can show the way, does not spare himself. During the battle, teaches the rider how to take away the enemy's weapons, is able to gallop both on the ground, in the sky and under the ground. On the advice of his horse, Batraz dirties its muzzle so that his appearance would scare away the enemy's horse (Dzhykkajty 2009: 20).

In Greek myths, Hades, the lord of the land of the dead, has immortal horses. They are harnessed in a golden chariot, and it is hard to stop them. The Ossetian lord of the dead, Barastyr, has immortal horses. He gives his horse to Wadynz to ascend to the terrestrial world. In some legends, the horse is a product of subterranean forces. Horses nurtured by devils have fabulous properties; with them the owner feels confident. A pupil of subterranean forces, the horse of Totraz, can move in the underworld. Soslan's horse, wounded on the battlefield, says: "Take off my skin and stuff it with straw. Then sit on my effigy and, who knows, maybe I will carry you home" (Libedinskij 1981: 182f.).

Deer. The Scythians had cult hymns about the god-ancestor, the man-deer. The Scythians associated the deer with the belief in resurrection, rebirth, revival of the killed beast. Griffin-like animals with a human head and deer antlers were found in Scythian burials. The Scythians appreciated such qualities of the deer as strength and swiftness. That is why its images are discovered in many finds, including the famous golden deer with 18 branches on its antlers. The Nart epic mentions *æstdæssiun sagtæ* (18-horned reindeer) too. The Scythians and Sarmatians have preserved the cult of the celestial deer. The Narts, for whom the deer was also a symbol of beauty and grace, covered vast air spaces and ascended to the gods on celestial deer.

Music and dance. The Scythians had their own music and musical instruments. Three- and nine-stringed harps have been found in barrows. According to a number of scholars, Scythian harps came from the east (Altai, Central Asia). The image of a woman with a nine-stringed harp on a fragment of the Airtam Frieze from Uzbekistan, the discovery of images of people playing harp during the excavations in Khorezm by S. P. Tolstov, as well as fragments of wooden harps found in Pazyryk, testify that the harp was a workable musical instrument among the Scytho-Sarmatian tribes from the Altai Mountains to Central Asia (Tolstov 1948: 177f.; Rudenko 1960: 62f.; Kaloev 1999: 142). Harps were also discovered by archaeologists in catacomb burials belonging to the Sarmato-Alanian tribes.

The harp (especially the 12-string harp) is widely represented in the Nart epic of the Ossetians. It was made by Syrdon under circumstances vividly reminiscent of the story of the Median boy. According to Herodotus, the Scythians cut into pieces a Median boy, who had learnt archery from them, in order to feed Cyaxares (Herodotus I, 73). Nart Syrdon stole a cow from Xæmyc, slaughtered it, cut it into pieces and began to boil it in a cauldron. Suspecting Syrdon of what he had done, Xæmyc sneaked into his secret underground dwelling, where he found Syrdon's young sons. When he saw the meat of his cow being boiled in a cauldron, he took out the meat and in return threw the chopped-up limbs of Syrdon's sons into the cauldron. When Syrdon returned home and saw this, he took out the bones and veins of his sons, made a 12-stringed *fændyr* (harp) from them and presented it to the Narts as a gift (Libedinskij 1981: 213 ff.). The ancient harp still lives in Ossetian musical culture today.

As the Scythians possessed musical instruments, they could not do without dancing. This is evidenced by archaeology. The Scythian Besputsky gravestone of the 4th century BC reflects funeral and memorial rites: the image of a man dancing on his toes. Judging by the painting No. 2 of Scythian Naples, funeral dances were known to the later Scythians as well (Vysotskaja 1976: 70). Correspondingly, dancing is one of the Narts' favorite pastimes. In their free time from trekking, they willingly gave themselves to the dance. When Soslan got to the other world, the first thing he met were girls dancing *simd*. The Narts usually performed their dances, called *simd*, on mountain tops or on the roof of Alægatæ's house. The dance during matchmaking with Agundæ (Akula). Acæmæz opens all hearts with his whistle playing: one could not listen to his playing and not dance. The Black Mountain and the White Mountain went dancing. And the guests went dancing. Spreading wide their branchy horns, a hundred one-year-old deer danced on the stone courtyard with a fractional clatter. When they got up from the wedding table, "then the glorious Narts went one after another into a merry dance to the marvellous playing of the whistle, and everyone clapped their hands. Here on the edge of the round table they danced, here on the edges of the big beer bowl they danced" (Libedinskij 1981: 305). Once Wryzsmæg was returning from a hunt, and suddenly he saw "all the valiant Narts gathered on the top of the Black Mountain dancing *simd* there, such a *simd* that the mountains crumble, the age-old trees in the dense forests shudder, and cracks run down their mighty trunks. The earth shakes under the feet of dancing Narts". And there are many such colourful scenes in the legends.

As one can see, the Narts were passionate lovers of music, dances and songs. The combination of militancy with a special love of music, songs and dances is one of the characteristic features of Nart heroes. As Abaev put it, the sword

(thirst for exploits) and the *fandyr* (bawdy fun) are a double symbol of the Nart people (Abaev 1945: 98ff.).

12 Conclusion

The above parallels between the Scythian world and the Nart epic are, firstly, far from complete. Secondly, our attention was focused only on the phenomena of the Scythian and Indo-European world, which are reflected in the Nart epic; we did not touch upon the Scythian-Ossetian ethnographic coincidences, which are even more impressive and comprise a wider range of parallels. Nevertheless, the above provides grounds for conclusions and generalizations.

1. The Nart epic is consistently connected with the Scythian world. The above-quoted statement of Dumézil about the Scythian-Sarmatian nucleus in the formation of the Nart epic, as well as the well-known conclusion of Abaev that “The origins of the epic lead to the legends of the North Iranian tribes, Scythians, Sarmatians, and Alans” (Abaev 1982a: 79), remain true and unshakable both in their scientific validity and argumentation. In the light of new research on Nartology and Indo-European mythology, the view that the Caucasus was the birthplace of the Narts’ sagas is becoming increasingly vulnerable, unprovable, does not stand up to serious scientific criticism, and, most likely, is an attempt to pass off wishful thinking as reality. In another work, Dumézil clearly expresses the opinion that the core of the Narts’ legends “came from Ossetia, but these peoples (Caucasian, L.Ch.) enriched them with new episodes and new heroes” (Dumézil 1990: 9). The same opinion is held by another researcher, J. Grisward: “Ces légendes des Ossètes du Nord ont, en effet, débordé chez leurs voisins (Tcherkesses, Tatars, Abkhazes, Tchétchènes-Ingouches) où elles ont été adoptées, souvent adaptées, mêlées ou refondues” (Grisward 1969: 297, n. 3). Only Ossetians know the full history of the Narts: “the Nart cycle of the Ossetians is richer and more structured than that of the Circassians” (Dumézil 1976: 26). This is also evidenced by the fact that “several groups of Narts’ legends and some images of Narts apparently came out of the Alanian, Sarmatian-Scythian, ‘Euro-Iranian’, i.e. ultimately Ossetian fund” (ibid: 26f.). The names of the main characters of the epic (Wærxæg, Wryzmæg, Æxsar, Æxsærtæg) are of Iranian origin. The famous American scholar John Colarusso (Littleton/Malcor 2000: xix) and others consider Ossetians as the main bearers of the Nart epic.

2. Parallels from the Nartiad lead to the Scythians, but they are not limited to them. As new research shows, comparative analysis reveals a rather curious (sometimes striking) commonality of many images and plots of the Ossetian Nart epic not only with the European but also with the Indo-Iranian world. The vivid images of the prominent Narts Soslan and Batraz are sufficient to illustrate this. They allow drawing parallels with Iranian, Indo-European, Greek, Celtic and Scandinavian characters. The question arises: If the core of the epic was formed on Caucasian soil, how could the above parallels from Scandinavian and Irish antiquities to ancient Indian (Aryan) mythology be possible (Soslan – Rama, Soslan – Indra, Soslan – Varuna, Soslan – Heracles, Soslan – Havain and Guinn, Soslan – Apollo; Batraz – Indra, Batraz – Rustam, Batraz – Ares, Batraz – Arthur and Lancelot, Batraz – Cu Chullain; Syrdon – Ahriman, Syrdon – Loki, Syrdon – Odysseus, etc.)? The Ossetian epic preserved in various forms its own historical facts, everyday historical traditions from the life of the Scytho-Sarmatian world, outside of which there is no special reason to look for any additional information. Yet, let us repeat, the epic preserves in its basis a slender religious and mythological system of the Northern Iranian world of nomads. The process of formation of the Ossetian Nart epic, to all appearances, was interrupted by the defeat of Alania by the Mongols.
3. According to new research, rather convincing parallels have been established, testifying to the decisive role of the image of the prominent Nart Batraz in the formation of the images of Arthur and Lancelot in the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. If we add to this the plot coincidences (Soslan and Batraz – Cu Chullain, Syrdon – Loki) in Irish and Scandinavian sagas, it becomes obvious that the West became acquainted with Narts' sagas through the Sarmatian-Alan tribes. As J. Colarusso correctly notes, the Narts' stories “not only ... show numerous, striking, detailed parallels with the lore of ancient India and Greece, as one might expect from their intermediate position between these two great traditions, but they also show similar parallels with, of all things, the Arthurian cycle” (Littleton/Malcore 2000: xix). The Arthurian legends are based on a pre-feudal heroic epic among the Sarmatians and Alans who found themselves in England and France as part of the Roman armies and during the Great Migration of Peoples. This circumstance turned out to be so decisive that it allowed to assert: “the core of what later became the Arthurian and Grail literature was born on the steppes of ancient Scythia among a remarkable people whose impact on both the history and folklore of the West is only just beginning to be appreciated” (Littleton/Malcor 2000: 283).

4. Analysis of the works of other researchers (Dumézil, Vielle, Sattsaeu, etc.) allows to expand not only the geographical boundaries of the epic, but also to deepen its chronological framework. In particular, the parallels between the Nart epic and ancient Iranian religious and epic monuments (Avesta, Shahnameh) as well as ancient Indian epic heritage (Ramayana, Mahabharata) suggest that the mythological core of the Nart epic dates back to the Aryan culture, which is part of the Indo-European culture. Ossetians and Iranians, as genetically related peoples, could inherit common things in the epic from the times when their ancestors still lived together and formed one people (Sattsaeu 2008: 146). Thus, the origins of the formation of the mythological core of the Nart epic, through Iranian mediation, go back to the 2nd millennium BC, to the Indo-Iranian (Aryan) period. At the same time, although more than a thousand years passed from the collapse of the Aryan society to the Scythians, there were changes in the everyday, economic and social life, the Aryan ideal still served as a basis for explaining and justifying the social and political structure of the Scythian society.
5. Nart epic is a noticeably more archaic variant of this genre than e. g. Shahnameh and other literary epic cycles of Iranian peoples and from this viewpoint it is of great interest for the study of the distant past of the Iranians.

The Scytho-Ossetian ethno-cultural parallels have been enriched by new research. Nevertheless, the identified parallels cannot be considered exhaustive; the achieved level of comparative study of the Nart epic is far from complete. The continuation of the study of these parallels and the involvement of young scholars in them is very tempting, for, as the famous Scythologist E. E. Kuz'mina wrote, "ethnography and folklore of the Ossetians are an important source for the reconstruction of Scythian mythology and the elucidation of its genetic links with the Indo-European mythological system" (Kuz'mina 1983: 103).

Semiotics of the Mirror in Folklore and Ethnographic Traditions of the Ossetians

Zalina Kusaeva

The mirror is one of the significant symbols of culture. The archetype of mirroring is based on the semiotic concept of duality (binarity): the mirror “doubles” the world, and this explains why it is so mythologized in culture (Eco 1999: 78). At the beginning of the 20th century F. de Saussure proposed an interpretation of the sign, which became traditional in the semiotics. He connected the sign with the doubling of reality, and, as a consequence, with the generation of sign space: “On ne peut vraiment maîtriser le signe <...> que lorsqu’on s’est rendu complètement compte de sa nature double” (de Saussure 2002: 114). The double nature of sign (de Saussure: *sème*) is understood as a certain bilateral essence, whose acoustic image is called *signifiant* (de Saussure 1931: 99) or, in terms of de Saussure’s Notes Item, *sôme* (de Saussure 2002: 114), and what it represents – *signifié* (de Saussure 1931: 99) or *contre-sôme* (de Saussure 2002: 115). According to the above theory, the reflected image of a thing is included in the modeling relations of human consciousness, and the mimetic mechanism becomes the mechanism of sign generation. Initially, this concept only concerned the understanding of language as a system of arbitrary signs, but later this statement went beyond linguistic disciplines and gave grounds to think that the sign nature is a general property of culture.

From the semiotic point of view, this statement can be easily explained by referring to the scholarly research of A. K. Bajburin, who most thoroughly investigated the semiotic status of things in his works. According to him, in archaic and traditional societies “there is no specialization of sign systems, no division into the world of signs and the world of things, which is so characteristic of modern society. Here things are always signs, but signs are also things. <...> When they enter a certain semiotic system (for example, ritual) they function as signs, when they fall out of the system they behave as things” (Bajburin 1981: 215).

Accordingly, the use of mirrors in ritual practices, as well as the variety of artistic images of the mirror and related motifs, widespread in the folklore and ethnographic tradition of ancient peoples, could not but influence the status of the mirror as a sign. Since ancient times it has been believed that the mirror

has an ambivalent nature, which can be traced at the level of both higher and lower mythology. According to the religious and mythological representations of ancient societies, the mirror symbolizes truth, self-realization, wisdom, reason, soul, reflection of supernatural and divine intelligence, the clearly shining surface of divine truth, the higher intelligence displayed in the Sun, Moon and stars. Accordingly, the mirror is not only an object, but also a symbol, which since ancient times has occupied a prominent place in the beliefs of different peoples and various trends of philosophy, and the symbol is complex and quite ambivalent. Since the belief in the prophetic power of mirrors determined the ritual function of the object in the rite of divination, in many traditions the mirror was associated with the negative magic.

Because mirrors have much in common with the surface of water, with the reflective properties of the water surface, they, like water, represent an element different from the earth, fulfilling the role of a border, marking the entrance to the beyond and opening the way to another world. Creating a “gap” in the visible material fabric of existence, in mythological terms the mirror is perceived as a window into the parallel world. Therefore, the mirror was used as an object of visual magic. In the studies about the Ossetic folklore, the problem of transcendence of the folk worldview, associated with the mythologeme of the mirror, was emphasized in the works of Sh. F. Dzhykaev (Dzhykkajty 2009) and V. S. Gazdanova (Gazdanova 2007). However, this topic seems promising for further study, unlike the fairly well researched issues concerning similar mythological objects marking the boundaries of worlds, such as *lægæť* ‘cave’ and *xid* ‘bridge’ (Mamieva 2009; Mamieva/Tsokolaeva 2014).

The mystery of mirror reflection has long been a stimulant of mythological imagination. Hence the numerous omens, legends and customs associated with the mirror. For example, the Ossetians try to prevent the babies from being reflected in the mirror before the first teeth appear. According to the belief, the child is defenceless against dark forces, which through reflection in a mirror can take his soul to another world. The proximity of the mirror mythologem to the idea of death determined the need for careful handling of the object. The Ossetians, as well as many other peoples, still have an omen that a broken mirror promises bad luck. It is based on mythological notions of danger lurking in the destruction of a border and the possibility of penetration of evil spirits into a community of people. Thus, the notion of the mirror as a mythologem of infernal space formed the belief in the negative magic of the object capable of causing harm to a person.

It is characteristic that the Ossetians were similarly cautious about the windows of their dwellings, finding correlative links with the mirror. Thus, the Ossetian calendar ritual cycle preserved the winter festival *Ruzgwyty*

bon 'Window Day', which falls in February (*Ærtqīræny mæj*), a week after the Great Shrovetide (*Styr Alardy / Styr Cærvtækaxæn*). According to the accepted protecting ritual, the windows of dwellings are smeared with clarified butter (*carv*), which has a high ritual status in the Ossetian tradition. Since mythological notions of ritual attributes (butter, mirror) correlate with the female sphere of life, the main action is performed by women. As usual, three ritual cakes are baked. The ritual is accompanied by a prayer addressed to the Creator and heavenly protectors, asking for God's grace (*farn*), abundance and protection of the household from dark forces: "*Næ ruzgwytæj næm alkæddær amondǵynxury ruxs kæsæt! Næ binontæm ævzærcest makæcæj baxæccæ wæd! Færnæizagæmæ bærkadǵyn wæm!*" "May happy sunshine always come through the windows to us! May the household be protected from the evil eye! May we be abundant and filled with *farn*!" (FS Kusaeva 2012). Because the above ritual is a narrow family one, the prayer texts contain requests for prosperity for the representatives of a particular family (*binontæ*).

It is also interesting that this tradition reveals the local specificity of mythological beliefs of the inhabitants of Dargavs village, because the rite is not widespread among the other Ossetians. At the same time, these microlocal forms embody cultural meanings common to the Ossetian traditional beliefs. Water as a mythologem, which has semantic affinity to the mirror, is given no less mystic by the Ossetians. Water is a natural mirror. Historically, the mirror as an object was invented after people had unravelled the mechanism of the reflection on the water surface. The Ossetians, like many other peoples, do not approach natural water bodies in the dark. This belief retains echoes of animistic notions, according to which there is a danger that water spirits can carry away a person's soul through his reflection in water.

The metamorphosis of the mirror image in archaic mythology of many peoples of the world allowed M. V. Ron to identify three mythologemes: 1) the mythologeme of the Looking Glass as an otherworldly space; 2) the mythologeme of the Mirror-Sun as a source of light and fertility; 3) the mythologeme of the Mirror-Eye as a carrier of absolute knowledge (Ron 2004: 46). According to the proposed concept, motifs and images associated with the mirror are also present in the Ossetian folklore and ethnic tradition. Thus, in the Ossetian Nart epic the ability of the mirror to accurately reproduce the visible appearance and movement of any object made it into the prototype of various magic "optical devices", from the fairy-tale magic mirror to all sorts of analogues of the spyglass and the Heavenly Mirror (*Arvajdæn*). For example, in the tale (*kadæg*) "*Soslan æmæ Taryfurt Mukara*" (Soslan and Tar's son Mukara) there is a magic object called *Kæsænxætæl* (*dardmæ kæsæn zauma* 'an object for distant vision, an analogue of telescope'), belonging to Soslan

(Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/319). Signs of etymological proximity and functional identity with the mentioned object are also traced in a similar miraculous object called *Kæsæncæst*, lit. ‘eye (*cæst*) for looking (*kæsæn*)’ (Abaev 1958–89: 1/589), in the *kadæg* “How Sozryko married the daughter of the Sun and how he died” (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/769). The corpus of plot variants about all sorts of miraculous “optical devices” that we are interested in is also represented by the *kadæg* “Safaiy qan Qyrymsoltan” (Krymsoltan, the ward of Safa), where such a magic object for vision – *Wastyrgjij kæsæncæstytae* – occurs (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/75), which is endowed here with the properties of the Heavenly Mirror (*Arvajdaen*). However, the similarity between the functional features of *Wastyrgjij kæsæncæstytae* and *Arvajdaen* are but partial. The miraculous spatial vision of the former, as well as that of the mirror sword at the disposal of Sajnaeg-ældar (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/308), is limited only to the reproduction of phenomena occurring on the earth, whereas the semiotic potency of the latter corresponds to the ideas of the ancient Indo-Iranian tribes about three cosmic planes: it is capable to demonstrate all visible and invisible objects located in three worlds, the upper (*wælarv* ‘heaven’), the middle (*zæxx* ‘earth’) and the lower (*dælzæx* ‘underworld’). The above properties of the magic mirror violate the principle of *co-spatiality* of the original and the mirror: the mirror can reflect everything in the universe including the objects beyond its “field of view” (Levin 1988: 11). The principle of *synchronicity* of the image with the original is violated too, since *Arvajdaen* is able to see all the events of the past, present and future. Accordingly, the miraculous properties of the Heavenly Mirror, which consist in reproducing objects and events in both vertical and horizontal space-time planes, result from its being a sign and from its semiotic nature, distinguishing it from an ordinary mirror, which reflects only “visible” objects directly in front of it.

In the epic texts, the Heavenly Mirror (*Arvajdaen*) acts as a symbol of the status of its owner Satana. The stories about the diviner’s ability to see everything happening in the universe connect it with the properties of the marvellous object. In myths, *Arvajdaen* fulfils the functions of a magical assistant and is present as a story-forming component in a rather extensive corpus of *kadægs*: *Sozryqo Beduxajy kud rakurda* (“How Sozryko married Bedukha”, Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/159), *Xæmyc us kud rakurda* (“The Marriage of Khamyts”) (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/209), *Bezenægy fyrt Aræxcau* (“Son of Bedzenag Arakhtsau”, Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/188), *Nogaj Batyr æmæ Batraz* (“Nogay Batyr and Batraz”) and others. According to mythological ideas about the sacral semantics of the mirror, associated with the belief in its prophetic power, ethnographic sources record

the custom of divination with mirror reflection by the ancient Iranians, Slavs, Greeks, Romans, Etruscans, as well as by the peoples of the Far East, Central Asia and Siberia. In proverbs and sayings, tales, and legends the mirror appears as the *All-Seeing Eye*, possessing knowledge of the past, present and future.

The belief in the prophetic power of mirrors originates in the connection of the sacral semantics of the mirror with the mythologemes of water and the sun (Ron 2004: 10f.). The mirror inherits the symbolism of water, which in the mythology of many peoples endowed things with power. On the basis of these notions the tradition of fortune-telling by water reflection emerged. Subsequently, the water surface was substituted by the mirror. The owner of the Heavenly mirror Satana was endowed with the sacral power of heavenly and water elements at the miraculous birth from the celestial *Wastyrgy*, the patron of warriors and travelers, and the daughter of the Lord of waters Dzerassa (Gutieva 2016). Elaborating the issue of the semiotic features of the mirror mythologeme, we should return to its association with solar and lunar symbolism, since the mirror personifies the disc of the Sun and denotes the reflected light of the Moon. The research tasks also include considering the proximity of mythological images of the Sun, the Eye and the Mirror, based on their role in the visual perception of the world. In the Ossetian folklore and ethnic tradition, the kinship of the above concepts can be established, firstly, through the etymology of the involved terms.

Thus, the verb *kæsyn*: *kast* 'to look, seem, see' has the same root as one of the names of a mirror, *kæsæn*. From the same root the lexeme *cæst* 'eye' derives (Abaev 1958–89: 1/589f.). Thus, the primitive semantics of the Ossetic designation of mirror is connected with the notion of visual perception. Secondly, the proximity of these concepts in folklore and mythological tradition manifests itself in the solar symbol of the Woman observing the world through a mirror. The image of the Omniscient *Mirror-Eye*, possessing absolute knowledge of the world and acting as a symbol of comprehensiveness, is widespread in the folklore of European peoples, as well as in the myths, tales and fiction of the Ancient and Medieval East (Kusaeva 2016: 131). In Iranian mythology, everything associated with the mirror and water has a feminine origin. Thus, for example, in the Avesta there is a cult of Ardivisura Anahita (Avestan 'mighty, immaculate'), the goddess of water, daughter of Ahura-Mazda, one of the 28 Highest *yazatas*, i. e. deities. Ardivi was understood as the source of world waters flowing from the top of the primordial ridge in the divine realm of light and giving rise to all waters on earth. In the Avesta, Ardivisura Anahita plays the role of the patroness of harmony and all living things, to whom a separate hymn (Yasht 5, Ardivisur-yasht) is dedicated (Steblin-Kamenskij 1990: 23ff.). According to some researchers, e. g. the Swedish scholar H. S. Nyberg,

the cult of Ardisura Anahita as the goddess of water was formed by nomadic Iranians who lived near the banks of the Syr Darya and formed the community of Ardisura Anahita, distinct from the settled Iranian community of Mithra (Nyberg 1938: 279ff.). It is of considerable interest that the cult of water has real outlines in the Ossetian ethno-cultural tradition. Most obviously it manifests itself in the ritual of the spring cycle calendar holiday called *Kasutæ* (Kusaeva 2014: 149).

It is appropriate in this context to draw attention to the fundamental differences between the mythologeme of the *Arvajdæn* and the magical objects, which exclude its attribution to the lower mythology, since, as follows from its properties and name, the Heavenly Mirror belongs to the divine (upper) world. As an object of solar significance, *Arvajdæn* is identified with *Cykurajy færdyg* (Bead of wish fulfilment, literally “The bead that gives everything one asks for”). The folklore tradition has preserved the ritual song “*Cykurajy færdyg*”, which is still performed, and exists independently from any ritual or ceremony (Kusaeva 2015: 165ff.). The study of archetypal symbols of the preserved folklore material reveals functional similarities between the above mythologemes (mirror and miracle bead) and allows us to reconstruct most ancient Indo-European myths. As the main plot-forming component, this text presents the motifs of the “tests of the bridegroom” and “difficult task” belonging to the pre-wedding ritual complex, which are among the most widespread in Indo-European folklore. It should be noted that the mythologeme of the All-Seeing Eye *Arvajdæn* and the matchmaking motif associated with it play a prominent role in the Ossetic folklore. For example, the multiple variants of the fairy tale *Arvajdæny Arġaw* (“The Tale of the Heavenly Mirror”, Qazbegty/Kaloty 1949: 330ff.) are illustrative. It is characteristic that all the fairy tales, whose main plot-forming component is the Heavenly Mirror, are connected with the motif of hide-and-peek.

Returning to the text of the ritual song under consideration, it suggests itself a mythological identity of the Heavenly Mirror and the miraculous bead, with their common feature being the solar aspect. Confirmations of this assumption can be found when considering archaeological and ethnographic evidence, according to which many ancient peoples conceived the mirror as an attribute of a female deity, linking it to the cult of the sun, fertility and water: Tabiti and Cybele in Scythia, Aphrodite in Greece, Venus in Rome, Isis and Hathor in ancient Egypt, the Mother Goddess of the Sakas and other Iranian-speaking peoples of Central Asia, Dian-mu and Nuiwa in China, Amaterasu in Japan. The connection of the mirror with these deities was predetermined by the special properties of the object. Firstly, bronze and various metal alloys were used for making mirrors, in the composition of which gold or silver with solar semantics

were added. The surface of metal mirrors, concentrating and reflecting light rays, was perceived as a source of light hearth and was a symbol of heavenly luminaries. As a rule, Indo-Iranians had solar signs on the reverse side of mirrors. Thus, according to the scientific research of V. S. Gazdanova, the famous Scythian Kelermes mirror has on its reverse side the Scythian calendar, or the annual cycle of the sun. At the same time, its eight-part structure allows us to talk about a mandala, a kind of “map of the world” (Gazdanova 2007: 308).

It is indicative that in many cultures the round convex shape of mirrors, imitating the solar or lunar disc, was traditional. Secondly, the mirror, reflecting the world, doubles reality, multiplies it and, as a consequence, acts as a symbol of multiplicity. The ability of metal to reflect light and multiply reality influenced the formation of the mythological image of the mirror as a symbol of the sun and fertility (Ron 2004: 16). In previous works the author of the present paper had occasions to note that within the mythological worldview of the Ossetians the miraculous bead is at the heart of the universe as a realistic substitute of the Sun. It is important to note here that the motif of the miraculous bead occurs in folklore creations of different genres. In particular, its symbolic significance is noteworthy in the etiological myths about the origin of celestial luminaries, where *Cykuraj færdyg* is identified with divine energy and sunlight and participates in the construction of cosmological models (Takazov/Kusaeva 2015). It is indicative that during a special cult action the bead is placed in the centre of one of the three ritual pies, namely, the upper one, symbolizing *wælarv* ‘divine world’. In the ritual prayer it appears as the All-Seeing Eye: “*Oh, Cykuraj færdyg, you see everything that is hidden from the gaze of an earthly man! May those heavenly patrons, who endow you with power and miraculous properties, bestow their grace on us, so that there would be no obstacles on our life path!*” (Kusaeva 2015: 168). The metaphorical construction of the prayer text shows that a symbol such as a miraculous bead can be interpreted as an analogue of the Heavenly Mirror, because in its shining, reflective surface, as in a magic mirror, one can observe everything that is inaccessible to human sight. It is important to note that the prayer address is directed not to the bead itself, but to the heavenly patrons who endow it with miraculous properties, which is an important argument against the erroneous opinion that *Cykuraj færdyg* belongs to fetishistic objects. To put it differently, the bead and the mirror symbolize the sacred, but they are not sacred themselves.

The above ritual action traces the echoes of the ancient Ossetic society, where ritual, being a fundamental manifestation of honouring and propitiating the higher powers, acted as the main semiotic mechanism of the tribal unity and regulator of its life. Mythological ideas of the mirror as a symbol of the feminine principle and the belief in the reproductive power of the

object manifest themselves in the religions of many peoples and determine its role in wedding rituals. The participation of the mirror in the wedding ritual is conditioned by its semantics and sacral connection with female heavenly patrons, providing a happy marriage union and giving the power of fertility. Owing to Gazdanova's scientific research about the use of a mirror in wedding rituals, one could expand one's ideas about the semiotic properties of a mirror in the Ossetic folklore and ethnographic tradition. Thus, she showed that in the 20th century the mirror was an important ritual object at weddings in Ossetia (Gazdanova 2007: 302). In particular, in the 80s of the 20th century in the Kurtatinsky gorge of North Ossetia the information was recorded, according to which the second best man (*æmʒwarǵyn*) had to carry a mirror in front of the bride when she was led out of the house (Dzitsstsojty 1989: 91). Having studied the data on wedding rituals contained in the records of the collector of Ossetian folklore D. Temiraev for 1912, Gazdanova noted that the mirror was in the hands of the second best man. However, while in the rite the second best man (*æmʒwarǵyn*) is a male, the text of a ritual song mentions the celestial *Wasgergi* (dig.) / *Wastyrǵy* (St. George) as the first best man (*k'ũxylxæcæg*), and *Mady Mairan* (dig.) / *Mady Mairæm* (the Virgin Mary) as the second best man (*ænzɪwargin madæ*), who holds the mirror.

Of particular interest is Gazdanova's observation regarding the parallelism of the images of *Mady Mairan* (dig.) / *Mady Mairæm* and *Satána*. This assumption was made on the basis of the epic texts, in which the image of *Mady Mairæm* is superimposed on that of *Satána*, who is the owner of the magic mirror (Gazdanova 2007: 304). The mirror was used in the marriage rituals of many Iranian-speaking peoples and was associated with the cult of the fire and the sun. The solar semantics of the mirror determined its association with the positive magic and the belief of its protective function. Mirror-Sun acts as an amulet, protecting marriages from evil spirits. An interesting evidence related to the use of a mirror in the traditional culture was obtained during our folkloristic and ethnographic research in the village of Dzhalgan (Southern Dagestan), inhabited by a little-studied Iranian-speaking community. One of the main elements of the wedding ceremonies of Dzhalgan people is an archaic ritual of taking the bride out of her parents' house. During this rite, the bride is escorted to the groom's house, while one of the accompanying women carries a mirror and a lit candle in front of her. The use of a candle testifies to the transformation of ancient forms of wedding culture, because in the past, according to the information we recorded from local residents, a burning torch was used instead of a candle. The presented ritual traces the commonality of ancient Iranian traditions, which determine the connection of the mirror with the cult of fire and the sun. In wedding rituals, the mirror

is an attribute of the female deity, also embodying the idea of fire and fertility, and acts in inseparable connection with solar symbolism (lit candle / torch) (FS Takazov/Satcaev/Kusaeva 2016).

Still more characteristic is the evidence of the use of a mirror as an important symbol in the wedding rituals of the Pamir peoples, who have preserved many vestiges of ancient Iranian tradition. Archaic symbolism can be traced in the Pamir initiation rite of veil removal. The ritual is performed by a young man who removes the veil from the bride with a pointed metal object, opening her face. The action is accompanied by a thrice repeated ritual prayer: *"In the name of three fathers and three mothers!"*. From that moment this young man is symbolically considered the "father" of the bride and after three days presents her with all kinds of gifts, including a mirror, which is the main ritual object symbolizing numerous offspring, purity, light and family prosperity (FS Kusaeva 2016).

Archaeological materials found in various Scythian complexes show that the mirrors associated with solar symbolism and with the image of a female deity played an important role in the system of religious beliefs of the Scythians. For example, the well-known finds discovered in the tracts of the Nosaki, Kul-Oba, Chertomlyk, the First Mardvinovsky and Melitopol barrows are gold plaques depicting a female figure (in profile) sitting on a throne with a mirror in her hand. Next to her, a young Scythian is depicted drinking from a rhyton, which he holds in his right hand, while his left hand is pressed to his chest (heart). There are different interpretations of these compositions (Rostovtsev 1913: 6f., 14; Artamonov 1961: 59ff.; Khazanov 1964: 93). According to Raevskij, these monuments depict a wedding rite, or, more precisely, the mythological marriage between the goddess Tabiti and the first Scythian king Kolaksais (Raevskij 1977: 98ff.).

Semiotic functions of the mirror are also actualized through its use as an important attribute in the funeral rites of ancient peoples (Vagner 2012: 173ff.). Similar facts are also noted in the Ossetic tradition, as evidenced by finds in Scythian, Sarmatian, Alanian and medieval Ossetic burials (Khazanov 1964: 89). The spectrum of representations of the mirror image in Ossetic mythology can also be expanded by the concept of the "Mirror of the Dead" (*Mærdty ajdæn*), which, according to an Ossetic myth, is located at the entrance to the land of the dead and is designated to reveal the sins of the deceased (Dzhykkajty 2009: 114). Thus, the study of semiotic features of the mirror symbol has determined its polyfunctional and polysemantic role in Ossetic religious and mythological beliefs. The variety of empirical material related to the mirror motifs allows us to conclude that this mythologeme plays a significant role in the sign system of the Ossetic ethno-cultural tradition.

Sacral Archaics of Ossetian *Kuvd* in the Context of the System of Ancient Techniques of Religious Ecstasy

Alexey Chibirov

Exploring the issues of cosmogony in its relationship with myth and tradition, the historian of religion M. Eliade notes: “La cosmogonie est le modèle exemplaire de toute espèce de « faire » : non seulement parce que le Cosmos est l’archétype idéal à la fois de toute situation créatrice et de toute création – mais aussi parce que le Cosmos est une œuvre divine ; il est donc sanctifié dans sa structure même. Par extension, tout ce qui est parfait, « plein », harmonieux, fertile, en un mot : tout ce qui est « cosmisé », tout ce qui ressemble à un Cosmos, est sacré. Faire bien quelque chose, œuvrer, construire, créer, structurer, donner forme, in-former, former – tout ceci revient à dire qu’on amène quelque chose à l’existence, qu’on lui donne « vie », en dernière instance, qu’on la fait ressembler à l’organisme harmonieux par excellence, le Cosmos. Or, le Cosmos, pour le répéter, est l’œuvre exemplaire des Dieux, c’est leur chef-d’œuvre” (Eliade 1963: 46f.). According to one of the Indian cosmogonic myths, the Universe develops cyclically, when periods of creation interchange with periods of destruction. At the origins of these processes three gods stand: Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, who make up the so-called Trimurti, the Hindu triad. Vishnu sleeps lying on the serpent Ananta, which symbolizes Infinity. Ananta rests in the ocean of the Unconscious. From Vishnu’s navel a lotus sprouts, which contains the awakening Brahma. When Brahma opens his eyes, the universe arises. This universe is Vishnu’s dream. Vishnu dreams of the world he knew, and Brahma creates matter and life on the basis of his visions. But this world is not perfect, and then Shiva begins to dance to destroy it and let it be reborn again. When Brahma closes his eyes to go back to sleep, everything is destroyed. We can observe similar myths of the “birth and death” of the universe in many peoples. It is quite possible that cosmogony is nothing but a model of the rebirth of the world in case of its destruction.

The cosmogonic myth of the Ossetians is inextricably linked, first of all, with the Nart epic. The system of the cosmogonic beliefs constitutes a “world model” of the culture of the bearers of the Narts’ epic tradition. Considering the cosmogony of the epic, we can speak of two spatial models: vertical and

horizontal. In short, the vertical model includes the relationship of the Narts with the celestial pantheon headed by *Xwycæwtty Xwycaw* (God of the gods), while the horizontal model is based on the relationship of the Narts with the surrounding world. According to Ossetian cosmogonic ideas, the Narts' time continuum covers the period from the epoch of primordial creation to the "break" with the celestials, the transition of the Narts from the mythical time to the historical, the destruction of all the creatures of the mythical time (*Wadmertæ, Gwymirytæ, Wæjgwytæ*) and the transformation of Chaos into Cosmos (Tskhovrebov/Gostneva 2012: 382).

In this paper we will touch upon one of the most important elements of Ossetian cosmogony, the concept of *kuvd* in the context of the system of archaic techniques for achieving religious ecstasy. What is *kuvd* and why do we single out this term, which combines seemingly completely mutually exclusive notions, in the cosmogonic context? According to the definition of the famous ethnographer V. S. Warziati, *kuvd* is a ritual feast with sacrifice, which belonged to the most important institutions of social life of the Ossetians (Warziati 2007: 153). Another meaning of this religious and cultural term is such an important concept of spiritual life of the Ossetians as prayer. The *kuvd* ceremony was led by *kuvæg*. Abaev defines the term *kuvæg* as 'worshipper' (Abaev 1958–89: 1/614), although in the present context it would be probably more appropriate to translate it as 'priest'. Our interpretation of the term is as follows: *kuvd*-prayer, being a component of the *kuvd* as a ritual feast, usually with sacrifice (Abaev, *ibid.*), is a transformed shamanic ritual, whose primary, archaic essence (idea) is preserved in its name, i. e. *kuvd*-prayer, the original purpose of which was to enter an "altered state of consciousness" for obtaining mystical or religious experience. The Narts organized a common feast (*kuvd*) in a ritual big house and for them this was an action of the highest sacredness, the most important cultic act of their social life (Dzhykkaity 2012: 375). Considering the forms of verbal contact between the *kuvæg*-priest and the worshippers as a way of teaching communication, Chochiev writes: "Ass-Alanian *kuvd*-prayer is fulfilment of the public ritual (*kubh*) of the Indo-European epoch". Further on in the text a rather consistent and interesting description of the structure of the *kuvd* follows, indicating the role of each participant of the ritual, starting with three *xistærtæ* (The Elders), who lead the ceremony of "prayer-feast", distribute the sacrificial shares, and according to the centuries-honoured ceremonial, perform the *kuvd*, that is, "the public ritual of joining the Truth" (Chochiev 2001: 57). Warziati noted that "the prayers (during the *kuvd*, A. Ch.) are a sample of verbal magic and are built according to a certain plan". And further: "The preservation of them (the texts of the *kuvd*-prayers, A. Ch.) is promoted by the long-standing opinion that the word in the sacred

formula is saturated with magical power. Its pronunciation, according to the ancients, should lead to the desired result" (Warziati 2007: 166, 174).

In the modern interpretation of history as a science, there has always been an invisible conflict between "mystical" experience and scientific enquiry. The cyclical, sacred time that is characteristic of religious communities does not always fit into the scientific conception of civilized societies, which view history through the prism of linear time, that is, only as a set of dates and events arranged chronologically. However, it should be taken into account that, what we call today "shamanism" and "magic", for the ancients was something extremely important, comparable to what the modern science means for us. Science is clearly prejudiced against such concepts as "shamanism", "plants-teachers", "altered state of consciousness", and yet it is impossible to find an explanation for many phenomena in world culture, especially mythology, without resorting to such terminology.

It is from this point of view that the consistent logical chain constructed by Chochiev and Warziati seems to lack one important link. There could not be any mystical revelation from above to a priest (*kuvæg*) just like that. This state was achieved either by long diligent prayers in solitude (hermitage), abstinence, fasting, or by mass intake of some psychoactive substance that allowed the participants of the ceremony to enter an "altered state of consciousness". For example, Scythians widely used cannabis as an ecstatic agent in funeral ceremonies. Herodotus described felt-covered idols with heated stones in the centre of the hut. The priests threw hemp grains on them and received ecstasy in clouds of intoxicating smoke, in which they came into contact with spirits and souls of the dead. Herodotus (IV, 75), who did not understand the religious nature of the action wrote that the smoke made them "so happy that they howled in joy" (Eliade 1978: 336). The Germans prepared a decoction of hallucinogenic mushrooms, which they drank before battle, transforming themselves into berserks – fierce destroyers dressed in bear skins. In the Indian Rigveda and the Iranian Avesta we find mention of the cult drink Soma (Haoma) or Amrita, whose cult in both cultures bears a discernable shamanistic mark.

In the Avesta, Haoma is a multifaceted concept: it is both the god who revealed himself to the prophet Zarathustra, and the deified hallucinogenic drink that gives immortality and a transcendental state of merging with the whole world. Besides, it is the plant itself, from which the juice is squeezed to make the Haoma-drink. What kind of plant it was, is not established with certainty; G. Gordon Wasson in his work "Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality" identified the Haoma with the hallucinogenic mushroom fly agaric (Wasson 1972: 10 et passim). In other words, Haoma is a triune deity. A part

of the Scythians, whom the Persians called *Saka haumavarga* (Yamauchi 1982: 101) venerated Haoma (cf. the Ossetic name of hop, *hwymællæg*, A. Ch.). According to the Avesta, Haoma became the first priest who glorified the celestials. The solemn sacrifice of the Haoma (Avestan *haomayasna*) guaranteed immortality for the believers, as well as stability of the world order in the cosmos and society. Toporov describes the rituals associated with the Haoma as follows: “Yasna began with the sacrifice of a bull, then the Haoma was rubbed and mixed with milk. The resulting drink of immortality was dedicated to Ahuramazda. The moment of mixing the Haoma juice with milk symbolized the miraculous appearance of Zarathustra in the world. With the last clear in the world’s history to be created by the Saoshyants (saviours), the world would return to the original perfect state of universal immortality ... One of the hallucinogenic effects of Haoma was to alter (or even ‘invert’) the perception of spatio-temporal and subject-object relations. At the mythological level, this could correspond to such paradoxes as the simultaneous presence of Haoma in heaven and on earth, and especially the combination in Haoma of the hypostases of the god (in particular, Mithra, the bearer and guardian of the world law), the priest offering sacrifice to him, and the sacrifice itself (compare with the trifunctional system of the mythical Nartian society, tales of Tsartsyata, Indian *trimurti*, mythology of the Scythians, Germans, Slavs, the trinity of God in Christianity, etc., A. Ch.) ... At the same time Zarathushtra refers to Haoma and as a man” (Toporov 1988: 578f.). The god Haoma belongs to the category of the “dying and resurrecting deities”, such as Dionysus, Adonis, Osiris etc. Dumézil interpreted the image of the Nart Soslan as a solar mythical hero, a representative of the “dying-resurrecting gods” in the Scytho-Sarmatian mythology. The Avesta says that Haoma was dismembered by other deities, and from his body they prepared a divine drink of immortality, which symbolized “a salvific act of cosmic sacrifice, as a result of which universal order is established”. Zarathustra praises Haoma for being intoxicating, inspiring, giving strength of passion, capacity for defence, health, healing power, development, growth, power extending to the whole body, knowledge. Through these gifts Zarathustra overcomes “the enmity of all hostile devas and mortals, sorcerers and sorceresses, *kavi* and *karapan* rulers, and (the enmity of) false and bipedal false teachers, and (the enmity of) bipedal wolves and quadrupedal wolves” (Meletinskij 1957: 46).

With the rise of Zoroastrianism, the fire altar becomes the centre of the cult. According to Zarathustra’s doctrine, sacrifice is the basis of theological meditation. Zarathustra understood the eschatological fire in such a way that, “... nonobstant sa fonction justiciare il purifie et « spiritualise » le monde”. He also notes that “... le plus ancien zoroastrisme, si imparfaitement reflété par

les *gāthās*, semble accorder la primauté à la « sagesse », à l' « illumination » intérieure auprès du feu sacrificiel" (Eliade 1978: 329f.).

However, Eliade also states that the function of the cult of Ahuramazda was much wider: "Suivant une interprétation récente, l'officiant acquiert, par le truchement du rite (*yasna*), la condition de *maga*; c'est-à-dire qu'il jouit d'une expérience extatique qui procure l' « illumination » (*čisti*). Durant cette illumination, le prêtre-sacrificateur parvient à séparer son essence spirituelle (*mēnōk*) de sa nature corporelle (*gētik*); autrement dit, il récupère la condition de pureté et d'innocence qui précédait le « mélange » des deux essences. Or, ce « mélange » eut lieu à la suite de l'attaque d'Ahriman (on his brother Ohrmazd, A. Ch.). Par conséquent, le sacrificateur contribue à la restauration de la situation primordiale, à la « transfiguration » (*frašō-kereti*) du monde, œuvre rédemptrice inaugurée par le prêtre-exemplaire Zarathustra. On pourrait même dire que le sacrificateur participe déjà au monde transfiguré. L'état de *maga* est obtenu surtout par le sacrifice de *haoma*, « boisson d'immortalité » que le prêtre absorbe au cours de la cérémonie. Or le *haoma* est riche en *xvarenah*, fluide sacré, à la fois igné, lumineux, vivifiant et spermatique. Ahura Mazdā est par excellence le possesseur du *xvarenah*; mais cette « flamme » divine jaillit également du front de Mithra (*Yasht* X, 127) et, comme une lumière solaire, émane de la tête des souverains. Cependant, tout être humain possède son *xvarenah*, et au jour de la transfiguration, i.e. de la Rénovation finale, « la grande lumière semblant sortir du corps brillera tout le temps sur cette terre ». En absorbant rituellement le *haoma*, le sacrificateur surpasse sa condition humaine, se rapproche d'Ahura Mazdā et anticipe *in concreto* la Rénovation universelle" (Eliade 1978: 315f.).

There were different ways of entering an "altered state of consciousness". Ossetian prayer included, among other things, rhythmic subdivision of the spoken speech, precise use of rhyme and assonance, and skilful construction of phrases. The poetic form of the prayers was also of particular importance for the *kuvd* ceremony (Warziati 2007: 175). In some schools of Christian ascetics, one of the ways of "opening" the mind was the frequent and rhythmic repetition of prayers, while observing a strict fast. Orthodox monks through abstinence and constant prayers acquired abilities for healing and foresight (monk Abel, Seraphim of Sarov, etc.) acquired the experience of luminophany (vision of the bright divine light, followed by "projecting a man into a Universe different in quality, an entirely different world, transcendent and holy," Eliade 1979: 76). "Par le mystère de la Passion et de la Résurrection, le chrétien abolit le temps profane et il est intégré dans le temps sacré primordial" (Eliade 1957: 30).

Amazonian shamans still use in their practices "plant teachers" (*plantas maestros*), one of which is a powerful hallucinogenic remedy called *ayahuasca*,

a decoction, the main component of which is the aquatic liana *Banisteriopsis coapi*. Different tribes of the Amazon basin call this decoction differently, but its basic function remains unchanged: making one enter an “altered state of consciousness” in order to gain mystical experience and sacred knowledge. For example, the Machigenga tribes inhabiting the upper Madre de Dios River call the *ayahuasca* “*kama-rampi*”, which means “to die and rise again”. This name most accurately reflects the essence of the ceremony. The *ayahuasca* decoction is prepared from two ingredients – the stem of the *ayahuasca* liana and the leaves of the *shakrun* or *chakrun* tree. The tradition of the *ayahuasca* dates back several millennia. Aborigines believe that the recipe for its preparation was given to people from above. Indeed, it is not even possible to combine these two components by chance, with such a vast diversity of fauna, numbering more than eighty thousand different species. Shamans define four components of a proper ceremony. These are the *ayahuasca*, the “place of power”, the shaman, and God, although the concept of god in the context of the *ayahuasca* ceremony is, in our opinion, very blurred. Over time, experienced shamans reach such a level of mastery as to independently enter an “altered state of consciousness” during the ceremony without resorting to the *ayahuasca*. A very important role is played by shamanic songs called *ikaro*, which accompany the ceremony, and with the help of which the shaman or shamans control the whole course of the ceremony. The singing of the *ikaro* is usually accompanied by a rhythm, which the shaman produces with the help of a kind of instrument made of a bunch of dry leaves, called *chakapa*. In Siberia and North America, the function of the *chakapa* was performed by a drum. The text of the *ikaro* usually resembles a prayer, an appeal to the higher powers, the spirits of the jungle with a request to grant the participants of the ceremony both physical health and knowledge of God. The *ayahuasca* ceremony is still used by shamans in the jungle to successfully treat many mental illnesses, including drug addiction.

Another rather serious “plant of power” for the inhabitants of Amazonia is tobacco, which in the jungle is used exclusively for ritual purposes, but not as a product of constant use. In our opinion, the parallels with the Ossetian *kuvd*-prayer are self-explanatory, if we take into account that, according to Chochiev, in Ossetian society “knowledge was communicated in the form of hymns (*zar*), songs (*ǰar*), prayer recitations (*arǰaw*), prayers (*kuvd*), as well as ... prayers combined with dance (*kavd*). The Nart epic preserved them in the context of *kadaeg*” (Chochiev 2001: 57). All these elements are present in one form or another in the religious traditions of the Amazonian Indians.

The Rigveda consists of hymns that have been handed down by word of mouth through generations of priestly families. The hymn, along with

sacrifice, was considered one of the main means of influencing the deity. In a state of mystical trance Zarathustra heard the voice of Ahuramazda and contemplated his visions. Scythian priests-Enarei, effeminate servants of the cult of Aphrodite-Argympasa, were in fact shamans, and parallels with them can be found among Ossetian priests called *Зwary lægtæ* (Chibirov 2012: 97). In Ossetian religious practice there was such a notion as *kwyryszaw*, old men and women endowed with the gift of prophecy who on New Year's Eve went to a field near the Tartup sanctuary where they fell asleep. During sleep the soul of the *kwyryszaw* would leave the body and go on a journey to a magical meadow in order to steal a sheaf with a handful of bread grains for future harvests (Chibirov 2008: 378). The Ossetian musical tradition included "mythological songs-prayers", addresses to representatives of the Upper World of the Ossetian cosmogony, such as Wastyrgý, Æfsati, Alardy (Alborov/Chibirov 2012: 361). Songs played a major role in the cult of Ahuramazda, if we consider that the name of paradise, *garō.damāna*, meant literally "the house of song".

As for the Nart epic, signs of shamanism can be observed in the cycle about Wyrzymag (his transformation into a dog) and about Xamyc, whose wife turned into a frog. Afsati, the deity of wild animals in the Ossetian pantheon, could revive animals killed by hunters wrapping their bones in their skins. The Younger Edda tells of Thor's goat. When Thor, staying overnight at a certain peasant, slaughtered his goats, which were harnessed to his cart, he treated their meat to the owners. The next morning, he took Mjollnir's hammer and hallowed the remains of the goats, which immediately rose to their feet (Eliade 1968: 140). There are similar legends in other cultures and traditions. The Bible tells of a vision of Ezekiel in which the Lord commands him to gather dried human bones from the midst of a field. Subsequently, the Lord brought people back to life in Ezekiel's vision (ibid.). In ancient Egypt it was proper to preserve bones for later resurrection (Eliade, op. cit.: 140, n. 3). In the Nart epic, clear signs of shamanism are present in the cycle about Soslan and Bedukha, in the story of Soslan's journey to the land of the dead:

By that time he had reached the place of his wife Bedukha, and, lo and behold, Bedukha's body is there, but her head is not. Soslan sheds his tears and kills himself by weeping. "Why isn't my wife's head on her body?", he asks the other dead, "I came here to see her". "Her head should come here soon too", the dead told him. And, indeed, the head soon appeared there and got stuck to the body. (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003-12: 11/519)

Reading these and some other plots of tales, one realizes that the Nart epic could not emerge but through a tradition of entering the "altered state of

consciousness". Similar plots can be found in various cultures of the world. The Greek Orpheus, a healer, musician and visionary, descends into hell for recovering the soul of his wife Eurydice. Orpheus' demise can be described as shamanic, when his head, cut off by the Bacchantes and thrown into the Hebrus River, floated and sang all the way to the island of Lesbos. Subsequently, it served as an oracle (Eliade, op. cit.: 391). A Chinese myth tells of a saint Muliän, who in a mystical vision learns that his mother is suffering in hell from starvation; he descends into hell to save her. In another myth, a man goes to the other world to find his dead wife. He finds her near a spring, but she begs him to leave because she has now become a spirit. Still, the spouses escape from the Kingdom of the Dead together (Eliade, op. cit.: 356f.). In medieval European prose, Dante Alighieri descends into hell to rescue his wife Beatrice. Soslan descends to the netherworld on his horse. Similarly, Hermóðhr in the Nordic sagas descends to Hel on Odin's horse Sleipnir in order to recover the soul of his brother Baldr. Eliade (op. cit.: 383) believes that "ce type de descente aux Enfers est nettement chamanique". In shamanic rituals and in various mythologies the horse occupies a special place. The horse – first of all a carrier of souls and a funeral animal – is used by the shaman in various situations as a means of helping to reach a state of ecstasy, so to speak "to come out of oneself", thanks to which a mystical journey is possible. In the mythology of the horse, not infernal, but rather funerary character prevails; the horse is a mythical image of Death, so it is included in the ideology and practice of ecstasy. According to Eliade, the horse takes the deceased to the otherworld; it performs the so-called level break, the transition from one world to another. The funeral horse carrying the soul facilitated trance and the ecstatic flight of the soul to forbidden lands. It was for this purpose that a horse was dedicated to the deceased in the Ossetian tradition. In the shamanic rituals of many peoples of the world, symbolic ride expressed leaving the body, the "mort mystique" of the shaman (Eliade, op. cit.: 366).

Another way of transcending the boundaries of one's self was ritual dressing up as a woman, which is found in many traditions. Participants of such rituals are symbolically endowed with androgynous features. In this context, the myths about the androgyny of the ancestors of people in various cultures are very interesting, as well as the popularity of cosmogonies that claim that the world emerged from the cosmic Egg or was formed as a result of the disintegration of an originally unified entity that had the form of a sphere. Plato in the "Symposium" (183E–193D) describes the original human being as a bipedal being of spherical shape. From the notion of a bipedal deity as the paradigm and beginning of all existence the idea arises that all being is endowed with the qualities of both sexes. This can be confirmed by the androgynous nature

of many ancient gods. In the Nart epic there are characters with anthropomorphic masculinity and femininity, one of them being the elder of the Narts Wyrzmag (Chibirov 2012: 101), this undoubtedly emphasizes his priestly (shamanic) functions in the Narts' society. The biblical Adam, from whose rib God created Eve, was also an androgyne. Thus, according to the ancient rabbinical compendium *Bereshit-rabbah*, "Adam and Eve were made back-to-back, joined at the shoulders; then God divided them with an axe stroke, cutting them in two" (Eliade 1979: 104). The most important couple in the Indian pantheon, Shiva-Kali, is also sometimes depicted as one being. Androgynous were the Egyptian god Horus, the Scandinavian Loki and Odin, the Iranian god of infinite time Zurvan, who gave birth to the god of Light Ohrmazd and the god of Darkness Ahriman etc. A. H. Krappe, to whose observations Eliade refers, comes to the conclusion that the androgyny of the original man was a specific feature of the Indo-European tradition, and that the myth of the androgynous Adam arose under the influence of this tradition on Semitic mythology, which influenced each other from the earliest times (Krappe 1936: 321f.). Some religious festivals among the Greeks were accompanied by what was called "changing of clothes". Similar traditions were observed in India, Iran, and other Asian countries (Eliade 1979: 113). There was a much deeper meaning to this whole culture than might appear at first. "The principal function of this rite ... is, to be brief, a coming out of one's self, a transcending of one's own historically controlled situation, and a recovering of an original situation, no longer human or historical since it precedes the foundation of human society; a paradoxical situation impossible to maintain in profane time, in a historical epoch, but which it is important to reconstitute periodically in order to restore, if only for a brief moment, the initial completeness, the intact source of holiness and power" (Eliade, *ibid.*).

And yet, could the mysterious Haoma be reflected in the Nart epic and, as a consequence, in the spiritual life of the Ossetians as one of the most important elements of the *kuvd*? It is known that heroes of the Nart epic did not need priests, intermediaries between themselves and gods, and addressed the latter directly. In the Ossetian Narts' tales, the Narts did this also with the help of prayer called *kuvd rong*. The word *rong* is inextricably linked with the Nart epic, in which it appears as a favourite drink of the Narts, who are also said to be "table companions of the gods" (Abaev 1949: 348). The etymology of *rong* is of interest. According to Abaev, in the Old Iranian "Scythian" dialect, which was the ancestor of Ossetian, there was a word *frāna-*, which corresponds to Old Indian *prāṇa-* "spirit". The meaning of "spirit", as in Latin *spiritus*, was transferred to "spirits", heady drinks, and in general, to the state of intoxication (Abaev 1949: 353). A very important role in religious-magical ceremonies

of Alano-Ossetians was also played by beer (*æluton*), which had a high sacral meaning. Beer combined the fruits of the earth and the sun, and symbolized a kind of sacrifice to the glory of divine forces. “Endowed with the reflexes of a trifunctional structure, beer was a mediator in mythologically organized space, a kind of mediator between harmony and chaos, between the upper and lower cosmological spheres” (Warziati 2007: 151f.).

In this context, it is probably worth paying attention to the Ossetian name of hop, *xumællæg*. It is quite possible that in the *rong*, in its mythical and sacral nature for the Narts, as well as in the Ossetian “drink of immortality” *æluton*, we can see echoes of Haoma being a prototype of both *rong* and beer. In answer to Zarathushtra’s question as to the first man who squeezed Haoma, and the boon that befell him for his deed, the deity Haoma says the following: “Vivahvant was the first man who squeezed me for the corporeal world; that good befell him, that profit reached him, that to him a son was born, Yima the mighty [or brilliant] rich in herds, the brightest among those born, the sun-like among men. For he made, in his reign, animals and men immortal, the waters and plants not withering, so that they ate unfading food” (Salemann 1880: 175). It follows from the text that the golden age is a consequence of the appearance of the divine drink Haoma. Dzitstsojty (2017: 329) considers a similar connection between the appearance of the drink of immortality *æluton* and the golden age in the Ossetian tradition.

Of special interest are descriptions of the ritual bowls for the *kuvd*-prayer. Often the craftsmen who made the bowls put a deep esoteric meaning into their design, which testifies to the archaic nature of the sacred action, including parallels to the Bowl *Wacamongæ* described in the Nart epic (Warziati 2007: 127, 129). The sacrificial food presented for the *kuvd* as an element of ceremony, parallels to which can be traced in Zoroastrianism (sacrifice as the basis of theological meditation, A. Ch.), is also worth separate consideration.

The Ossetian *kuvd* could not be imagined without the ritual dance performed by the participants of the ceremony, in which another way of immersing oneself in the “mystical ecstasy” lies. Some researchers (e.g., Chochiev) believe that the word *kaft* ‘dance’ can belong with this series. However, Abaev considers the word *kaft* exclusively as a dance, without any ritualistic associations. According to him, the etymology of the word *kaft* goes back to the Kabardinian *qafä* ‘dance’ (Abaev 1958–89: 1/567). As a ritual dance in the context of Ossetian tradition, it is rather the ancient round dance called *simd*, usually accompanied by choral singing, that suggests itself. *Simd* was also a favourite dance of the Narts’ heroes. According to Abaev, “it began at a slow pace and, gradually accelerating, reached such a stormy force and impetuosity that weaker participants risked the integrity of their limbs in it”. Then Abaev

writes that those who perform *simd* “find God’s favour”, which indicates to a ritual significance of the *simd*. The following passage should be quoted in full: “It seems ... probable that Ossetic *sīm-* | *sem-* adjoins to Georgian *sama*, *samaja*, Arabic, Persian *samā’* ... The source of both Ossetic *sem-* and Georgian *samaja* should be considered as Arabic, Persian *samā’* ‘ritual dervish dance’, ‘saltatio’, ‘chorea’ ... In the practice of Sufi mystics, *samā’* as a combination of music (vocal, later instrumental) and all-consuming collective dancing acquired ritual significance and served as a means of bringing the participants into a state of mystical ecstasy” (Abaev 1958–89: III/108f.). It is quite possible that the magical ritual *kuvd*, an element of which is the extatic dance *simd*, is a distant echo of very important elements of Ossetian magical practice, which, most likely, were some kind of “instruction” allowing to enter an “altered state of consciousness” to obtain religious experience.

Thus, the modern Ossetian ritual feast *kuvd* can be interpreted as a reflection of an ancient mystery. From the above discussion we can conclude that its prototype together with the accompanying practices of acquiring mystical experience, such as prayer, dance and the use of psychoactive substances, provides the missing link between the space that we call real with the sacred. Over time, the sacred essence of *kuvd* has been distorted. The surviving form of the ceremony is far from the original idea. The “drink of power” (the essence of hallucinogen), which expanded the mind of the participants of the primary *kuvd*-prayer, making them enter an “altered state of consciousness”, transformed into ordinary alcohol. Warziati writes: “In the popular consciousness, alcoholic beverages in general and beer in particular were identified with the act of sacrifice. At ritually significant moments they were used to worship and communicate with supernatural forces” (Warziati 2007: 303). Describing the traditions of the modern Ossetian meals, in particular, the tripod table *fɣng* as one of the most important elements of the *kuvd*, Warziati notes that among the Ossetians “ideas and norms associated with meals practically did not cease to exist, although the tripod table itself has gone out of active use. In recent decades it has started to revive, but already as a material shell, as a sign of a certain stage of cultural history, as an ethnic and regional symbol” (Warziati 2007: 125). This situation can reasonably be projected onto the *kuvd* ceremony itself, as a shell of something more valuable and sacred, which was lost over time in previous generations of the Ossetians.

For many reasons, the present paper cannot naturally claim being a full-fledged research. In the course of the discussion far more questions arise than answers are given. In the end, the topic of the *kuvd* as a practice of achieving an “altered state of consciousness” for mystical (religious) experience, turns out to be much broader than the primary idea, because we are situated in a

continuum connecting the corporeal with the divine. In our opinion, the connection between the past and the present is not limited only to a chronological set of historical facts, there is something more important, some missing link that unites the experience of the “mystical” with the experience of science. It is a search for this link that is the focus of this paper.

Wastyrgy's Three-Legged Horse in Religious and Mythological Beliefs of the Ossetians

Anzor Darchiev

One of the main characters of the Ossetian religious pantheon is Wastyrgy, the heavenly patron of men, warriors and travellers. A thorough study of mythological plots and images associated with him should contribute to a more complete reconstruction of archaic religious and mythological beliefs of the Ossetians. Folklore texts depict him as a horseman who descends from heaven to help honest people and punish their offenders. Wastyrgy is among the main actors of the Ossetian Narts' epic. The narrators call his marvellous white horse a three-legged horse (*ætyk'axyg*), and researchers have different opinions about this peculiarity.

1 Hypothesis of E. G. Pchelina

The first to attempt interpreting the image of the three-legged horse of Wastyrgy was E. G. Pchelina. The researcher connected the bronze artefacts depicting hippocampi, i.e., horses with fish tails, which she found in the village of Sokhta and in the sanctuary of Rekom, with the three-legged horse of the Ossetian Narts' epic (Pchelina 1986: 45ff.). It should be noted for fairness' sake that the hypothesis of a correspondence between the mythological hippocampus (a sea horse with a fish tail instead of hind legs) and the mythologeme of the three-legged horse was expressed long before Pchelina. The German Iranist Georg Hüsing wrote as early as in 1932: "Das Roß Poseidaons ist aber auch der dreifüssige Hippokamos, der mit zwei Vorderfüßen und einem Schlangen- oder Fischleibe dargestellt wird" (Hüsing 1932: 9). However, the question arises, how grounded the comparison of Wastyrgy's three-legged horse with the fish-tailed hippocampus is.

All the passages in the editions of the Narts' epic, which Pchelina claims to contain direct references to Wastyrgy's three-legged horse with a fish or snake tail, prove to fail doing it upon examination (Darchiev/Darchieva 2019: 144ff.). Moreover, these tales repeatedly testify that the water depths are beyond the control of the divine rider: in nearly all the variants, the daughter of the water

deity Dzerassa eludes him by diving into the sea (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1/19, 32, 40, 44, 47, 53, 65, 70, 74, 80, 86, 92); Wastyrgy cannot cross the river or the sea, and when he and his horse were almost carried away by the current, the Nart Marguts comes to his aid (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/525, 532). True, there are tales in which Wastyrgy crosses the sea on horseback (Dzagurov 1925: 3), but even here nothing is said about the fish or snake tail of his horse and nothing points to it even at the level of tropes. On the contrary, Wastyrgy crosses the sea, “swimming like a goose” (*qazy lenk gaengæ*) (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/535).

That the three-legged horse belonging to Wastyrgy in the epic is rather loosely correlated with the water element and quite clearly connected with the air sphere follows from many facts. When crossing the river, Wastyrgy counts not on the fish tail that his horse allegedly has, but on its wings: *Arast sti æmæ ju ran ju styr dony wasmæ baftydy sti æmæ sæ donæn je'nnae farsmæ cæwyn qwyd. Wastyrgy bakatai kodta: “Ja, mæ bæx zy acæuzan, mæ bæx bazarǵyn u, felæe zy Marǵucy bæx kwyd acæuzæn?”* // “They set out on their journey and in one place they found themselves on the bank of a big river, and it was necessary for them to cross to the other side of it. Wastyrgy was worried: «Well, my horse will cross it, since my horse is winged, but how will Marguts' horse cross it?»” (Dzagurov/Guriev/Khamitsaeva 2011: 91f.). As noted above, the narrator compares Wastyrgy crossing the sea not to a fish, as one might expect, but to a waterfowl (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/535). In another tale, Wastyrgy appears among the Narts riding a lame horse (which, in mythological terms, is equivalent to a three-legged one). But at the right moment the lame horse slowly treading the ground turns into a winged horse and soars upwards, becoming unattainable for any earthly horse (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/494). Apparently, here too we are dealing with relics of ancient mythology, because, as E. E. Kuz'mina notes, “in all Indo-Iranian traditions the likening of a horse and a bird is widespread” (Kuz'mina 1977: 100). Yet some correspondences can be pointed outside the Indo-Iranian tradition: in German folklore a three-legged horse flying through the air is also mentioned (“In Husby stob ein dreibeiniges Pferd durch die Luft davon”), which is associated with archaic ideas about the supreme god of Germanic-Scandinavian mythology Odin (Wolf 1852: 22).

The absence of ichthyomorphic features of the miraculous horse of Wastyrgy in the most complete scientific edition of Narts' texts makes one skeptical about Pchelina's hypothesis. Nevertheless, there are important observations in Pchelina's study that help to elucidate the mythological content of the image of the three-legged horse. Pchelina correctly emphasizes the solar features of the three-legged horse in the epic, although she does not directly

connect the interpretation of the motif of three-leggedness with this fact (Pchelina 1986: 45 f.). However, in the mythologies of different peoples of the world elements of triplicity are inherent in the solar symbolism, and we believe that it is the solar symbolism of the horse which can be explained by such an unusual feature of the horse as the three-leggedness (for more details see in the next chapter). In this connection, it is necessary to note bronze plaques in the form of “whirling rosettes”, discovered by Pchelina in the sanctuary of Rekom. On one of them, instead of curved arcs diverging unilaterally from the centre, three miniature horse heads are depicted (Pchelina 1986: 47 f.). The connection of triple elements with the image of the horse and with the solar myth in the Indo-Iranian tradition, is perhaps evidenced by one interesting observation of Kuz'mina: both in the ancient Indian rite of Ashvamedha, and in the Scythian ritual the number of sacrificed horses is a multiple of three (Kuz'mina 1977: 111f.).

2 Criticism of the Hypothesis about the “Fire-Footedness” of the Marvelous Horse

In 1976, the journal *Max Dug* published an article by the Ossetian poet and prose writer Georgi Chedzhemov entitled “*Narty næرتون Wырызmæg*”, in which special attention was paid to the motif of the three-legged horse belonging to Wastyrgy. Chedzhemov assumed that the three-legged horse is found exclusively in the Ossetian mythology (in fact, it is known in the folklore of various peoples of the world from Northern Europe to Siberia; see below). Considering a horse, even a mythological one, possessing only three legs instead of four to be nonsense, the author proposed the following interpretation of the epithet *ærtk'axyg*. In his opinion, the image of Wastyrgy was coined on the basis of the image of Nart Wыryzmag, and therefore the horse belonging to Wastyrgy must have absorbed the features inherent in Arfan, the horse of Nart Wыryzmag. And since Arfan emits sparks with his steel hooves, the same property should be possessed by Wastyrgy's horse, and, therefore, he could be called *Wastyrgyyy artk'axyg bæx* “fire-footed horse of Wastyrgy”. Over time, *artk'axyg bæx* or *ærtk'axyg bæx* “a fire-footed horse” could change into *ærtk'axyg bæx* “a three-legged horse” (Chedzhemty 1976: 96).

Even if we accept the hypothetical thesis about the relationship between the images of Wastyrgy and Wыryzmag, the proposed interpretation inevitably raises questions. The assumed “fire-footedness” of Wastyrgy's horse derives solely from the comparison with Arfan, the horse of Nart Wыryzmag. But why then we do not find texts, in which the epithet *ærtk'axyg* “three-legged” or

ærtk'axyg “fire-footed” would have been applied to Arfan himself? On the other hand, apart from Wastyrgy, in the Ossetian Narts’ epic the owner of a three-legged horse is also Nart Soslan: 1) *Wædta æ ærtik'axug bæxbæl, æ tær-nixi ba ewnæg cæstæ, wobæl sarġ fevardta æma jeci æxsævigon ranæxstær æj, sæwmæ sabat wozænæj, zæggæ, wæd* “Then [Soslan] saddled his three-legged horse with one eye on its forehead and set out the same night, on the eve of the Sabbath” (recorded by Konstantin Gardanov in the village of Khristianovskoe, no later than 1902, s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11/494); 2) *Je 'rtik'axug Zynz-alasabæl / Jeci æ bajvæd bærgæ rabaduj, / Narti bæstæmæ, zæġuj, bærgæ fæjjagajuj* (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 11: 498) “[Soslan] sat on his three-legged *zynz-alas*, / He went to the Nart country” (narrator Dabeg Gatuev, 68, from the village of Khristianovskoe; recorded by Kazbek Kazbekov on 5 February 1941). The image of Nart Soslan cannot be deduced from the image of Nart Wyrzymag, and therefore the three-leggedness of his horse cannot be explained by extrapolating the hypothetical “fire-footedness” of Arfan. However, the main difficulty lies elsewhere: in the Nart epic there is not a single case of using the epithet **artk'axyg*/**ærtk'axyg* “fire-footed”. There is no such word in any lexicographic source, and we do not find any documented quotation confirming its existence in the Ossetian language before the above-mentioned article by Chedzhemov. Thus, the replacement of *ærtk'axyg* with **artk'axyg*, i.e. the replacement of a three-legged horse with a “fire-legged” horse, has no basis in the Ossetian folklore and literary tradition.

Nevertheless, this witty and not devoid of poetic elegance hypothesis has gained many supporters both among unsophisticated lovers of the epic and among experienced researchers. Chochiev, in his 1982 monograph, also writes about the reinterpretation of the “fire-footedness” *ærtk'axyg* of the winged horse Wastyrgy into the “three-footedness” *ærtk'axyg* (Chochiev 1985: 168f.). He calls Wastyrgy’s horse Arfan and lists *ærtk'axyg* “fire-footed” as one of his most frequent epithets, but without specifying even single source confirming this position (Chochiev 1985: 165). Relying on Chochiev’s book, these conclusions are repeated by Ivanchik (2005: 163f.) and Chibirov (2018: 13). The “Dictionary of Ossetian mythology and way of life” compiled by Tsgoev testifies to how much influence this hypothesis has acquired at present. It also states, without any reference to sources, that Ossetians have long called the horse Wastyrgy *ærtk'axyg* “fire-footed”, and the epithet *ærtk'axyg* “three-footed” is just its incorrect variant (Tsgoev 2017: 671).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the motif of the three-legged horse belonging to Wastyrgy is clearly recorded in the Narts’ texts written by different narrators. Here are examples. 1) *Wycy wyngæg saxaty jæm Xwycaw Wastyrgijy ærbawaġta jæ æ ærtk'axyg bæxyl æmæ jæ egærttimæ* “In this difficult hour

God sent her Wastyrgy on a three-legged horse and with greyhounds" (narrator 80-year-old Kavdyn Guriev from the village of Guli of Kurtata gorge; in March 1896 recorded by Gagudz Guriev, s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1/18). 2) *Kæcæjdær fæzindi Wastyrgý æmæ kwy bambærsta Narty sæfty xabar, wæd je 'rtyk'axyg bæxyl Narty qæwy smidæg* "Wastyrgy appeared from somewhere and, when he realized that the Narts were perishing, on his three-legged horse he found himself in the Nart village" (narrator 127-year-old Pepe Begizov from the village Yedys, South Ossetia; 3 February 1939 recorded by Dudar Begizov, s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1/463).

3 Three-Legged Horses in the Epics and Mythology of the Peoples of the World

Three-legged horses are found in the mythology of many peoples of the world, and researchers compare them with a similar image in Ossetian folklore. For example, Tuallagov notes three-legged horses in the Karachai-Balkar and Kabardinian epic, in the tales of the Vainakhs and Avars. By the Yakuts, a three-legged horse is considered an animal that carries a shaman to another world (Tuallagov 2001: 53ff.). To this series we will add three-legged horses from French (Cosquin 1886: 1/135ff., 209), Swiss (Tscheinen/Ruppen 1872: 241ff.), Russian (Afanas'ev 1957: 11/4), Hungarian (Kovács 1966: 171), Georgian (Mourier 1888: 50, 51, 58), Ket (Nikolaev 1985: 104), Turkmen (Sakali 1945: 1938) and Kurdish (Braginskij/Olderogge 1989: 165) tales and legends. The image of a three-legged horse is widespread in German folklore (Panzer 1901: 262), and its deep meaning was investigated by Carl Gustav Jung from the point of view of analytical psychology (Jung 1948: 37ff.).

In Greek mythology, Charon, the carrier of the souls of dead people in Hades, was originally represented as a three-legged horse (Scheibelreiter 1976: 46). In Danish legends, the goddess of death Hel is after the souls of people riding a three-legged horse, but, according to M. Oldfydd Howey, originally Hel was honoured as a mother goddess on a snow-white three-legged horse (Howey 1923: 205). Odin (Wodan), the supreme god of Germanic-Scandinavian mythology, possesses an eight-legged horse Sleipnir, but in German legends about the "Wild Hunt" Odin appears as the leader of the army of the dead and rides not on an eight-legged horse, but on a three-legged one (Menzel 1855: 203; Obermüller 1866–72: 11/418; Ninck 1935: 142). P. Wolfram regarded it as a mythological reflection of the ancient ritual action, performed by members of the male union and preserved in the form of processions of rural youth in different parts of Europe until the beginning of the 20th century (Wolfram 1932:

364). Thus, for example, in different villages of Kent County the central place in such processions belonged to a three-legged horse: “The image of the horse is presented in the following form: on the end of a stick four feet long is fixed a very ancient, carved from wood and painted horse’s head. Attached to this structure is a cloth sack in which the man (“Hoodner”) takes shelter. He actually has to walk bent over to mimic the elongated, elongated torso of a horse, while leaning on a vertically held stick on which a horse’s head is attached, so that the animal appears three-legged (the stick in front is the third leg). This reveals to us the mystery of the ghostly animals in Wild Hunt, which are again and again labelled as three-legged. This figure occurs also in Romania, not differing in appearance from the English one” (Wolfram 1932: 363f.).

4 Solar Interpretation of the Motif of Three-Leggedness of the Miracle Horse

What is the meaning of the three-leggedness motif in relation to the horse of Wastyrgy? As Abaev noted, Wastyrgy is endowed with the features of a solar deity (Abaev 1990b: 133 f.), and it is not by chance that he is the owner of miraculous horses, since the solar symbolism of the horse is widespread both in the Indo-European tradition and beyond it. We believe that the three-leggedness of the horse can be explained through its solar nature, because in archaic cultures the triple symbolism was closely connected with the idea of the sun (Evsjukov/Komissarov 1984: 58 ff.). In Asia Minor, for example, the sun was often depicted in the form of the so-called triskelion: a disc from which three running human legs emerge (“radiate”) (Goblet d’Alviella 1891: 71f., 90, 221f.). The tripod, a common household and religious object in antiquity, is also considered a solar symbol, because its three supports correspond to the three “moments” of the sun’s path: sunrise, zenith and sunset (Cirlot 1971: 352).

The connection of the three-leggedness of the horse with the solar symbolism of this animal is also suggested by some facts of Indo-Iranian mythology. The ancient Indian solar god Vishnu in one of his zoomorphic incarnations appears in the image of a horse and is endowed with corresponding epithets: “having the face of a horse”, “horse-headed” (Gonda 1954: 148). At the same time, according to the Vedic myth, Vishnu makes three miraculous steps (*tripada*), which, according to one of the most widespread interpretations, denote the movement of the sun: sunrise, zenith and sunset (Kuiper 1962: 139f.). It should be noted that the ancient Indian *pad-* denotes both step and foot (Toporov 2010: 114 f.). The conclusions by V. V. Evsjukov S. A. Komissarov about the semantic identity of the triple step and three-leggedness, confirmed by many details

of Indo-European rituals as well as by materials of ancient Chinese mythology (Evsjukov/Komissarov 1984: 58ff.) appear thus to be well-founded. We believe that it is this identity that explains the images of three-legged Vishnu known in Indian art (Varadpande 2009: 51).

Another idea of Vishnu is also associated with the mythologeme of three steps. The Dutch priest Philip Baldaeus (1632–1671), author of the “Description of the Shores of the East Indies”, gave a lot of interesting information on Hindu mythology. He describes the tenth avatara of Vishnu as a white flying horse (“weiß fliegend Pferd”, s. Baldaeus 1672: 553) in the heavens, which stands on three legs and keeps the front right leg raised (“ein weiß Pferd oben im Himmel/welches auf drey Füßen stehe/ und das rechte Forderbein in die Höhe halte”). When the sinfulness of men reaches its limit, the horse will lower the fourth leg and the earth will be destroyed (Baldaeus 1672: 552). It is believed that Baldaeus used some unpublished manuscript work on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the author of which drew materials from both written and oral sources (Charpentier 1924: 420). There is also a tradition according to which the tenth coming *avatara* of Vishnu is a rider on a white flying horse and with a flaming sword in his hand (Vollmer 1836: 997).

M. Jähns compared Baldaeus’ information with an Iranian legend from the “Zardusht-nama”, according to which the legs of the favourite horse of the King Gushtasp were pulled into the torso, i.e. hidden. The prophet Zardusht was able to heal the animal by pulling out its hidden legs with the help of prayer. Apparently, Jähns considers the raised leg of Vishnu’s horse as a correspondence to the motif of “hidden legs” in the Zoroastrian legend, and he refers to Vishnu’s horse itself as “three-legged” (Jähns 1872: 409).

The three steps of Vishnu denote not only the movement of the sun, but also the way to the higher solar world, where people stay after death (Dumézil 1986: 235). There is a similar notion in Iranian mythology. With three steps Ameshaspenta (the highest deities of the Zoroastrian pantheon) ascend from the earth to the solar sphere and reach the paradise abode of righteous souls (Darmesteter 1892–93: 1/401). Zoroastrians describe paradise as consisting of three levels, passing through which the soul of a righteous person makes three steps, and the third step belongs to the sphere of the sun (Pavry 1929: 93, 104), just as in the Rigveda the third step of Vishnu is identified with the sun at its zenith (Kuiper 1962: 139f.).

In the Ossetian rite of dedicating a horse to the deceased (*bæxfeldisyn*), one of the old men first circled a saddled horse around the deceased three times, then with a cup of beer or *araka* made a dedicatory speech and, after giving the horse a taste from the cup, poured the drink on its hooves (Khamitsaeva 1992: 365). In another variant of the rite, the cup must be broken on the hoof of

the horse (ПРКОО-2: 11/700). The meaning of the connection between horse hooves and intoxicating drink can be clarified in comparison with the data of Vedic mythology. According to Austrian ethnologist Karl von Spieß, in archaic cultures the vessel for the drink of immortality could have the form of a horse hoof. Thus, in Vedic mythology, 100 jugs of intoxicating drink *sura* or *madhu* (both words mean honey or some drink made of honey) flow out of a horse hoof at the command of divine twin horsemen Ashvins. Moreover, the three footprints left by the three steps of Vishnu are referred to as “full of honey” in the Rigveda (RV I, 124, 4). It is also said that “the source of honey is in the highest footprint Vishnu” (RV I, 124, 5). Since Vishnu, on the one hand, leaves three footprints, and, on the other hand, is directly identified with a horse standing on three legs, he should be imagined as three-legged. Thus, von Spieß concludes, the three Vishnu’s horse tracks (“drei (Pferde-) Stapfen”) filled with honey, reflect the mythological idea of the horse hoof as a source of an intoxicating drink (honey) (Spieß 1914: 42).

Wastyrgy not only moves between the worlds on a three-legged horse, but he also endows dead people with miraculous horses so that they could get to the Land of the Dead faster. Generally speaking, Wastyrgy is somehow especially closely connected with the otherworld. In the Nart epic, it is he who performs the burial of Akhsar and Akhsartag, having built a crypt for them with a single blow of a felt whip (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1/32, 52, 65). When Donbettyr’s daughter Dzerassa cunningly escaped from him into the sea, he throws after her: “*Ėæy, dodojag dæ kona! Wælwyl dyl nal fæxæst wyzynæn, fælwæ myn Mærdty ta kædæm irvæzzy næ!*” / “Hey, woe to your hearth! In this world I can no longer catch you, but where will you hide from me in the other world?” (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1/65, cf. Miller 1881: 46). In this threat, apart from the bitterness of deceived male expectations, one cannot help but feel Wastyrgy’s confidence in his unlimited power in the world of the dead. He penetrates into Dzerassa’s crypt (again, the action is in the zone of the inanimate) and brings the dead beauty back to life, whereas in other Narts’ texts the power to bring dead people back to the world of the living for a while is vested in Barastyr, the lord of the Land of the Dead.

When trying to understand the surprising connection of Wastyrgy with the world of the dead, one should, obviously, remember the inherent functions of a war deity. According to Abaev, he “inherited the features of that Alan god of war, which the Alans worshipped in the image of a sword” (Abaev 1990: 109). But the same god of war, according to B. Bachrach, was also worshipped by the Alans as the god of the afterlife (Bachrach 1973: 111). Probably, it should be assumed that Wastyrgy together with military functions inherited those features of the Alan god of war, which characterized the latter as the lord of the otherworld. In this case, it becomes clear why in traditional Ossetian religious

beliefs it is Wastyrgy who is considered the founder of the rite of dedicating a horse to a dead man (Khamitsaeva 1992: 179).

An anonymous article of 1868 about religious beliefs of Ossetians (it is believed that its author was P. I. Golovinsky) contains a highly interesting description of a farewell speech given to the deceased: "This speech, which is either shortened or stretched, depending on the skill of the speaker, is the same in content for everyone; only in relation to dead brave men – friends of St. George (i.e. *Wastyrgy*, A. D.) in arms – a special turn is observed. When a brave horseman had died, the news thereabout was conveyed to St. George by a "hero"-swallow (*Narty zærvatykk*), the fastest of all birds. Having flown to St. George and sat on his right shoulder, it reported: "Your friend, so-and-so has died". St. George ordered the *narty zærvatykk* to give the deceased the best horse or the fastest *æfsūrǵ* (miraculous stallion) from his herd. Immediately after death, the deceased is washed, dressed in clean linen, a bridle is put in his right hand, and one of his relatives, addressing him, says: "You are a good, kind, brave man, you should appear on the best horse before Barastyr. I advise you to take a horse from the *kanta*. Horses of this people have deer ears, big, shining eyes, amber lips, ivory teeth, golden manes, silver wool. If all the horses of the *kanta* are in a race, try to take a horse in the herd of St. George; if he has horses in a race, then take the purest wheat and bait the *æfsūrǵ* of St. George with it. Having obtained a horse or an *æfsūrǵ*, ride on it to Barastyr" (PPKOO-2: 11/786f.). It is clear from this speech that St. George / Wastyrgy gifted horses not to all the dead, but only to brave warriors. Deceased brave men are called "friends" of Wastyrgy (Saint George) himself, and in this we see an echo of the ancient ideology of a military male alliance, whose heavenly head and patron was the god of war. A. I. Ivanchik (1993: 317ff.) and K. Kershaw (Kershaw 2000: 186) have already written in their studies that it is Wastyrgy / Saint George who is such a patron deity of military male alliances by the Ossetians.

The sequence of searching for a horse by a deceased brave man is worth special attention in this text. Having failed to find a suitable horse among those of the *kanta* people, he must try to choose one from the herd of Wastyrgy (St. George); if this fails, the deceased is offered a third and, apparently, the most difficult option – to lure a miraculous horse (*æfsūrǵ*) belonging to Wastyrgy. The note explains that "Afsurg is a three-legged animal, similar to a horse, the fastest of all animals" (PPKOO-2: 11/787). So, the dead brave goes to the realm of the dead on the marvellous three-legged horse of Wastyrgy himself, a fact that may seem strange, but we find a close parallel for it in Germanic-Scandinavian mythology. Here Odin (Wodan) is the god of war, the patron of male unions and the ruler of Valhalla, the heavenly parlour ("paradise") where brave warriors fallen in battles stay. Only Odin possesses the marvellous eight-legged horse Sleipnir. At the same time, researchers have discovered one very curious

detail: memorial steles of Gotland (Sweden, the second half of the 1st millennium AD) from Ardre, Hablingo and Tjangvide contain the image of a dead man travelling to the other world on Odin's eight-legged horse (Wolfram 1932: 367). According to O. Höfler, this indicates that the lord of Valhalla himself was sometimes represented as a horse (Höfler 1934: 38). Yet, for us the analogy with the Ossetian text of the dedication, in which the dead brave man moves to the other world on a three-legged horse belonging to Wastyrgy, is especially important.

5 “Limpness” and “Three-Leggedness”

Sometimes Ossetian narrators, while calling the horse three-legged, in the same text also refer to it as a lame horse (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/494). A similar situation can be traced in other folklore traditions. In the same stories miracle horses are so often called three-legged or lame that researchers have long ago come to the conclusion that lameness and three-leggedness are identical (Hüsing 1909: 73f.). Let us give only some examples. In the Russian fairy tale “Sivko-burko” the youngest of the three brothers, Ivan the Fool, leaving home, begs his brothers to give him at least some horse: “The brothers could not fight back: “Well, take, fool, a three-legged mare!”. As time passed, Ivan the Fool again set out on his journey and asked his brothers for a horse. They again could not refuse him and “told him to take the lame mare again”. This story with persuasions was repeated for the third time: “No, they could not fight back, they fought and fought, they told him to take a skinny lame mare” (Afanas'ev 1957: 11/4f.). As we can see, here “three-legged”, “lame” and “thin” act as equivalent characteristics of the horse.

The third equivalent of the three-legged horse, “thin mare”, should perhaps be compared with an interesting observation of Karl von Spieß. The Austrian ethnologist saw the reflection of the three-legged horse motif in the name of the Iranian hero Kersaspa, which means, according to Spieß, “he who has a damaged horse” (“der mit dem schadhafte Pferde”, s. Spieß 1931: 131). The more precise etymology of this name is somewhat different: “having thin, skinny horses” (“magere Pferde habend / having lean horses”, s. Mayrhofer 1956–80: 1/263), and its connection with the mythologeme of the three-legged horse may cause certain doubts. However, it should probably not be completely excluded, given the identity of the definitions “three-legged” and “skinny” applied to the horse in the above Russian tale.

Georg Hüsing cites Edmund Küttler's information that the “flawed / thin”, three-legged horse is found in Georgian folklore under the name of Raši (Svan. Rašū) and it is none other than Raḥš, Rostahms' horse (Hüsing 1911: 38).

Also in German folklore, the character partly resembling Ivan the Fool of Russian fairy tales and having the same unrepresentable nickname – Grindkopf “Lousy-headed”, in the plots close to the above-mentioned Russian fairy tale, also strives to participate in battle, hunting, searching for living water, etc., but receives only a lame (“three-legged”) horse for these heroic deeds (“... aber man giebt ihm ein lahmes (‘dreibeiniges’) Pferd”, s. Panzer 1901: 262).

To explain the mythological significance of the three-legged (lame) horse Georg Hüsing tried to include it in the context of the Iranian lunar myth, but on a very shaky basis. Seeing similarities between the miraculous three-legged donkey of the Pahlavi texts and Apaosh, the demon of drought in the form of a black horse, he extrapolated to the latter the sign of three-leggedness (Hüsing 1909: 52f.), although there is no indication of this in the sources. Rolf Neumann supported Hüsing’s interpretation and even tried to apply it to the interpretation of the lame eight-legged horse Sleipnir belonging to Odin (Neumann 1913: 224f.). However, this hypothesis was not further developed.

As noted above, Odin/Wodan’s horse appears in German legends not only as eight-legged, but also as three-legged, and its three-leggedness is again associated with lameness or equated with it: “His (Odin’s, A. D.) three-legged, i.e. lame, horse was called Sleipnir, Schleifer, Celt. slaopairean” (“Sein dreibeiniges, d.h. lahmes, Pferd hieß Sleipnir, Schleifer, kelt. slaopairean”, s. Obermüller 1866–72: 11/418).

Victoria Prasser notes also that in German folklore the lame or three-legged horse (“das hinkende oder dreibeinige Pferd”) is the animal of Wodan and interprets lameness as a sign of theriomorphism. Prasser gave interesting examples from German ethnography (peasant dances with movements imitating lameness, running competitions in which the last man had to tie a bundle of straw to his knee and limp as if he had a padded knee), which, in her opinion, are the remnants of the rituals of male union and the cult of Wodan (Prasser 1940: 118f.). The legends in which the protagonist not only appears on a three-legged horse, but also finds himself wounded in the leg, i.e. lame, testify to the theriomorphic character of this hero and to the connection of these legends with the mythology of Wodan, who originally appeared as a horse (identified with his famous horse Sleipnir): “Demnach würde auch das Hinken des großen erwarteten Sagenhelden auf seinen einst theriomorphen Charakter zu deuten sein; verständlich wird dies dies uns wieder, wenn wir in dem Sieger eben den Gott der Männerbunde, Wodan, erblicken, der, wie bereits dargelegt, die anthropomorphe Hypostase des ursprünglich pferdegestaltigen Dämons ist” (Prasser 1940: 118f.).

In this connection, it is interesting to note an Ossetian text in which Wastyrgy appears among the Narts on a three-legged, lame horse. When the Narts offered him to dance with them, he replied: *Mæ bæx k’wylx u, mæxædaeg*

dær k'wylyx dæn mæ bæxaw, æmæ mæ awazut fæltaw mæ fændagyl // “My horse is lame, and I myself am lame like my horse, so it is better to let me go my way” s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/494). In this fragment we see an echo of the same archaic representation that was noted above in the mythology of Odin: the divine rider identifies himself with his lame horse.

6 Conclusion

The three-leggedness of the horse belonging to Wastyrgy is not a later semantic aberration of his “fire-footedness” but a mythological motif belonging to a very archaic layer of traditional spiritual culture of the Ossetians. The motif of three-leggedness of the horse of the solar deity Wastyrgy belongs to those triple elements, which are inherent in solar symbolism in religious and mythological beliefs of many peoples of the world. The three-legged horse belonging to Wastyrgy functions also as a psychopomp, a feature which finds correspondences in ancient Greek and Germanic-Scandinavian mythology.

The closest analogies are found in genetically related mythological systems (the ancient Indian sun god Vishnu takes three miraculous steps that mark the way to the heavenly abode of ancestors, he is depicted as three-legged or identified with a horse standing only on three legs; in Iranian mythology – three steps by which after death a man ascends to the solar sphere).

Taking into account the obvious connection of the solar Wastyrgy with the world of the dead, we can assume that his three-legged horse, carrying the deceased to the other world, is a zoomorphic embodiment of the Indo-Iranian mythologeme of the three steps of the solar deity, taking the soul of the righteous to the abode of bliss.

Noose in the Ethno-cultural Tradition of the Alans-Ossetians

Boris Mysykkaty

Ancient authors are unanimous in the fact that the tribes living in Scythia and Sarmatia were excellent riders and masters of a special equestrian discipline: the art of noose throwing on their enemies at full gallop. If we recall the Scythian custom of rewarding warriors who proved that they had killed their enemies (Herodotus IV, 64; 66), as well as the custom of the Savromatian Amazons to marry only after killing three enemies, then the noose would be the optimal weapon to deliver to the chief the corpse of a slain enemy for getting access to the division of booty, or a living captive for ransom or sale as a slave. The latter became particularly relevant in an era when military elites began to don heavy armour, which meant the possibility of capturing a warrior, or even a king, who could pay a huge ransom for freedom. In this regard, the Roman military historian and theorist Vegetius wrote that “*Cataphracts (armoured horsemen), because of the heavy armour they wear, are protected from wounds, but because of the bulkiness and weight of the weapons are easily captured: they are caught with nooses*” (Epitome of Military Science III, 23). According to the Latin author of the 4th century Pseudo-Hegesippus (On the ruin of the city of Jerusalem V, 50), the Alans are “*a fierce people and long unknown to ours, very “skillful in battle to throw a noose and entangle the enemy” (laqueos iacere atque hostem innectere ars Alanis bellandique mos est)*. The same is mentioned by its primary source Josephus Flavius, describing the Alanian raid on Armenia in the 1st century AD, during which the Armenian king Tiridat was almost captured by an Alan who threw a noose on him: “*Producing plunder with ease and meeting no resistance, they, making desolation, reached Armenia. Here Tiridates ruled, who came up against them and gave battle, but narrowly escaped capture during the battle, for the enemy, having thrown a noose (βρόχος) from afar, would have dragged him away from the field of battle if he had not immediately managed to cut the rope with his sword and escape*” (Jewish War 244–251). Cassiodorus conveys the same thing in his translation of the “Jewish War” (*procul enim quidam misso laqueo circumdatum tracturus fuerat nisi celeriter gladio rupisset laqueum atque ita fugisset*, Bell. Iud. VII, 42). The Armenian historian of the 8th century Ioannes Mamikonyan in his report about the raid of the “Northmen” on

Armenia (The History of Tavrion xxiv) tells that during the duel of the leaders, the leader of the “Northmen” threw a noose on the king of Armenia, turned his horse and rode back, but Tiridat, in order not to be torn from the saddle, directed the horse after the enemy (Nefedkin 2011: 181). Movses Khorenatsi tells about the Basilian tribe that lived in the Volga steppes and invaded Armenia in the 3rd century through the Derbent Passage. The Armenian author writes about the king of the Basilians, who were probably Eastern Alans or Roxolans: “The king of Basilians comes up to the sovereign, takes out from under the horse’s equipment a noose of veins covered with leather and, skillfully throwing it on from behind, wraps it around his left shoulder and right armpit, for his hand was raised to strike with a sword” (History of Armenia II, 85). Long before the appearance of the Alans on the historical scene, many authors wrote about the use of nooses among Iranian nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes. Thus, for example, Herodotus tells about the tribe of the Sagartians (Σαγάρτιοι), a semi-nomadic people living on the northern borders of Achaemenid Persia, whose main offensive weapon was a noose made of woven leather straps. “This is the manner of fighting of these men: when they are at close quarters with their enemy, they throw their ropes, which have a noose at the end; whatever he catches, horse or man, each man drags to himself, and the enemy is entangled in the coils and slain” (Herodotus VII, 85). As for the Scythians proper, no direct archaeological evidence indicating to the use of nooses by the Scythians has been found so far, which is not surprising due to the organic materials from which the noose was usually made. The absence of noose blocks or rings indicates, probably, the existence of archaic types of nooses, whose loops were made in a special technological way, from the same material as the noose.¹

Nevertheless, there are indirect pictorial and written sources which testify to the use of noose among the Scythians. Greco-Scythian toreutics is rich in everyday details of Scythian life, one of the most famous examples being, of course, the famous silver amphora from the Chertomlyk barrow (4th century BC). The middle frieze of the amphora depicts scenes of horse breeding and sacrifice, which is in detail similar to the written description of this rite by Herodotus. The “father of history” wrote in his work that the Scythians sacrificed horses in a special way: by strangulation with a noose thrown around the horse’s neck (Herodotus IV, 60–61). Machinskij rightly saw in this image

1 Such nooses are still used by reindeer herders in Siberia, for example, Evenki *maut* is made of twisted reindeer skin taken from the neck of a reindeer killed during the rut, when the neck skin thickens to protect it from wounds caused by antlers during reindeer tournaments. The lug is made in a special way from the same piece of leather as the noose. Probably, Scythian nooses were made by a similar method from the neck skin of horses sacrificed.

exactly the sacrifice of a horse with the help of nooses, traces of which were left on the amphora in the form of fragments of thin silver wire on the horse's neck and the characters' hands (Machinskij 1978: 236f.). However, the poses of the characters and the horse do not cause much doubt that they used nooses. The Scythians noosing horses on the side images of the same Chertomlyk frieze (see illustrations) use an identical tool. Two other images on gold objects of the 4th century BC deserve attention; the image of an old warrior on a cone from the Perederieva Mogila in the Dnieper region, and an identical character on a similar object from the Sengileev barrow, recently discovered in Stavropol. In both images we see a one-type character whose torso from the right shoulder under the left armpit is wrapped with multithreaded loops resembling a rope or a noose.² Apart Herodotus, Lucian of Samosata mentions Scythian nooses in a list of various items of armour, which according to an assumption of his character Mnesippos could well be, on a par with the *akinak*, embodiments of the Scythian god of war (Toxaris xxxviii, 4). Valerius Flaccus specifies that the Scythian tribe of the Auchates were "skilful in *throwing great circles of flying noose and in using the noose (laqueis) to drag distant enemies towards them*" (Argonautica vi, 132). Similar military practices are attributed by Pausanias to the early Savromates: "*They throw nooses on the enemies confronted by them and then, having turned their horses, overturn those caught in the nooses*" (Description of Hellas i, 21, 5). From the Sarmatian time the narrative of Pomponius Mela dates, in which the tribe of the Syraks and the customs of their female warriors Amazons are described: "*The women participate in mounted battles, and they do not strike with a sword, but, having thrown a noose on the enemy, drag him behind them, and thus kill him*" (Descriptive Geography i, 19, 5 / i, 103). The image of a she-warrior on horseback with a noose in her hand has been preserved in the Ossetian Nart epic (see below).

A symbolic image on an early Sarmatian gold belt buckle made in the animal style with turquoise inlays is also of interest. It depicts a fanged wolf struggling with a buffalo snake, which throws a deadly loop around the wolf's neck, reminiscent of a noose. In this respect, some data of the Ossetian epic are very interesting, where the hero, who wants to master a miracle horse, is forced to weave a miracle noose from the skins of the Zali snakes he destroyed, which turns out to be stronger than the noose woven from six buffalo skins (*zaljag kælmytæ fæcağta jæ mæstyjæ æmæ wydon cærmittæ bastyğta æmæ sæ sbydta*

2 I express my gratitude to A. Y. Alexeev for pointing out these images and for his valuable observations.

wydonæj arqan, Kokajty 2014: 73).³ It is also worth notion a similar Old Indian object called *nāgapāśa* ‘snake noose’. This attribute of gods and heroes is described in various sources including the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana as a type of magic noose used in battles and consisting of a snake or intertwined snakes (Liebert 1986: 188).⁴ Its other synonyms are *pāsapannaga*, *nāgāstra*, *nāgapāśāstra*,⁵ *nāgābandha*, *citrabandha*, *sarpabandha* (Emeneau 1960:

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- 3 In my previous work, which focuses on some issues related to the vestiges of the image of the Indo-Iranian god Vayu in the tradition of Iranian-speaking nomads, I have already suggested that the image of the fighting wolf and snake should be seen as a metaphorical representation of the struggle between the two antagonistic origins of this ambivalent god: the snake is the embodiment of the “evil Vayu” and the wolf of the “good Vayu” (Mysykkyaty 2019: 327f.). If this assumption be true, then we can assume that originally the noose functioned as an attribute of the Indo-Iranian god of life and death Vayu, from whom the Vedic Yama inherited this attribute. After all, it was Vayu who was the lord of the breath-*prana* of all living beings, which he could interrupt with the help of a strangling tool, i. e. the noose. Important in this respect is the fact that Vayu is associated with horse-breeding (see Mysykkyaty 2019: 309, 312, 314, 320). This feature of him, reflected in particular on the Novosvobodnensk fresco, is most archaic. Perhaps, the Scythian special way of horse sacrifice with the help of a noose, as described by Herodotus (cf. the name of the Ossetian Wayug **Æfsagbid*, literally “tormenting horses”), goes back to these ideas (Dzitssojty 1992: 211). It is noteworthy that in the same tale (Kokajty 2014: 73) the Ossetian descendants of Vayu, the *wayug* giants, appear, whose role is to test the hero’s noose for strength. Having torn the first two nooses woven from buffalo skin, they find it impossible to tear the noose woven from Zali snakes (*Anæcydyty wæjgwytyæ dæc æmæ Qaraman dæc, æmæ fefidar is wyj, wycy arqan*, Kokajty 2014: 73). Interesting enough, in the epic Mahabharata the son of Vayu, Bhima, is known for his enmity towards snakes and rakshasas. One of the stories of his youth tells how Duryodhana set many poisonous snakes on him, which Bhima killed with his bare hands (and in several instances the term *sarpabandha* “snake noose-rope” is used in describing this incident) (Emeneau 1960: 299f.). In the Ramayana, his other son, Hanuman, finds himself entangled by *nāgapāśa* “snake noose” from which he manages to free himself with difficulty (Emeneau 1960: 294f.). These epic motifs are partially illustrated in zoomorphic form by the plot of the struggle between the wolf and the snake depicted on a Sarmatian buckle (on the connection of Vaiyu and his sons with the image of the wolf see Mysykkyaty 2019).
- 4 This information was kindly provided by Y. V. Vasilkov in personal correspondence. According to the Hindu tradition, *nāgapāśa* was originally an animate being, a character of myths, later transformed into an attribute of gods and heroes (the torque-snake of the god Shiva, the noose of Durga, the arrow-arcane of Arjuna, Lakshmana, Indrajit). In some cases, *nāgapāśa* is called *nāgāstra* or *nāgapāśāstra* literally “snake-noose-arrow”, and is used in archery as an arrow, which, once hit the enemy, turned into a bondage from which it was impossible to free oneself (sometimes into a *padabandha* leg bondage; cf. a similar Iranian term: Pashto *puwāśa* ‘noose, shackles’ from **pada-bastrā-*, where the second part goes back to the base *band-*). Its epithet in Buddhist texts (including Khotanese), *amoghapāśa* ‘irresistible noose’, reminiscent of the symbolic ‘noose of fate’ in the Persian epic Shahnameh, is also worth noting.
- 5 For the Scythian representations of the snake-arrow and analogues to this image, see Alekseev 2015: 6ff.

291ff.). The Parthians, related to the Sarmatian tribes and led by natives of the Sarmatian tribal union of the Dahae, continued to adhere to traditional warfare and used the noose with similar skill as their northern brethren. According to the medieval Byzantine Encyclopaedia Suda, the Parthians are called ‘noose-bearers’ (σειροφόροι): “With nooses (Σειραῖς) – of woven straps; and the people of Parthians, those who are called ‘noose-bearers’ (σειροφόροι). They fight from their horses, spinning nooses made of straps; approaching their enemies, they throw loops of straps and, turning back, rapidly drive their horses back, and with an onslaught drag those who are caught in the loops dead or alive” (Suda σ278, see Adler 1928–38: IV/346; Nefedkin 2011: 180). A loop-shaped device for fastening a noose is preserved on a horse carapace from Dura-Europos, which is kept in the National Museum of Damascus (Khazanov 2008: 120).

Nooses were used not only by the Parthians, but also by the military nobility of Armenia, which was greatly influenced by the Parthians and adopted this practice from them. In the epic song about the wedding of King Artashes to the Alanian princess Satenik, recorded by Movses Khorenatsi in the 5th century, it is sung about the Armenian king: “And he swept a swift-winged eagle across the river, | And threw a noose of red leather with a golden ring, (*oskēōt šikap’ok paranri*) | And encircled the camp of the princess of the Alans” (History of Armenia II, 50, s. Dumézil 1976: 52).

The tradition of using the noose in warfare and hunting took root in Parthian Persia to such an extent that when the Sassanids replaced the Arsacid dynasty, they appreciated the noose as an auxiliary armament of the rider. By the way, the close contact of Byzantines with the peoples of late antiquity and early Middle Ages such as Alans, Sassanid Persians, Huns and Avars led to the inclusion of the noose in the equipment of the professional mounted warriors, as described in the writings of the Byzantine expert of military matters Emperor Mauritius: “Saddles should be provided with large coverings; bridles should be of good quality; two iron stirrups should be attached to the saddle, a noose on a strap (*λωρόσσοκον*),⁶ slings, a travelling bag large enough to hold provisions for a soldier for three or four days” (Strategikon I, 2). There are at least four known Sasanian dishes depicting a heroic king hunting with a noose (pehl. *gyān-nizār*; Persian *kamand*), and in only one case is he depicted on foot. A silver dish from the Abkhazian State Museum in Sukhum depicts Bakhram II hunting a bear with a noose; a bow is visible behind the shoulders of the shah, and a killed bear lies under the hooves of his horse.⁷ Another dish from the Azerbaijan

6 Cf. the loop-shaped device on the horse armour from Dura-Europos (see illustration above).

7 According to the Avestan tradition bears, along with monkeys, were considered to be the creations of Ahriman, originating from the mating of humans and divas (avest. *daēva*) of the

Museum in Tabriz contains an image of Shapur I hunting an ostrich or bustard, one bird lying under the hooves of his horse galloping while the other is noosed by the neck. The third dish is decorated with an image of a rider putting a noose around the neck of an onager (wild donkey, Pers. *gōr*). The same plot can be seen on a dish from Nizhniy Novgorod (kept in the State Hermitage Museum), which depicts Shapur III on foot, noosing an onager by the neck.⁸ These iconographic sources indicate that the noose was held with one hand, and the second hand was *used to* control the stock of noose strap collected in the bay. One can also cite interesting information from the Pahlavi text *Draxt ī Asūrīg*, in which a goatskin noose is mentioned, “*which is used in many battles, and it never comes off from the saddle fastenings*” (Dmitriev 2008: 66ff.). In the *Shahnameh* there is a well-known story about a punitive expedition of the Sassanids against the North Caucasian Alans, during which Shah Khosrow I Anushirvan (531–578) sends a messenger to the Alans with a warning that mighty warriors who are “*skilful with the arrow, the mace and the lasso*” have arrived (Alemany 2000: 357). The validity of this data about the use of noose by horsemen in the time of Khosrow Anushirvan is confirmed by the historian al-Tabari, who described a complete list of armament and equipment of the Sasanian mounted warrior of that era. The noose is also mentioned in the hands of skillful horsemen in later Persian works, such as “Warka and Gulshah” by the poet Ayuki, etc. (Theotokis 2018: 161f.).

The noose is most often found in the Iranian epic tradition, where it is an integral part of the hero’s panoply. Moreover, it appears that Iranian kings sent their sons to learn using the noose from Saka heroes of Sistan. For example, the Saka hero Rustam taught the Persian prince Siyavush using noose.⁹ In the poem, nooses are mentioned most often in the hands of the Sistan heroes as well as of the enemies of the Persians, nomadic Turanians, who invaded Iran from the northern regions. Scholars rightly regard the Turanians as a collective image of the northern Iranians of the Scytho-Sarmatian world, just as in the Georgian chronicles (which were greatly influenced by the Persian written tradition) they appear under the collective ethnonym Ossetians (Old Georgian

night, having caught up with a diva, he nooses and beheads him. It is not excluded that there is a hint of this epic plot on Sasanian dishes.

8 In the Iranian epic poem *Shahnameh* there is a story about Akvan-diva (Avest. *akamanah* “evil intent”), who appears before the protagonist Rustam in the form of a buff onager with a black stripe from mane to tail. The rider pursues him for three days and three nights, having caught up with the diva, he nooses him and beheads him. It is not excluded that there is a hint of this epic plot on Sasanian dishes.

9 In India, princes practiced the use of the noose from a young age as part of their compulsory training (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 240).

ovsni). The Turanians manage to steal even the famous Rakhsh, the horse of Rustam himself, with the help of nooses.

In the *Shahnameh* the noose is mentioned at least three hundred times, the review of which is not appropriate within the framework of this paper. This issue undoubtedly deserves a separate study, I will only note that the noose is presented in a rather multifaceted way: it is not only a weapon, but also a metaphorical image. In some cases, the noose is allegorically referred to as the braided tresses of a beautiful princess (“the *maiden is given a fatal, irresistible noose*”); in other cases it is an image of death, time, fate, which holds an invisible noose around the neck of each person, which is tightened at the fateful hour (“*It is the custom of fate: with one hand he gives the crown, and holds the noose in the other. | When you sit on the throne, glowing with triumph, the noose slips you off the throne*”). The noose is also used as a measure of length, with each ring of the noose corresponding to one cubit (“*Ten kamands each, if you measure them*”), as equipment for climbing or ascending a fortress wall (“*The brave man threw the noose on the sharp prong of the tower and was up in no time*”), etc.

But primarily, the noose is an indispensable attribute of the Sistani heroes. Sukhrab's great-grandfather, named Sam, says to the Shah of Iran: “*I will travel around the world, clad in armour, I will throw my noose, I will defeat my enemies*”, asking his permission to set off on a journey. And when Sam decides that his son Zal should take his place, he explains to the Shah that “my arm has *become weak for the noose*”. Zal also turns into a noose-bearer hero, with its help he gets his wife Rudaba, hunts lions, etc. However, it is the exploits of his son Rustam “Sak” (*Rustam-i Sagzī*, under this epithet he was known in Persia, and in Armenia as *Rostom Sagčik*) that are described most extensively in Firdausi's poem, and accordingly, the noose is most often in his hands. Among other feats, he uses the noose to master the miracle horse Rakhsh, kill a sorceress, defeat the king of Damascus Aulad, nearly capture the king of Turanians Afrasiab, capture the Hakan of China, the ruler of Sham, drive Turanians away from Mugan, defeat the Keshan hero Kamus, and so on. His sons also perform feats with the help of the noose, Faramarz avenges with it the Shah of Kabul for Rustam's death, and Sukhrab's “*sixty-rings noose of exorbitant length*” serves the hero in hunting, war and even for capturing the beautiful Amazonian woman Gordaférid.

As known, before the Sassanid rule, the territory of Sistan was called Sakastan, i.e., the “Land of the Saks”. The Saks are none other than the Eastern Scythians of Herodotus, who in the 1st century BC founded a powerful Indo-Scythian kingdom in the north of Indostan, whose borders also included the territories of Persian Sistan. In this regard, it is interesting to note that on a

number of Indo-Scythian coins of the 1st century BC the noose is the main attribute of the king, i.e. it replaces the bow as traditional royal regalia, depicted, for example, on Parthian coins of the Arsacid dynasty. In the oral folklore of Sistan, the noose is mentioned quite often (Grjunberg/Steblin-Kamenskij/Boldyrev 1981: 28, 165, 214, 225f., 243ff.).

Iranian-speaking nomads known in the Chinese chronicles as Yuezhi, who had come to the region to replace the Indo-Scythians and Parthians, established a powerful empire, the Kushan Kingdom. The Chinese sources say that the horsemen of the Kuei-Hu tribe, in the west of Kushan, “*used nooses of raw-hide, which they, whipping the horses, threw on people*” (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 240).¹⁰ The monuments of material culture of the Kushans testify to their use of nooses in war, hunting (Brit. Mus. No. 1880.35), raids (1880.52), as well as in everyday life (1880.887). We see such scenes on stone reliefs of a Kushan stupa of the 3rd c. AD from Jamal Garhi, in the very north of Pakistan (historical region of Gandhara), fragments of which are kept in the British Museum. Kushan coins often depict a deity holding a noose and a trident, which closely adjoins the iconographic tradition of India (Shiva-Rudra). In Hinduism, the noose (*pāśa*) is an attribute of a number of gods. In particular, Varuna punishes sinners with it, and the gods of death Yama¹¹ and Kala¹² use it to kill living beings,¹³ which has a direct parallel in the Iranian tradition with its invisible noose of time “*from which neither the poor man nor the king can dodge*”. It is quite remarkable in this context that in the Avesta, the most ancient Iranian written source, the noose is mentioned precisely as an attribute of the demons of death Asto-Vidotu and Vizarsh (Rak 1998: 423). This fact is not

10 Cf. in the *Shahnameh* mention of a Saka noose: “Having taken out a raw-bark noose from the belts, the giant threw it with a swing”.

11 Cf. in the ancient Indian epic “Mahabharata” the expression “Son, drive away from you Shakuni, already covered with the noose of Death!” (Neveleva/Vasil’kov 1998: 79, 172).

12 Cf. in India the sect of “stranglers” of the Thags, who kill their victims by strangulation, sacrificing them to the goddess of death Kali.

13 This symbolism is particularly vivid in the ancient Indian epic “Mahabharata”, in the book about the night “beating of sleeping warriors” (Sauptikaparva). “Black, with red eyes and mouth, wearing red garlands, painted with red ointment, clothed in red robes, with nooses in her hands, whirling, the Night of Death appeared to them in their own eyes, advancing (on them) with laughter, entangling men, horses and elephants with formidable nooses, dragging behind her countless *pretas* with hairless heads entangled with nooses.” (Neveleva/Vasil’kov 1998: 27f.). The night massacre of the Pandavas’ camp is mythologically juxtaposed with the eschatological motif of Kālarātri, the Night of Death, i.e. the night of the death of the universe at the end of the world period, the final moment of the world destruction at the end of the *yuga*. Kālarātri is identified with Durga, the female hypostasis of Shiva (Rudra) or his consort (Neveleva/Vasil’kov 1998: 121, 172).

surprising in view of the connection of the noose with the nomadic world and the Avestan general demonization of all images and attributes associated with nomadic life.¹⁴

Considering this topic, one cannot avoid another interesting and controversial issue: the interpretation of late Roman mosaics depicting riders on the hunt from Borj Jedid, Tunisia. The fact is that to date the problem of attribution of their characters remains controversial. One of the main arguments (certainly not the only one) against attempts to attribute these images to Roman horsemen (Duval 2002) is the presence of a noose in the hands of one of the horsemen noosing a horned deer by the neck at full gallop. Strangely enough, the researcher who put forward this interpretation does not discuss this motif in any way and mentions it only twice (... *deux cavaliers, dont l'un capture un cerf au lasso ... Le cavalier au lasso*, see Duval 2002: 334f., fig. 2). While from the vast amount of surviving images and written data there are no known cases of noose used by Roman or Berber horsemen, there are Roman mosaics depicting pedestrian children and teenagers catching ducks with a loop and noose (Villa Casale, Sicily; Villa Aviario, Tunisia, etc.). However, riders with a noose in their hand are not known anywhere in the western part of the Roman Empire except on mosaics from Borj Jedid.¹⁵ This circumstance makes us return to the previous theory about the depiction on these mosaics of horsemen from the times of the Vandal Kingdom, which included Alans who participated in the Great Migration of Peoples (the official title of the king was *rex vandalarum et alanorum* “king of Vandals and Alans”). There is no information about the use of the noose by the Vandals.¹⁶ Moreover, the only Germanic tribe that used the noose were the Goths,¹⁷ a tribe that moved the furthest to the east, neighboured in the Northern Black Sea coast with Iranian-speaking nomads

14 In another paper, I tried to trace a similar fate of the wolf image revered by the nomads and demonized in the Avestan tradition as well as in the epic poem *Shahnameh* (see Mysykaty 2019: 337f.).

15 A good example of the use of nooses by foot soldiers are the images of gladiators *laquearii* armed with a noose and a dagger, which appeared in the late antique period. The consular diptych of Flavius Anastasius Probus (first half of the 6th c. AD) shows in the lower register gladiatorial games organized by him, with the participation of two foot *laqueatores*.

16 G. Theotokis in his special work on the Byzantine nooses admits that this mosaic from Tunisia depicts a Vandal rider (“probably a Vandal, lassoing a deer”), thus contradicting his own, quite fair statement that only the Goths used the nooses, having borrowed them from the Huns or the Alans (“the Goths, as they were the ones who took over the lasso from the Huns and the Alans”, see Theotokis 2018: 162, 168).

17 According to John Malala (*Chronographia* 364, 14, 23) the Goth Areobindus, the leader of the Gothic federates (*comes foederatorum*) in the service of the Romans in the first half of

for several centuries, and felt a huge cultural influence from them. Based on these data, it can be concluded that the mosaic from Borj Jedid depicts an Alanian rider, or that the Alans had a strong cultural influence on the Vandal elite, whose members, like the Goths of the Northern Black Sea region, began to practice such Alanian customs as horse hunting with a noose.

It is also worth noting that the motif of a rider hunting a deer is one of the most popular among ancient nomads: we often find it in Scythian, Saka and Sarmatian images, and it appears also in the tales about the reasons of the migration of the Huns and Hungarians in Europe. Besides, it is one of the favourite motifs of the Nart epic of the Ossetians, where the horned deer is the hunter's favourite and most desirable prey. According to Abaev's fair description, the deer is "a favourite animal of Ossetian folklore. Hunting a deer is hunting *par excellence*, and deer meat is an obligatory treat for any Narts' feast" (Abaev 1949: 49). The motif of catching a deer with a noose is also known in Ossetian folklore.¹⁸ Thus, for example, in a late medieval song about Belle Azaukhan, the heroine promises to marry the one "who from the deer herd on the Kum Plain will separate a deer with hundred horns (*sædsigon sag*), | will drive it by the Dzulat tower, | and, having baited it, (*Arqan ibæł ragæłzǵæj*) | will tie it to a horse-brace under the Dzulat tower" (Khamitsaeva 1992: 111f.).¹⁹

1 Noose in the Narts' Epic of the Ossetians

Nooses are not mentioned very often in the Ossetian epic, but the cases that I have managed to collect suffice to convince me that the Narts were well acquainted with this unsophisticated device.

The deep antiquity of the noose is indicated by an Ossetian epic motif about the use of nooses by the oldest population of the earth, the Wadmer giants, a generation of beings preceding the creation of the Narts. The resurrected giant tells Soslan that they "caught beasts with a noose, then killed them with stones" (Libedinskij 1978: 416). The giants Gumirs and Wadmers

the 5th century, defeated the Persian champion Ardazan in a one-on-one fight by noosing (ἐσόκκευσεν), threw him off his horse and killed him (Theotokis 2018: 157f.).

18 Similar motifs are also found in other Nart stories, though they speak only about catching a live deer or a fallow deer, but there is no mention of a noose in them (see, for example, Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: v/6).

19 The name of the tower implies a medieval Alan town, named Lower Dzhaulat in literature; it was destroyed by Mongol conquerors, then rebuilt by the Golden Horde and destroyed again by Tamerlane during one of his campaigns in the Caucasus.

are convincingly explained as the tribes of the Cimmerians, who preceded the Scythian-Sarmatian nomads.

In a Digor legend, the white horse of the Atsaevs advises the young Atsamaz to dig a deep hole and hide in it, having tied the horse with a strong noose (*mænbælbafedar arqan nibbættæ*), and to keep hold of its end so that the horse could stand on a puff and defeat the enemy horse in a duel (Khamitsaeva/Bjazyrov 1989–91: 11/317; Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: 1V/317).

The young hero Sauway invaded a distant overseas country where a herd of foals grazes on the plain. Riding up to the herd, he “caught a three-year-old motley foal and took it out of the herd” (*ærtæazdzyd qulon bajrag ærcaxsta æmæ jæ ralasta*), then drove the whole herd, repulsing an attack of a group of herd owners, and drove it to the Narts (Abaev et al. 1975: 329; Libedinskij 1978: 406).

In the story about abduction of the cow, Soslan catches Syrdon’s dog with a noose: “Suddenly he saw, pale with anger, | That Syrdon’s dog was chewing bones. | Thinking that the hour had come, | He quickly caught the dog with a noose” (*Wæd Sozyryqo arqan ajxældta | Æmæ zy kwyzy wajtağd racaxsta*, s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: VI/293). The motif of catching a horse with a noose is found in the story “*Narty Chyzg*”. “The girl got on her horse, took a noose (*arqan ajsta*) and rode round the herds. An iron-faced horse saw her and chased after her. The girl turned her horse sharply and threw the noose (*arqan fexsta*). She caught the iron-furred horse and the horse collapsed on the ground. The girl pulled him to herself and then brought him to the Narts” (Gutiev 1996: 93).²⁰

The hero, who wants to get the miracle horse, advises his younger comrade to noose it (*Arqanbast æj bakæn*) so that it does not hit his head (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: VII/492). Another story says that “the *Nart man sat on an Arab (horse), took a noose, swung it and caught a bison*” (*næرتون læg ..., arabbagyl'ysbadtī arqan rajsta, nyzzyltda jæ æmæ dombajy ærcaxsta*, s. Abaev 1958–89: 1/69).

The numerous horse herds of Marguz the Noseless are guarded by shepherds who are armed with special devices for horse breeding (*Qojraxti xæccæ, arqanti xæccæ*, s. Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: V/500). The word *qojraxti* is interpreted by the commentators of the edition as “some device for catching horses” (Khamitsaeva/Dzhikaev 2003–12: V/709). The etymology of the word helps to clarify its meaning. The word *qojrax* does not really exist in Ossetic, but there is *qorrağ* | *qojrağ* with the meaning “pole with a hook”, which goes back

20 Cf. above information about Sarmatian Amazons killing enemies with a noose and a sharp turn of the horse.

through Adyg. *qorağ* ‘pole with a hook’ and Kabard. *qūrag* ‘pole’, to Kumyk *quray* ‘pole’ (Abaev 1958–89: 11/312). In fact, we have a device known among Turkic-Mongol nomads for catching grazing horses, consisting of a long light pole to which a noose with an open loop at its end was attached (Mong. *uurga*, Tat. *uquruk*, Russ. *ukrjuk*).

As one would expect, in the South Ossetian epic of Daredzan, whose main characters are Persian epic figures such as the mighty Rostom, the noose is often used for military purposes, for catching horses, as a climbing tackle when climbing out of a deep well, etc. (Kokajty 2014: 23, 25, 32, 49, 72f.). On the contrary, in the published versions of the tales of the epic of Tsartsats (Taqazty 2007) the noose is not mentioned.

The noose is also mentioned quite often in the variants of tales about the Narts of the Balkaro-Karachays (Alieva et al. 1994: 366, 381, 399f., 450, 537, 539, 540, 543, 593, 596, 598), Adygs (Alieva et al. 1974: 221, 224, 289, 316; Gutov et al. 2017: 73, 182, 194, 266, 268, 354, 388, 409, 449) and Kabardians (Zvjagintseva et al. 1957: 252, 291).²¹ These tribes, unlike the Ossetians, preserved quite a high level of horse breeding culture after the Mongol conquests. At the same time, the noose is not found in Ingush and Chechen variants.²²

2 Noose in Ethnography, Folklore and Folk Literature of the Ossetians

In addition to the Narts’ epic, nooses are found in Ossetian folk tales. In one tale, seven brothers use nooses (*arqanæj arxajync*) to try to catch a miracle horse, but none of them succeeds (Salamov 2006: 70; Æmbalty 2009: 113). In another tale, an old man wields a noose and helps the hero (Æmbalty 2009: 70). A poor man named Batraz manages to snare a tiger that rushed at him (Kaloev 1976: 52). In another case, the hero reasoned: “whether to throw a noose on him, but he will probably not get it” (*obæl max arqan gældzæn æma nin ibæl ku næ raqæta*, Abaev 1958–89: 1/69). In the tale of the poor man and the angel of death, the noose is metaphorically represented in the image of old age tightly constricting the legs of the elder Yerman (Farniev 2005: 69). Similarly, Farniev conveys the meaning of folk wisdom in verse, but in this case

21 I am grateful to K. Rakhno who kindly pointed out this source.

22 Only once in a metaphorical sense, at that in the meaning not “a noose for catching”, but “a thick rope” (Dalgat 1972: 74; cf. the same turn in Alieva et al. 1994: 414, 381, 422, 423, 463).

the noose acts as a metaphor of need, which tightened ferociously the neck of poor mountaineers (Farniev 2005: 307).²³

The short story “*Ænæivgæ som*” tells about a rich villain who planned to make himself a noose made of human skin straps torn from the backs of his guilty employees (*adæjmag ærqwydy kodta lædžy carmæj arqan sarazyn*, s. Khamitsaeva 2010: 70; *Æmbalty* 2009: 113).

Abaev also gives a number of examples with the mention of noose in folk literature “the horse was grazing on a noose between the meadow and the pasture” (*bæx arqanæj xiztæj igwærdænæj særvæti ’xsæn*, Abaev 1958–89: 111/88); “then I will drag you away with my own hand on a noose” (*wæd dæ mæxi kuħæj arqanæj arqanæj alasdžynæn*, Abaev 1958–89: 11/14).

In folk poetry, the image of the noose is often found both literally and metaphorically. Khariton Pliev says that Ossetia itself at a young age gave the hero a noose so that he could catch horses and participate in races (*Mæ Ir ... Nyssağtæj myn arqan mæ k’uxy*, Kodzati 2012: 164). In Alexander Tsarukaev we find the image of a heavenly thunder throwing a long noose like a chain of red-hot metal (*Ærvnærd myl darg’ arqan tyxta syrxyng ræxysaw*, Kodzati 2012: 237).²⁴ In the heroic “Song about Aslambeg”, the hero, planning a raid to steal cattle from a Balkar gorge, asks to bring to him the Alagirian *kævdæsard* (son of a noble’s concubine) Dzarakhmat, “instead of a hair noose (*qisyn arqanæj bæsty*)”.²⁵ The folklore collector *Ambalty* Tsotsko (Uvar Ambalov) specified in a note to the recorded song that Dzarakhmat was so strong and adroit that he did not need a noose to catch horses (*wyj axsta ænæ arqanæj*), he grabbed them by the neck and so caught them (Salagaeva 2007: 1/533). Thus, it becomes obvious that catching horses without a noose was not within the power of everyone (cf. Slanov 2007: 93), which is why the name of the poor *kævdæsard* Dzarakhmat has been preserved in folk memory due to his extraordinary ability.

In the mountain song “Princess Daum”, telling about the Kabardian raid on Donifars, it is said that when Aslanbek Kaitukin and his cousin Tatarkhan Bekmurzin made another raid on Digors, the sad result of this failed enterprise

23 Cf. similar metaphors in the Avestan tradition.

24 Cf. in the epic of the Balkars and Karachays information that the fiery noose of the hero Joruzmek is lightning, “which he throws at enemies. [Sometimes] the noose, having broken off, reaches the ground” (Alieva et al. 1994: 596). Cf. also the mythological image of the Ossetian thunderer Watsilla, who noosed the serpent Ruimon with a red-hot heavenly chain, symbolizing the lightning (see the depiction of this myth on the late Alan stone Etok stele Duka-bek).

25 This obscure phrase could also be translated as “bound with a hair noose”, but in that case it is not quite clear why Tsotsko *Ambalty* makes a rather long comment about Dzarakhmat’s ability to catch horses without a noose.

was that “*Alisultan was chopped into a kebab ... the last descendant of the Shaugenukovs Zhenchek was strangled with a noose*” (Warziati 1989: 103). It follows from the lyrics of the song that Digors continued to use noose in military actions as late as the 19th century.

The legend about the folk hero Chermen (the Tulatovs’ *kævdæsard*), recorded in Russian, also deserves attention. It tells how Chermen collected tolls for the princes of the Tulatovs on the Daryal road. Once during his absence, a Georgian prince passed by, who did not want to pay the toll and used force against the hero’s comrades at the outpost. When Chermen returned and learnt about the incident, he chased the offender, “*caught up with him, noosed him and brought him to the assembly post ...*” (Bzarov 1993: 56).

Interesting ethnographic information about nooses is given by Izmail Ajlarty in his work “Iron Farn”. According to him, nooses were woven from strong materials, then they were crumpled and kneaded. Hair nooses made of horsehair were easier to use. The end of the noose was tied on the right side of the saddle bow. It was almost impossible to get free from the noose thrown on the head, the horse would stumble and the rider would fall out of the saddle. Nooses were also used by foot soldiers during the war. Other users of nooses were robbers, who caught their victims alive, waiting for travellers in ambushes near the roads. The information that Ossetians also used nooses with iron hooks instead of a loop (*æfsæjnag k’ænzÿtæ, k’æpsyrtae*) is also very interesting.²⁶ Thanks to these devices, one could climb a wall or a steep cliff by throwing the noose upwards so that the iron hook caught on the stone and thus climb to the intended place (Ajlarty 1996: 509).

According to M. A. Tsallagov, after one of the battles of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, the Ossetian horsemen were reluctant to leave the battlefield, and many of them “*dragged prisoners with noose in a Mongolian way*” (Tsallagov 1967: 108).

The skill of hunting with a noose was also retained by the Alans-Yasses, who migrated to Hungary in the 13th century. There is information that in the Hungarian Alföld (the Pannonian lowlands, where Sarmatian and Alanian emigrants settled and accumulated since the 1st century AD and where medieval Yasses and Kuns settled by order of King Béla IV), mounted shepherds hunted wolves and other predatory animals with nooses (Kaloëv 1993: 142).

26 In this respect, one should mention a battle hook suspended on a belt on a medieval stone stele from Western Alania (Stanitsa Ispravnyaya, Karachaevo-Circassian Republic). Kuznetsov and Minaeva regard it as a battle hook “for pushing the enemy off the horse” (Kuznetsov 2015: 41f.).

3 Conclusion

For several millennia, the noose has not lost its relevance due to its uncomplicated design, low cost of manufacture and a huge range of spheres in which it could be used. Ancient writers mentioned the noose in the hands of Scyths, Sarmates and Alans mainly in connection with robbery raids and military conflicts, which is not surprising because in the vast majority of cases the authors described only important incidents, whereas the peaceful side of the nomad life was of little interest to them. In fact, as ethnographic and folklore material in particular shows, the noose served the ancestors of the Ossetians first of all as a tool of cattle breeding. It was used for catching and controlling cattle and especially horses grazing freely on the boundless expanses of steppes and plains, as well as on the mountain plateaus of the North Caucasus. In addition, the noose was similarly used for hunting, especially for a big game such as deer. It also served as an excellent tool for ensuring a man by forced movements, such as crossing a turbulent river, climbing a cliff, descending steep or slippery surfaces on glaciers in high mountainous areas, when retrieving the carcass of a shot animal that had fallen from rocks, by mowing hay on dangerous steep areas, etc.

Written, ethnographic and folklore data indicate that the noose was attached by a special device, like a strap, to the right side of the saddle bow. According to some information, its end could be attached to the saddle, at the right moment the rider took it in both hands, holding the reins and the coils of the noose with the left hand, and throwing the noose on the victim with the right hand.

The material indicates that nooses were used in a variety of ways, both in terms of their material component (woven straps made of leather of goat, deer, horse, ox, snake and even human, strips of special fabric, made of horse veins covered with thin leather, made of hair from horse manes and tails, sometimes mixed with human hair, made of strands of coarse goat hair, of hemp fibres, etc.) and in terms of their construction (braided, twisted, with a metal, bone or stone ring, with a leather eyelet of a special design instead of the ring, with a handle, a pole, an iron hook etc.).

Appendix: to the Etymology of the Ossetian Name of the Noose

The Ossetian name of the noose, like its Caucasian and Eastern European names, goes back to the Turkic word *arqan*. However, there is no reason to assume that the Ossetian ancestors were not familiar with it before their contact with the Turkic peoples. As described above, literally all tribes of Iranian-speaking nomads, especially the Alans, knew handling a noose masterfully.

As for its name, the displacement of its original name during the hegemony of Turkic-speaking tribes in the steppes of Eurasia can be seen as a quite natural phenomenon of renewal of the lexical fund of the medieval Alanian language.²⁷ After all, Turkic loanwords constitute the second largest group of borrowings in the Ossetic language after Caucasian. This could have happened, for example, when mastering a more perfect or new type of noose used by one of the Turkic tribes with which the Alans came into close contact at a certain historical stage. It is quite possible that this process began already with the appearance of the Huns, who opened the era of a thousand years of Turkic rule in the steppes. The Huns arrived in Eastern Europe with novelties of their time, such as a compound bow of the Hun type, which amazed contemporaries with its armour-piercing power and range of fire. Probably, in a similar way, the Hun noose²⁸ differed technologically from the previous models used by the Alans, which naturally led to its adoption, together with its Turkic name.

The Turkic word probably replaced an Iranian word of the same meaning. Since Turkic *arqan* means primarily “thick rope”, “rope”, “noose”, then the assumption suggests itself that the lost Alan word may have originally had this meaning. It is interesting that the Ossetian ethnographic definition of *arqan* is interpreted as *xæston bændæn* “military” or “battle rope” (Ajlarly 1996: 509). It is also noteworthy that in the Adyghe versions of the epic about Narts the noose is called *ark'en klapse* “noose-rope” (Alieva et al. 1974: 263, 266). In Kurdish texts, a similar expression is known: “*Let the youth, besides sabres, shields and spades, prepare rope nooses (warised xarboqa) to put them (enemies) around their necks and drag them*” (Tsabolov 2001–10: II/432, 450).²⁹

Rope is called in Ossetic *bændæn*, which derives from Iranian **bandana* parallel to Old Indian *bandhana* “rope”, (Abaev 1958–89: 1/250), both of them going back to Indo-European **bhendh-* ‘to bind, tie’. In ancient texts of India,

27 Similarly, in Kurdish, apart from Kurdish *fitrāk* ‘noose’, synonyms like *kamand* (from Persian *kamand* ‘noose’) *xarbōq* (the second part going back to Turkic *boy* ‘knot’) are attested (Tsabolov 2010: 432, 450). In Persian, along with *kamand*, one can find *rabqa*, *ribqa* ‘loop, noose, lasso’, a later borrowing from Arabic *ribq* ‘lasso’, *ribqa* ‘lasso, loop’ (Tsabolov 2001–10: II/197).

28 L. N. Gumilev considers the noose as perhaps the main weapon of the Huns. Hunnic nooses are repeatedly mentioned by ancient authors (John of Ephesus VII, 26, 8; John Malala 438, 18, 21). Ammianus Marcellinus writes that they “cast tightly coiled nooses in order to entangle the members of their opponents, to deprive them of the possibility to sit on a horse or leave on foot” (XXXI, 2, 9). Bone and stone blocks from nooses were found in some Hunnic burials (Khazanov 2008: 120).

29 I express my gratitude to K. Rakhno for valuable observations and rare editions sent to me.

bandhana appears as a full synonym of *pāśa* “noose” (Liebert 1986: 217).³⁰ Moreover, in some synonymous compounds, such as *nāgapāśa*, *pāśapannaga*, *nāgābandha*, *sarpabandha*,³¹ the elements *pāśa* and *bandha* interchange (Liebert 1986: 188; Emeneau 1960: 291ff.).

Besides, analogies are also found in Iranian languages, particularly in Pashto, which is closely related to the languages of the Scyths, Sarmates and Alans. Such words as *wāš* ‘rope (of goat hair, hair), noose’; *pulwāša* and *palwāša* ‘noose, shackles, buttonhole’, go back, via **bastrā-*, to the same Iranian root **iband-*: *bad-* ‘to bind, tie’ (ESIJ: II/68, 77). It is interesting to note that Pashto *wāš* corresponds to Ossetic *bos* ‘bandage, lace’, which allows us to assume for Ossetic the connection of the concept “noose” with another derivative of the root **band-*, which was quite probably the word *bændæn*.

Thus, the reconstructed Scythian-Sarmatian name of this archaic everyday object in the form **bændænæ* goes back to the Indo-Iranian epoch, i.e., to the times of the first horse riders of Eurasia, who in their everyday life could hardly do without nooses. It is not without reason that it was among the peoples of the Indo-Iranian branch that the noose took an important position in warfare, hunting, cattle breeding, as well as in mythological and religious symbolism and iconography.

In Ossetic, rope is often called *qisbændæn* or *qis sinag*, literally “hair rope”, which finds a parallel in the folklore epithet of noose (*qisyn arqan* “hair noose”). It is noteworthy that Makharbek Tuganov in one of his ethnographic sketches (see above) depicted Ossetian horseman Abai Alborov with such a hair noose in his hand. According to ethnographic material, horse ties, nooses and ropes were *woven* from the hair of the trimmed manes and tails of young stallions

30 I express my deep gratitude to Ya. V. Vasilkov for pointing out this work and for his valuable observations.

31 As for the term *sarpabandha*, Yu. A. Dzitstsojty (personal correspondence) expressed an interesting idea that allows reconstructing another probable Ossetian name of the noose. The word *ærvædzæg* “loop, knot”, in Abaev’s dictionary remained without etymology (“The origin is not clear”, Abaev 1958–89: I/183). Its second part undoubtedly hides the word *æg* ‘loop; ring; link in a chain’. Its first part *ærvæ-* may go back to the reconstructed base **harpa-* “snake” and mean something “tied like a ring of a snake”, i.e. like a snake coiled in a ring, which reminds of a noose folded in a bay. The base **harpa-* is reconstructed on the basis of Old Indian *sarpa-*, because Old Indian *s-* in the position before *a* regularly corresponds to the phoneme **h-* in Old Iranian, which in Ossetic gets regularly lost. Old Iranian **r̥p* yields Ossetic *-rv-* (cf. *carv* ‘clarified butter’ from **čarpa-*, s. ESIJ: II/233). It is noteworthy that in all the examples given by Abaev this word either designates ‘noose’ or is accompanied by the word for ‘rope’ (*bændæn jæ xurxyl ærvædzæg aværdta* “threw a noose of rope over her throat”; *Tærqani bæxi ærvæægægæg bastæj fejjaftan* “we caught Tarkan’s horse tied with a noose”, s. Abaev 1958–89: I/183).

(Kaloiev 1993: 76, 83), from coarse goat hair (cf. Pashto *wāš*) or from hemp fibres (Tsallagova/Chibirov 2015: 132, 182).

In view of the above, it is interesting to pay attention to the fact that the rope was part of the obligatory household items that every illegitimate son of a feudal lord (ir. *kævdæsar*d, dig. *kumaj'ag*) had to inherit at his separation from his father's house (Bliev/Bzarov 2000: 160; Bzarov 1988: 52, 112).³² Perhaps, this late custom reflects a remnant of archaic ideas about the necessity of a rope-arcane in the herdsman's economy.

32 Cf. above the noose of Chermen.

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The present volume brings together a carefully curated collection of scholarly essays that offer a multidimensional portrait of Ossetian cultural continuity from antiquity to the present. It presents original research by leading experts in the fields of Ossetology, Caucasian history, mythology, and ethnography. Each contribution provides a rigorous examination of particular elements—linguistic, mythological, archaeological, ritualistic, or historical—that illuminate the complex interplay between antiquity and modernity in Ossetian society.

The articles included in this volume, appearing in Russian from the late 19th century to the present day, essentially represent landmark publications on the Scytho-Alano-Ossetian problematics. The volume, in essence, reflects the development of this field of Iranian Studies over nearly a century and a half.

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