

Avar - Oguz Contacts

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The study of the relationship of the peoples of Dagestan, and in particular the Avars with the Turkic population - with the Oguzes is of great importance for ascertaining the military-political and cultural-religious aspects of their ties. Many questions of their contacts are still poorly researched and need further investigations. The history of the interrelations of the population of Mountainous Dagestan and the Türkic tribes goes back to the era of the Great Migration of Nations (V-VI centuries AD). At this time, the territory of the North-Eastern Caucasus and Dagestan has long been a link between Transcaucasia, Asia and South-East Europe. Here were witnessed the most convenient and strategically important routes which connected mentioned areas and the local population with nomadic tribes of Huns, Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, Kipchaks.

In the second half of the 1st millennium AD here arose a number of states, the largest and most powerful of which were the Khazar Khaganate in the plains and foothills, and Serir in the mountains. - The mutual relations of these two states often determined the political climate in the North-Eastern Caucasus.

The state ("Kingdom") Serir is known from written sources since the VI century AD, although its appearance should, in our opinion, be attributed to the end of the IV - the beginning of the V centuries. Tsar of Serir had titles of Iranian origin (Vakhrarzan Shah - king of the boar, Filan Shah - king of the elephant). Another title is also interesting: "Sahib" (owner), who was only called the king of Sarir, while all the other rulers of Dagestan were called "Malik" (ruler).¹ The rulers of the early feudal state of mountainous Dagestan - Serir, along with the title of Sahib al-Sarir, had another title: "Hakan al Jabal", which means the ruler of the

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1 Vladimir, Minorskij, *Istoriya Shirvana i Derbenda*, Moskva 1963, s. 98-99.

mountains. One King of Serir had the name “Avar”, and the other “Bayar” - terms of Turkic origin.²

The influence of Khazar culture and language is reflected not only in the artifacts of material culture, but also in various spheres of spiritual culture of the peoples of Dagestan, especially in its “Khazar deniz” (Caspian Sea) coastal part. This influence is also reflected in the toponyms, ethnonym and hydronyms of foothill Dagestan. The following toponyms are preserved here: Khazar-kala in Novolaksky, Khazar-yurt in Levashinsky districts of modern Dagestan. The influence of the Khazars is also traced in the Mountainous Dagestan: in the modern Shamil district of Dagestan there is a place called Khazar- Khazar Kaganate in the coastal Caspian plain and in the adjacent mountainous part of Dagestan, researchers explain the origin of the names of the early feudal rulers of Serir, Kumukh, Kaitag, who were called “Hakans of the Mountains”, “Tarkhans” or “Semender”.³ Ancient Turkic elements were preserved in the Lak language as well.⁴ In the late XIX - early XX centuries some of Dagestan peoples practiced the custom of artificial “correction” of the child’s head, which can also imitate the ancient Khazar custom of the deformation of cranium, attested in the craniological materials of the Upper-Chiryurt (in Kizilyut district of Dagestan) burial grounds (VII-VIII centuries).⁵

But we are primarily interested in the communications of the Avar population with Oguzes and our attention is drawn to the fact that the Turkic toponyms, ethnonyms and homonyms were especially preserved in Mountainous Dagestan, in the Central Avaristan and mostly on the Hunzah plateau. It is interesting that typical Turkic names were worn by many Avars. The title of the Avarian King “Nutsal” is also known as Dogri (in Turkic “fair”), Zagashtok (Sagashtyk in one of the Turkic languages means a smart, wise man).

In all Dagestan languages social terminology is mainly of Turkic origin. The names “khan”, “bek”, “chagar”, “karabash” etc. are used in communication vocabulary and have firmly become a part of folklore⁶. Even in such old existed

2 Dibir, Ataev, *Nagornyy Dagestan v rannem srednevekov'e*, Mahachkala 1963, s. 210, 247.

3 Bagadur, Malachihanov, *O proshlom Avarii*, Mahachkala 1928, s. 48.

4 Ali, Kayaev, *Materialy po istorii lakcev // Rukopisnyj Fond Instituta istorii, arheologii i etnografii DNC RAN, F.1, D.144*, s. 5-12.

5 Murad, Magomedov, *Obrazovanie Hazarskogo kaganata*, Moskva 1983, s. 245-257.

6 Alevdin, Satybalov, *Social'no-politicheskie terminy tyurkoyazychnyh dokumentov ehpoli feodalizma v nekotoryh yazykah Severo-Vostochnogo Kavkaza*, *Uchenye zapiski instituta istorii, yazyka i literatury DNC RAN*, Tom V, Mahachkala 1958, s. 105.

feudal formations as the Avar and Gazi-Gumuk khanate, local social terms such as “Nutsal” and “Shamkhal” gradually disappeared and were replaced by the Turkic term “Khan”.

In the medieval era the wives of the Turkic feudal elite enjoyed certain rights and independence. Evidence of this is the existence of a special “female” titles such as “Bika”, “Hanum”, etc. Similar titles existed not only in the plains of Dagestan among the Turks, but also in Avaristan. So, the Avar Governess, in particular the well-known Bakhu, bore the title of “Bika”. In the village of Hunzakh there is a genus (“tukhum”) of Turkic origin “Oguzylal”, i.e., Oguzes. Between Avars the first name “Oguz” is sometimes found. The term Oguz is found in the geographical nomenclature of Avaristan. For example, near the village of Gotsad there is a tract “Oguzil hionli” (in Avar language means “shadow side of Oguz”). In everyday speech of the Avars “Oguz” or “Uguz” scornfully referred to almost severe person. Until now, on the Hunzah plateau, children are being frightened by the words: “Oguzylal Rachunel Rugo! “ (Oguzes are coming!).

Along with another Avar genus from Hunzah which clearly has the Turkic name is “Daytilal”. i.e., Dayties. They were considered a tukhum of warriors, who, as well as fighters of above mentioned Oguz tukhum, played an important, glorifying in Dagestan folklore role in the defeat of the troops of Nadir Shah in 1743-1745. Branch of the genus “Uguzilal”, known as “Karagishilal” (completely Turkic homonym) owned the best lands in Hunzakh. This family rose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, by its power and wealth, successfully competed with the faded ancient Nutsal family of Avar rulers. Military commanders of the Avar Khan were usually from the genus Oguzilal and Daytilal. Tukhum Uguzilal was permanently released from the taxes to Nutsal because they carried guard duty in the fortress. For the military service some representatives of this tukhum received land allotments on the on the sacred Hunzah Mount “Akaro”.

In the area of the modern village of Arkas (Buynaksk district), which was in the middle ages the border town of Serir, there are toponyms of undoubtedly Turkic origin. These are the terms “Urdu”, which are found three times in the vicinity of Arkas. At a distance of 500-700m. to the west of Arkas there are two slopes, known as “Urdu” and “Tassab Urdu” (Upper Urdu). In Urdu, there are building remains of the medieval era. In addition, “Urdu” is also called a large field next to the modern cemetery of Arkasa, to the north-east of it. Here, Dagestan archeologist Dibir M. Ataev discovered the remains of the robbed stone crypts. “Urdu” - definitely Turkic word (horde), which firmly entered the Avar language

in the meaning of “camp”. The source of “Tarih Andi”, describes the arrival of the Turkic detachment (led by its leader Yevluk) in Andi.⁷

The Turkic military organization apparently had some influence on social life, and especially on military life of the Avars. In this connection, it is interesting that the Avars were (and still are) divided into societies called “Bo” (literally, the army, the society) - “Gyderil Bo”, “Hunderal Bo” (Bo of Gig, Hunzah provinces) etc. In the past, the word “Boi” was used to designate the division of Oguz into large tribes. Linguistic data fully admit such a borrowing, since in all derivatives and dialect forms of this word the root “bo” always remains unchanged. In addition, the absence of this word in the social terminology of the Ando-Tsez and in the other Dagestan languages, indicate the non-Dagestan origin of this word. This assumption is also supported by the fact that phonetically the word is not characteristic for the Avar language. The fact that in Turkic “bo,” as in Avar, means a specific community of people, most likely indicates precisely the Turkic language, from where this word passed into Avar.

The motifs, undoubtedly related to the Turks, were preserved in the Avar folklore. Among the Avars, a fairy tale about Dingir-Dangarch (or Dingir-Dagarch) is widespread. In this name it is customary to see a secularized deity, who in the past played a certain role in the religious representations of a particular people. For example, a similar phenomenon took place in relation to the ancient deity Dalai, which was once common to the Dagestanis and Vainakhs. Evidently, a similar evolution was also experienced by Dingir-Dangarch, in whose person one can see the common Türkic god Tengri.

One of the decisive forces on which the Muslims relied in the Central Avaristan were of the Turkic origin the influence of them was strengthened with the adoption of Islam in Hunzah. It is no accident that Bayar, son of Avar King Surakat, in the struggle for the father’s throne, lost through the fault of the first warriors of Islam in Avarastan, relied on those Christian elements, beginning with Tushin and Alan and ending with the local Hunzah nobility, whose adherence to Islam was, as the chronicler says, “an act of forced necessity”.

Attraction of the Turkic elements of the Serir was one of the links in that long chain of measures aimed at strengthening its political might (building powerful fortresses and “long” walls, adopting and introducing Christianity, establishing dynastic alliances with the rulers of Tbilisi and Derbent).

7 Mamajhan, Aglarov, *Andijcy: Istoriko-ehntnograficheskoe issledovanie.*, Mahachkala 2004. s. 33-34.

The above examples show that in the Mountainous Dagestan, in particular in Avaristan, there are many materials that evidenced the presence of the Turkic elements here.

In this connection, the question arises: how did these Turkic elements turn out to be in Avaristan, in the center of Mountain Dagestan? “Oguzes” - nomadic Turkic tribes inhabiting the northeastern Mongolia - since the VIII century have begun to conquer the neighboring Western territories. In the XI th century, together with the closely related tribes, they invaded the pre-Islamic, Asian cultural World and established a huge Empire of the Seljuks.⁸

Tribes and detachments of the Turks began to penetrate into Transcaucasia, probably even earlier [9, p. 103]. The mass resettlement of them falls to the first half of the 11th century and is connected with the aggressive campaigns of the first Seljuk sultans. Soon after the Seljuks conquered Persia, their sultans, however, sharply changed their policy towards Oguzes. The Sultans, who were extremely worried about the center of the Oguzes in the cities of the Kaganate, “untied the arms” of the Oghuz in every possible way, actually pushing them to various military adventures. In the first half of the XI th century Oguzes in Transcaucasia are mentioned not only quite often, but apparently, they have become a decisive political force here. Bar Ebrej informs, that in 1040-1041. “they reigned in Azerbaijan”.⁹ This information is also confirmed by *Tarih al-Bab* (History of Derbent), which reports on the fortification of the fortress of Yazidiye by Shirvan Shah Kubad, fearing the attack of the Turkic Guzes.¹⁰ It should be noted that in one of the largest villages of southern Dagestan, in the village of Akhty there is “Oguz cemetery.” In southern Dagestan there is a village Okuz (modern Kurakh region). The etymology of this term in the light of the Turkic toponymy of Southern Dagestan begs of itself.

Oguzes, being caught by fate under the rule of the Seljuk rulers, had no choice but to engage in robbery, entering detachments organized by that social stratum known as “Gazi” or serving as mercenaries to various rulers. And this phenomenon has become massive. We can confidently say that in the XI-XII centuries it is hard to find any ruler, who refused the brave Oguz to serve him as his warriors¹¹.

8 Vasilij, Bartol'd, *Sochineniya*, Tom. I. CHast' II. Moskva 1963, s. 549-552.

9 Rauf, Gusejinov, *Sirjjskie istochniki ob Azerbajdzhane*, Baku 1960, s. 105.

10 Minorskij, *Istoriya Shirvana i Derbenda*, s. 56.

11 Vasilij, Bartol'd, *Sochineniya*. Tom. I. CHast' II, Moskva 1963, s. 537-580.

It is logical to assume that the rulers of Sarir, who in the Xth-XIth centuries AD conducted an active foreign policy and therefore interested in the creation of a strong regular army, willingly accepted the service of Oguzes who became famous in the East as excellent warriors. Al-Masudi wrote that “the Oghuz are the most brave of the Turks”.¹²

However, by attracting the Oguzes to the service of the Kings of Sarir, they set themselves another goal, namely, the solution of their internal problems. Oguzes, for example, were very suitable as punishers, in the role of which mercenaries usually appear. This fact seems to us reflected in the above mentioned saying “the Oguzes are coming!” The Oguz nobility, apparently, occupied a very privileged position at the court of the King of Serir, as his personal guard and associates, opposing them to the local feudal nobility with their separatist tendencies.

Our little essay on the Turks in the Mountainous Dagestan would be incomplete if we did not explain the way of penetration into the Mountainous Dagestan. As is known, Oguzes appeared not only on the southern borders of Dagestan (i.e., in northern Azerbaijan) but also on one of the islands of the Caspian Sea.¹³ In IXth century they appeared on the lower reaches of the Volga and the Don rivers.¹⁴

Representatives of both these branches of the Oguzes could penetrate into the Mountain Dagestan and for such penetration there were quite well-known ancient ways. One of them is - Derbent, Tabasaran, Richa, Kumukh, and the other - to Western Dagestan through Andia or along the Sulak river through Chirurt, Akhatli-Irganay or via Kafir-Kumukh, Arkas-Arakany. Judging by the current state of study, it seems that the southern path seems more likely, because data on the presence of Oguzes in the Northern Caspian region are not yet known, while in northern Azerbaijan and in Derbent they left very visible traces. So, the above observed materials show that there sufficient evidences which indicate the Avar-Oguz contacts and existence of Oguz elements in ancient Avaristan, as well.

12 Al-Masudi, Luga zolota i rudniki dragocennyh kamnej, *Sbornik materialov dlya opisaniya mestnostej i plemen Kavkaza* (SMOMPК) Vyp. XXXVIII, . Tiflis 1908, s. 54.

13 Aleksandr, YAkubovskij, Voprosy ehtnogeneza turkmen v VIII-X vv, *Sovetskaya ehtnografiya*, № 3, 1947, s. 50.

14 Svetlana, Pletneva, Pechenegi, torki, polovcy v yuzhnorusskih stepyah, *Materialy i issledovaniya po arheologii SSSR*, № 62. Tom. I, Moskva-Leningrad 1957, s. 164.

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