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On the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity of the Caucasus

According to today's definition, the area of the Caucasus on the border between Europe and Asia is 467.964 square kilometers, in fact – more. If we add to this the area of real geographical Caucasus within the boundaries of modern Turkey and Iran (the North-Eastern provinces of Turkey and the extreme north regions of two provinces in North-Western Iran), its area exceeds 580,000 square kilometers.¹ Throughout history the Caucasus was and still is ethnically and culturally motley; it was an area of meeting, and coexistence of different cultures and ethnicities.

About 50 ethnic groups live in the Caucasus. Often, even within one ethnos there existed a significantly different folk culture. What was the reason for the multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity of the Caucasus? The reason for the abundance of territorial units / historical-ethnographic regions within one ethnos?

It is a well-known fact, that the reason for the diversity of anthropological type, languages, and cultures of the peoples on the earth was determined by completely different landscapes, natural-geographical, and climatic conditions. Groups of people follow the form of agriculture, dictated by the natural-geographical environment and climate. The same factor conditioned and continues to determine material culture (residential buildings, labor tools, clothing).

Physical geography is also closely related to history; geographical factor was the cause of many conflicts and wars that took place in the world, which led to the mixing of groups of people/ethnicities and the emergence of new peoples. For instance, frequent movement of nomads in the steppe space of Eurasia. Geographical factor also contributed to the survival of peoples, since for this reason they never got mixed with others. Mountainous landscape protected ethnicities from outer invasions.

Large geographical regions were characterized by virtually the same natural-geographical and climatic conditions. This is why people residing in such geographical

¹ Topchishvili, *What territory does the Caucasus encompass*.

areas had similar cultures. But there also are large geographic regions, with varied landscapes and climates. The Caucasus is an example of the latter.

Marxist-Leninist science literally ignored the role of the geographic environment in the development of human society – everything was inserted into certain schemes. European historical science paid special attention to the role of natural-geographic environment. In this respect we may recall the representatives of the French School of Annales. It is emphasized that the surrounding nature and climate influenced not only the behavior, the psyche of individuals but also groups of people.¹ Peoples and ethnic groups always tried to be in harmony with nature – one of the purposes of ethnological science is to find out how much peoples were in harmony with nature and environmental factors, from economic and material standpoints.

The Caucasus is located between the Black and Azov Seas, and the Caspian Sea. The Northern border of the Caucasus is considered to be the Kuma-Manych Depression and the lower reaches of the Don River; its Southern border is the border of the former Soviet state (now that of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) with Iran and Turkey. The Southern and Northern borders of the Caucasus are defined relatively. The Lesser Caucasus is an integral part of the South Caucasus, a significant part of which is outside the borders of today's Georgia and Armenia. An integral part of the Caucasus region is the gorge/basin of the Chorokhi River, the gorge/basin of the Arax and the headwaters and upper reaches of the Kura River. Thus the border of today's Caucasus is defined by natural landscape factors in the North and political factors in the South.

The North Caucasus is part of Russian Federation, while the South Caucasus comprises three states – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to the textbook of A. Leister and G. Chursin “Geography of the Caucasus” southern border of the Caucasus directly coincided with the borders of the Soviet state. In tsarist times, the Southern border of the Caucasus was confined differently, but still followed the border of the Russian Empire. At that time, the territories of historical Georgia and Western Armenia were part of the Russian Empire and were perceived as the Caucasus (Artvin district, Kars region by the then-administrative division). During the Soviet era, these territories were not considered the Caucasus as they were part of Turkey. This is the southern part of the geographical unit known as the Lesser Caucasus. It is rightly noted, that the Lesser Caucasus (and the entire anti-Caucasus) continues to extend westward into Turkey (in the form of the ridges of Pontus and Taurus of northern Armenia) and to the east – in Iran (Karadağ , which connects the Lesser Caucasus with the Talysh-Bogrovdagh – Elbrus Mountains).²

¹ Fossier, *People of the Middle Ages*.

² Maruashvili, *Physical Geography*.

In terms of nature and geography, the Caucasus is not homogeneous; its one natural-geographical zone markedly differs from other, often adjacent, zones. The Caucasus is also heterogeneous linguistically, ethnically and culturally. Moreover: the Caucasus is not a geographical unit of a single civilization. According to natural-geographical parameters, the Caucasus was divided into two main parts: the North and South Caucasus. The northern part of the main watershed of the Caucasus is in the North Caucasus, the southern part – in the South Caucasus.

In terms of natural-geographical principle, the North Caucasus is also divided according to vertical-specificity: 1. Mountainous Caucasus; 2. Foothill lowland; 3. Steppe Precaucasus. There are also mountainous, foothill and lowland sub-regions in the South Caucasus. If in the North Caucasus mountain system is only on the central watershed, in the South Caucasus in addition to the watershed ridge, there is another mountain system – known as Anti Caucasus (the Lesser Caucasus and Talysh mountains). The Lesser Caucasus is directly connected to the mountain system of the watershed ridge by a low mountain chain known as the Surami (Likhi) Range.

South Caucasus includes the Black Sea strip of the Russian Federation with the cities of Sochi, Tuapse, Gelendzhik, and Novorossiysk. Nor do the territories of Georgia and Azerbaijan include only the South Caucasus. Local-territorial units of Georgia Tusheti, Khevi and Pirikiti Khevsureti are to the North of the main watershed ridge of the Caucasus. A significant part of Azerbaijan is beyond the main ridge of the Caucasus.

The Caucasus is distinguished by its natural-geographical diversity. Here, along with highlands, there are vast steppes and semi-deserts, temperate and subtropical climate. There are 21 completely different physical-geographical regions and 11 climatic districts in the Caucasus. Accordingly, diverse are its flora and fauna.

In the Caucasus ethnic composition of the population, multiplicity of languages, diversity of material culture and economic life, diversity of social development, difference in spiritual cultures, are largely conditioned by the natural-geographical and climatic conditions. Even Strabo noted, that here lowlanders were farmers and highlanders – herdsmen. The peoples of the Caucasus created the developed forms of agriculture in the lowlands as well as in the foothills and mountains, which, in turn, were conditioned by artificial irrigation and the arrangement of terraces. The ethnic groups living in different natural-geographical and climatic conditions were not closed (although isolated ethnic groups lived in Daghestan). Circumstances forced them to have close agro-economic ties with each other and, therefore, to share many of each other's cultural achievements. The peoples of the Caucasus seldom had the opportunity

for peaceful development. Throughout history in addition to empires, nomadic tribes also showed interest in it. Ethnic map of the Caucasus changed especially after the Russian Empire gained foothold here. Russian Empire made the Caucasus more ethnically diverse, and some ethnic groups even lost their ethnic niche.

In the Caucasus there are surfaces of different origins and shapes: plains, lowlands, hillsides, mountain ridges, volcanic peaks; its different parts boast different climates – polar climate of the highland Caucasus, subtropical humid climate of Western Caucasus lowlands, dry subtropical climate of the steppes of the Eastern South Caucasus. Diverse is the flora of the Caucasus.

A. Leister and G. Chursin noted that geographical features of the Caucasus distinguished it from other regions, which does not allow for regarding it as one whole: “Diversity of geographic features of the Caucasus, which makes it an object of completely exceptional interest and sharply distinguishes it from nearby countries, does not allow for considering it a homogeneous whole and prompts to divide it into separate parts, each of which is something more or less homogeneous in nature, but sharply differs from the other parts of the Caucasus”.¹

In the Caucasus, there are three parts with very different nature:

1. Precaucasus (the North Caucasus). 2. Main ridge of the Caucasus. 3. The South Caucasus. The first is a vast plain, which occupies the entire northern part of the Caucasian isthmus. It bears more resemblance to the neighboring Northern Lowlands and East European Lowlands than to the Caucasus Range in its south. The second stretches diagonally from the Black to the Caspian Sea. This is 28% of the entire Caucasus. The third is located south of the main Caucasus ridge. To the northwest, it consists of the Rioni and other river Gorges that flow into the Black Sea and of the Kura and Arax river basins. The surface of the South Caucasus is represented mainly by mountain ranges, hills, lowlands and plains. The plateaus of the South Caucasus are distinguished in their height (average altitude 1500 meters above sea level) and closure, which is manifested in the fact that they are bordered by high mountain ridges on all sides.

Accordingly, agricultural regions of the Caucasus coincide with its main climatic, pedogenic and botanical districts. This or that farming culture determines the physiognomy of the area. The Caucasus is diverse in agricultural crops. Therefore, distinguished here are many agricultural districts and regions within them, 10 districts and 21 regions altogether. Looking at the physical and geographical regions of the Caucasus, we will find that from natural-geographic standpoint South Caucasus is more diverse than the North Caucasus.

¹ Leister, Chursin, *Geography of the Caucasus*, p. 4.

What is the role of the geographic environment in the formation, settlement and defense of ethnic groups in the Caucasus? In which natural-geographic regions and climatic zones of the Caucasus did ethnic groups alternate and survive more?

Why was Georgian ethnos more cohesive despite the ethnographic diversity? Why did more than 12 Adyghe territorial units in the North-West Caucasus fail to form an ethnic unity, create a single social system, like the Georgians and Armenians, and form a state? The reason should be sought for in natural-geographic environment. Different landscapes, climate, and soil of the ethnographic regions of Georgia forced the Georgians living there to have close economic relations with each other, as each of them was meticulously adapted to the natural-geographic environment and, therefore, developed the branches of agriculture as demanded by the environment. Therefore, the Georgians of different ethnographic groups could not exist without each other.¹

In 1918 it was noted: “This natural completion of Georgia’s borders at the geographical boundary – predetermines the country’s economic integrity”. The area within these topographic boundaries is one country, one natural, organically whole agro-economic province. Each part of the country has close economic relations with the other parts, at the same time, it is separated from the neighboring countries by natural borders, so no part of Georgia can exist without the whole of Georgia. Cutting off any part of Georgia, which due to geographical conditions, is connected to the whole with all arteries – would be mutilation of a single organic economic body. And the historical unification of Georgia as one collective within the afore-mentioned natural borders is not accidental in itself: “History here was shaped by the logic of geography; History had a genetic connection with Georgia’s organic economic and historical integrity”. “The name Caucasus-Transcaucasus” is a figment; the so-called Caucasus is actually four different cultural and historical collectives, four countries: Georgia, Armenia, Aderbejan and Caucasian Highlands, and “Caucasus” is merely a mechanical connection of various organic units“.²

As for the ethnic units of Adyghe origin, they lived in a more or less homogeneous natural-geographic environment. The form of farming that they had, met their needs and they did not practically have economic ties with each other. So, they pursued a closed-loop life. Living near the sea and the steppes harmed the Adyghe in this respect. They did not lead a sedentary lifestyle, like the South Caucasians, and, unlike them, did not pursue extensive and intensive farming – being semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary they practiced primitive farming. What was the reason for this? Frankly speaking,

¹ Topchishvili, *Historical-ethnographic Parts of Georgia*, pp. 454-484.

² Ingoroqva, *About the Borders*, p. 4.

the natural and geographic environment. They lived near the steppes, where nomads moved, and the proximity to the nomads also did not allow them to follow sedentary lifestyle – one or another Adyghe tribe was localized in one gorge in one century and in another gorge in another century. Due to primitive farming, the villages also frequently changed location. Here is what was written about Abadzekhs – one of the local Western Adyghe groups: “The Abadzekhs, like other groups of Adyghe, were distinguished in significant mobility. After collecting harvest, they would leave their dwellings along the Belaya and Kurdzhyps and go for the winter high into the mountain forests, from where in the spring they would again go to more open places”.¹ “Similarly destructive for Kabarda were constant campaigns of the Crimeans, Nogays and Kalmyks, which in many ways changed the picture of the Kabardian resettlement”.² Due to this, viticulture as well as gardening were foreign to them.

The Adyghe could not switch to a perfect form of agriculture and therefore retained the form of relation with nature inherited from their ancestor, because the sea provided them with a basic means of subsistence. However, it was not marine fishing but rather foreigners from the sea who bought captives from them, providing an incentive for the intensification of forays; thus giving them an incentive to expand their raids. That is why their so-called upper echelons consisted of marauder leaders, who had accumulated some property not thanks to private property on the land, but as a result of the looting of neighbors and other ethnic groups. Thus, the main obstacle and impediment to the ethnic development of the Adyghe was the biosphere in which they lived, and which surrounded them.

The growing population of the South Caucasian highlands moved to live in the foothills and lowlands, but the North Caucasian highlanders could not do this, because the geographical environment of the North Caucasus is different from that of the South Caucasus. In the former, the mountains were directly connected to the lowlands, and these lowlands were steppes. Traditionally the steppes were the area of nomadic life for sometimes Iranian and sometimes Turkish nomadic tribes. Everyone had occupied their own ethnosphere. The multiplied ethnic groups needed to survive. The way out was found – the North Caucasians started raiding each other. To Xaverio Glavani’s question: “Why do you arrange raids?” The Circassians answered: “There is no money or markets in our country; Where can we earn money to buy clothes for young people? We do not produce any fabric, but after the raids, traders loaded with goods come here. They supply us with all the necessary items. Those from whom we annually kidnap three children, do not become poor at all. They give birth to children every year

¹ Anchabadze, Volkova, *Ethnic History*, p. 24.

² Anchabadze, Volkova, *Ethnic History*, pp. 17-37.

and thereby compensate for the loss. The raids allow our youth to dress well. If we kidnap children from our people, they will kidnap elsewhere. This is a simple exchange between different areas. This way we develop fighting spirit among young people". After the collapse of the unified state of Georgia, the raids of the North Caucasians moved to the south – to Georgia. And these were not just the Lezghin raids. They took place along the entire northern perimeter of Georgia and the change of population in Abkhazia – replacement of old Abkhazians with new Abkhazians – was the result of the Circassian and Ubykh raids. The raids brought such income to the Avars that most of them literally gave up farming in the late Middle Ages.

What was the reason for the raids? – natural-geographic environment. Limited poor farming conditions in the mountainous areas pushed the North Caucasian highlanders to raid. The unstable ethnic situation at the foothills of the North Caucasus did not allow them to maintain normal interethnic relations.

The Georgian way of life in valleys, the presence of mountains, foothills and plains, completely different landscapes of Western, Eastern and Southern provinces, different climatic zones were main reasons not only for the unification of Georgian people, but also for their survival. Why could not Eastern neighbors of Georgians – the Albanians survive, the Albanians who converted to Christianity at the same time as Georgians and who had written language from the 5th century? The reason for this largely is the monotonous landscape on the territory of modern Azerbaijan. Albanian ethnos, living in steppe conditions, in a monotonous landscape, could not defend itself against the nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkic-speaking invaders.

Turkish semi-nomadic tribes were more interested and attracted by the landscape of Albania (modern Azerbaijan) than the forested gorges of the South Caucasus. Thus, monotonous landscape facilitated the replacement of one ethnic group with another, and the newcomer swallowed up the culturally and economically more advanced local ethnos.

Similarly, one can compare the landscape of Georgia with that of Armenia located in the Caucasus. It is known that the Armenians were widely scattered throughout the world, what was the reason for such migration? The inclination of the Armenians to migrate was conditioned by the landscape in which they lived. The Armenian plateau is mainly plains, located at an altitude of 1700-2000 meters, where there is no vegetation such as forest. The invader who came to the Caucasus, first of all, went to Armenia. An Armenian actually had nowhere to hide, and in such a situation he fled with his wife and children and found refuge in other countries.

This was why most of Eastern Armenia was deserted, and at the end of the 19th century there were more Turkic-speaking people living than Armenians in Yerevan district

(in 1886, 52 thousand and 36 thousand, respectively). The fleeing Armenian population was replaced by Turkish population. The Turks had no problems adapting to the natural and geographical conditions in the new place. The Armenian plateau was the best suited for semi-nomads. The abundance of pastures allowed them to expand their traditional – cattle breeding. Turkish tribes also had no problems adapting to the new landscape either.

Thus, geographical environment was main reason which distinguished the North Caucasians from the social development of the South Caucasians. Lev Gumilyov emphasized that political systems of peoples were closely connected with their systems of economy.¹ Economic systems, in turn, were conditioned by natural-geographic and climatic factors. The peoples of the Caucasus differed from each other in this respect too (in political systems as well). Here, too, everything is explained by the natural-geographic environment. To the north, the North Caucasus is bordered by Eurasian nomadic area. From the 9th century B. C. nomadic tribes alternated in this nomadic area. This circumstance did not contribute to the creation of a sustainable ethnic situation or a sustainable political situation here. Even in the foothills of the North Caucasus there is a steppe environment and this landscape and climate only made the nomadic ethnos who came here semi-nomadic. A stable ethnic and political situation was not created due to the newly arrived nomads. As for the mountain, it was very conservative. Its landscape did not allow for social differentiation here. Naturally there was no Social differentiation either. Everything was subordinated to the community. The land was divided equally among all. However, there was a kind of top layer, but this top layer had emerged not as a result of private ownership on the land, but they were the leaders of the raids, the leaders who had acquired property through banditry. This situation existed centuries before the introduction of Russian Empire into the Caucasus.

Ecological diversity of the Caucasus led to the emergence of completely different types of economy and culture here. Consequently, the North and the South Caucasus walked different paths of socio-economic and cultural development. Only the inhabitants of the adjacent highland territories of the South and North Caucasus had similar realia of economy and material culture.

Complex landscape conditioned ethnolinguistic diversity of the Caucasus, as due to the complex and diverse landscape different speech codes never actually mixed here.

Not only ethnically diverse is the Caucasus, most of the ethnic groups living here are divided into local-territorial units, which we often refer to as historical-ethnographic districts. Despite the existence of a common literary language these ethnographic groups, did and still do speak dialects and sub-dialects. For example, the largest ethnic unit in Dagestan – the Avars, comprises many local-territorial units. Accordingly,

¹ Gumilyov, *Ethnogenesis and Biosphere of the Earth*, p. 179.

there are many dialects of the Avar language. Moreover, almost every village has its own speech. Often the speech of neighboring villages is also very different. Georgian language used to have many dialects and speeches. What led to the emergence of groups with ethnographic peculiarities in such relatively small ethnic groups and small areas? It is a natural – geographic factor. Formation of local-territorial units was conditioned by the life of representatives of one ethnic group in different relief and landscape. In Daghestan this was compounded by endogamous marriages – they never sought for marriage partners outside the village; only siblings never married each other.

It is fair to note that despite such, at first glance, differentiation, both the Armenians and Georgians showed amazing unity at a critical moment. Such attraction of ethnographic groups to Georgia was determined by internal agro-economic unity.¹ Therefore, diverse ethnic culture of the Caucasians was conditioned by geographical heterogeneity. Lev Gumilyov generally discussed this in his research: “Undoubtful is the connection between ethnic culture and geography”.²

We should also touch upon the reasons for the survival of Georgian people. The landscape of Georgia saved Georgian people from disappearing. Enemies rarely raided Western Georgia due to the complexity of the terrain and forest gorges, it was the opposite in Eastern Georgia. In the latter, the population was often annihilated, the villages were deserted, and the deserted villages were often filled by the increased population of Western Georgia.

From this standpoint, the role of highlands is also invaluable. The aforementioned form of economy and connections determined creation of the state of Georgia and formation of a strong Georgian ethnos, its turning into one nation. Such economic existence was dictated by the natural-geographic conditions of the country.

The scientific literature on various developments in the geographical region of the Caucasus, its Southern and Northern parts, emphasizes and states: “The presence in the center of the Caucasus of the main mountain range of the Caucasus – one of the largest watersheds in the world – led to the alienation, rather than rapprochement of the South Caucasus with the North Caucasus, as well as with the countries of the Middle East and Central Eurasia located beyond their limit [...] Pliny the Elder noted that the gate of the Caucasus divided the world into two parts. In two parts of the world, they usually implied Ecumene, the land of ‘intelligent people’ and Terra Incognita – ‘the land of the barbarians’”.³

Practically no states were created in the lowlands of the North Caucasus (not to mention the mountains). These used to be destroyed soon after creation (the Khazars,

¹ Arutyunov, *Silhouettes of Ethnicity*, p. 87.

² Gumilyov, *Ethnogenesis and Biosphere of the Earth*, p. 35.

³ Kavtaradze, *Georgia, Caucasus and Geopolitics*, p. 41.

the Alans, the Kipchaks). Here the ethnic groups also frequently alternated. Thus, we constantly had an unstable ethnic situation. The so-called ethnic chaos was caused by certain reasons. In this case we do not mean highlands again and again. However, mountainous regions could not escape the change of ethnic situation either. We refer to the mountainous and foothill regions of the North-West and Central Caucasus, where local ethnic units were later replaced by Iranian and Turkish ethnic groups (Alan-Ossetians, Karachay-Balkars).

Thus, geographical factors contributed to the diversity of social and cultural development in the Caucasus, including ethnic diversity. For the same reason, in one of its parts indigenous ethnic groups were preserved, and ethnic units were replaced in another part. No less important were the surrounding ethnic contact areas. If for the North Caucasus such was the nomadic world of Eurasia, for the South Caucasus these were the centers of the Middle East and Greco-Byzantine civilization.

It is known that the Ottoman Empire deliberately spread Islam in occupied Southern Georgia. The spread of Islam was followed by the gradual replacement of the Georgian language with the Turkish language. The Turkish language was disseminated in the places which the Turks invaded more easily due to the terrain. In the unscalable mountain gorges, the local Georgian population retained its mother tongue (Achara, part of Shavshetian Imerkhevi, Klarjeti, Parkhali gorge of Tao).

Thus, the North Caucasus to the North of the main Caucasian range and the South Caucasus to its South boasted not only geographical but also ethnographical differences. Indigenous ethnic groups in the North Caucasus as well as in the South Caucasus underwent various development stages, in terms of both social development and economic life. Ethnic and cultural mosaicism was conditioned by different natural-geographic (terrain, landscape) and climatic conditions of the Caucasus region. Quite rightly, Sergei Arutyunov attributes the peoples of the Caucasus to different civilizations and he refers to the so-called Caucasian civilization as a phantom: “In any case, it is clear that today the peoples and nations of the Caucasus are divided into several different civilizations, and not only the phrase ‘persons of Caucasian nationality’, but even the expression ‘representatives of the Caucasian civilization’ should most likely be considered a phantom, although they partly reflect some basic features of the mentality, which can be conditionally called the ‘Circassian mentality’”.¹

Thus, in the geographical region of the Caucasus, multiethnicity, cultural diversity and, in large ethnicities the abundance of local-territorial units / historical-ethnographic regions are conditioned by the geographical factor.

¹ Arutyunov, *Silhouettes of Ethnicity*, p. 42.

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On the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity of the Caucasus

Summary

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the Caucasus is an ethnically and culturally diverse geographic region. About 50 ethnic groups live here with a rich tapestry of varying cultures. This diversity extends beyond the indigenous Caucasian population, encompassing speakers of both Indo-European and Turkic languages.

What was the reason for the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Caucasus?

The natural and geographical milieu has become its cause. Here are high mountains, vast steppes, semi-deserts and a temperate to subtropical climate. The region is demarcated by 21 distinctive physical-geographical zones and 11 climatic districts, each marked by its unique characteristics.

It should also be taken into account that the ancient Caucasus was located between two cultural worlds. To the south, it interfaced with the civilized societies of the Middle East, while to the north, it neighbored the nomadic societies. This dichotomy has historically aligned the peoples of the South Caucasus with the Middle Eastern civilization and the northern inhabitants with nomadism. The proximity of the North Caucasus to the nomadic world of Eurasia catalyzed migratory movements from here to the South Caucasus (Lek, Ossetians, Adyghe-Abkhazian ethnic groups). In the late Middle Ages, the activation of piracy and forays of the highlanders of the North Caucasus was largely due to geographical factors. Unable to migrate to the plains, the multiplied population found raids on their immediate neighbours and in Georgia as one of the means of subsistence.

The semi-nomadic way of life of the Circassian tribes living in the Northwestern Caucasus was also determined by geographical factors. Frequent migrations across Eurasia prohibited these tribes from settling in one locale permanently.

Why did the Albanians who had lived to the east of Georgia vanish and how did the Georgians preserve their identity? A striking contrast in geographical terrains between Azerbaijan and Georgia emerges, with the territory of Azerbaijan to the east of historical Hereti (Saingilo) predominantly consisting of plains devoid of mountainous terrain. All historical-ethnographic regions of Georgia have different natural geographic environments. During the early Middle Ages, the plains residence of the Albanians led to their decline, while the Georgians' survival was buttressed by their mountainous landscapes and wooded valleys. This divergence in Georgia's geographical features

nurtured distinct folk cultures, catalyzing economic relations among its varied regions. These connections facilitated early-stage integration, heralding the formation of a cohesive Georgian nation. In the words of Pavle Ingoroqva in 1918, “Georgia’s historical unification within these borders is no accident but rather the product of geographic logic, a genetic intertwining of history, economics, and territorial unity”.

The crux of the survival of the Georgian nation finds grounding in narrow valleys embraced by mountains and forests. Within the Ottoman Empire’s dominion Georgians preserved their ethnicity and mother tongue in those areas. Conversely, regions devoid of such landscapes, like Kola, Artaani, and Tao, witnessed the extinction of Georgian presence.

Due to geographical factors, an unstable ethnic situation has developed in the foothill and steppe zone of the North Caucasus. This situation was created by the periodic movement of nomads from the east to the steppes of Eurasia. It was because of this that the surplus population of North Caucasians living in the mountains could not move to the plains. Historical epochs saw a succession of migratory communities like Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Huns, Avars, Khazars, Kivchaks, and Mongols traversing these plains.

The scarcity of interactions between the mountain inhabitants hampered ethnic integration, resulting in distinct ethnic units rather than a cohesive group. This phenomenon led the Vainakh tribe to splinter into Chechens and Ingush instead of coalescing.

Dagestan’s multi-ethnic composition further owes itself to the interplay of geographical and social factors. Endogamous marriages, specifically the practice of marrying within the same village, facilitated the preservation of distinct speech codes and thereby contributed to the region’s multifarious ethnic landscape.

კავკასიის ეთნიკური და კულტურული მრავალფეროვნების შესახებ

რეზიუმე

ევროპისა და აზიის მიჯნაზე მდებარე კავკასია ეთნიკური და კულტურული თვალსაზრისით მრავალფეროვანი გეოგრაფიული რეგიონია. აქ 50-მდე ეთნოსი მკვიდრობს. ისინი განსხვავებული კულტურის მატარებლები არიან. ამავდროს კავკასიაში მკვიდრობენ არა მხოლოდ ძირძველი კავკასიელები, არამედ ინდოევროპულ და თურქულ ენებზე მოლაპარაკენიც.

რა იყო კავკასიის მრავალფეროვნების მიზეზი?

ბუნებრივ-გეოგრაფიული გარემო იყო კავკასიაში არსებული ეთნიკური სიჭრელის და განსხვავებული ხალხური კულტურის მიზეზი. აქ მაღალმთიანეთთან ერთად არის ვრცელი სტეპები და ნახევრადუდაბნოებიც, ზომიერი და სუბტროპიკული ჰავაც. კავკასიაში ერთმანეთისაგან სრულიად განსხვავებული 21 ფიზიკურ-გეოგრაფიული რაიონი და 11 კლიმატური ოლქი გამოიყოფა.

გასათვალისწინებელია ის ფაქტიც, რომ კავკასია ძველ პერიოდში მდებარეობდა ორ კულტურულ სამყაროს შორის; ესაა სამხრეთით ახლო აღმოსავლეთის ცივილიზებული და ჩრდილოეთით ნომადური საზოგადოებები. სამხრეთ კავკასიის ხალხები ისტორიულად ახლო აღმოსავლეთთან იყვნენ დაკავშირებული, ჩრდილოეთით მოსახლენი კი – ნომადებთან. ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიის ევრაზიის ნომადურ სამყაროსთან სიახლოვე განაპირობებდა აგრეთვე აქედან ადგილობრივი მოსახლეობის სამხრეთ კავკასიაში ჯგუფურ მიგრაციას (ლექები, ოსები, ადიღურ-აფხაზური ეთნიკური ერთობები). გვიან შუა საუკუნეებში ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიელ მთიელთა მეკობრეობისა და თარეშების გააქტიურება დიდ წილად ასევე გეოგრაფიული ფაქტორებით იყო განპირობებული. ვერ ახერხებდნენ რა დაბლობში გადასახლებას, გამრავლებულებმა თავის რჩენის ერთ-ერთ საშუალებად როგორც იქვე მეზობლებზე, ასევე საქართველოში თარეშები გამოიყენეს.

ჩრდილო-დასავლეთ კავკასიაში მცხოვრები ჩერქეზული ტომების ნახევრადმომთაბარეული ცხოვრების წესიც გეოგრაფიული ფაქტორით იყო განპირობებული. ევრაზიის სივრცეში ნომადების ხშირი მოძრაობა მათ მუდმივად ერთ ადგილზე ცხოვრების საშუალებას არ აძლევდა.

რატომ გაქრნენ საქართველოს აღმოსავლეთით მცხოვრები ალბანელები და როგორ შეინარჩუნეს თავისთავადობა ქართველებმა? თუ შევადარებთ ერთმანეთს საქართველოსი და აზერბაიჯანის გეოგრაფიულ რეგიონებს, მათ შორის დიდ სხვაობას დავინახავთ; აზერბაიჯანის ტერიტორია ისტორიული

ჰერეთის (საინგილოს) აღმოსავლეთით მხოლოდ დაბლობია, აქ არ არის მთა-გორაკებიანი რელიეფი. საქართველოში კი ყველა ისტორიულ-ეთნოგრაფიულ მხარეს ერთმანეთისაგან განსხვავებული ბუნებრივ-გეოგრაფიული გარემო აქვს. ადრე შუა საუკუნეებში სამხრეთ კავკასიაში მცხოვრები ალბანელების გაქრობა დაბლობში ცხოვრებამ, ხოლო ქართველების გადარჩენა მთამ და ტყიანმა ხეობებმა განაპირობა. საქართველოს რელიეფის ამ მრავალფეროვნებამ კი ხელი შეუწყო მეტნაკლებად ერთმანეთისაგან განსხვავებული ხალხური კულტურის შექმნას. საქართველოს ისტორიულ-ეთნოგრაფიულ მხარეთა განსხვავებულმა ლანდშაფტმა განაპირობა აქ მცხოვრებთა მჭიდრო სამეურნეო-ეკონომიკური კავშირი, რამაც, თავის მხრივ, ხელი შეუწყო ისტორიის ადრეულ ეტაპზე ქართველთა ინტეგრაციას, ერის ჩამოყალიბებას; მათ ერთმანეთის გარეშე არსებობა არ შეეძლოთ. ჯერ კიდევ 1918 წელს პავლე ინგოროყვა აღნიშნავდა, რომ „თავისთავად შემთხვევითი როდია ისტორიული გაერთიანება საქართველოსი ერთ კოლექტივად ზემოხსენებულ საზღვრებში: ისტორიას აქ ჰქმნიდა გეოგრაფიის ლოლიკა; ისტორიას გენეტიური კავშირი ჰქონდა საქართველოს ეკონომიურსა და ტერიტორიულ მთლიანობასთან“.

ქართველი ერის გადარჩენის მიზეზი საქართველოს მთა-გორიანი და ტყით დაფარული ვიწრო ხეობები იყო. ოსმალეთის იმპერიაში შემავალ საქართველოს სწორედ ასეთ მხარეებში შეინარჩუნეს ქართველებმა ეთნიკურობა და დედა ენა, ხოლო იქ, სადაც ასეთი ლანდშაფტი არ იყო, ქართველები საერთოდ გაქრნენ (კოლა, არტაანი, ტაო).

გეოგრაფიული ფაქტორის შედეგი იყო ჩრდილოეთ კავკასიის მთისწინა დაბლობ და სტეპურ ზოლში არამდგრადი ეთნიკური ვითარება. ამ ვითარებას ევრაზიის სტეპებში აღმოსავლეთიდან დროდადრო ნომადების მოძრაობა ქმნიდა. ამის გამო იყო, რომ მთებში მცხოვრები ჩრდილოკავკასიელების ნამატი მოსახლეობა დაბლობში ვერ გადადიოდა საცხოვრებლად; შესაბამისად ისინი უფრო სამხრეთ კავკასიაში გადმოდიოდნენ. ბარში კი ისტორიულად აქ ერთმანეთს ენაცვლებოდნენ კიმერიელები, სკვითები, სარმატები, ალანები, ჰუნები, ავარები, ხაზარები, ყივჩალები, მონღოლები.

მთებში მცხოვრები ხალხების შეზღუდული კონტაქტები ეთნიკურ ინტეგრაციას აბრკოლებდა, არ ხდებოდა ამ ეთნიკურ ერთობათა დიდ ეთნოსებად ფორმირება. სწორედ ამან განაპირობა ერთი მოდგმის ვაინახების ორ სხვადასხვა ხალხად – ჩეჩნებად და ინგუშებად ჩამოიყალიბება. ინტეგრაციის ნაცვლად მოხდა დეზინტეგრაცია.

დაღესტანში მულტიეთნიკურობას, გეოგრაფიულ ფაქტორთან ერთად, ამ ხალხებისათვის დამახასიათებელი სოციალური ვითარებაც უწყობდა ხელს, კერძოდ, ენდოგამიური ქორწინება. აქ ნათესავების ერთმანეთზე დაქორწინების ტრადიცია არსებობდა. ერთი სოფლის მკვიდრნი მეორე სოფლის მკვიდრებზე არასდროს ქორწინდებოდნენ. შესაბამისად არ ხდებოდა სამეცხველო კოდების შერევა.