

*History-Archaeology*

## **Is Ethnicization of the Archaeological Cultures of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennia B.C. Possible in the South-Central Region of the Caucasus?**

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**ABSTRACT.** The specific ethnic character of cultures discovered at various archaeological sites is of utmost importance for historical science. In the present study boundaries of archaeological cultures of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennia B.C. in the South-Central Region of the Caucasus and their local versions are compared with the data of one Georgian written source giving historical and geographical information on settlements of Georgian tribes. Coincidence of these data allows us to raise the question of ethnicization of concrete archaeological cultures.  
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**Key words:** *ethnicization of archaeological cultures.*

The main goal of historical science is connecting archaeological cultures with concrete ethnical formations. In order to achieve more or less acceptable results of such endeavor, it is necessary to consider a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches and summarize their data. Without it we shall not be able to get an adequate answer. However, it is my belief that any research in the above mentioned direction must take into consideration the data of written sources illustrating contemporaneous developments with the issues under investigation and support the conclusions made on the basis of the archaeological finds referring to the cultures in the South-Central region of the Caucasus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia B.C.

It is well known that so far we do not have in our possession written sources referring to the earliest period of this region of the Caucasus. Such documents would have provided the basis for establishing the ethnic character of the relevant archaeological cultures. In order to achieve our goal, we made use of a later Georgian source describing, in the view of quite a few scholars, the historical and geographic situation of that region prior to its social stratification, and coupled it with the

data obtained as a result of archaeological studies. We assume that our research has been successful.

Analyzing this subject matter I focused on one of the earliest written sources of Georgia's past by the historian Leonti Mroveli's work "History of the Kings and Patriarchs of the Georgians" [1], particularly on the part that describes the oldest period of Georgia's history.

"First let us recall that for Armenians and Georgians, Ransians and Movkanians, Hers and Leks, Megrelians and Caucasians there was a single father named T'argamos. This T'argamos was the son of T'arši, grandson of Yap'et', son of Noah. Now this T'argamos was a giant. After the division of tongues – when they built the tower at Babylon, and the tongues were divided there and they were scattered from there over the whole world, - this T'argamos set out with his family, and he settled between the two inaccessible mountains Ararat and Masis ...

... Now the land which fell to him by lot - this is the border of his land: to the east, the sea of Gurgun; to the west, the Pontus sea; to the south, the sea of Oreti; and to the north, the Caucasus mountain.

Among his sons eight men became, renowned, powerful and famous giants. Their names are these: the first was called Haos, the second K'art'los, the third Bardos, the fourth Movakan, The fifth Lek, the sixth Heros, the seventh Kavkas, the eighth Egros. These eight were giants. But the biggest giant of them all was Haos; for there had never been such a one, neither before the flood nor after, in stature, power, and courage.

The land of Ararat and Masis was no longer sufficient, so T'argamos divided the country and his family between these eight giants. Half of his family and the better half of his land he gave to Haos; and to the (other) seven he gave their portion according to their merit. He led the seven northwards and shared out the lands according to their worth.

To K'art'los he gave and appointed as boundary: from the east Heret'i and the river Berduji; from the west the Pontus sea; from the south the mountain which runs along that same river Berduji and the mountain which runs to the west, whose source passes towards the north and joins the Mtkuari, and the mountain which runs between Klarjet'i and Tao as far as the sea. From the north the boundary (was) Ğado, a small mountain which goes down as a branch from the Caucasus and whose point reaches the end of Ğado, which they now call Lixi. And all (the land) between their boundaries he gave to K'art'los. To Bardos he gave (the land) south of the Mtkuari, from the River Berduji as far as where the Mrkuari and Rahsi join. Bardos built the city of Bardav and settled there. To Movakan he gave (the land) north of the Mrkuari from the confluence of the Lesser Alazan as far as the sea; and he built the city of Movaknet'i and dwelt there. To Heros he gave the land north of the Mtkuari, from the confluence of the Lesser Alazan as far as Tqetba, which they now call Gulgula. And this Heros first built a city between the junction of two Alazans, and he called its name Heret'i. From his (name) Heret'i is called Heret'I; and now they call that place Xorant'a" [1: 3-6; 2: 2-5].

Later, in the written source, the boundaries of settlement of Kartlos and his descendants are described in detail.

"... But from here we shall begin and relate the story of K'art'li and of their people, and their history up to our own days, and how T'argamos divided the land among his family and his eight sons.

He gave to K'art'los the territory which we have described above. This K'art'los went first to the place where the Aragvi joins the Mtkuari. He went up on the mountain which is called Armazi, and first constructed a fortress on it and built a house there; and he called that mountain K'art'li by his own name. Until the idol of Armazi

was erected there, the mountain was called K'art'li. After that the whole of K'art'li was called K'art'li, from Xunan as far as the sea of Sper. After this the same K'art'los built the castle of Mtueri, which is now called Xunan. He lived for many years and his family multiplied. Among his children five giants became noteworthy, whose names were: of the first Mc'xet'os, of the second Gardabos, of the third Kaxos, of the fourth Kuxos, of the fifth Gač'ios. These five were giants, but Mc'xet'os was more gigantic than the others. K'art'los died and they buried him at the entrance of K'art'li, which is now called Armazi... The wife of K'art'los divided (the land) among those same five giants, her sons. To Gardabos she gave Xunan and defined the boundary: from the east the river Berduji, from the west the city Gač'iani, from the south the mountain previously mentioned, and from the north the Mtkuari. To Gač'ios she gave the castle of Orbi and (the land) from the river Skwired'i as far as the entrance to Aboc'. This Gač'ios built the city of Gač'iani, which is now called the city Sanadiro. To Kuxos she gave the city Bostan-k'alak'i, which is now called Rustavi; and she gave him (the land) between the mountain of Kaxet'i and the Mtkuari. To Kaxos she gave (the land) between the Caucasus and the mountain of Kaxet'i from the Aragvi as far as Tqetba, which is the frontier of Heret'i. This Kaxos built Č'et'et'i. Kuxos helped in the construction of Č'et'et'i. Because Deda-c'ixe was the portion of Kaxos, the latter gave it to him for the sake of his assistance; and he helped in the construction of Celeti, which was called Ber – the first construction of Kaxet'i.

Now Mc'xet'os, who was the most gigantic of his brothers, stayed in the domains of his father K'art'los, which they now call Armazi. He built a city between the junction of Mtkuari and the Aragvi, and named it Mxeta. Furthermore he held the land from Tp'ilisi and from the Aragvi as far as the sea of Sper on the west... "[1: 8-10; 2: 9-12].

Thus, the above mentioned written document begins with a story of a biblical character who divided his inherited country – the Caucasus – among his eight children: Haos, Kartlos, Bardos, Movakan, Lek, Heros, Kavkas and Egros. Among those eight siblings was the founder of the Georgians, Kartlos, after whose death his spouse divided the land previously awarded to him among their five children: Mtskhetos, Gardabos, Kakhos, Kukhos and Gachios.

It is believed that on the basis of ancient sources accessible to him the author (Mroveli) gives us information concerning the peoples of the Caucasus in general and Georgian tribes in particular prior to social stratification among them [3: 183; 4: 54; 5: 11; 6: 5-14, 19, a map; 7: 161; 8: 34].

We are not going to investigate the question of the origin of the sources that Mroveli used for his analysis of the earliest period of Georgian history. It is not our purpose. However, it should be pointed out that his analysis of the origins of Georgian history seems to be accurate since it corresponds to the chronological data of the period. For instance, after finishing the story about the division of the land among the heirs of Thargamos, Mroveli describes first the invasion of the Khazars from Daruband and Darial, then he informs us about the period of Persian hegemony after which he narrates about the campaign of Alexander the Great, and finally names 24 kings prior to Christianization of Kartli [1: 11-71].

Thus, according to Leonti Mroveli, division of Georgia and particularly of the lands belonging to Kartlos happened earlier than the events written in his work, because it preceded the separation of the principality of Targamos and his heirs preceded the events.

If we assume that Leonti Mroveli was mistaken when he named the Khazars while he should have presumably used the Scythians instead, then the chronological sequence is quite accurate. First, the story refers to the invasion of the Scythians (8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> cc. B.C.), then it moves to Persia of the Achaemenid dynasty (558-330 B.C.); finally, it relates the campaign of Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). This is followed by the list of 24 kings and only afterwards the author speaks about the Christianization of Kartli (G. Melikishvili points out that Leonti Mroveli is mistaken here and indeed he must have been referring to the invasion of the Scythians, the fact mentioned earlier by Claproth and Patkanov [8: 35]. This opinion is shared by G. Melikishvili as well [8: 37]. O. Lordkipanidze agrees with this assumption and considers that the events described in the first part of Leonti Mroveli's work took place earlier than the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. [9: 804-805]). Thus, in Mroveli's analysis everything falls in its place.

D. Muskhelishvili, on the basis of the material available to him, believed that the historical and geographic information presented in Mroveli's work referred to the events of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cc. B.C. [10]. For my part, I also had an opportunity to express my opinion on the matter and regarded a part of this historic and geographic information as referring to an earlier period, at least to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. [11: 196-197].

Today this estimation seems to have acquired greater credibility, and we are able to attribute a part of Mroveli's information even to an earlier period.

Most importantly, in this written source the boundaries of the lands belonging to Kartlos, as well as to his brother Heros and to the successors of Kartlos are scrupulously described, and their parameters correspond

to the boundaries of the various archaeological cultures and their local variation that were determined according to archaeological discoveries in the region (The archaeological finds in various parts of East Georgia that are related to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia B.C. are not fully researched. Therefore, I limited my own research to a comparative study of the information given in the above mentioned written source and the data provided by the archaeological finds. For this reason, I intentionally omitted from my sphere of argumentation the information about the territories awarded, according to the source, to the children of Kartlos, i.e. to Gardabos and Gachios).

Hence, according to the present archaeological data available to me, it is absolutely certain that the common boundaries of the lands belonging to Kartlos and his brother Heros coincide with those of the mid Bronze Age Trialeti culture of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. [12; 13: 98-171, Fig. 33(1); 14: 165-172; 15; 16: 112; 17: 74; 18: 9-13; 19: 16, 34, 35] and the early stage of the following late Bronze Age South-Central Caucasian culture that is genetically related to it [11: 163-164; 20], provided that these two cultures are viewed more or less in the same framework. It should be emphasized here that according to the existing material it is possible to differentiate two local cultures that emerged on the basis of South-Central Caucasian culture in the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; the stretch of their boundaries, if taken separately, coincides with the territorial borders of the principalities of Kartlos and Heros who are mentioned as brothers in the aforementioned written source. It is obvious that this fact adds credibility to the information regarding genetic ties between Kartlos and Heros as stated in the source.

Certain aspects of our reasoning need to be verified but it is significant that the data going back to such early period point at certain possibilities for determining the ethnic character of the archaeological culture and its variations.

As discussed above, according to the written source, the land inherited by Kartlos was divided after his death. In this regard it is particularly noteworthy that both the written source and the archaeological finds on the same territory confirm that during the ensuing development the unified South-Central Caucasian culture gradually broke up, forming its local variations. Initially, in the second part of the Late Bronze Age, around the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., in the middle section of the Mtkvari valley, on the territory of the present Inner Kartli emerged the so-called leaf-shaped dagger culture, the outer boundaries of which almost precisely coincided with the borders of the land inherited by Mtskhetos, one of Kartlos's sons just as it was described in the written

source (It is important to mention that the major artefact of this culture, leaf-shaped bronze dagger blade, and not only this, does not seem to have emerged locally. Daggers of the previous period found in this region as well as on the territory of the entire South-Central Caucasus, are of different kind - they have a bronze handle and belong to the period of greater sophistication. It is also noteworthy that they differ considerably from leaf-shaped daggers of the following period that were found on the same territory. The latter are bronze daggers that must have been developed in the tradition of earlier local cultures. Thus, leaf-shaped daggers characteristic of archaeological finds of the second phase of the Late Bronze Age, i.e. the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., seem to be alien bodies for this area and were in existence for only a short period of time. However unexpected this may sound, items similar to them both in their general shape and specific details can be found in Western Europe of the same period. This fact deserves special attention and should be kept in mind whenever development of the local culture is analyzed [20]). However, on the territory inherited by Heros, a culture of assemble-handled daggers and swords emerged that was rooted in the earlier South-Central Caucasian culture and was distinguished by several characteristic features; it spreads beyond the boundaries of Heros's lands including the entire area of the rivers Alazani and Iori, reaches the river Aragvi to the west and the river Mtkvari to the south.

In the following phase of its development, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. a particularly important process of segmentation takes place within the archaeological culture of this region. These events, when compared with the data of the written source, present a rather firm foundation for discussing ethnic identity of the society to which the given archaeological finds belong.

The data are as follows. In the second phase of the late Bronze Age, approximately in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. throughout the of the river Mtkvari valley middle section, i.e. the land inherited by Mtskhetos, one of Kartlos's sons, the aforementioned culture developed that was characterized by the presence of an artefact alien to this region, namely those of leaf-shaped dagger blade. However, it is of utmost importance that at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B. C. and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. within the established boundaries of this area, there emerged a whole group of specific artefacts that seem rooted in, developed and genetically tied to the traditions of the ancient, Late Bronze Age South-Central Caucasian culture. It is particularly significant that, as mentioned above, the boundaries of the culture

to which these artefacts, as well as the leaf-shaped daggers, belong coincided precisely with the borders of the land inherited by Mtskhetos, the son of Kartlos as described in the written source. Taking into consideration the existence of the stable boundaries of a certain material culture during a rather long period of its development and correspondence of these boundaries with the borders of the area inhabited by one of the Georgian tribes or settlers, it becomes only necessary to connect these data.

It is also significant that at the same time, in the second phase of the Late Bronze Age, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, along the banks of the rivers Iori and Alazani, all the way to the river Aragvi valley to the west, and to the valley of the river Mtkvari to the south, there stretched a culture of assemble-handled daggers and swords; however, during the ensuing development, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., three groups of archaeological material appear, each with many specific features but clearly of the same origin. The territorial boundaries of these groups almost precisely coincide with the borders of the land inherited by Heros, on the one hand, and with the borders of the lands belonging to Kakhos and Kukhos, the two sons of Kartlos, on the other

In my opinion, the above-mentioned data allows me to put forward a few ideas that are fairly credible even if somewhat premature.

1. The written source emphasizes blood relations between Heros and Kartlos, and of course between Kartlos and his descendents. In this regard, it is of utmost importance that from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. the archaeological cultures and related local groups found on the territory of their settlements having a common origin, developed consistently and were products of a millennium long process of human endeavor. They differed in many ways from the world outside of their boundaries. They were closely connected for quite a lengthy period of time and maintained numerous common traits as a unified entity. Thus, the evidence of the written source and the results of archaeological studies are in complete harmony .

2. It is noteworthy that the unity of Kartlos's time mentioned in the written source seems to have disintegrated after his death and his heirs began governing separate parts of his land. Archaeological finds confirm precisely the same situation; during the earlier phase of the middle and late Bronze Age, in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., including the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. a unified culture existed throughout that area. Later, however, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and begin-

ning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. this unity disintegrated into separate groups genetically related to the previous culture. Here too the events described in the written source correspond exactly to the developmental stages of the archaeological cultures.

3. In order to determine the archaeological cultures and their ethnic character, it is also important that the boundaries of the lands inherited by Kartlos and Heros, as they were mentioned in the written source, coincide with the boundaries of the local variations of the culture that was typical of the entire South-Central Caucasus in the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.. During the following stages of development and as a result of the segmentation of the territory at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. they coincide with the boundaries of the lands belonging to the heirs of Kartlos.

4. It is obvious that so many similarities between the historic and geographic facts presented in the written source, and the results of the archaeological studies with reference to the boundaries of the cultures discovered in the area are the most impressive and cannot be incidental. This, in its turn, gives hope that it is possible to determine rather convincingly the periods of the historic and geographic information presented in the written source. In particular, the boundaries of the lands belonging to Kartlos and Heros may be determined as actually existing in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and down to the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. On the other hand, the historic and geographic data concerning the

heirs of Kartlos can be dated as referring to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.

5. I believe that the facts discussed above allow the creation of a reliable basis for the study of the ethnic character of the archaeological cultures that existed in the area of the South-Central Caucasus between the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. Additional authoritative studies are available dealing with the existence of factual material essential for credible discussion of this issue [21: 103; 22: 6, 7].

Thus, I have tried to formulate my opinion pertaining to certain ethno-genetic attributions of the hitherto unknown civilization in the Caucasus in order to demonstrate the necessity of further research in this direction, the necessity of bringing new material and to light its analysis from that point of view.

I am far from thinking that at this stage of research my conclusions will be accepted as proven facts; yet I do not exclude the possibility that they are very close to the truth. I would like to repeat that the most important thing for me is to turn the subject matter discussed here into a problem worthy of fundamental research. The results of this research could make a significant contribution to a new approach in the study of a certain period in the distant past of the Caucasus. I wish the scholarly community will take interest in my suggestion and will consider it essential to expand research in this direction and actively participate in its implementation.

*ისტორია-არქეოლოგია*

## დასაშვებია თუ არა სამხრეთ კავკასიის ცენტრალური ნაწილის ძვ.წ. II-I ათასწლეულების არქეოლოგიურ კულტურათა ეთნიზაცია

კ. ფიცხელაური

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არქეოლოგიურ კულტურათა დაკავშირება კონკრეტულ ეთნიკურ წარმონაქმნებთან ისტორიული მეცნიერების უმთავრესი მიზანია.

გამოკვლევაში სამხრეთ კავკასიის ცენტრალური ნაწილის ძვ. წ. II-I ათასწლეულების არქეოლოგიური კულტურების და მათი ლოკალური ვარიანტების გავრცელების საზღვრები დაკავშირებულია ქართული წერილობითი წყაროს მონაცემებთან, სადაც მოცემულია ისტორიულ-გეოგრაფიული ცნობები ქართველ ტომთა განსახლების შესახებ. მათი თანხვედრა დასაშვებ ხდის, დაისვას საკითხი კონკრეტული არქეოლოგიური კულტურების ეთნიზაციასთან დაკავშირებით.

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