

# The Problem of the Origination of Statehood in the North-Eastern Caucasus in the Epoch of Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages

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**Abstract.** The North-Eastern Caucasus, which includes the territories of the modern Chechen Republic and the Republic of Dagestan, is one of the oldest centers of the manufacturing economy in the Old World. The development of productive forces and production relations over several millennia, expressed in vivid monuments of material culture, starting from the Kura-Araxes Eneolithic culture, inevitably led to the socio-political evolution of society, the emergence of early forms of statehood or the inclusion of these societies in various kinds of military-political alliances. Numerous Nakh (ancestors of modern Chechens, Ingush and Batsbi) and Dagestan tribes were actively involved in such unions, and the territory of their settlement was partly or completely included at different times in the early state associations that arose in adjacent territories. Such early polities include the Ancient Georgian Kingdom (Iberia) and Caucasian Albania of the late antiquity, the Alanian Kingdom and the Khazar Khaganate of the early Middle Ages, known from written sources.

## 1 Introduction

The socio-political processes that took place in the Northeast Caucasus at the time under review are very important for studying the genesis of social institutions and the dynamics of their development in the history of the peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan. The current state of the study of documentary sources allows us to take a fresh look at the problem, long developed by historians, of the emergence of early polities in the North-Eastern Caucasus (Makhelonia, Ikhran, Bab al-Kist), as well as the participation of local tribes in the formation of early state formations in neighboring regions (Iberia, Caucasian Albania).

Determination of the role and place of the Nakh tribes (ancestors of modern Chechens) in the sociogenesis and political genesis of the peoples of the North-Eastern Caucasus and neighboring regions.

What facts of history, documentary sources, confirm the significant role of the Nakh tribes and peoples in the military-political events of the era of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages in the Caucasus.

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The study of military-political processes in the North-Eastern Caucasus in the era of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages and the study of the socio-political consequences of contacts with the early state formations of neighboring regions.

## 2 Research Methodology

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

An analysis of written sources allows us to conclude that the Nakh tribes played a rather significant role in the early history of the Georgian state, the first rulers of which were connected with the ancestors of the Chechens by a military-political alliance, sealed by dynastic ties. On the basis of written sources and data of material culture, there is reason to believe that the eastern areas of the settlement of the Nakh tribes were included in the orbit of influence of Caucasian Albania. In written sources, one can find indications of the emergence of their own early state formations among the local tribes of the North-Eastern Caucasus in the early Middle Ages, the existence of which turned out to be short-lived, obviously due to the emergence of new centers of political power - the Alanian kingdom and the Khazar Khaganate.

## 3 Results and Discussions

The main source for reconstructing the early history of the Iberian kingdom is the chronicle "The Life of the Kings of Kartli" by Leonti Mroveli, compiled in the 11th century. According to his information, the first Georgian king was 27-year-old Farnavaz, who came from a noble family, whose representatives were the rulers of Mtskheta. Having lost his father and uncle as a result of a heated struggle for power at the age of 3, he, according to Leonti Mroveli, fled with his mother to the north, to the Caucasus Mountains [1, 29]. The indication that Pharnavaz subsequently married "a maiden from the clan of Kavkas [tribe] Durdzüks" [1, 30] is, perhaps, an indication of the place where he grew up and matured during his forced exile. Enlisting support both within the country and abroad, Farnavaz proclaimed himself the king of Kartli, sealing the union with the North Caucasian tribes by dynastic marriages (except for the Dzurdzüks, also with the Ovs, for whose leader he gave one of his sisters). If you believe the chronological calculations of M. G. Dzhnashvili, then Farnavaz established himself on the Georgian throne in 302 BC. e., and died in 237 BC. e., leaving behind a completely prosperous country with a fairly strong government.

After the conspiracy and rebellion of part of the old aristocracy, his son Saurmag, who inherited Pharnavaz, was also forced to flee with his mother to her relatives ("to his mother's brother"), to Dzurdzuketia, where he gathered his allies and supporters - the Dzurdzüks, Ovs (Sarmatians?) and "Roman aznaurs". With their help, Saurmag restored his power in Georgia, at the same time elevating his Dzurdzük allies and allocating land for them to settle from Didoetia (the territory of Dagestan inhabited by the neighboring Chechens Didoets - Tsez) to Egrisi (Colchis) and Svanetia. All this speaks of the close ties that the Mtskheta rulers maintained with their warlike northern mountaineer neighbors, and especially, as we see, the Nakhs [1, 30; 2, 127-131]. Dzurdzuki (or durdzuki), as you know, in the Georgian medieval chronicle tradition, the collective name of the ancestors of modern Chechens and Ingush.

In the II century. BC e. the military-political activity of the powerful union of Nakh tribes continues. Direct indications of the existence of such a union can be found in the most ancient sections of Kartlis Tskhovreba. So, in the section "Invasion of the Khazars" it is said: "Over the sons of Kavkas was Durdzük, the son of Tiret" [1, 25]. During the reign of the third king of the Farnavazian dynasty, Mirvan (the turn of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC),

having entered into an alliance “with the Caucasians who were in Chartaleti, the inhabitants of Durdzuketi appeared and captivated Kakheti and Bazaleti” [1, 30]. Huge efforts had to be made to repel the invasion of the Nakh tribes: “King Mirvan called all the eristavis of Kartli, gathered a large army - horse and foot ... The battle lasted a long time between them, many [people] fell on both sides” [1, 31]. The chronicler especially notes that during these events, “the Caucasians, who [once] went over to the side of Saurmag”, remained loyal to the king of Kartli [1, 31].

Shortly after the invasion of the Durdzüks, Mirvan “erected stone gates and called them Darubal” [1, 31]. The reason for all these bloody military clashes, according to the ancient Armenian version of “Kartlis tskhovreba”, was that “the Durdzüks forgot their vow” [1, 31], i.e., for reasons unknown to us, the pre-existing between the Kartli kings and fuck the union. It is known, however, that at that time Iberia (Kartli) experienced a period of economic and political upsurge. Mirvan, obviously, decided to take advantage of the favorable moment and subdue the Nakh tribes, which they regarded as a violation of previous agreements and was the reason for a large-scale retaliatory military invasion. It should be especially noted that the Durdzüks acted in close alliance with the Nakh tribes living in Chartaleti [3, 124]. “Initially, Chartal,” writes G. A. Melikishvili, “apparently, was a broader concept and included the whole of Kakheti.”

One of the first chapters of “Kartlis tskhovreba” is called “Invasion of the Khazars”. Many researchers believe that in this narrative, the ancient Georgian chronicler describes events related to the military and political activities of the Scythians (and later Sarmatians) in the Caucasus in the 1st millennium BC. e. Be that as it may, according to the Georgian historical tradition, as Leonti Mroveli testifies, before the advent of the Khazars, “Veinakhs were probably the most active ethnic group in the North Caucasus. In case of danger, the Veinakhs resorted to the help of their allies, for whom the Durdzüks, in turn, provided support in the Caucasus” [1, 53]. According to the ancient Armenian version of “Kartlis tskhovreba”, the allies “filled the lands of Khazrats with the hands of the son of Tiret – Dutsuk...” [4, 15]. Commenting on the message about Tiret, G. V. Tsulaya writes: “The mention of the “father” Durdzuk should be regarded as recognition of the significant role of the ancestors of the Veinakh peoples in the ancient history of the Caucasus long before they were mentioned in written sources. This is also confirmed by the data of other authors” [1, 54].

Strabo in the North Caucasus repeatedly mentions tribal skeptukhs (literally: “rod” or “scepter-bearers”, i.e. leaders). In this regard, it would be useful to recall the cuttings of the bases of deer antlers found among other objects of the Koban culture, especially numerous in Chechnya. F. Bayern, E.I. Krupnov and D.V. Deopik consider them to be the batons of military leaders [5, 31], and V.I. Kozenkova interprets them as symbols of power and weapons [6, 26]. As is known, the process of formation of tribal aristocracy in ancient times was closely connected with the constant participation of tribal groups in various military campaigns. The most striking example of the separation of the military elite and a special military estate on the territory of Chechnya, even at an earlier time, are the rich Serzhen-Yurt burials of warrior horsemen. IX - 1st floor. 8th century BC e.

M. Kh. Bagaev notes a significant similarity in the material culture of the population of mountainous Dagestan (the basins of the Avar and Andi Koisu rivers) and Chechnya (from Ichkeria to the headwaters of the Argun River) of the 8th-10th centuries, which allows him to assert the existence at that time “single area of the material culture of the mountain peoples” [7, 15].

Researchers have repeatedly addressed the issue of the northern boundaries of the settlement of Albanian tribes. So, K. V. Trever and J. A. Khalilov, who were thoroughly engaged in the study of the history and material culture of Caucasian Albania, considered the Sulak River as its northern border [8; 9], and S. V. Yushkov – Terek [10, 139]. The northwestern border of the distribution of Albanian influence is completely unclear. Meanwhile, one of the rivers flowing through the Albanian lands, the Soana River, is fairly

reasonably associated with the Argun River [11, 130-132; 12, 27; 13,211], flowing through the central regions of mountainous and lowland Chechnya.

O. M. Davudov, summarizing all the materials known to him, draws the following conclusion: “According to sources dating back to the 2nd century. BC e., the territory of Dagestan to the Terek was part of Caucasian Albania. These borders remained unchanged until the Sasanian construction in Derbent in the 5th-6th centuries. n. e. This is evidenced by the inscription of King Shapur I on the Kaaba-i-Zardusht” [13, 211-212]. Moreover, in his opinion, there is reason to say that “the territory between Derbent and Argun-Terek constituted a separate province and had its own name and its own administrative center” [14, 141].

As you know, in 225-226. the Arsacids in Parthia were replaced by a new Sassanid dynasty, which began an active struggle with Rome for spheres of influence. Among the countries conquered by Shapur I by 262, the Kaaba-i-Zardusht inscription mentions Atropatena, Armenia, Iberia, Mahelonia and Albania - a country up to Kap-koh (Caucasian Mountains) and the Alan Gate (Daryal Gorge). S. T. Eremyan, after a detailed analysis of this text, came to the conclusion about the possibility of localizing Mahelonia next to Albania. True, he compared Makhelonia with the kingdom of the Muskuts in southern Dagestan [15, 48-57]. However, it follows from the text that Makhelonia is located next to Caucasian Albania, near the Caucasus Mountains and the “Alan Gate” (Daryal Pass). Nakh tribes settled here in Albanian times. To this day, the Ingush are known among the Ossetians under the name *mækhkhalon*. According to O. M. Davudov, “under the name of Makhelonia, not only the ancestors of some Ingush, but also all the Nakh peoples, were hiding. The localization of Makhelonia on both sides of the Main Caucasian Range, near the headwaters of the Argun, most of all corresponds to the data of the Shapur I inscription. n. e. Such political boundaries of Albania contributed to the formation of a special historical-cultural or cultural community on the territory of this state” [13, 212].

An indirect indication that some part of the Nakh tribes could at times fall under the political influence of Caucasian Albania can also be the message “Kartlis tskhovreba” that the Georgian kings Azork and Armazel (70s of the 1st century AD. ) provided military assistance to the “king of the Leks”, who “brought the Durdzüks and Didoi”. V. F. Minorsky, R. M. Magomedov, I. Kh. Abdullaev, K. Sh. Mikailov and many others believe that under the ethnonym of the early Leks//Legs one should see all the indigenous peoples of Dagestan [16, 134; 17, 37-56; 18, 47-57; 19, 157-158; 20:13-26]. N. S. Trubetsky generally believed that the Chechens, Laks and Udins form one language group, originating from the ancient Legs [21, 111].

S. T. Eremyan, citing information about the “kingdom of machelons and geniokhs”, notes that the geniokhs and machelons (macrons) of the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus, well known from ancient written sources, are clearly separated from the geniokhs and machelonia of the Eastern Caucasus, known from the inscription of Shapur I on the Kaaba - i-Zardusht [22, 48-57]. Makhelonia, as established by O. M. Davudov, is localized “in the upper reaches of the Argun River on both sides of the Main Caucasian Range” [13, 234]. In this regard, of interest is the message of Pseudo-Arrian in the “Detour of the Euxine Pontus”, that “beyond the geniokhs lies the sea called the Caspian” (50, 9).

In medieval Dagestan sources (in particular, in the well-known chronicle “Derbent-name”), the country Ithran/Irhan is mentioned in the North-Eastern Caucasus. According to A. V. Gadlo, in the early Middle Ages, this country occupied the eastern part of Alania “and the nearest foothills of Dagestan and modern Chechnya and Ingushetia” [23, 20]. V. A. Abaev wrote that the name of one of the ethnic groups Ossetians *ir//iron* dates back to the local pre-Ossetian population, which preserved it after Iranianization as a self-name [24, 79; 25, 380, 546]. K. Z. Chokaev reports that in the Itum-Kalinsky district of Chechnya, some representatives of mountain communities, in particular Khyachara and Tierla, consider themselves to be Khliry.

An important factor that contributed to the emergence of early state associations in the Caucasus, especially in its eastern part, was the ever-increasing pressure from the Persian state. According to Ibn al-Faqih, the Persian king Kavad I in the Eastern Caucasus built a whole system of fortifications - Bab al-Abwab: “three hundred and sixty castles (qasr) [stretching] to Bab al-Lan” [26, 47, note . 47]. According to Ibn Khordadbeh, Bab al-Abwab, representing “360 castles or fortifications in mountain gorges”, was built by the son of Kavad I Khosrov I Anushirvan. He also gives the names of the most significant fortifications from this defensive system in the Kabka gorges: Bab-Sul, Bab-Alan, Bab-Sahib-as-Sarir, etc. [26, 47] Anushirvan, while still a prince, “lived at the Alan Gates” [26, 19]. He, at the behest of his father, “restored the city of Semend, the fortress of Balkh, the city of Kuyvan, Ithran, Gelbakh, the fortress of Surkhab, the Small Majar (Kichi-Majar), the Great Majar (Ulu-Majar) and other fortresses in Dagestan” [27, 460].

The localization of Ithran presents great difficulties. So, in “Derbend-name” it is said: “Sepahsalar of Isfendiyar sat in the fortress of Ithran, having made a [golden] throne. Therefore [the ruler] of Ithran is called the Owner of the Throne (Sahib-i Serir). The Arabs, however, call him Hatem al-Jibali.

A large river flows through Ithran. All the rivers flowing out of Gurjistan flow through him. On this river he built a city called Balkh. The ruler of Balkh became known as Endirey” [26, 20].

Arab authors (Ibn Haukal, Masudi) report that Sahib as-Sarir is a descendant of the famous Sasanian commander Bahram Gur (Bahram Jubin, Vahram Chobin), who received this nickname in the middle. VII in [26, 48, approx. 65; 16, 203]. The title “hatim al-jibali” in Arabic means “seal of the mountains.” In Arabic sources, there is also the title “Khakan al-Jibali” – “Khakan Gor” [26, 48, approx. 66; 28, 7].

In the publication of M.A. Kazembek, it is said that the Khazar khakan took away “Ikhran and the fortress of Gelbakh” from the Persian commander Anushirvan, after which the khakan’s troops were garrisoned here. The significance of Ikhran for the Khazar rulers is evidenced by the information given in the Derbend-name: “The deposits of gold ore that were on that border, and the deposits of silver ore that were on the Terek, Kha-kan transferred the sepahsalar of this border line - the ruler of Ikhran” [ 26, 19].

So, Ikhran, judging by the data of Derbend-name, is a territory in the North-Eastern Caucasus, subject to Khazaria. In some lists of “Derbend-name” Gelbakh (var.: Kilbakh, Gyulbakh, Gilbakh) is called the ruler (emir) of Ithran. In others, it appears as the name of one of the main fortresses of Ikhran, usually identified by Dagestan historians with the modern. With. Chiryurt (Avar. Gelbakh) Kizilyurt district of Dagestan.

The situation with Balkh is more complicated. M.A. Kazembek believed that Belkh (or Balkh), i.e. the old Andy-Ray, lay 3 miles south of the present Endyrey [27, 482]. In the notes to the Russian edition of Derbend-name, M. Alikhanov-Avarsky also expresses the opinion that there were two Endireys: the current Endirey, “called Kulbakh, and another, more ancient, lying, according to legend, 15-20 miles south the first and sometimes called Balkh” [29, 49, 44].

D. M. Ataev writes about the early medieval Bulgarian city of Endirey, which, in his opinion, was located 2 km northwest of modern Endirey. This is the so-called. Andreyaul settlement. There are other opinions about the localization of Balkh.

According to Dagestani folk legends, it was Endirey who was previously called Belkh, Balkh, or Balk-shagar (that is, the city of Balkh) [27, 480-483]. According to Kabardian legends, on the banks of the river. Malki (Turk. Balkh) was the city of Malkan, or Balkh [30, 45]. The impregnable fortress of Bolkazar also appears in Chechen legends and traditions (perhaps, the addition of two words Bolk and Khazar).

As for the semantics of the name Balkh, most likely it is connected with the Turkic-Mongolian word balyq/baliq/balig – “city”, “fortress” [31, 80, 81, 644; 32, 59; 33, 1166, 1495, 1498; 34, 362]. B. Malachikhanov connected the oikonym Balkh with this word. In

his opinion, this name, “having a common noun in general, referred to Endery, defining its characteristics as a large settlement that had an impact on a large district” [35, 199].

In one of the lists of Derbent-name, it is reported that Tumanshah “began to rule the Fog of the KSK to Khumr.” The name Tuman KSK looks strange, except for its compound or consisting of two independent names - Tuman and KSK. The Petersburg list of “Derbent-name” localizes the borders of the Tumanshah’s possessions from Ikhran, located in Northern Dagestan, to Khumr. A.K. Alikberov identifies the last name with the Khumarinsky settlement known in Karachay-Cherkessia. He associates KSK with the Arabic name of the Circassians - Kasak or al-Kasakiyya. Under the Fog, A.K. Alikberov sees “the Alans or the lowland Turks, who were really numerous and actually controlled the lands from the Kashaks to Khumra” [36, 165]. In “Derbent-name” (lists R and Kzh) Tuman is called a “numerous tribe”, to which Khosrov I Anushirvan granted possession up to Khumr, appointing a hakim named tumanshah over them. The title tumanshah, according to A.K. Alikberov, definitely indicates the ability of its owner to put up 10 thousand soldiers in case of military necessity. army [36, 164]. In written sources, Arab campaigns against the Khazars in the 1st half. 8th century invariably associated with campaigns against the tumanshah. Thus, the expedition of 735 against the Tumanshah was undertaken during the period of fierce clashes in the “lands of the Turks”, and one of the Arab detachments “conquered three fortresses of the Alans, and the other detachment attacked the Tumanshah” (al-Usfuri. Tarikh, 45).

An attempt to conjecture the KSK, according to A.K. Alikberov, leads to an insufficiently convincing version of the KST, and through it to the name of the Kistin tribe. In addition, it is believed that the Arabic name of the village of Richa in South Dagestan is Bab al-Kist. This name is also recorded in local historical writings (as, for example, in Tarikh Abi Muslim, 79-83). “The possessions of the Kists or Bab al-Kist,” writes A.K. Alikberov, “in this case could mark the boundaries of the territory of Sasanian influence not long before the construction of fortifications in Bab Alan. However, the solution of this issue is impossible without the localization of the Khumr fortress” [36, 165]. The localization of Khumr proposed by A.K. Alikberov makes it possible to consider the KST option - cysts - more preferable, since the space from Ikhran to Khumr is mainly the territory of the Central and North-Eastern Caucasus, where one of the main ethnic components were the Nakh tribes; Kasaks, the ancestors of the Circassians, are confidently localized in the North-Western Caucasus. The compound nature of the term Tuman KSK//KST (i.e. Tuman-Kist) can be considered a direct indication of the dominant position of the Nakh-speaking population in this political entity.

## 4 Conclusions

It is difficult for a conscientious and unbiased researcher to imagine that the Nakh tribes, who, as shown above, showed the most active participation in the military-political life of early medieval Georgia, were completely inert in this regard in relation to their ancestral lands in the foothill flat zone of the North-Eastern Caucasus, which was part of the East Alanian kingdom with its capital in Maas (Magas).

A huge role in the ethno-political events of the 1st millennium AD. e. Nakh tribes played. Leonti Mroveli writes in his chronicle: “Over the sons of Kavkas was Durdzuk, the son of Tiret.” G. V. Tsulaia remarks on this occasion: “The selection of Durdzuk as the most glorious offspring of Targamos by the author of the 11th century. not by chance. It was explained by the fact that in the 1st millennium BC. e. Checheno-Ingushetia was a socially relatively developed unit of great strategic importance. So, according to Baladzori, Durdzuka was a heavily fortified bridgehead “of twelve gates, each of which is a stone castle.” All this contributed to the active role played by the ancient Chechens and Ingush in the political life of the Georgian kingdom close to them at various stages of its history.

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