

On Ossetic and its Turkic neighbours, Karachay-Balkar

The significant amount of Turkic loanwords in modern Ossetic, an archaic East Iranian language, bear witness to the fact that in the past there were clear, intensive contacts between the ancestors of modern-day Ossetians and the Turkic world. The Turkic groups that have been geographically closest to these Ossetians are the Balkars and Karachays, who speak closely related Kipchak dialects and, nowadays share the same standardized language (*Karachay-Balkar*). The modern Ossetians usually call their Balkar neighbours the *Asy*, which historically referred to the Ossetians themselves. Both names, *Balkar* and *Asy* were already mentioned in the famous early Persian-written geographical work “The Regions of the World” (*Hudūd al-‘Alam*), as *ās* and *balqar* respectively. The transfer of the ethnonym *ās* to the Balkar points to intensive cultural contacts, such as interethnic marriages and strategic alliances between these two peoples. According to O. Pritsak they may have lived together in the Northern Caucasus until the Mongol invasions. This cohabitation may well be ancient, as it is known from historic sources, that an Ossetic group (the *Jász*) and (Kipchak) Cumans (*Kun*) settled in Hungary during the 13th century.

For this talk I shall look into the mutual borrowings between (Proto-)Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar that resulted from these intimate contacts. These borrowings include:

- mythical-religious terms, e.g. *Syrdon/Sirdon* ‘name of a mythic hero’ ~ Kar.-Balkar *Šyrdan*, *Amistol* ~ Kar.-Balk. *Abystol* ‘month of November [lit. of the Apostles]’,
 - cultural expressions, e.g. *qaru/qar(w)æ* < Kar.-Balk. *qaryj* ‘strength’,
 - or toponymic features, e.g. *swadon/sawædonæ* ‘spring, well’ > Kar.-Balk. *šawdan*.
- The exact nature of these borrowings will be assessed together with the phonological peculiarities that delineate them from borrowings from other Turkic languages (notably Oghuzic).

Selected bibliography:

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