

The Caucasus on ECAI

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The Chinese culture has existed for some 5000 years.

The Indian culture has existed for some 4000 years.

The European culture has existed for some 3000 years (Henryk Skolimowsky. Human values and Capitalism, CACOR, Proceedings, Ottawa, 1998) which is well-known.

The Caucasian culture has existed for some 4000 years which is less known.

The Caucasus is one of the most interesting and important historical and cultural regions. Since prehistoric time has been a meeting point for civilizations of the East and West. Ancient Greek historical sources mentioned toponym "Caucasus" in the 6-5th centuries Ferekydos, Gecatos, later Gerodotos, Aeschilos designated as "the highest mountainous peaks"

The Caucasus between Anatolia and the Iranian plateau in the South and the great Eurasian steppe in the North is usually spoken of as a crossroad between Europe and the Middle East and gateway to Central Asia.

It's hardly possible to have Eurasian space without taking the Caucasus factor into comprehensive account.

The Caucasus locates between two seas- the Black Sea in the West, which links to Turkey, Ukraine, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean world through the Turkish Straits and the Caspian Sea in the East, which provides easy water route to Central Asia, and by way of the Volga, to Russia. The Caucasus territory extends 450 000 square kilometers and is divided by the main Caucasus range, which is a natural border into north and south in "cultural and political geographical sense".

From time immemorial the major highway through the central part of the Caucasus passed through the river valleys of the Aragvi (flowing south) and the Terek (flowing north), across the Jvari (Cross) pass.

The Caucasus has been famous for its natural resources, climate, biological diversity and landscape with its snowcapped mountains, alpine pasture lands, a subtropical zone of plantations and luxuriant vegetation. There are mighty peaks - Mount Elbruz with permanent snow (18, 471 ft), Tetruld (15,920 ft), Shkara (17, 040 ft), Kazbek, which is very impressive and etc.

Archeological monuments of all periods of the history of mankind have been discovered in the

Caucasus.

The oldest in Eurasia, well preserved lower mandible of a fossil human being dated more than 1,5 million years on an ancient settlement of the early Stone Age (early Ashel) has been found in Caucasus (south-east Georgia, Dmanisi) and belongs to Homo erectus, and is the most outstanding development in paleontology since the time of the remarkable finds of early Pithcanthropus in Kenya.

Among different fixed archeological monuments of Neolithic period is clay Statutes representing sitting women, symbolizing "the Great Mother of Gods" - fertility and flowering of living Nature. The early Bronze epoch is represented by so called Kura-Araxes Culture, which has been spread, on a large territory of south and north Caucasus, as north Iran and East Anatolia. In the Caucasus were discovered houses with a living building, an adobe floor, a central column and a round figurative hearth, an adobe flat beam roof with central flue hole, variety of pottery, bronze weapons, jewelry in the burial grounds.

The Caucasus is surrounded with well-known myths of Prometheus, that the Greek God chained to one of the Caucasus Mountains for giving the divine secret of fire to mankind, myth of the dove which Noah released from his ark during the flood. After it returned from Mount Ararat with an olive branch in its beak, Noah understood that peace had come to the world. He left the ark and a new life began, myth of the Argonauts, and Jason who sailed there for the Golden Fleece. He took it with the help of the Colchis (ancient name of western Georgia - M. A.) king's daughter Medea, who was taken back to Greece with the Argonauts. The Caucasus is called 'a living museum of ancient races' with diversity of cultures, languages and religions; with cult of family; cult of woman; code of honor, code of personal pride, of chivalry, and hospitality, the last is based on the belief that a "guest is sent by God" goes beyond all religions. The Institute of qonaqh or "sworn brother between Christian and Muslim men is surviving and is of particular in this respect. The 11th century historians Leonti Mroveli stressed that all children of the Caucasus are children of one father: Targamos

Caucasians are divided into different ethno-cultural identities, each of which has specific traditions and customs, folklore, choreography, dress, legends and language.

The ethnic panorama of the Caucasus is also rich and varied, with as many as fifty ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive language or dialect. As Strabo says, only in Dioscuria, ancient town of Kolkheti lived more than 70 tribes with their own languages.

Since the ancient times (4-3 cent. BC.) trade-routes connected east and Europe through the Caucasus. Roman geographer's Castorius world map of routes proved it.

The Great Silk Road connected China to the West passed through Georgia, from Phasis by Black Sea reached Byzantium and Rome and etc. Caucasus while "going back to basics" as of being a bridgehead of meeting different civilizations has become an integral part of the world cultural, social and political atlas. The idea of reemerging Silk Road will open up a valuable trade and transport corridor along the Old Silk Road between Europe with Asia and serve as a hallmark of multifold ongoing changes in the region and the world and thus merits attention of political, economic or scientific circles of the globe.

The 'Mountain of languages'- 'Jebel al-Asan' called Caucasus the Arabs, as about 40 languages are there. It's said when Pompey paved the new way to Caucasus, passing through its central part Iberia, he employed over a hundred interpreters to talk their way through 'polyglot Caucasus'.

The most numerous of the indigenous nationalities are the Azeris, the Armenians and the Georgians.

The Azeris are Turks and speak a language close to Anatolian Turkish. The Armenians are an ancient Indo-European and speak Armenian. The Georgians are Paleocaucasian. Their language belongs to a separate Ibero-Caucasian group of languages. It is comprised of the following main groups: Kartvelians, Abkhaz-Adyghes, Veinakhs, and Dagestanians. Each of these groups consists of subgroups, which include 33 languages, of which 22 are spoken in Dagestan. Many scholars share the concept of Ibero-Caucasian linguistic affinity. The resemblance of the Caucasian peoples to one another has been proven by archeological, anthropological, and ethnographic evidence. In addition to Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians, and peoples of Iranian stock- Ossetians, they are Northern Samartians and nomadic Alans, who appeared in the northern Caucasus in the first century AD, and were assimilated by the indigenous Kabardians, yet preserved their language and were enriched by Caucasian folklore and customs, the Ossetians changed into Cyrillic in the nineteenth century, Kurds, Tat and Talysh (mountain Jews), have roots in the Indo-European family of languages. After the Georgians and the Armenians, the Circassians came closest of all the Caucasian peoples to developing the prerequisites for nationhood. They had traditions of roots extending back to the dawn of record history, wrote Habjoca.

The Turks tribes of the Caucasus emerged as a result of mixing the native peoples such as the Balkars, the Carachai, and the Nogha in the North Caucasus and the Tatars in the South Caucasus. There are small populations of Greeks, who have lived in the Caucasus since ancient times, the Assyrians, the Moldavians, the Estonians, the Gypsies, the Koreans, and the Slavs. The Kalmyks are Mongols who occupy the steppes north of the mountains. Russians came to the Caucasus in the sixteenth century. When the population of the region increased from 10 million in 1912 to more than 30 million in 1989, its main beneficiaries were Russians. Their number increased from 4 million in 1912 to 8,5 million in 1989. The Germans created their first colony in the 19th century. In the

Caucasus, languages make for a rich culture and are identified with historical traditions, and symbolize national existence.

The Caucasus has contributed two alphabets to the world: Georgian and Armenian. The ancient Caucasian manuscripts give us a rich material to study of its culture, for the first time such as surviving epigraphical monuments: inscriptions, made on stone and mosaic and manuscripts (palimpsests), among them Gospel, texts in liturgy, theology, church history, canon law, hagiography as translated so original, history, travels, collection of songs with music notes (by Michael Modrekili) and etc.

The earliest surviving Georgian building inscription is from Bolnisi Sioni Church and dates the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century, the most ancient inscription which is abroad is mosaic inscription from Georgian monastery in Palestine and at same time it is the evidence of their settlement in Jerusalem. These specimens of ancient Georgian manuscripts are taken from the manuscripts, the main parts of which are kept in the K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of Georgian Academy of Sciences.

The Armenians and Georgians developed their own script and native literatures and art, inheriting all the best from their neighbor Greece, Rome and Iran and this influence is in their literature, although both have some common features but they significantly differ from them.

The public veneration of Saints in the Christian Church has existed since the 2nd century. The Christian religion was introduced in Caucasus in the middle of the 4th century. The earliest saints were martyrs. The earliest narrative work is the Georgian Original hagiography monument 'The Martyrdom of St. Shushanik, dated the 5th century. The high level of works points out of the existence of proper traditions.

Multi-ethnic Caucasus is also multi-religious. After language, religion was most important for the Caucasian peoples. Christianity was spread in the 4th century at the time of Constantine the Great. The adoption of Christianity represented the influence of Byzantium and the Christian West (Roman World), as opposed to that of Persia and the East.

The Arab conquest that began in the 7th century introduced Islam, which soon spread through Azerbaijan and Dagestan in the North Caucasus.

Christianity is predominant in Georgia and Armenia while Islam is prevalent in Azerbaijan and in most of the northern Caucasian autonomous republics of the Russian Federation.

The main religions Christianity and Islam coexisted with Judaism. The Georgian Jews claim to be one of the oldest elements of Diaspora in the world (since 6th century BC)

Orthodox Georgians and Monophysite Armenians mainly represent Christianity. Both countries also have communities of Roman Catholics, who appeared largely as result of European missionary efforts in the 17th- 18th centuries. Some of North Caucasians who live in the center and west adhered to ancient forms of Christianity until the 18th century. A small portion of Kabardinians professes Orthodox Christianity.

North Caucasian Muslims are mostly Sunni. Azerbaijanians are mostly Shi'a and most Muslim Abkhazs, Circassians, Chechens and others emigrated to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century.

The Caucasian peoples with their highly developed sense of national identity, which rested on the following factors as language, religion and historic traditions, cohabited successfully with enemies for centuries. Neither the Caucasian range, which divides the region into the Northern and Southern Caucasus, nor the different languages and religions, formed a barrier between the Caucasian peoples. Anti-Semitism and religious fanaticism were unknown for them. They understood that without concessions and tolerance they couldn't survive and therefore tried to live as a single family.

The Caucasus Atlas on ECAI begins with South Caucasus, as consists of Independent States (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and from the last with Georgia, because Georgia several centuries has been a home to multitude of ethnic groups and religious tolerance has encouraged the development of cultures. The Caucasian languages Scientific Institute were established in Tbilisi (Georgia), hundreds of students from the North Caucasus formed in Georgia institutions. In the old part of Tbilisi there is a monument of 18th century poet, Armenian by birth, he grew up in Tbilisi and wrote in poetry in three languages. His monument symbolizes the unity of South Caucasus and also syntheses of various cultural elements that gave raise to specific Tbilisi urban culture. Azeri and Armenian cultures have flourished in Tbilisi and have produced outstanding works of literature, music and art (G. Sundukian, A. Shirvanzade, O.Tumanian, A. Khachaturian, S. Paradjanov, M. Akhundov and others).

The goal of the project: Caucasus on the ECAI is creating update interlinked and reliable data bases which will be incorporated mapping, including the most useful information and improving the knowledge about Caucasus and will tie the past with the present and the coming generation.

The Caucasus on ECAI will be complex, large scale, cover as much information as possible, open-ended or evolving and collaborative, it will be the historical and cultural Guide to the Caucasus.

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