

Circassian toponymy of the Krasnodar Territory

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Circassian toponymy is widely represented in the Krasnodar Territory. Basically, it has been preserved in medium and small geographical objects and is easy to translate. From the perspective of studying the history and culture of any nation, as well as preserving its memory associated with the geography of its ethnogenesis, local toponymy, preserved in the names of residential settlements, hydronyms, names of mountains, hills and tracts, is of great importance. Some toponyms are controversial today and cause distorted versions of the history of the region excluding the role of the indigenous population. As a rule, the local population mostly does not know about the Circassian origin of local toponymy. However, the Circassian (Adyghe) toponymy bears traces of the region's ancient history right up to the Bronze Age and this is confirmed by archaeological material and its connection with local place names. In this article I consider the most famous examples of the Circassian toponymy of the region and their features.

Main questions

Circassian (Adyghe) toponymy is widely represented in the Krasnodar Territory to the south of the Kuban River. This is the historical area of residence of Circassians (Adyghe) and related Abkhazians (including their neighbours – Abaza). The majority of the Circassian (Adyghe) toponymic terms are well preserved in the names of small and medium-sized geographic objects and can be deciphered with varying degrees of confidence. The exceptions are the large toponymic objects such as the Laba and the Kuban rivers. It might be difficult to exclude Circassian origin or some relation to a very ancient period in the history of the Adyghe-Abkhazian language. This feature of the Circassian (Adyghe) toponymy was noted in Soviet times by Jamaldin Kokov in one of the best scientific works on Circassian (Adyghe) toponymy – *Adyghe (Circassian) toponymy* (in Russian) (Kokov, 1974).¹

¹ If not indicated otherwise, the toponyms discussed in this paper are based on (Kokov, 1974) or (Meretukov, 2003).

The peculiarity of the names of small toponyms and microtoponyms is a clear segmentation of their meanings in the Circassian language. As a rule, these are places of residence of certain families (for example, *Mugutam*, *Kobletam*, etc. – i.e. ‘the place of Mugu’, ‘the place of the Koble’).² Many places have preserved the original names that cannot be found in the Krasnodar Territory nowadays but are present in the foreign Circassian (Adyghe) diaspora or in the North Caucasian Circassian (Adyghe) republics of Russia. Also, landscape features (for example, *Хатлане* (*Khatlane*) – ‘dog's paw’) or flora and fauna (for example, *Комх* (*Kotkh*)³ ridge – literally ‘boar backbone’) are well preserved in toponymy. Abkhazian names can also be found in the Circassian environment, more likely associated with the cross-living of these related ethnic groups in the past. The rare external names include the *Бакан* (*Bakan*) gorge not far from the modern port of Novorossiysk. According to one of the versions coming from folklore, *Bakan* is associated with the name Beslan Bakan – the leader of migrants from Crimea, killed in this gorge in battle (Meretukov, 2003). At the same time the toponym has an original version of deciphering through the name *Бэчкъан* (*Bechkhan*) – one of the well-known clans among the Natukhai – Circassian (Adyghe) subethnos. In the microtoponymy of the Republic of Adygea there are words associated with the Mongol invasion and the heroes of the resistance, many of whom are reflected in the song Nart epos of the Circassian (Adyghe) people. Some place names have a religious pagan origin. For example, Cape *Кодову* (*Kodosh*) near Tuapse is associated with the cult of *Kodosh*. Even in the 19th century Circassians designated sacred groves by this word where they performed the rites, in part similar to the religion of Druidism. Near the village of Bolshoy Kichmay there is a small district called *Ахинтам* (*Akhintam*) – literally ‘the place of Akhin, the pagan patron of livestock. There is a folk legend about his death in this place.

The peculiarity of the names of medium toponymic objects is numerous variations in their translation. This is due to the distortion of names when translating them into Russian, which is simpler in structure and incapable of reflecting many sounds of the Circassian (Adyghe) language. After the deportation of the Circassian (Adyghe) population in the 1860s, most of the future Krasnodar Territory was occupied by new settlers who did not

² For this task I use the Cyrillic to Latin transliteration interstate standard, issued in 2002 (Interstate Council, 2002).

³ In this transliteration the letter *kh*- sounds like *ch*- in the name Bosch (Hieronymus Bosch).

speak the Circassian (Adyghe) language. They transformed the names that were difficult for them in their own way. In this form the toponyms were recorded by public authorities as official names. For example – the village *Чемитоквадже* (*Chemitokvadzhe*) in the Lazarevsky district of the city of Sochi. In the Circassian (Adyghe) language it is *Цурмыткъуаджэ* (*Tsurmytykuadzhe*) and denotes the former ancestral settlement (aul) of the Circassian (Adyghe) clan *Чырмыт* (*Chermit*). As a rule, such names carry the original name of the family that lived in the area prior to eviction. Such a division is preserved in modern auls of Circassians (Adyghe) in the form of division into quarters where representatives of different clans live. An example of the distortion of Circassian (Adyghe) toponyms by Russian-speaking officials is the *Псезуане* (*Psezuape*) River in the Lazarevsky district of the city of Sochi, derived from *Псышъуанэ* (*Psyshuape*) (Voroshilov, 2007). The most vivid example is the toponym *Къожау* (*K'ozhau*) (literally 'shady beam') which first turned into *Къожэкъо* (*K'ozhek'o*) (adyg. *Кожжох* (*Kozhokh*) literally means 'boar beam') in documents and later into the famous mountain resort *Хаджох* (*Khadzhokh*) (adyg. *Хъаджыкъо* (*Hajadzhyko*) in the new meaning of 'Son of Haji' and with a new legend about the road to Haj – pilgrimage to Mekka).

Difficulties of translation and misconceptions

It is not always possible to specify unambiguously the translation of even well-known names. For example, the *Псэкунс* (*Psekups*) River still raises controversy over the decryption of its name despite its simple component. *Псы* (*Psy*) is a typical Circassian (Adyghe) term for water geographical objects. It literally means 'water'. The second part, which in different versions can mean 'blue', 'sand' or 'pass', depending on the sound content, is causing controversy. An insignificant number of toponyms were subjected to full renaming and only at a later time. This was mainly due to the lack of accurate knowledge of a particular name or to the events / people of the latter half of the 19th – early 20th century. Some of the objects of the coastal area were named after land owners in the 19th century, its tenants. In a similar way, the mountains and hills at the forefront of the warfare in 1941–42 were named after the heroes of the Second World War who fought or died in those places. Some objects were renamed just because of difficult pronunciation in Russian. For example, the *Белая* (*Belaya* or 'White') River in the Circassian (Adyghe) language is called *Шъхъагуащэ* (*Shchaguasche*), which can be

translated as ‘Princess’, has not become naturalized in the official name. Sometimes among the toponyms there is Indo-Aryan influence. The Russian name of the mountain is *Индюк* (*Indyuk*, ‘turkey’), whereas in the Circassian (Adyghe) it sounds like *Хиндыкъушхьэ* (*Hindukushhe*) – literally ‘the mountain of the Hindustani’ (Voroshilov, 2007). Some other names show Tatar influence (*Durso*, *Nogaychuk*).

Toponymic names of some places cause multiple disputes. The most striking example is the name of the resort town of Gelendzhik – the former trading post of the Ottoman Empire (Spasenova, 2017). The official translation of the word *Gelendzhik* from the Old Ottoman language is considered to be the term ‘little bride’. It corresponds to the legend of the slave trade in the bay in Ottoman times until 1829. Circassians (Adyghe) call it *Хулыжуй* (*Khulyzhiy*) (adyg. ‘Small pasture’) which causes disputes. The followers of the theory of Circassian (Adyghe) naming consider the word *Gelendzhik* to be derived in consonance from the Circassian (Adyghe) *Хулыжуй* (*Khulyzhiy*). All considered, it is quite difficult to confirm or deny this theory. Historical documents indicate the existence of both names in the Ottoman period in the territory of Gelendzhik Bay. The Ottoman trading post was called *Геленчик* (*Gelenchik*) but it lay on the small river *Хулыжуй* (*Khulyzhiy*), upstream of which the Circassian (Adyghe) aul of the same name lay. A serious, scientific analysis of a possible adaptation of the Circassian (Adyghe) word to the Old Ottoman language was never carried out.

Similar disputes occur around the name of the resort town of Anapa (Voroshilov, 2007). In the Circassian (Adyghe) academic and social environment the opinion on deciphering the toponym *Анапа* (*Anapa*) was established as the Circassian (Adyghe) *Ианэ* (‘*ana*’) – ‘the table’ and *нэ* (*pa*) – ‘the nose, the edge’ (in the meaning – ‘edge of the table’). This version is reinforced by the fact that the Circassian (Adyghe) traditional table has a round shape resembling the rocky protrusion on which the city of Anapa is located. In addition, according to the historical data, the Anapa area was ruled by Circassian (Adyghe) tribes in the Middle Ages. Only at the end of the 18th century was it used extensively by the Ottoman Empire which paid the Circassians (Adyghe) a kind of payment for peaceful relations. There is another version of the transition of the abbreviated Italian name *Мапа* (*Мапа* – *Maporium*) to the Circassian (Adyghe) language which was used by the Genoese in the 13th-14th centuries to refer to Anapa. The competitor here is the Greek version connected with the ancient Greek and early medieval

history of the city. In this form Anapa appears as a derivative of Greek *Ayia Napa*, the analogue of which can be found in Eastern Cyprus and translated as ‘The Sacred Forest’. The problem with this word is that in Greek history this city was never known as *Ayia Napa*. In ancient and early medieval times, it was called *Gorgippia* or *Sind harbour*. Nevertheless, the Greek version today has many followers who are aggressively pushing this idea in the social environment as a reason for minimizing the significance of the history and culture of the indigenous population evicted in the 19th century.

A separate topic is the names of Russian settlements of the Krasnodar Territory corresponding to the names of the Circassian (Adyghe) and Abaza subethnos – the villages of *Шапсугская* (*Shapsugskaya* from the Shapsug tribe), *Абдзехская* (*Abadzekhskaya* – Abadzekh tribe), *Бесленевская* (*Besleneevskaya* – Besleney tribe), *Натухаевская* (*Natukhaevskaya* – Natukhay tribe), etc. (Shtybin, 2018). All of the above names can be divided into two types. The first group includes the former Russian military fortifications, which were built to subordinate one or another subethnos inhabiting those lands. Today only the village of *Темиргоевская* (*Temirgoevskaya*) can be included this group. It was founded by the Russian General Friedrich von Zass in 1848 as a military fortification on the Labinsk cordon line. Temirgoevskaya kept the Circassian-Adyghe-Temirgoy tribe in obedience between the Kuban, Belaya and Laba rivers. The Cossack village affiliated with the Temirgoyev fortification appeared in 1855 when the Russian authorities decided to resettle the Cossacks along the Labinsk line to strengthen control over it. The second type is settlements, not fortifications. They received their names from Circassians (Adyghe) tribes who lived in those places but were expelled by the end of the Caucasian War. A whole range of villages are part of this group – *Натухаевская* (founded 1862, *Natukhaevskaya* Natukhay tribe), *Бжедуховская* (founded 1863, *Bzhedukhovskaya* - Bzhedugh tribe), *Махосhevская* (founded 1862, *Makhoshevskaya* – Makhosh tribe), *Бесленевская* (founded 1861, *Besleneevskaya* – Besleney tribe), *Баговская* (founded 1862, *Bagovskaya* – Bag (Abaza) tribe), *Баракаевская* (founded 1862, *Barakaevskaya* – Barakai (Abaza) tribe), *Абдзехская* (founded 1862, *Abadzekhskaya* – Abadzekh tribe), *Шапсугская* (founded 1863, *Shapsugskaya* – Shapsug tribe). Bagovskaya and Barakaevskaya received their names from the Abaza tribes Bag and Barakai. But this was always Russian settlements with no representatives of the exiled tribes among the residents. Basically, their population consisted of

immigrants from the Cossack villages of the Black Sea or Line Cossack Host and retired soldiers from the regular regiments of the Russian army. Often, they received their name from the regiment name involved in the conquest of a Circassian (Adyghe) tribe. For example, the village of Shapsugskaya is named after the Shapsugsky regiment which participated in the conquest and eviction of the Circassian-Adyghe-Shapsug tribe in the foothills of the Krasnodar Territory.

The necessity to preserve local toponymy for history and linguistics is of particular importance. Many toponyms contain information about the transformation of the original Abkhaz-Adyghe language group of Caucasian languages as well as the history of this region. An example of the importance of understanding the toponymy of the region for the study of history is the names of the river *Ashe* and the aul *Kichmay* in the Lazarevsky district of the city of Sochi. According to one version, the Ashe River can be translated from the Circassian (Adyghe) language as *Iauɣə* ‘a weapon’ (Voroshilov, 2007). The aul Kichmay lies today 8 kilometers downstream of the Shahe River. It adopted the old name which was also preserved in the name of the river flowing in the Shahe River on the site of the former Kichmay, which was before the Caucasian war. Its name can be translated as ‘old smithy’ or ‘smell of smithy’ (*Кышмае* - *Kyschmae*). It is interesting that today the valleys of the Ashe and Shakhe Rivers abound with archaeological finds of blacksmith tools and anvils of different eras. Historical documents have preserved the evidence of the presence of blacksmith masters in these places. Smithcraft was very popular among the mountain Circassians, but they produced low-quality metal. However, the study of archaeological finds in the valleys of these rivers suggests much more ancient history of local "blacksmith" toponyms. Today the cliffs of the valley of the river Ashe contain iron siderite (Kudin, 2015). There are many dolmens in this area – megalithic monuments of the Bronze Age. As a rule, not far from them next to streams, there are the remains of ancient smithies. The blacksmiths of that distant epoch used them for smelting primitive iron plates for ritual purposes. Even today remains of metallurgical slag can be found in such forges, the age of which is estimated at 4000–4200 years. Unfortunately, this question today is very poorly covered in science but it is already possible to link with confidence the “blacksmith” names of rivers to the oldest period in the history of the region.

Problems and hopes of modern toponymy science

Unfortunately, today there is no comprehensive work on the collection, analysis and deciphering of Circassian (Adyghe) toponyms of the Krasnodar Territory, even at the level of the Soviet period. The most complete publications (in Russian) are Адыгская (Черкесская) топонимия [*Adyghe (Circassian) toponymy*] by Jamaldin Kokov (Kokov, 1974) and Адыгейский топонимический словарь [*Adygean toponymic dictionary*] by Kasim Meretukov (Meretukov, 1990). The latter includes the lost toponymics of the flood zone of the modern Krasnodar reservoir. These dictionaries include data on the toponymy of the Circassian (Adyghe) republics of the North Caucasus and the Krasnodar Territory, regardless of administrative boundaries. More modern toponymic publications are limited to a strictly defined toponymic territory leading to the loss of the studied issue from the big picture of the area of the Circassians (Adyghe) historical residence. Also, it does not take into account the possible migration of terms. Many of them are compilations from the previous editions and rarely carry any scientific novelty. These publications include *Toponyms of the Russian Black Sea Region* (in Russian) by Vladimir Voroshilov (2007), *North Caucasian Dictionary of Toponyms in Two Parts* (in Russian) by Alexander Tverdiy (2006) and *Secrets of Geographical Names* (in Russian) by Natalia Kostarnova (2016). A good description of the main Circassian (Adyghe) toponymic names of the Lazarevsky district of the city of Sochi was published by the Lazarevsky historian Tamara Polovinkina in their book *Sochi Black Sea Coast* (in Russian) (2006). Moreover, individual dictionaries today are beyond the reach of the broader public and academic community since their publishers release them in closed limited editions and neglect their distribution. In addition, many scientific articles on toponymic topics have been published today, affecting certain aspects related to the understanding of toponymy, as well as the influence of external languages that are not indigenous for the Western Caucasus region.

Auls of the Circassian-Adyghe-Shapsugs of the coastal Black Sea zone officially regained their native names in the 1990s and today nobody claims to rename them. But there still remains an extremely important factor, which is to preserve the indigenous toponymy of the region for science, society and the world, as a source of knowledge about the distant past of the Caucasus and of all mankind.

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