

Nomads and Azerbaijan

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Azerbaijan is a country with a very ancient and specific culture and history. As with any other people, Azerbaijan during the history of its economic and cultural development experienced the influence of many historic factors. The geographic situation of Azerbaijan is such that it was like a specific bridge connecting the steppe of South Russia, where different ancient nomadic tribes such as the Scythe, Alan, Sarmats, Huns, Khazars, and Kipchaks were placed, with the ancient, settled, agricultural civilizations of South Asia. The impassable Caucasus Mountains safely defended these civilizations from northern nomadic tribes and only two ways through, the gorges Derbent and Daryal, were open for contact with these nomads. Both of these routes passed through Azerbaijan and during about three thousand years wave after wave of different nomadic tribes passed through Azerbaijan.

All their traces can be seen in culture and economy, in burial tradition, in names of places, rivers and settlements. The nomads had brought a new ideology, which after combining with local indigenous spiritual culture, acquired new specific aspects.

Within the bounds of one small paper it is impossible to explain all the aspects and stages of influence of the nomads and the process of historic development of Azerbaijan; I would like then to define only the main stages of this appearance.

1- Most early archaeological evidence of mass roaming of ethnic nomads to the territory of Azerbaijan dates from 2,000 B.C. From the late fourth millennium B.C, settled agricultural civilizations were formed in Azerbaijan, centred between the rivers Araks and Kura. This Araks-Kura's agriculture existed until the end of the second millennium B.C. Hundreds of settlements were left, which were kept in the form of big hill, named in Azerbaijan *Tepe*, with many stratum, wonderful raw architecture, beautiful ceramics, and many implements of agricultural production. The burial monuments of this period reveal simple ground burial patterns, where the corpses were buried in writhed form. But at the end of the second millennium B.C. the life of these settlements came to an end.

The character of burial sharply changed too. Ground burial with writhed form of corpses was replaced by barrow burial, where the corpses stayed in drawn form. These burials, as a rule, have a lot of bronze, later iron weapons, fighting awes, tips of arrows and spears, swords and daggers. Often a group burial was found containing a horse. If we take into consideration that for this period an absence of settlements was typical, it becomes clear that we are witnessing the invasion of Azerbaijan by new ethnic group.

In the opinion of many researchers, these were Indo-Iranian tribes, which later settled on the Iranian plateau and contributed, in the early first millennium B.C., to the foundation of the ancient Iranian states - Media and Achaemenides. Under the influence of these tribes, two archaeological cultures of late Bronze and early Iron Age, were formed in Azerbaijan, named the Khogjaly-Khedabac and Telish-mugan cultures. Both of them date to the 12th to 13th centuries B.C.

2. The second nomadic wave experienced in Azerbaijan was the Scythes. In the formation of Gerodot, the Scythes passed through a narrow gorge in the Caucasus Mountains, keeping the Caspian Sea on their left. This means that the Scythes came to Azerbaijan, and then to the countries of South Asia, through the passage of Derbent. In ancient manuscripts of Azerbaijan and other Caucasus countries, Scythes, who arrived in the seventh century B.C., were named the Sacs. Many archaeological excavations conducted in Azerbaijan and Daghestan have discovered a lot of Scythian monuments.

First of all, these are the tips of arrows of Scythian type, with decorations including elements of Scythian beast style.

The Scythes created on the territory of Azerbaijan the so-called Scythian kingdom (or empire), thus creating the earliest state in this country. This kingdom, named *Sakosena* in manuscripts and localized in the north west of Azerbaijan, has left many monuments with elements of Scythian culture, including the town Sheka, preserved to the present day, which evidently once played the role of administrative center of this state.

3. In the opinion of many researchers, after leaving, the Scythians went from South Asia to steppes of Black Sea. Some of them stayed, for all that, in Azerbaijan and gradually merged with local tribes.

A result of this symbiosis was the appearance of Albanian tribes, distinguished, as has been written in sources, by their warlike behaviour, as they could subordinate all the other tribes on the territory of Azerbaijan, East Georgia, and South Dagestan, and created here in the fourth century B. C. the state of Caucas Albania, which existed as an independent political union until the third century A.D., when it was conquered by Sassanid Iran. This country supported close trade and cultural relations with Grecian cities near the Black Sea, ancient Rome, and ancient Central Asian countries, and even with distant India and China.

Through the territory of Albania passed one of the more animated trade routes from India and China to the Black Sea and further to the Mediterranean. We are informed about this trade route by authors from antiquity; Strabon, Plinius, Theothan, Methillas and others. The presence of animated trade routes has been made evident by many archaeological finds. This trade route passed from Central Asia, alongside the river of Amu-Darya (Ox), through Uzboy to the Caspian Sea, then alongside the river Kura, through the whole of Azerbaijan to Iberia and Colchis (Kolkhis) - the countries of ancient Georgia and then further through the Black Sea to Grecian sea side city-settlements, to the Mediterranean and into the boundaries of the empire of ancient Rome.

Along it have been investigated many settlements, antique cities and necropoli. Among the finds there are many imported goods, from remnants of Chinese silk, including many coins, and treasure. There are in these treasures, as a rule, coins minted in the Roman Empire, in the Bosphoras, in Greek cities, the Parthenon, as well as Bactrian and Sogdian coins.

In written manuscripts we are informed that Caucas Albania was a strong, prospering country and successfully repelled the raids of northern nomads during the course of its development. Only a few Sarmat and Alan nomadic tribes succeeded to reach the northern

region near the frontier of Albania. Just near-by, a catacomb burial containing a deformed skull was discovered.

In the third century A.D. Caucasus Albania was incorporated as a vassal country into the mighty Sassanid Empire. At the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries A.D. on its north frontier appeared new nomadic tribes. They were Turkic and Hun tribes. Wave after wave they invaded Azerbaijan, plundering and pillaging on their way. During three centuries, the fifth to the eighth centuries, great numbers of Turkic tribes arrived in Azerbaijan, the latest of them being the Savirians, Bulgarians, Maskutians, Avarian, Hun and Hazarian tribes. Many of them settled here, because of the beautiful alpine meadows in the Caucasus, whilst mild winters without snow in the lowland of Kura-Araksia created ideal conditions for cattle breeding. The rulers of Sassanid Iran tried to fight against these raiders. Like the rulers of China in early Middle Ages, they created a defense system to block the movement of the nomads system. In the north-east of Azerbaijan, in locality of Derbent, a three-line defense system was built, in Barmacian, Bilgilchai and Derbent. The greatest of them was the Gilgilchai; it was 54 km long, 3 metres wide and 5 to 6 meters high.

North of this was Derbent's defense system, which has remained until the present day and stayed contemporary by its monumental character. But nothing could stop Turkic nomads. Infrequently, local rulers of Albania allowed them to settle within the boundaries of Azerbaijan, and then used them as a means of pressuring Sassanid Iran.

So, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the first Turkic tribes were established in Azerbaijan and had built semi-settled households. Then began the long process of merging local settled agriculture with nomadic culture. It was long and destructive for Azerbaijan's economy, because the economic interests of foreign nomads and local agriculturists were diametrically opposed. The nomads strove to expand winter pasture land, resulting in the reduction of the land under corn, and agriculturists on the contrary tried to expand their farms at the expense of pasture. For centuries this continued as an often invisible, sometimes open fight.

A change to this came in the eleventh century, when the Oghuz, a Turkic tribe under the leadership of Toghrulbak from Turkestan, moved to the west. Very quickly, the great empire of the nomadic Seljuks was created. After its disintegration most part of them went away. But 12 tribes stayed in Azerbaijan, settled in the southern parts and in the lowland of Kura-Araksia. Since this period, the majority of Azerbaijan's population became Turkic speaking people. In the twelfth century the process of forming Azerbaijan's ethnic population was finished, and it appeared thus appeared on the historical arena as a Turkic linguistic people, and a part of a larger Turkic world.

So, it was the third mighty nomadic wave, which was to determine the historic, cultural and economic development of Azerbaijan.

4. Finally, the fourth nomadic wave to reach Azerbaijan was closely connected with the campaigns of Genghis Khan (Chingis-khan). The results of this large-scale movement of nomadic peoples, in which many other nomads took part besides the Mongols, was at first destructive but later became constructive. It seems that the Mongols and other tribes which had come to Azerbaijan in fact settled here. In the northwest of Azerbaijan there is a place

whose population, as researchers confirm, can be distinguished anthropologically from other surrounding populations. And although they have spoken for a long time Azerbaijan's dialect of the Turkic language, their life and culture are identical with the surrounding population's; up to the present day they are named the Mogols (Mongols).

In the thirteen century, the century-age fighting between nomadic and settled parts of Azerbaijan reached to a well-known equilibrium. The boundaries of these two modes of life conditionally became the river Kura. To the right of it agriculture was particularly cultivated and by the steppes of Mill and Mugan, adjacent to the left side lived the cattle breeders. Such division with little changes has persisted up to the nineteen century.

Thus, ancient and medieval nomadic tribes had a great influence on the historic, economic and cultural development of Azerbaijan. Modern Azerbaijani culture is beautiful fusion of both, based on elements of ancient settled-agricultural and modern dynamic nomadic culture.