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# ***The contacts between the Ossetians and their Turkic neighbours, the Karachay-Balkars,***

*according to V.I. Abaev (1933) and Marrian ideology*

Johnny Cheung, Inalco (Paris)

*A modest tribute to Uwe Bläsing  
and his forensic approach  
to etymology and the origin of words*

## *Introduction*

Ossetic is geographically the most western East Iranian language spoken in the Northern Caucasus. It is spoken in two areas, viz. in Alania - North Ossetia, which is part of the Russian Federation, and in South Ossetia which declared its independence in 2008 in the aftermath of the Georgian-Russian war. According to the 2010 Russian census, around 488,254 declare Ossetic as a first language (and 528,515/527,177 identify themselves as Ossetian). The language is dominated by Iron, which also serves as the main or official language for the Ossetians. A minority, less than 100,000, speaks the relatively archaic dialect of Digoron, which is used predominantly by the Sunni Muslim minority in Alania - North Ossetia.

In contrast, the Karachays and Balkars speak two very closely related Turkic languages that are usually classified as “West Kıpçak”. They are settled primarily in two Russian republics, viz. in Kabardino-Balkaria (Balkars) and in Karachay-Cherkessia (Karachays), situated in the Northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. Although the Karachay and the Balkar share the same standard, literary language, often simply called Karachay-Balkar, it is mostly based on the speech of the numerically superior Karachays, 218,403/217,856 vs. 112,924 Balkars, according to the Russian census 2010. Historically, the language had never acquired literary status, as the speakers would have resorted to writing Arabic and / or Russian instead, until the introduction of this literary Karachay-Balkar commissioned by the Soviet government in 1935/6. According to the same census, 212,522 of the combined total of Karachays and Balkars declare to use Karachay-Balkar natively. The Karachay-Balkar settlements are divided in two contiguous political units, but unlike the Ossetians in their home regions, the Karachays and Balkars do not constitute a majority in their respective republics, where there are sizeable, ethnic Russians and Caucasian-speaking Kabardino-Cherkess (also known as Circassians).

Historically, the Scythians, Alans, Sarmatians the nomadic Eurasian tribes described in the Classical Greek and Roman sources, are considered to be the linguistic ancestors of the modern Ossetians, although, evidently, the linguistic documentation is rather meagre and often limited to personal names, the occasional quote in a Classical Greek source, such as Herodotus, and grave inscriptions. The same may

apply to the attempts to establish a direct linguistic link between the modern day Karachay-Balkars and the (presumably) Kıpçak speaking Cumans and Pechenegs, if not including the other elusive Bolghars with their unclear Turkic affiliation. This is obviously equally a bone of contention. Of course, there are other mostly lesser known Turkic languages spoken in the Caucasus, such as Nogay (a South/Central Kıpçak or “Aralo-Kaspian” Turkic language), Kumyk (West Kıpçak), who might also lay claim on these historically attested peoples and tribes.

Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar are not in imminent threat of extinction, as these languages have an enshrined position within the political framework of their autonomous republics. Language retention of the native language among the Ossetians and the Karachay-Balkars is fairly high, despite the omnipresence of Russian, which is the language of education and serves as the natural *lingua franca* among the many Caucasian nationalities. In their respective republics, of the 459,688 North-Ossetians, 402,248 of them indicated that they had a command of Ossetic (87.5%), whereas of the 194,324 Karachays living in the Karachay-Cherkessian Republic 181,740 had a command of Karachay-Balkar (93.5%), and in the case of the 108,577 Balkars in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic 96,252 (88.6%), according to the census of 2010<sup>1</sup>. Although, in the larger towns and cities, Russian is heard pretty much everywhere, Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar respectively are usually the everyday language of communication in the country side.

The level of marginalisation in the former Soviet and contemporary Russian society differs considerably for both communities. Ossetians are well integrated in mainstream Russian society and are therefore treated relatively favourably, especially after the annexation of South Ossetia by Russia in 2008, but the Karachay-Balkars are generally viewed with some suspicion, on account of their religion (Islam) and possible ties to other Turkic groups and communities in Russia and abroad, including possible, political aid and interference from Turkey. Even their full rehabilitation and measures to compensate for the wrongdoings in the past were not in place until an official decree was signed by Boris Yeltsin on March 3rd, 1994, who restored their cultural rights in their assigned Republics. Compounding to their rather marginal position in Russian society, is the dearth of prominent Karachay-Balkar intellectuals, who could speak out and carve out a cultural and political space for their communities in Russian society.

The scholarly study of these language did not start in earnest until the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19th century, pretty much after the conquest of the Caucasus by the Russians. Actually, the main recordings of Karachay-Balkar were initiated only, at the turn of the 20th century, by the Russian linguist Nikolai Karaulov. Thanks to the efforts of another prominent Russian scholar, Vsovolod Miller and his later pupil, the native Ossetian Vassiliy Abaev, Ossetic has been studied in depth, especially its historic

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<sup>1</sup> All figures are cited from the documents available at [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm).

relations with the other Iranian languages, European language groups (Slavic, Celtic), Finno-Ugric groups (Hungarian, Mari), and of course with Turkic as well. This also includes several important synchronic descriptions of Ossetic and its dialects, and the myths and folklore as well.

Karachay-Balkar, on the other hand, lacks many of such kinds of research, such as the interpretation of the customs, the historic dimensions of the language, possible contacts with other ethno-linguistic groups, and so on. Even an in-depth description of the dialects of Karachay-Balkar has not yet appeared. A bilingual Karachay-Balkar - Russian dictionary did not appear until 1989 (Tenišev 1989). The older Russian-written literature on Karachay-Balkar was meant as an aid to help the Karachay-Balkars to master Russian.

The impact of the contributions made by linguists, especially in Russian and the Soviet-Union on the intellectual formation and appraisal of the “mother” language by its speakers is undeniable though. A major reason why ethnic Ossetians are so positive and protective of their language is also thanks to the popularisation of all these researches showing that the Ossetians were somehow of ancient “stock”: heated arguments whether they are the heirs of the Scythians, Sarmatians or Alans can be heard even in a local barber shop in Vladikavkaz. Ossetic was actively researched by Russian and later, Soviet scholars, because it was Indo-European and spoken by a largely Christian population, in a sea of largely non-Indo-European languages with sizeable Muslim populations. For this reason, their speakers received a relatively favourable treatment, in comparison to other minorities.

The situation for Karachay-Balkar could not be more different. The Karachay-Balkars spoke a Turkic tongue, and were largely Muslim, and therefore, most likely, hostile, overtly or latently, to the official, atheistic Soviet system. The Karachay-Balkars were deliberately broken up in two ethnic designations, despite the clear ethnic communalities and almost identical language. Also, they were “housed” in separate republics, which they also had to share with unrelated groups, viz. the Cherkessians and Kabardinians respectively. Actually, these Cherkessians and Kabardinians speak very closely related West Caucasian languages. This kind of ethnic, or tribal fragmentation was actively pursued by the Soviet authorities, creating micro-nationalities against the wishes of the local intellectuals, as observed by Alexandr Bennigsen (1983). Obviously, the ulterior motive is “divide and conquer” in order to prevent potentially big challenges to Soviet rule.

Russian or Soviet research on Karachay-Balkar was rather limited, other than within the context of its status as a Turkic language that was spoken in the Caucasus. According to the School of the prominent Soviet scholar Nikolai Marr, Karachay-Balkar was a kind of linguistic “mongrel”, the result of “crossbreeding” (*скрещення*) between Turkic and Svan [*lege*: backward Caucasian, JC] elements, as described in a speech at a 1929 meeting of the Soviet Academy of Sciences: “... The timeliness and urgency to study this language [of the Karachay-Balkars, JC] is because of the

established relations of the Svan with the Turkic languages of the aforementioned peoples, which makes it possible to identify the process of crossbreeding on the one hand, but on the other hand, to establish the presence of Japhetic elements in those languages, and, therefore in Turkic generally, insomuch Balkar and Karachay appear as the languages of the said system.”<sup>2</sup>.

Even worse, at the end of the Second World War many nationalities, especially those with an Islamic background, were the target of large scale deportations, such as the Ingush, Chechens, Karachays, Balkars, the Buddhist Kalmyks and the Muslim Digor Ossetians, who were accused of collaboration with the retreating Nazi German troops. One can notice the huge gap in (pan-)Soviet publications on Karachay-Balkar, nothing was published between 1941 (*Bizni zamanni ğigiti*, Nalčik) and 1960. When many deported nationalities were allowed to return to their ancestral lands after the death of Stalin, it was in this year, 1960, a very short description of the Karachay-Balkar dialect forms, was published in Nalčik (the capital of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic).

The relative academic marginalisation of the Karachay-Balkars can also be seen in Soviet publications on the language contacts between the Karachay-Balkars and the Ossetians. The significant amount of Turkic loanwords in modern Ossetic, bears witness to the fact that in the ancient past there were intensive contacts between the ancestors of modern-day Ossetians and the Turkic world, ever since the Judaeo-Turkic Khazar Empire in the 6th c. CE and later the Golden Horde, which consisted of a Mongolian aristocracy and Turkic speaking subalternity. Not to mention, Oğuzic Azerbaijani used to be the *lingua franca* throughout the Caucasus since the founding of the Safavid Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the Russian conquest of the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, this Turkic influence on the Ossetic language is much more profound than that from the Caucasian languages that are spoken in the region, such as adjacent Ingush-Chechen, Kabardino-Cherkess (= Adyghe) or Georgian.

The Turkic groups that have been geographically closest to these Ossetians are these Balkars and Karachays, who themselves have borrowed many Ossetic forms. The modern Ossetians usually call their Balkar neighbours the *Asy*, who, historically speaking, referred to the Ossetians themselves. Both names, *Balkar* and *Asy*, were already mentioned in the famous early Persian-written geographical work “The

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<sup>2</sup>“... Своевременность и срочность изучения этого языка объясняется установленными связями сванского с тюркскими языками названных народов, что дает возможность с одной стороны выявить процессы скрещения, с другой — установить наличие яфетических элементов в указанных языках, а следовательно и в тюркских вообще, поскольку балкарский и карачаевский являются языками именно этой системы.”, in *Письмо Н. Я. Марра в Президиум АН СССР с обоснованием необходимости экспедиции в Кабардино-Балкарию и перечнем предполагаемых ее участников* [Letter of N. Ya. Marr at the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet-Union on the necessity for an expedition to Kabardino-Balkaria and a list of potential participants], 19 February 1929 (Letter 141, repr. *ALP* 2013: 214 f.)

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 the eminent Ukrainian-born Turkologist Omelyan Pritsak they may have lived together in the Northern Caucasus until the Mongol invasions (*Fundamenta* I: 341). Indeed, as asserted recently for instance, by Džurtubaev (2010: 4) in his introduction, the ethnogenesis of both the Ossetians and the Karachay-Balkars is an “interrelated process” (*взаимосвязанных процесса*).

This co-existence and co-mingling of these groups is further confirmed by mediaeval European sources, when an Ossetic group (known as the *Jász*) and the Kıpçak speaking Cumans (*Kun*) settled in Hungary during the 13th century. It is only natural to wonder whether the Karachay-Balkars can be considered to be the last remnant of the mediaeval Kumans. After all, those Cumans were living very closely, if not in some sort of symbiotic relation, with the *Alans*, the conventionally accepted (immediate) ancestors of the modern Ossetians. In the past, the Mingrelians would apply *alani* to the Karachays. Even today, the term *alan* is still employed by the Karachay-Balkars as a self-identification. According to Thordarson, *OGS*: 28 f., “[w]e are thus justified in regarding the Karachay-Balkars as Turkicised Alans”, also on account of the numerous place names of Ossetic / Alanic origin in the Karachay-Balkar regions. This is difficult to prove (or disprove) though, as we have no idea how the social circumstances and interactions were originally between the Iranophone Ossetic- and Turkic-speaking Karachay-Balkars in the modern Karachay-Balkar regions.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Abaev (1933) and Nikolai Marr*

This historic “cohabitation” was seized upon by the famous Ossetian linguist and prominent Ossetologist Vassiliy I. Abaev, to confirm Nikolai Marr’s Japhetic theory, proclaimed in the early 1920s<sup>4</sup>. According to this pseudo-scientific theory, which was also known as *New Study of Language*, languages rather reflected a continuous

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<sup>3</sup> Other explanations are conceivable, a large group of mostly, Iranophone Alans may have vacated these areas, voluntarily or involuntarily (after the well-documented Mongol invasions). Subsequently, they were occupied or became dominated by the Turkic Karachay-Balkar population, who would also have imposed their language on the remaining (Iranophone) sheep herders. Neighbouring groups would still have called them by their older names, etc. Also conceivable would be that a centuries-old situation of active bilingualism in these areas had shifted in favour of a predominant monolingual Turkic environment, when an external, Turkic language, i.e. Azeri, became the *lingua franca* of the Caucasus. This kind of linguistic symbiosis and co-existence between two linguistically unrelated groups is well known elsewhere in the world, e.g. between the Iranophone Balochis and Dravidian-speaking Brahuis in Pakistan. The dominance of one language over another depended on the political constellation and the linguistic preference often alternated with each generation.

<sup>4</sup> Most of his articles on the Japhetic Theory can be found in Marr, *Izb.* I.

merger of previous language.<sup>5</sup> Nikolai Marr adopted and gave a Marxist interpretation to the European mediaeval idea that, analogous to the legendary origin of the Semitic peoples and their languages from Noah's son Shem, the origin of most European nations and ethnicities was sought in Noah's other son, Japheth. According to Marr, the languages spoken by Japheth's children would be the substrate that was later overlaid by Indo-European languages. The different layers (of borrowing) would correspond to the different social classes of ancient societies (in Europe). Language was considered a superstructure on the base of society, concurrent to the creation of a (single) socialist economy. As language mixing was therefore the logical consequence, the notion that the languages of peoples could be traced back and therefore classified according to a common origin (as, notably, proposed by Indo-European linguists), was dismissed as a "false consciousness" (*ложное сознание*), introduced by bourgeois nationalism. New languages were rather the result of crossbreeding, while the ultimate origin of languages derives from the four primordial sounds sung by the ancient people during their chores, viz. *ber, yon, roš, sal* (Marr, *Izb.* II: 130).

In the article published in the journal, *Language and Thought*, Abaev (1933) discussed precisely the intermingling and mixing of the Karachay-Balkars and Ossetians, which were reflected in the mutual borrowings between these two groups. This treatment was subsequently incorporated in his collected writings known as *Ossetic Language and folklore* (*OJaF*: 1949)<sup>6</sup>.

His field trip to Baksan and its surroundings, located in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, seems to have been undertaken shortly after the official endorsement by Marr in his letter of 1929 (as cited above). The work contains a comprehensive list of putative Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar parallels compiled by the then youthful Abaev as a faithful disciple of Marr. Evidently, it shows several, methodological shortcomings, which were naturally connected to his expedient adoption of Marr's Japhetic theory, the prevailing dogma of that period. Notably, the article does not give an ultimate origin of the forms, i.e. whether derived from Proto-Iranian (PIr.), Old / Proto-Turkic (OT/PT) or from "Caucasian". Even if we ignore the ideological bias, Abaev's paper also contains numerous factual errors, which were, regrettably, not corrected afterwards, when, later, these forms were incorporated in his famous *Historical-Etymological Dictionary of Ossetic*. In this dictionary, he frequently assigned an older origin of these parallels (which was finally permitted after Stalin had denounced the Japhetic theory in an article, first published in the newspaper *Pravda* on June 20, 1950, on which see *VJa* 1952: 3 f.).

Unfortunately, Abaev often suggested etymologies that were *a priori* implausible. Also, it seems that some of the forms cited by Abaev were rather

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<sup>5</sup> This has led to a complaint by a Soviet scholar critical of Marr that "the study of the connections between related languages is turned over as a monopoly to bourgeois linguistics" (cited by Pollock 2006: 122).

<sup>6</sup> His work was more or less repeated by Lajpanov (1967).

ephemeral, such as the counting system with Digoron sounding names that was apparently used in the southern Kabardino-Balkar region of Greater Khulam (near to the Russian - Georgian border). Actually, these numerals do not appear to be attested in other Karachay-Balkar-speaking areas (and therefore, not incorporated in the standard(ized) Karachay-Balkar language). The publication also includes other terms too. A good example is Ossetic *gæmæx* ‘bare, with bare spots’, for which a Karachay-Balkar form *gəməx* ‘a spot covered by scarce vegetation’ was cited by Abaev as parallel, without any source. So far, I have not found any corroboration for this, only Karachay *qymyža* ‘bare(footed)’ (?). Forms such as *gəməx* are perhaps no more than ad hoc borrowings that can be naturally found in the vocabulary of the few (bilingual?) Balkar speakers who happened to have been in intensive contact with local Digoron speakers (by marriage, trade or otherwise).

Although Abaev introduced the region as a kind of melting pot of customs, traditions and languages of the local peoples, he did not however, explain the exact social or sociolinguistic circumstances (such as code-switching, active bilingualism, and other aspects of interlinguistic and multilingual communications) of this region. It remains, for instance, unclear how competent those informers were in either Digoron Ossetic or Balkar, and how the linguistic skills were acquired, through marriage, upbringing, trade or otherwise. There were arguably no religious objections against intermarriages between Sunni Digoron and Balkars speakers. Abaev asserted that the Ossetic elements in Karachay-Balkar were not recent but the result of “the legacy of ancient Alanic-Turkic mingling, which took place on the areas of all the gorges, from the Terek to the Upper Kuban river”<sup>7</sup> (*OJaF*: 18). However, many of the claimed Ossetic loanwords in Karachay-Balkar, were not attested elsewhere, which would rather suggest recent or *ad hoc* borrowing. This could be an indication of (recent) bilingualism.

Although Abaev did distinguish elements that were borrowed from Ossetic into Karachay-Balkar between elements that were borrowed from Karachay-Balkar into Ossetic, the criteria for the distinction were rather haphazard. Certain semantical, and morphological criteria were invoked though to decide from which direction a term was borrowed, e.g. Oss. *bælas* ‘tree’ with a generic sense would have been passed on to Karachay-Balkar *balas* ‘a wooden hay-dragger’, which is rather specialized (but, theoretically, both *bælas* and *balas* could have been independently borrowed from a third source). Elements that could not be perceived as borrowed from Ossetic to Karachay-Balkar, or vice-versa, were considered to be, tacitly, from the postulated Japhetic substrate.

At first sight, this kind of categorization was in the spirit of Marr, but the criteria for the distinction of the forms, as original or borrowed, were muddled. In fact, he relied tacitly on an etymology postulated by previous (non-Marrian) linguists,

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<sup>7</sup> “наследие старого алано-тюркского смешения, происходившего на территории всех ущелий, от Терека до верхней Кубани.”.



but this was reluctantly acknowledged. Without the traditional historical-comparative framework, any etymological attempts in the article were rather ad hoc.

Assigning an (ultimate) origin for the forms was, of course, of secondary importance to Abaev (1933), as these “parallels” were rather classified according semantic categories:

- A. terms from the inanimate nature,
- B. terms from the animate nature,
- C. designations of cultivated plants,
- D. designations of domesticated animals,
- E. terms from the material culture,
- F. anatomical and medical terms,
- G. social and ethnic terms,
- H. designations of physical and mental properties,
- I. *varia*.
- J. counting system (as an indication of economic interactions)
- K. religion, mythology and folklore,
- L. toponyms.

For this conference, I would like to present a few of my own observations and a personal assessment of Abaev’s treatment of the Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar “parallels”. I will limit myself to the categories A. and B. His work is a very instructive example of Soviet linguistics of the interbellum.

As for the assessment of the Karachay-Balkar material<sup>8</sup>, I have relied principally on the dictionary that was published by Tenišev in 1989, which may confirm whether these loanwords mentioned by Abaev have been genuinely indigenized in Karachay-Balkar. Another valuable publication is that from Gustav Schmidt, who more explicitly considered the Ossetic *borrowings* into Karachay (Schmidt 1931). Again, regrettably, the ultimate origin of the Ossetic elements was not always identified, whether they were inherited from Old Iranian or merely local, Caucasian *Wanderwörter*. A much more recent and very valuable lexical study was done by Siemeniec in 2000, on the Turkic “Erbwortschatz” of Karachay-Balkar and therefore also taken into account here as well.

A. In the category of inanimate terms, Abaev cites several “parallels”. Of the 16 forms, 4 forms are of Ossetic / Iranian origin, 3 forms of Karachay-Balkar / Turkic

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<sup>8</sup> The transcription of the Karachay-Balkar form is according to the modern Romanized Turkish alphabet, which should enable Turkish speakers to perceive the relation between Karachay-Balkar and modern Turkish more easily. However, *x* is used here to denote the voiceless fricative velar, whereas *ğ* is the voiced correspondence. As it is the case in most Turkic languages, the Karachay-Balkar velars *k*, *g* have both back and front realizations (the allophones [q]/[k] and [g]/[g]/[ɣ]), depending on the vocalic environment. Quite often, the complementary distribution of these realizations do not apply to (especially, the most recent) borrowings, e.g. from Arabic or Russian.

origin, 3 were wrongly analyzed (or simply unclear), perhaps 4 from an third source and 1 was perhaps ephemeral:

i. The following Ossetic forms that have a clear Iranian origin are:

- *cægat* ‘northern side of the mountain’ (PIr. \**čakāta-*, Middle Persian *cagād* ‘peak, summit’, Sogdian *ck’’t* ‘peak, forehead’) ~ *çeget* (Balk.) ‘north(ern) direction’ (borrowing from Balk. *çeget* would have yielded Oss. †*cægæt*).
- *awwon* ‘darkness, cover’ (\**āwa-wahāna-* ‘covering into/down’, cf. Persian *bahāneh* ‘pretext, cover’) ~ *awana* ‘contour, silhouette, outline’
- *dorbun* (Karachay) ‘(bear) cave’, (Balk.) ‘cave, cavern’ (lit. ‘stone-bottom’, from PIr. \**darwa-*<sup>9</sup> ‘solid, hard (as wood)’, cf. Khotanese *dūra-* ‘hard’ and \**buna-* ‘bottom’, cf. Pers. *bon*). The corresponding Oss. formation \**dorbun* is not attested though, only its elements *dor* ‘stone’ and *bun* ‘bottom, floor’ are clearly Ossetic in origin.
- *sawædonæ* ‘well’, Iron. *swadon* (< pl./f. \**syāwā* ‘black’ + \**dānā* ‘river, waters’) ~ (Balk.) *şawdan* ‘springs, well’. Etymologically speaking, Oss. *sawædonæ* literally means ‘black water(s)’, which could be calque on an earlier Karachay-Balkar \**kara sū* for ‘well, or spring’ ?

ii. On the other hand, Ossetic must have borrowed quite substantially from Karachay-Balkar as well. The difficulty is that quite often the Karachay-Balkar forms are almost indistinguishable from their Turkic cognate correspondences. The following forms may derive from Karachay-Balkar due to its typical phonological features:

- *töppe* ‘top, crown (of the head); peak; tuft’ (< PT \**töppe*, cf. OT *töpi*, Kumyk *töbe*, Turkish *tepe*) ~ Ossetic (Digoron) *c’opp* ‘pluck, wool’, Iron *c’upp* ‘summit, peak’ (*c* < \**t’*)
- *kaya* ‘rock, boulder’ (< PT \**kaya*, Turkish *kaya* etc.) ~ Ossetic (Digoron) *k’æjæ*, (Iron) *k’æj* ‘slate’ Evidently, the Ossetic form may also derive from another Turkic language. The Svanetic form *k’a* ‘slate’ however is rather a direct loanword from Iron Ossetic *k’æj*.
- *irxi* ‘stream, creek’ (< OT *arık* ‘irrigation canal’, cf. Chagatay *ariğ*, Turkish *ark*, etc.) ~ Ossetic (Dig.) *ærxæ* ‘gorge, dry riverbed’
- *tulpıw* ‘vapour; air’ ~ *tulfæ* ‘vapour, steam’, see further below.

iii. The following forms may be wrongly analyzed or unrelated:

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<sup>9</sup> The reconstruction \**dárwa-* would explain the vocalism in Ossetic (cf. Cheung 2002: 128 f.), and in Khotanese *dūra-*, cf. Emmerick (1989: 211). This thematized adjectival formation is a derivative of \**dāru* (gen. stem *dru-*) ‘wood’, Persian *dār*, etc. The cue for this connection has been taken from Maciuszak (2007: 205 f.). The additional cognate forms (Old Persian *duruva-* ‘secure, firm’, Avestan *druua-*, Sanskrit *dhruvá-* ‘healthy’ cited by her are, are unconnected though, as (also) shown by its morphological derivational process (in Sanskrit) and the semantic discrepancies.

- *k'öldym / k'uldun* ‘(mountain) slope, hill’, unrelated to Karachay-Balkar *küllüm* ‘sun-kissed spot’ deriv. of *kün* ‘sun’).
- (Iron) *ran*, (Digoron) *rawæn* ‘place’. The cited Karachay-Bakar *ran* is only attested in the expression *kaya-ran* ‘rock ledge, a certain spot on the rock, rock terrace’, in fact it just reflects a compound with *a*-elision *kaya aran* (*aran* ‘valley, lowland’) > *kaya ’ran*. Karachay-Bakar *ran* is therefore an accidental form, being unrelated to Oss. *ran*.
- *k’æxæn* ‘slope; cliff’. The cited Karachay-Bakar parallel *tæxæn* ‘flat area on the rock’ was no longer incorporated in Abaev I: 631.

iv. The following forms may be borrowed from a third source, perhaps independently:

- (*æ*)*zme(n)sæ* (Digoron) ‘sand’ (Iron *yzmis*) ~ (Balkar) *üzmez* ‘id.’. The Balkar form does not conform to Turkic morphology, hence it might be a borrowing from Ossetic, although it has no further correspondences in Iranian or in the neighbouring Caucasian languages. An Iranian preform *\*uz-maišā-* ‘mixture, being mixed up’ (*\*maiz-* ‘to mix, mingle’) has often been suggested (cf. Abaev IV: 282), but this reconstruction is fraught with problems, both semantically and morphologically.
- *xuræ* ‘gravel’ (Iron *xwyr*) ~ ? (Balkar) *xuru* ‘stony place, cobblestones’ (no further documentation)
- *cuxcur* ‘flowing water’ ~ *çuçxur* ‘water fall’ ← South Caucasian / Kartvelian ?, cf. *\*me-rčx-e* ‘shallow (of water)’, *\*rečx-/rčx-* ‘to purl, babble, murmur’ (Klimov 1998: 119, 157).
- *typpyr / tuppur* ‘bloated, fat’; [Digoron] hill’ ~ *duppur* ‘hill’, with similar forms in Darginian *dupur* ‘mountain’, Persian *topoli* ‘fat’, derived from a Turkic formation with *\*töppe* ?

v. A very recent, ephemeral borrowing is:

- *gæmæx* ‘bare, with bare spots’ ~ Balkar form *gæmæx* ‘a spot covered by scarce vegetation’, see above.

B. The 32 terms from the animate natural field are largely neither from Iranian nor Turkic. The botanical terms are usually indigenous (Caucasian). Of the parallels, 7 are Ossetic forms borrowed into Karachay-Balkar, 5 from Karachay-Balkar into Ossetic, whereas the remaining 14 may be most likely from a third source (independently). Finally, 6 borrowed forms may be just ephemeral (4) or misinterpreted (2).

i. Ossetic forms borrowed into Karachay-Balkar are:

- *bærz / bærzæ* ‘birch’ ~ *myrzy* ‘id.’ (< PIr. *\*barzā-*, Skt. *bhurjá-* m. ‘*Betula utilis*’)
- *kærdæg* ‘grass’ (< PIr. *\*karta-ka-* ‘cut’) ~ *kirdik* ‘id., greens’ (form contaminated with *kirdiŕ*?)
- *xans* (Digoron) ‘long, thick grass; tall weeds’ (< PIr. *\*kāsa-* ‘tall grass’, cf. Pers. *kāh* ‘straw’ (*’ns* from *fans* ‘wool’)) ~ *xans* ‘grass’

- *fadawon* (Digoron) ‘soft, dry grass (for decking)’ (lit. ‘foot-covering’, with *fad* ‘foot’ < Plr. \**pāda-*) ~ (Balkar) *fadawan* ‘straw often used as padding in mountain shoes’
- *mulzug* (Iron *mæɫʒyg*) ‘ant’ (< Iranian \**marwi-* + \**-čī-ka-*) ~ (Balkar) *gumulcuk* ‘id.’ (with *gu*° from *gubu*). The Balkar form is evidently a borrowing from Digoron *mulzug*. This Digoron formation shows an additional *u*-umlaut in comparison to the Iron correspondence.
- *sinzæ* (Iron *synʒ*) ‘thorn; blackthorn; splinter’ ~ (Balkar) *šinji* ‘spine, (plant) needle’, see below.
- *tæk’uzgæ* Digoron ‘rowan (berry)’ ~ *taqüzük* (Abaev: *tüqüzgü*) ‘id.’. The lack of vowel harmony and the velar *q* in front of *ü* of the Balkar form all point to borrowing from Digoron *tæk’uzgæ*, but the ultimate origin is unknown.

ii. Several Karachay-Balkar forms from the animate world have entered Ossetic, we may cite the following forms, which themselves may be borrowings from another language:

- *bittir* ‘bat’ ~ *bittir* (Iron *xælyn bytтыr*) ‘id.’, see below.
- *gabu* ‘dandruff’, (Karachay) *gibi*, (Balkar) *gubu* ‘spider’ ~ *gæby*, *gæbu*, *gyby* ‘mite’. The Ossetic forms appear to be borrowings from Karachay-Balkar *gabu*, etc., which again may be an adaptation of a Kartvelian formation, notably from a Georgian dialect form, cf. Gurian *ჭიბა-* ‘tick’ (Klimov 1998: 100).
- *gılıw* ‘foal; rat’ ~ *gælæw* ‘rat’. According to Abaev Digoron *gælæw* is an “infantile deformation” of *k’ælæw* ‘foal’, which would be comparable to Kabardian *qolow* ‘piglet’, Georgian *qoqo*, Megrelian *γoyo* ‘calf of buffalo’. Rather than considering “infantile deformation”, Digoron *gælæw* may simply be a loanword from Karachay-Balkar, as *gılıw* has retained the two meanings ‘foal; rat’. Of course, Karachay-Balkar *gılıw* may well be Caucasian in origin.
- *mıga* ‘quail’ ~ *mæga* ‘snipe’. The Balkar form may have been borrowed directly from Kartvelic, notably Georgian *mçqer-* ‘id.’. The Balkar form, which would have simplified the consonant cluster, may then have been borrowed into Ossetic, which shows a semantic shift.
- *pursa* (Iron *pysyra*) ‘nettle, *Urtica urens*’ ~ *mursa* ~ ‘id.’, see below.

iii. The following forms have been borrowed from a third source, mostly independently. They consist mostly of terms from the local flora, which are often Caucasian:

- *æxsæli*, *æxsælæ*, (Iron *æxsæly*) ‘juniper’ ~ (Balkar) *şkeyli*, *şkildi* ‘id.’ ← South Caucasian?, cf. Georgian *aşk’ili* ‘wild rose’, Megrelian *şker-* ‘rhododendron’.
- *sk’eldu* ‘cowberry’ ~ *şkildi* ‘juniper’ (Tenišev 1989: 751 ‘можжевельник’), *kızıl şkildi*, (Karachay) *kızıl işkildi* ‘cowberry, *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*’, also dial. *işkildi* ?) ← a variant of the Caucasian ‘juniper’ forms (-*di*: unanalyzable suffix in both Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar). The Karachay-Balkar forms seem to be borrowings from an unattested Iron correspondence \*(*y*)*sk’ildy* of Digoron *sk’eldu*.

- *cumæ*, (Iron) *cym* ‘dogwood, *Cornus*’ ~ *çum* ‘id.’, cf. Lezgian *čumal*, Tabassaran *čemel* ‘id.’ (similar forms: Turkish *çim* ‘grass’)
- *zedyr*, *zezyr*, *zedyræg* / *zæduræ* ‘blackberry’ ~ *züdür* ‘id.’ ← a Caucasian language ?, perhaps to be analyzed as \**zə* ‘red; blackberry’ (cf. Adyghe *zə* ‘red’ or Abkhaz Bzyp *a-z* ‘blackberry shrub, bush’, Chirikba 1996: 87), and \**dur* ‘fruit’ ? (cf. Lezgian *dur* ‘dried fruit’, Ossetic *dyrg* ‘fruit’, loanword). Alternatively: from Finno-Ugric, according to Tenišev (1989: 807), apparently following Abaev I: 396.
- *zæbidyr* / *zæbodur*, *zæbedur* ‘mountain goat, *Capra caucasica*’ ~ *cuğutur* ‘id.’ ← from a preform \**ǰəγ<sup>w</sup>ətur*, undoubtedly of Caucasian origin, probably West-Caucasian, cf. Adyghe *šəqultər* ‘id.’ (Apažev - Kokov: 576).
- *mæntæg* / *mæntæg*, *mont* ‘burdock’ ~ *mant* ‘id.’ ← *Wanderwört* ?, cf. Svan *mant* ‘id.’, Greek *mínthē* ‘mint’.
- *næzi* (Iron) *næzy* ‘pine, *Pinus sylvestris*’ ~ (Balk.) *nazi*, (Karachay) *nızı* ‘fir’ ← Kartvelic \**naɰw* ‘spruce, fir(-tree)’, cf. Georgian *naɰv* (but also as a regional *Wanderwort* in other Middle Eastern languages, cf. Persian *nāz*, *nāžu*, *nājū* ?)
- *murtgæ*, *murk’æ* ‘*Viburnum*’ ~ (Karachay) *murtxu*, from Kartvelic, cf. Georgian *marçqv-* ‘strawberry’.
- *mæra* / *mura*, *pura* ‘hollow’ ~ *pura* ‘hollow, rotten (tree)’ ← ?, cf. Chechen, Ingush *mur* ‘hollow tree’.
- *ninæg* ‘raspberry, *Rubus idaeus*’ (Iron *mænæg*) ~ *nanik* ‘id.’ ← ?
- *tægær* ‘maple’ ~ *tıgır*, (Balk.) *tıkır* ← Caucasian, cf. Svan *tek’er*, *tek’ra* ‘maple’
- *turtu*, (Iron) *tyrty* ‘barbary, *Berberis vulgaris*’ ~ Karachay-Balkar *türttü* ← *Wanderwort* ?, cf. Lezgian *turt* ‘id.’, similar forms such as Persian *tūt*.
- *ug* ‘owl’ (Iron *wyg*) ~ *uku* No doubt, these forms are onomatopoeic in origin, cf. Megrelian, Laz *yu*, Svan *yu*, etc. The Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar forms have probably been borrowed independently from each other, from another Caucasian language, if not a “spontaneous” expressive form.
- *gælæbo*, *gæbælo*, (Iron) *gælæbu* ‘butterfly’ ~ (Karachay) *göbelek* ‘id.’ Abaev also cites the Balkar forms *gebelo*, *gelbo* (< Digoron?), probably, ultimately, of Turkic origin (cf. Turkish *kelebek*). Almost all Turkic correspondences of *kelebek* have retained a final velar (with the exception of faraway Uyghur *kepilē*), and also the voiced velar *g-* needs an explanation.
- *mæga* ‘snipe’ ~ (Balk.) *mıga* ‘quail’ ← Kartvelic, cf. Georg. *mçqer-* ‘quail’. A difficult to pronounce consonant cluster *mçq* would obviously be simplified in both Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar: the assumed Kartvelic form from which they were borrowed is perhaps \**mçqa-*. On final \**-r* in Proto-Kartvelic, cf. Klimov (1998: 317f.).

iv. Ephemeral are probably:

- *kældæ* ‘dry wood, deadwood’ (Iron *kældy<sup>n</sup>/m*) ~ *kıldı* (not found in Tenišev and other publications): *kıldı* is rather an *ad hoc* borrowing from Digoron ? The Digoron form

seems to be a lexicalized past participle of the verb *kæln* (Iron *kælyn*) ‘to spill, fall down’, which is of PIr. origin.<sup>10</sup>

- *zumarǵ*, *zumarǵ*, (shortened) *zum* (Iron *zym*) ‘Caucasian snowcock, *Tetraogallus caucasicus*’ (lit. ‘winter-bird’ < (thematized) Ir. \**zyama-* ‘winter’ + \**mrga-* ‘bird’) ~ *cumarik* ‘id.’ (not in other publications). Karachay-Balkar *cumarik* as a borrowing from Ossetic is not attested elsewhere.

- *kændys* / *kændus* a slightly toxic plant ~ *kiindeš* ‘id.’

- *qoppæg* / *qoppæg*, *qobæg* ‘an edible lily’ ~ *xömpek*, *xoppug* ‘id.’

v. Totally unclear are the following cited forms, also on account of the unclear meaning (misinterpretation, misheard?):

- *bynz* / *binzæ* ‘fly’ ~ *didin* ‘wasp’ (not confirmed elsewhere, also not included in Abaev I: 280).

- *zægæræg* ‘not fully bloomed flower’ ~ *cıgıra*, *zıgıra* a kind of edible plant

### *Some observations*

There are several highly interesting forms that must have been borrowed from the period prior to the entry of the linguistic ancestors of Karachay-Balkar and Ossetic in the (northern) Caucasus, i.e. prior to the Mongol invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Abaev was the first to label these ancient borrowings as “Scytho-European” isoglosses, which in practice, meant that the (claimed) ancestors of the Ossetians would have borrowed, mainly, from Germanic and Slavic (also Celtic and Latin), on which see Abaev (1965). However, similar, ancient borrowings from Hungarian, were not included in this label, simply on account of the fact that Hungarian was not part of the Indo-European language family. A typical example of such a “Scytho-European” isogloss as defined by Abaev would be the following “Ossetic ~ Karachay-Balkar parallel”:

- *sinzæ* (Iron *synz*) ‘thorn; blackthorn; splinter ~ (Balk.) *šinji* ‘spine, (plant) needle’. In this case, *sinzæ* may reflect older \**spina*-<sup>11</sup> + dimin. suff. \**čī*. The preform \**spina*- would be a loanword, most conceivably from East Slavic, cf. Russian *spiná* ‘spine’, Old Polish *spina* ‘id.’ (genuine or ultimately < Latin ?). The “spine” form appears to be a widespread European cultural term, attested in Latin *spina* ‘thorn’, Baltic (Latvian) *spina* ‘rod’, Germanic (e.g. Old High German *spinela* ‘hairpin’), Engl. *spine*, etc.

However, there is an implicit bias towards these ancient borrowings, as Abaev considered mostly (pre-)Ossetic as the first receiver of those so-called “Scytho-

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<sup>10</sup> Abaev also entertains the possibility of a connection with several European designations for ‘wood; log’, e.g. Greek *kládos* ‘branch’, Slavic \**kòlda* ‘block, log’ (Russian *kolóda*), Germanic (Old Icelandic) *holt*, German *Holz* ‘wood’. This may be co-incidental rather than a “Scytho-European” borrowing.

<sup>11</sup> Initial \**sp-* > \**sf-* > \**s’s’* (palatalization) > modern Oss. *s-*, cf. *sistæ*, Iron *syst* ‘louse’ < Proto-Iranian \**spiš* + \**čī* (e.g. Avestan nom. sg. *spiš*, Persian *šepes* ‘id.’).

European isoglosses”, effectively disregarding the possibility that the ancestors of Karachay-Balkars may well have contributed to these “Scytho-European isoglosses” as well. After all, Karachay-Balkars can also be considered as a modern remnant of the powerful Cumans and Pechenegs, who used to occupy a good chunk of the Eurasian steppes. Thanks to their expansion, Cumans and the Pechenegs came certainly in contact with South Slavic speaking groups, and for a prolonged period of time. These Southern Slavs may have just only recently used a literary language, which is now known as Old Bulgarian, or alternatively, Old Church Slavonic.

The second, politically significant ethnic group the Cumans and the Pechenegs would have met, were the Hungarians, who, completed their conquest of Carpathia in the 9-10<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Hungarian arrival in the Balkans came in the aftermath of the attacks by these Cumans around 895. A written testimony to these contacts is the so-called Codex Cumanicus compiled in Hungary in the 12-13th century to serve as a text book of the Cumanic language.

We may cite several borrowed forms for which Abaev claims Ossetic as the initial adopter, but actually, they most likely have entered an earlier stage of Karachay-Balkar first, before their adoption in Ossetic:

- *bittir* ‘bat’ ~ *bittir* (Iron *xælyn byttyr*) ‘id.’ ← South Slavic, esp. Church Slavic *nepŭtyrĭ* ‘bat’ (which shows metathesis of *t ... p > p ... t*, cf. Russian *netopyr*). The Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar forms appear to be an ancient borrowing from (South) Slavic. The question of course is which language has borrowed first. The apparent loss of *ne*<sup>o</sup> may provide us with a clue. Karachay-Balkar (and other Turkic languages) does not have native nouns with initial *ne*<sup>o</sup>, only derivatives of the pronoun *ne* ‘what’ are attested, cf. Siemieniec (2000: 158 f.). A foreign formation such as the South Slavic *nepŭtyrĭ* would be inevitably re-analyzed as an expression with the interrogative pronoun *ne*. In contrast, in Ossetic there would be no apparent reason to resort to such a re-interpretation. There are several inherited formations with initial (Proto-Ossetic) *\*ne*<sup>o</sup>, e.g. *\*nez* (= Digoron *nez*, Iron *niz*) ‘disease’, *\*new-* ‘to cry’ (= Dig. *new-*, Iron *niw-*), *\*ne-* negative prefix. Initially, an early predecessor of Karachay-Balkar would thus have borrowed the South Slavic form, after which it was passed on to Ossetic.

- *mursa* ~ *pursa* (Iron *pysyra*) ‘nettle, *Urtica urens*’ ‘id.’. According to Abaev (1949) the Ossetic form has been borrowed into Karachay-Balkar, with the initial labial stop becoming the corresponding nasal *m-*. This however cannot be correct, as only older voiced *b*<sup>12</sup> may become *m-* in Karachay-Balkar, e.g. the indigenous name for the

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<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, the fate of the initial labial stops in Turkic is rather complicated. According to Pritsak: 352, *b-* becoming *m-* is a typical Kıpçak development (“echt kiptschakisch!”), e.g. *maka* ‘frog’ (< PT *\*bāka*, cf. Kumyk *baka*), (Karachay) *miyik* ‘big’ (but Balkar *biyik*, cf. Tatar, Nogay *biyik* < PT *\*bādük*, cf. Turkish *büyük*). It is difficult to postulate a watertight phonetic rule though, especially since there

Balkar is *Malkar*. It is more likely that an earlier Karachay-Balkar form *\*bursa* is the source of the Ossetic form, which looks not very ancient anyway (with atypical *p*- and final *-a*, rather than *f*- and *-æ* respectively). Therefore, the Karachay-Balkar form itself may have been passed on by those Cumans with their extensive contacts with several (South) European linguistic groups. In this case, Karachay-Balkar *mursa* seems to be an old borrowing from Hungarian, viz. *borsó* ‘pea’ (Old Hungarian *burso* 1254, a place name), with final *-ó* < *\*-V̄k(V)* and de-affricatisation of *\*č* > *s*)<sup>13</sup>. The Hungarian form itself reflects a Turkic loanword *\*burčak* (Benkő: 129), which is the term for a legume, pulse(-like) plant, notably *pea*, *vetch* (and also metaphorically ‘hail-stone’), cf. Turkish *burçak* ‘vetch’, Karachay-Balkar *burçak* ‘hail’, (Balkar) ‘pea’ (Siemieniec 2000: 70 f.; Clauson: 357; Sevortjan 1978: 275 f.). The semantic shift from ‘a legume’ to ‘nettle’ in Karachay-Balkar *mursa* needs an explanation though: perhaps, the preform *\*bursa* is rather a blend formation of two similar Hungarian forms: *borsó* ‘pea, vetch’ and *bors* ‘pepper’ (*bors* ← Turkic *burç* ← ultimately Sanskrit *marica*, Clauson: 771 f.; Sevortjan 1978: 274 f.).

As another example of such a labial correspondence / adaptation, we may cite:

- *Abistol*, *Amistol* ~ Oss. (Dig.) *Amistol* Summer month (June-July) ← ultimately Greek *apóstolos* Abaev (*OjaF I*: 283) insinuated that the source of the Karachay-Balkar form is Ossetic Digoron *Amistol*. The Digoron form is difficult to explain, notably *-m-* and the vocalism *-i-*, if it were a direct borrowing from Greek, or more likely via a Slavic intermediary *apostolŭ*, the expected Ossetic (Digoron) form should have been †*ap*<sup>(ʰ)</sup>*ostol* (and Iron †*ap*<sup>(ʰ)</sup>*ustul*). Rather, the Balkar form may be the source of the Digoron form, a voiced stop *\*b* is normally not found natively<sup>14</sup> in intervocalic position, which would therefore have been adapted as *-m-* in Ossetic. The back-vowel *ɪ* is represented by *-i-* in Digoron. The Balkar form on the other hand, shows a regular phonetic adaptation of the Slavic outcome *apostol* of the Greek form. Balkar indigenous vocabulary does not contain an intervocalic, voiceless labial stop, hence Slavic / Greek *-p-* → Balkar *-b-*, cf. Proto-Turkic *\*tāpan* (or *\*tāban*?) ‘heel’ > Balkar *taban* and P-Turkic *\*tōpik* ‘knee’ > Balkar *tobuk*. In addition, Balkar also shows a regular alternation *b ~ m*, unlike Ossetic, which does not have an intervocalic *-b-* in its indigenous phonemic inventory, as all Old Iranian intervocalic *\*-p-*, *\*-b-*

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are relatively few cases within Karachay-Balkar (and also borrowings from other Turkic languages may have distorted a possible phonetic distribution).

<sup>13</sup> Also Chuvash *pārça* ‘pea’ shows loss of the final velar. Assuming that Karachay-Balkar *mursa* is a loanword from Chuvash is fraught with phonological and historical inconsistencies. The older suggestion that pre-historic Ossetic would have borrowed somehow from Chuvash is equally problematic. According to Gombocz (1912: 52), the Finno-Ugric forms, Mari *pursa*, *pirsa* (both modern Chuvash and Mari lack indigenous voiced stops) and Hungarian *borsó* would all have been borrowed from Old Chuvash *\*burčay*, but this reconstructed Old Chuvash *\*burčay* is simply too close to all the other Turkic forms to corroborate this statement, at least, with regard to Hungarian *borsó*.

<sup>14</sup> On the development of intervocalic *\*p* > Ossetic *v*, (after *\*u*) *b*, cf. Cheung (2002: 18f.).



have become -v- (except after \*u). Finally, the extraneous vowel sequence *a ... o* of *apostolŭ* would naturally be adapted as *a ... ɪ* in Balkar.

Finally, from the inanimate sphere (cat. A., see above), the following form may also be an ancient Cumanic borrowing that has entered Ossetic:

- *tulpɪw* ‘vapour; air’ ~ *tulfæ* ‘vapour, steam’. A rather far-fetched connection with Sanskrit *turīpa-* ‘semen (fluid)’ was cautiously cited by Abaev IV: 316 f.). Both forms, Ossetic *tulfæ* and Karachay-Balkar *tulpɪw* have probably been borrowed, perhaps rather from (South) Slavic \**toplŭ*, Old Church Slavic *toplъ* ‘warm’ (Derksen 2007: 490), with regular metathesis of \**pl* > *lp*. Ossetic does not have a native labial stop *p* in its phonemic inventory, all forms with *p* point to either a foreign origin or is the result of a simplifying gemination of a consonant segment (e.g. *nk* > Iron *pp*).

Considering the more faithful phonetic adaptation of Slavic - *ŭ/-ъ* in Karachay(-Balkar) as *-ɪw*, Ossetic *tulfæ* seems to have been borrowed from Cumanic. The Karachay(-Balkar) form *tulpɪw* appears to show *umlaut*, a feature that can already be noticed in the writing of the *Codex Cumanicus*, and in modern Karachay-Balkar also in certain lexicalized phrases, e.g. *bu-kün* ‘today’ > *bügün*. However, the exact circumstances of this kind of *umlaut* are unclear. If the direction of the borrowing were the other way round, Ossetic initial *-u-* would have been consistently adapted as *-u-/-ü-* in Karachay-Balkar.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The one-sided concentration on research of the (putative) linguistic ancestors of the Ossetians in the past hundred years by Russian and Soviet scholars, rather resulted in the marginalisation and even downplaying of the Turkic linguistic component of this centuries old relation. Ossetic was intensively studied and many aspects of its history, speakers, literature and dialectology became better known, resulting in an appreciation and pride among its modern speakers. This, however, cannot be said of the speakers of Karachay-Balkar. Marked by academic neglect (and deportation of its speakers during the dark period of Stalinism), the Karachay-Balkar language was also considered to be somewhat of a linguistic crossbreed, as fostered by the *Japhetic Theory* developed by Nikolai Marr. This has pretty much resulted in an approach in which many, non-Turkic borrowings found in Karachay-Balkar were considered to be taken directly from Ossetic or from a common Japhetic / Caucasian substrate language.

This situation can be illustrated by the long exposé published by the Ossetian scholar Vassilij Abaev in 1933, on the relation between the linguistic ancestors of modern Iranophone Ossetic and Turcophone Karachay-Balkar speakers. He considered the Ossetic – Karachay-Balkar parallels found in the local Balkar dialect as the result of ancient “Alanic-Turkic” mingling, on top of a Japhetic/Caucasian substrate. But the bias is not only due to the adoption of Marr’s *Japhetic Theory*. It also had a personal bias, as he ascribed the great majority of these cases to an earlier

Ossetic provenance, giving little thought to the possibility that Karachay-Balkar could also have passed on quite a lot of borrowings to Ossetic as well.

The results from the assessment of the Ossetic – Karachay-Balkar parallels, on the bases of two semantic categories, discussed by Abaev (1933), can be summarized as follows:

- there is no clear direction of the borrowings: both Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar have contributed in almost equal measure to each other's vocabulary.
- as can be expected, a large group of these “parallels” consists of borrowings from local (Caucasian) languages, and it is often unclear whether they entered Ossetic or Karachay-Balkar first.
- in addition, the linguistic ancestors, the Cumans, of the modern Karachay-Balkars may have also borrowed from European languages, after which they would have entered Ossetic: (Greek *apóstolos* →) South-Slavic *\*apostolŭ* ‘apostle’ → Cumanic *\*abistol* (> Karachay-Balkar *Abistol*) → Ossetic *Amistol* ‘Apostle(’s Month)’ (→ dial. Balkar *Amystol!*).

The main criteria that have allowed us to distinguish the direction of borrowing between Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar are:

- phonological criteria: e.g. the presence of vowel harmony in Karachay-Balkar forms and its absence in Ossetic, the phonological restrictions and adaptations typical for Karachay-Balkar and Ossetic respectively. In Karachay-Balkar we may notice, for instance, the lack of forms with initial *ne-*. Ossetic, on the other hand, does not possess (indigenous) *p* and intervocalic *-b-*, while it shows the frequent substitution of initial stops (especially from Karachay-Balkar and other non-Caucasian languages) with their corresponding ejective consonants. Notable examples are: (Slavic) *nepŭtyrŭ* → Karachay-Balkar *ne bittir* → Ossetic *byttyr / bittir*; Karachay-Balkar *töppe, kaya* → Ossetic *c’upp / c’opp* (*c* < *\*tʰ*), *k’æj / k’æjæ*; Ossetic *tæk’uzgæ* → Karachay-Balkar *taqüzük*.
- semantic shifts: the language that has preserved the meaning of the borrowed form from a donor language most closely, may also have adopted the form first. Examples include: Karachay-Balkar *gılıw* ‘foal; rat’ → Ossetic *gælæw* ‘rat’; (Kartvelic) *\*mçqa-* ‘quail’ → Karachay-Balkar *mıga* ‘quail’ → Ossetic *mæga* ‘snipe’.
- historical-comparative evidence: forms directly inherited from their linguistic affiliated group, i.e. (Indo-)Iranian or Turkic respectively, as shown by historical-comparative methods, may decisively point to the direction of borrowing: Karachay-Balkar *töppe* (< Proto-Turkic *\*töppe*, Turkish *tepe*, Kumyk *töbe*, etc.) → Ossetic *c’upp / c’opp*; Ossetic *kærdæg* ‘grass’ (< Plr. *\*karta-ka-* ‘cut’) → Karachay-Balkar *kırdık* ‘id.’.

A further (re-)assessment of the Ossetic and Karachay-Balkar material may shed more light on the historical contacts between the Ossetians and Karachay-Balkars, which in turn may assist in the formation of their respective self-image and identity.

Precisely, the lack of great, especially, local researchers and scholars has created a cultural and historic void in the national narrative of the Karachay-Balkars. For this reason, many Karachay-Balkars have resorted to “borrow” aspects of their culture and historiography from their Turkic brethren, notably from Turkey. This kind of interest of course has often been denounced as “panturkism” in the Russian media.

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