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ETYMOLOGICAL PARALLELS: MTSKHETA - MASHĪTĀ/MAŠQĪTĀ - DIMAŠQ

Abstract

On November 19, 2020, at the Free University Center for the Study of Arab Countries and Islamic World, was held a seminar where I presented a report on the connection between the etymologies of Mtskheta, the historic Syrian settlement of Maskhita (*mashītā*), and Damascus (*dimašq*).

The issue of the relationship between the Georgians and the peoples of the Caucasus in general, with the ancient peoples of West Asia, was studied by several scholars (I. Javakhishvili, S. Janashia, N. Berdzenishvili, G. Tsereteli, G. Melikishvili). To explore this problem, together with the archeological materials, the linguistic data are worthy of attention, especially the proper, geographic, and tribal names of the peoples of the ancient East, lexical units of household, agriculture, and of the other sectoral content.

According to the researchers, the name of Mtskheta is connected with the tribal name of the Meskhetians (Moskhi – Mushki). The Mushks, who emigrated from West Asia, in particular from Mesopotamia, should have settled at first in Meskheta, and then in the outskirts of Mtskheta in the 8th century BC. They mixed with the local population. The main city of Kartli (Iberia) developed rapidly from the 8th century due to its geographical location.

The name of the historic village Maskhita (*mashītā*) near the Syrian port city of Latakia is written in Arabic using *shīn* and *qāf* (*mašqītā* – مشقينا). Such written tradition reflects old, historical circumstances. The settlement must have been founded by the ancient Assyrians, hence its name is of non-Arabic origin and it, in our opinion, must be related to the tribe of Mushks. In oral speech, the substitution of “Mashqita” (*mašqītā*) with “Maskhita” (*mashītā*) should be explained by the influence of spoken Arabic. In ancient times, namely, in the second millennium BC, Mushks were living in the well-watered lands of Upper Mesopotamia. Their migrations have been studied. Ivane Javakhishvili considered the ancestors of the Kartvelian tribes of Mushks and Tobals as the emigrants from Asia Minor in the pre-ancient period. It should be mentioned that the Mushks from Mesopotamia created a kingdom in Cappadocia. Their capital was named “Masakha”, which is associated with their patriarch, “Mosoch” (Josephus Flavius).

The tribal name “Mushk” (*mušk*) is, in our opinion, also found in the name of the ancient city Damascus (in Arabic – *dimašq*). In Aramaic, we have *dammašq*, in ancient Hebrew *dammešeq*. *darmešeq* is recorded in the inscriptions of Qumran. The first member in *dār mešeq* – *dār* means dwelling, and the second member – *mešeq*, in our opinion, means the tribe of Mushks. Thus, *dimašq* (دمشق) can be translated as the abode of Mushks. The presented etymology of Damascus is proposed for the first time based on a comparative analysis of the scientific literature.