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ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF SELF-DESIGNATION OF GEORGIANS - “KARTVELI”

Abstract

The etymology of self-designation of Georgians has not been solved definitely, even though a number of articles have been devoted to the etymology of the term. There does not exist a generally shared opinion around the issue. A review of the history of research into the ethnonym “*Kartveli*” points to the divergence of views. “*Kartveli*” is explained by scholars on the basis of evidence of Kartvelian languages.

The present paper is an attempt at an etymological analysis of this term. The dominant view in Georgian scientific literature is that the Zan equivalent of the word “*Kartveli*” is Megrelian “*Kortu*”. So Georgian *-el* denotes the origin in some words, and in Zan, the corresponding suffix in the group of words is Megrelian *-u*.

We do not share this view. In our opinion, “*Kartveli*” is derived from the ancient Georgian ethnotoponym “*Kartu*”, which denotes Georgia – the country of Georgians, plus *-el* – the old Georgian vowel *u* passes into the consonant *v*.

So, the Zan equivalent of the old Georgian “*Kartu*” – is Megrelian “*Kortu*”. Besides, the term “*Kartukhi*” is attested in Xenophon’s “*Anabasis*”. The archaic suffix *kh* is attested in Georgian ethnonyms *Meskh-i*, *Kolkh-i*, *Taokh-i*, and *Javakh-i*. To this category of Georgian ethnonyms also belongs the Georgian “*Kartukhi*”.

Keywords: *Kartveli*, *Kortu*, etymology, *Kartukhi*, correspondence.

The attempts to etymologize the ethnonym “*Kartveli*” have been of special interest in Kartvelology.

In the opinion of D. Muskhelishvili, “the etymology of self-designation of Georgians “*Kartveli*” (sing.) and “*Kartvelni*” (pl.) has not been definitively solved” (Muskhelishvili 1993, 377).

According to the widespread opinion, the Zan equivalent of “*Kartveli*” is Megrelian “*Kortu*” (Georgian).

Some scientists think that the Georgian determinant *-el* in some words denotes the origin, and in Zan, the corresponding suffix, attested in the auslaut of a group of words, is Megrelian *u*. E.g., Georgian *begh-el-i*: Megr. *bagh-u* (barn), Georgian *tkhm-el-a* (alder), whose archaic form is *tkhm-el* (Klimov 1964, 99): Megr. *tkhom-u*, Georgian *ugh-el-i*: Megr. *ugh-u* (yoke).

G. Klimov, in his Etymological Dictionary of Kartvelian Languages, has made a remark in connection with some words, the ethnonym *Kartli* among them, that the sound correspondence between Georgian *-el* and Megrelian *-u* is not convincing. We share this opinion since the examples of sound correspondence are common nouns, and “*Kartveli*” is a proper noun, ethnonym, and in ethnonyms, we have sound correspondence – Georgian *-el*, Zan *-ar*, e.g., *Odish-el-i*, *Odish-ar-i*. The difference is between the suffix *-el*, denoting the origin of “*Kartveli*”, and the determinant *-el* in common nouns.

In our opinion, Georgian *-el*: Zan *-u* is not a phonetical sound correspondence but a functional equivalence.

The basic form for the above ethnonyms is “*Kart*”, which according to D. Muskhelishvili, is an artificial term that has been created recently (Muskhelishvili 1993, 338).

We do not share this opinion. First of all, taking into account the evidence of Kartvelian languages, in Megrelian dialects of the Zan language and the Svan language, “*Kart*” is the name of the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi (earlier Mtskheta). This choronym has passed from Megrelian into the Abkhazian language.

As to the etymology of the ethnonym “*Kartveli*”, there is a divergence of views.

N. Marr – *Kasd* > *Kart* + the archaic Iverian plural *-iv*: *Kart-iv* > *Kartiv-el-i* > *Kartvel-i*.

IV. Javakhishvili – the first part of the term “*Kartveli*” is “*Kartu*”, the name of a country.

Gr. Ghapantsian – *Kart* + *vel* (< *ber*); *ber* means home, then the family, tribe, and, finally, a man from the home of *Kart*.

L. Melikset-Beg – “*Kartveli*” is composed of two ethnonyms – *Kart-Iveri*.

A. Shanidze – “*Kartveli*” originates from the Iranian ethnonym *Part*, the Armenian form of which is *Partev*. *Part-av-el-i* > *part-v-el-i* > *kartveli* (Shanidze 1980, 8-12).

G. Melikishvili – the presence of the consonant *v* in “*Kartveli*” is explained as euphony (Melikishvili 1965, 238).

T. Gamkrelidze and G. Machavariani think that Megrelian “*Kortu*” originates from Georgian “*Kartveli*”. *Kartvel* > *Kortual* > *Kortuau* > *Kortuou* > *Kortu* (Gamkrelidze, Machavariani 1965, 92).

For the etymology of the self-designation of Georgians, very important evidence is found in ancient languages of Front Asia, especially the Hattic and Hittite languages.

Based on linguistic, historical, or other scientific data, it can be concluded that the Hattians, who lived in Asia Minor in the second millennium BC and were called proto-Hittites, are the ancestors of Georgians. The Hattic name for the capital of the Hittite empire is *Hattusi*, which goes back to *Hattu* (< *Kartu*). The consonant *s* in the toponym *Hattusi* is the marker of the genitive in the Georgian language.

As to the linguonym *Hattili* (the language of Hattians), the morpheme *-il* is Georgian *-el*. It should be noted that in ancient Georgian, the Hebrew language is “*ebra-el-i ena*”.

The *Karts* also occur in the Bible as Cherethites – I Samuel 30, 14. Old Hebrew is characteristic of the vowel *e* as well as the transfer of the one-syllable into the two-syllable word, for example, *ard* > *erets* (country). The Georgian ethnonym *Meskh* > *Meskeh*, *Sper* > *Tobel*.

In our opinion, “*Kartveli*” is derived from the ancient Georgian ethnotoponym “*Kartu*”, which denotes Georgian and the country of Georgians, plus *-el*. The old Georgian vocal *u* has passed into the consonant *v* of the new Georgian language. So, the Zan equivalent of the old Georgian “*Kartu*” is Megrelian “*Kortu*”. Besides, the term “*Kardukh-i*” is attested in Xenophon’s “*Anabasis*”. The archaic suffix *-kh* is attested in a lot of Georgian surnames. If we consider a tribe as a group of families, the above suffix should also be traced in ethnic names, like *Meskh-i*, *Kolkh-i*, *Taokh-i*, and *Javakh-i*. To this category of Georgian ethnonyms also belongs Georgian “*Kardukh-i*”, from which, as a result of the fall of *kh*, is formed “*Kartu*”. The fall of the final *kh* is attested in another Georgian ethnonym – *Taokh-i* < *Tao*. Hence, the Zan “*Kortu*” was derived from “*Kartu*” by *a* > *o*. On adding the suffix of origin, we get first “*Kartueli*” in old Georgian and then “*Kartveli*”, cf. the transition of the vocal *u* into the consonant *v*, for example, *ghuino* > *ghvino* (wine), *dzueli* > *dzveli* (old), *chueni* > *chveni* (our), etc.

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