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The Ancestors of the Rusins and the Nomadic Tribes: Ethno-Cultural Interactions

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Предки русинов и кочевники: вопросы этнокультурного взаимодействия

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The assumption that Iranian-speaking tribes of the Greater Black Sea area played a significant role in the ethnogenesis of the Eastern Slavs was made by M. Lomonosov, E. Klassen, Y. Venelin, I. Zabelin, N. Zagoskin, D. Samokvaskov, D. Ilovaisky, A. Lappo-Danilevsky, M. Liubavsky, L. Niederle, P. Tretyakov, B. Rybakov, V. Sedov, G. Vernadsky, A. Udaltsov et al.

A number of researchers point out the ethno-cultural link between the Iranians and the Indo-Aryans (the two largest Indo-Iranian sub-branch representatives of the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family). O. N. Trubachev noted that one of the Scythians' names was "para" which meant "younger" or "descendants" (the Indo-Aryans were "old Aryans"). The largest confederation of Northern Iranian tribes of Sarmatia, which became the heir of Scythia, were the Alans. Their name comes from the adjective *aryana (arian; plural – aryānām), one of the varieties of the ancient Iranian form of ārya (Aryan) through the interchange of consonants l-r, "aria – ariana – alan".

In the Indo-Iranian habitat, ancient Indians and Iranians used the name *ārya* to designate their affiliation with the free people, separating themselves from slaves.

Herodotus, describing the Scythians, pointed out that the Hellenes gave them this name. From his description, we can conclude that the

unified nation of Scythians had never existed. There existed Scythian nomads and Scythian farmers. Scythian nomads lived in the steppe and raised cattle. Next to horses, sheep were the major livestock.

Scythian plowmen (Scythian farmers, Scythian Borisphenites; their self-name was Skolots) lived in the forest-steppe belt and were engaged in agriculture and sedentary cattle-breeding. The agricultural region of the Proto-Slavic tribes was the Middle Dnieper and the left bank areas with a mixed population (Gelons, Boudins and partially resettled Borisfenites). The formation of the Old Russian State took place in this region in the Middle Ages. Scythians proper dwelt in the regions of the Lower Dnieper and the Sea of Azov. Anthropological studies confirm that those whom Herodotus called Scythians-farmers were Proto-Slavs. Contacts of the Eastern Slavs' ancestors and the Scythian-Sarmatian population in the lands of the middle and lower reaches of the Dnieper and its tributaries, in the basin of the Southern Bug left their mark in the genesis of the anthropological features of the East Slavic peoples. Agricultural tribes were greatly influenced by Scythian culture, which made them similar to the Scythians in appearance. According to Boris Rybakov, the residence of the Eastern Slavs' ancestors in Scythia conditional caused the long absence of Slavic unity.

According to O. Trubachev and F. Filin, the intensification of Slavic-Iranian contacts dates back to the middle of the 1st millennium BC. This applies mainly to religious and social spheres. Mythology and the pagan religion of the Slavs developed under the Iranian influence.

A considerable Iranian influence can be found in toponymics. Such hydronyms as Prut (Porata), Tiras (*tūra* – fast, strong), Don, Donets, Dnieper, Dniester (*dān* – water, river), etc are of the Iranian origin.

In the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC, Sarmatians pushed out Scythians from the northern part of the Greater Black Sea area; after this the ancient authors called it Sarmatia. The Western Sarmatians (Alans, Roxolani, Yazyges) settled along the lower reaches of the Dniester and the Danube no later than the AD era.

At the beginning of the 1st century AD, the ancient authors first mentioned Wends (Slavs) in the Carpatho_Dniester region.

In the 6th century, a new, purely Slavic culture (called the Penkovsky or the Antes culture) replaced the Chernyakhov culture and spread throughout the territories of Moldavia and Ukraine.

According to V. V. Sedov, 'antes' is a tribal name of the Slavic group which had its own ethnographic features; its formation was greatly influenced by the active participation of the Iranian (Sarmatian) ethnic component. This view is shared by M. Gimbutas, who believed that

in the Prut-Dniester region the Sarmatians merged with the local population. By this time, they changed their nomadic existence for a sedentary way of life and took up farming. The ethnonym 'ant' probably dates back to ancient Indian 'antas' – end, edge; antyas – located at the edge, and to Ossetian 'attiya' – back, behind. Thus, the word 'antes' in the Russian translation means "those living in the border lands" or "borderers", "ukrainians". This name could be borrowed by the Greeks from the Alans living in the southern Russian steppes.

In the 7th – 9th centuries, the Penkovsky (Antes) culture of the Prut-Dniester interfluvial region was replaced by the Luka Raikovetska culture prevailing in the northern and central regions. Researchers have no hesitation in recognising the East Slavic origin of the Luka Raikovetska culture.

At that time, the territory of the Carpathian-Dniester lands was inhabited by the tribes of Croats, Tivertsy and Uliches. The Croats were one of the Antes tribes.

The ethnonym dates back to the period of the Slavicization of the Iranian-speaking population against the background of Cherniakhov culture. Tivertsy is an ethnonym derived from Tiras, the ancient name of the Dniester, their ancestors were one of the Antes tribes. Uliches lived to the south of Kiev. After conquering Peresechino in 940 AD, they migrated to the Southern Bug and the Dniester interfluvial region. The Croatian ethnonym most probably derived from the ancient Iranian words 'shepherd, cattleman'. Croats allegedly got their ethnonym during the existence of the Antes Union through assimilation of the Iranian population by the Slavs.

B. A. Rybakov suggested that Uliches' ancestors (Urgy-Urugundy) belonged to the Sarmato-Alanian tribes "involved into the process of the Slavic ethnogenesis". In the 3rd – 4th centuries, in T. Sulimirski's opinion, most of the Sarmatian tribes settled in the northern part of Bessarabia and in the adjoining districts of Moldova along both banks of the Prut river. Considering the fact that the ancient authors of that period called these lands "Alania" and the Prut was mentioned as the Alan river (Alanus fluvius) by them, it can be concluded that the Sarmatians subdued the local population. A lot of toponyms with the root "Yas", including the city of Iași, lead to the assumption that it was the Eastern branch of the Alans – Aorsy, Yasy or the Ptolemaic Asayas. The scholar identified them as the Antes present in this region from the 4th through to the 6th centuries whereupon they were assimilated by the Slavs.

It is in the southeastern borderlands of the Slavic world that the word Ru appeared, which, as V. V. Sedov considered, came from the

Iranian-based **rauka-* **ruk-* meaning “light, white, and to shine”.

The data obtained by archeologists, linguists, historians, and anthropologists on the Slavic-Iranian symbiosis have received confirmation from geneticists. Several research teams conducted a genomic study of the Russian population. The study revealed that Y-chromosome (Y-DNA) haplogroup R1a was common in Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians. This haplogroup emerged thousands of years ago and was very common among Indo-Aryans and the Iranians of the northern Black Sea.

Currently, in the higher castes of India (Brahmins), irrespective of their geographical and linguistic affiliation, the indicator R1a reaches 72.22%.

The article published in The American Journal of Human Genetics in 2008 mentions the R1a being an average indicator among Russians and reaching 55.4%. According to the authors of the monograph “Russian Gene Pool of the Russian Plain”, this haplogroup, most common for the East Slavs, also exceeds 50%, declining to 40% in the north-east of Russia. This study confirmed the similarity of the gene pools of Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

The research carried out in the Belgorod region among the indigenous Russian and Ukrainian populations showed an even higher percentage of carriers of haplogroup R1a which amounted to 55.82%.

In the author’s opinion, studying the gene pool of the indigenous East Slavic population in the Carpathian-Dniester region, considering their long-standing ethno-cultural contacts with the Scythian-Sarmatian world will reveal a higher percentage of carriers of haplogroup R1a.

Keywords

Rusins, Slavs, Antes, Tivertsy, Uliches, Croatians, Scythians, Sarmatians.