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**REVISITING THE SHIPPING AND NAVIGATION IN THE**  
**CAUCASUS IN THE ANCIENT TIMES**

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**Abstract**

The issue of shipping and navigation in the Caucasus is understudied, as well as the issue of these skills among the peoples of the Caucasus. Meanwhile, as it is known, the Caucasus is a huge land bridge, surrounded on two sides by three seas – the Black, the Azov and the Caspian seas. In addition, large water flows occur in the Caucasus, forming rather large river systems. In the South Caucasus, these are the Kura and Rioni rivers, in the North Caucasus – the Terek and Kuban. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that the Caucasian peoples, who lived on the shores of these seas and rivers from ancient times, did not learn to use their natural resources and the advantages provided by waterways, which are not only more economical, but sometimes safer than land roads. According to the available data, navigation has been known to the inhabitants of the Caucasus since ancient times. The well-known Norwegian explorer and traveler Thor Heyerdahl paid special attention to the drawings of boats in Gobustan. According to him, Gobustan boats with a curved bottom, probably reed, have no analogues in the world. Based on a comparison of the Norwegian petroglyphs with those of Gobustan, he concluded that they were drawn “by the same hand, but at different times”. He proposed a hypothesis about the existence in ancient times of some analogue of the waterway “from the Varangians to the Greeks”, connecting the Caucasus with Scandinavia.

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## **1. Introduction**

People from ancient times preferred to settle near water. A person can not live without water for a long time, water is necessary for cooking. In addition, rivers and seas have also become sources of food since ancient times. People also realized the benefits of being close to rivers and seas: in the absence of roads, it was much easier and safer to travel on water than among uncharted mountains, forests or steppes. Therefore, the coasts of rivers and seas have been inhabited by people since the most ancient era of human history. With the invention of the simplest floating means, and then more advanced means of shipping and navigation, rivers and seas became a means of trade and cultural interaction for many peoples on all continents. The history of shipping and navigation in the Caucasus also has an ancient history.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The shipping and navigation of the Caucasian peoples in the historical past, the cultural and historical significance of mastering the skills of shipping and navigation both for the Caucasian peoples themselves and for the population of other regions that came into contact with them as a result of mastering these skills.

## **3. Research Questions**

The research questions are geographical location of the places where the skills of navigation and seafaring arose in the Caucasus and time of the first reliable information about such facts.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose is to identify and systematize the material and linguistic data on the cultural contacts of the Caucasian peoples with other countries and peoples as a result of mastering the skills of shipping and navigation.

## **5. Research Methods**

The principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency and the analysis of historical sources were used as research methods. The work is based on the problem-chronological principle.

## **6. Findings**

The research allows stating that shipping and navigation of the Caucasian peoples was known from ancient times. Mastering the skills of navigation and shipping allowed the Caucasian tribes and peoples to maintain extensive trade relations with the population of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Our conclusions are confirmed not only in written sources, but also in the research of archaeologists, as well as linguistic data.

In the Bronze Age, ingots of metals from the Caucasus and from Asia Minor were transported with incredible speed for antiquity throughout Europe. Even before the First World War, the German archaeologist Bezzenger published a work in which he noted that East Prussia received metal from the Caucasus in the Bronze Age. The studies by Khomutova and Terekhova give reason to believe that the Caucasus, and the Koban tribes in particular, had a great influence on the development of iron production among the Ananyin tribes of the Volga-Kama (Kvirkvelia et al., 1984).

In this regard, it is interesting that in the Tatar (кәмә) and Chuvash (кимё) languages the name of a boat is very similar to the Chechen кема 'boat; vessel. In addition to the Chechen language, similar terms are noted only in some Dagestan languages: Botlikh, Godoberi (gama) and Khvarshi (gama, along with another term – lejčo) and are absent in other Caucasian languages (Klimov & Khalilov, 2003). There is a similar term in the Ossetian language – chema, as well as in the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Caucasus (Kum. geme, Karach.-Balk. keme). Vagapov traced the etymology of this term to the Proto-Caucasus. \*gam- // \*kam- 'a vessel, a bowl, a ladle, an ark, a ship', which gives, on the one hand, Chech. \*kāmi > kiema 'ship', on the other hand, Chech. chami 'ladle, scoop' (Vagapov, 2011). In linguistics, as in many other humanitarian scientific disciplines (for example, archeology), a discriminatory method is used, according to which any lexical matches in the Nakh languages with foreign system languages are considered to be external borrowings. According to the above mentioned facts, the opinion on the borrowing of maritime terminology, in particular, the name of a river boat (khin kema) or a sea vessel (khIurda kema) in the Chechen language from the Turkic-speaking steppe nomads, whose ancestral home was somewhere in the depths of Central Asia, seems doubtful. In our case, terminology similar to the Chechen one is observed mainly among the Turkic-speaking peoples of the North Caucasus and the Volga-Kama region. They could have had all sorts of direct close contacts the ancestors of the Chechens in the historical past.

Due to this, there is reason to say that various connections between the tribes and peoples of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus since ancient times were carried out not only along land routes, but also along river and sea arteries, in particular along the Volga-Caspian route.

The tribes and peoples that inhabited the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus also knew navigation from ancient times. According to Lavrov (1966), the Caucasian tribes already from the 3rd millennium BC learned coastal navigation, having laid important routes of communication with distant countries. Numerous port settlements and cities have been well known on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus since antiquity.

Ancient authors (Aulus Gellius, Strabo, Tacitus) provided quite detailed information about the types and structure of their ships. Aulus Gellius put them on a par with the types of ships of the Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans. The ships of the Caucasian tribes were also mentioned by Xenophon, Pseudo-Anacharsis and Nicholas of Damascus. Strabo directly said that the Heniochs, Achaeans and Zikhs had a thalassocracy on Pontus Euxinus (Strab. XI, 2, 13). He also reported that the inhabitants of Colchis supplied the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator not only shipbuilding materials, but also ships (Strab. XI, 2, 18–19).

According to the inscription at the turn of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC the satarchs were engaged in piracy (Snisarenko, 1986) In the Azov Sea. During the expansion of Rome to the East, the Romans had to

make a lot of efforts to fight the Caucasian pirates, sometimes suffering defeats from them (Tac. Hist., III, 47). Ovid, who lived much later, wrote that the Achaeans and Geniochs made raids along the entire Black Sea coast, except for its northern part.

In the 30s of the 3rd century on the shores of the Black Sea, a new formidable enemy appeared – the Goths. They subjected Gorgippia to terrible devastation, and 10 years later captured Tanais. During the next thirty years, the Goths, who captured the Bosphorus fleet, stormed Pitiunt, laid siege to Phasis, and sacked Trebizond. At the decline of the Roman Empire, piracy again assumed a wide scope: “Separate fleets of Pontic pirates sailed into the Cyprus Sea, traded on the shores of Lycia and Pamphylia and penetrated into the regions of Cappadocia” (Snisarenko, 1986, p. 212). Piracy remained one of the main obstacles to successful navigation in the Black Sea in the Middle Ages as well. Officium Gazariae, the management of the Genoese colonies on the Black Sea in its very first report of November 26, 1313, stated that the Black Sea is full of corsairs.

According to the data of ancient authors, various types of light and maneuverable ships of the Black Sea tribes of the Caucasus were known, united by the ancient tradition under the general term *camara*. G. Rawlinson believed that the vessels of the inhabitants of Transcaucasia and Anatolia described in Herodotus' History (Herod. I, 194) had a rather significant similarity with those boats that in his time communicated along the Tigris and Euphrates (Rawlinson, 1862).

Pisarevsky (1978), who devoted a small special article to the *kamars*, considered it possible to connect this term with the Indo-Iranian word *hamarq* ‘ram’ (Snisarenko, 1986). He substantiated his opinion by the fact that images of animals (sheep, horses) adorned the stems of ancient ships. In this regard, it is possible to point to the parallels in the Chechen language: *ka* ‘ram-kochkar’, a derivative of it is *coma/koma* in the meaning of ‘barash’.

According to ethnographic data, in the Chechen culture, the *kochkar-ram* symbolized courage, daring, and also purity, and therefore it was not uncommon to compare a young man with him (*com: tskhya ka bu hyo!*). There is an ornamental motif in the form of stuck-on stylized ram heads on ceramic vessels found in Chechnya dated back to the Early Bronze Age (Markovin, 1963; Munchaev, 1961). The ram is also widely known in Koban art (Volnaya, 2011).

However, we suppose that the striking similarity of the name *camara* with the name of the ancient people of the Cimmerians (Akkadian *Gimirāia*, other Greek *Κιμμέριοι*), who, according to Herodotus, inhabited the Northern Black Sea region and were driven out from there by the Scythians is of greater interest. In the Bible, the Cimmerians are known as the Japhetic people *Homer* (it is interesting that among the sons of *Homer Ashkenaz*//*Ashkuza* – Scythian is named). The Ossetian Nart epic mentions the *Gumirs* who preceded the *Narts*. In the Argun Gorge of Chechnya, there is the *Gemara*, an ethnoterritorial group. In the Trusovsky Gorge of Georgia, there are a river and the village of *Gimaray* (Geevsky, 1887). In the Georgian language, the word *gmiri* has been preserved in the meaning of “hero”, “giant.” All this is evidence of close contacts between the Caucasian peoples and the Cimmerians.

Different points of view were expressed regarding the ethno-linguistic affiliation of the Cimmerians, but the version about their Iranian origin is the most common. One of the alternative versions of the ethnogenesis of the Cimmerians is expressed in the late 1940s by Elnitsky (1949), according to which the Cimmerians were carriers of the Koban culture, widespread since the Late Bronze

Age in the Central and North-Eastern Caucasus, whose representatives were still nameless. Another interesting opinion is the point of view of Chlenova (1971; 1972) about the Cimmerian origin of the monuments of the western version of the Koban culture, which she included in the so-called Cimmerian-Karasuk community of Eurasian cultures. One of the well-known modern researchers of the Cimmerian problem, Makhortykh (1998), localized the country of Gamir to the north of the Main Caucasian Rangeland.

In addition to these written sources, there is direct archaeological evidence of the military campaigns of the late Cimmerians (who are now commonly associated with the carriers of the Novocherkassk complex) and their North Caucasian allies in Western Asia (Erlikh, 2007). In one of his later works, Dudarev (1999) believed that the Novocherkassk complex, which was a set of military accessories and horse harness, was formed in the beginning of the 8th century BC in the Koban cultural and historical region as a fusion of Koban, Western Asian and steppe components. The tribes of the Koban culture, as it is known, played an important role in the early stages of the ethnogenesis of the Chechen people (Kozenkova, 2001; Kozenkova, 2002).

The Cimmerians' campaigns in Asia Minor served as a kind of catalyst for the wide distribution of military items to the north of the Main Caucasian Range. In the North Caucasian antiquities of the 2nd half of VIII – the beginning of 7th century BC there are a number of Middle Eastern borrowings in the field of military affairs (helmets of the Assyrian and Urartian types, details of scaly shells, chariots similar in design to the Urartian ones, chest horse “pectorals”, bits of the Endzha-Konstantinovka type, characteristic details of horse harness) (Makhortykh, 2005).

From the beginning of the 7th century BC the active promotion of the Scythians to various regions of Eastern Europe begins, during which they meet with the Cimmerians.

Thus, if we take into account that at a certain historical stage one of the main regions where the Cimmerians lived was in the North Caucasus, we can assume that after their defeat by the Scythians, a part of the Cimmerians went to the Bosphorus region, which, according to V.D. Blavatsky, became the place of their special power and where the “Cimmerian” toponymy of ancient Greek authors is recorded (Blavatsky, 1948). However, as it is known, even from here the Cimmerians were subsequently driven out by the Scythians.

Herodotus wrote that after the defeat from the Scythians, the Cimmerians went to Asia Minor and Western Minor, moving along the coast of Pontus (Herod. IV, 12). Some later historians were inclined to trust the “father of history” unconditionally in this matter. The famous Caucasian scholar Lavrov (1989) wrote that there was no convenient land road along the Black Sea coast before the highway and railway were built there, since the rocks very often hung over the sea, leaving no room even for a hiking trail. Therefore, I already had to object to Academician Manandyan, Krupnov and others, who believed that the ancient Cimmerians were heading to Asia Minor along the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus. If they had a campaign, it was to the west of the Caucasus Mountains, as Herodotus claimed. In this case it was possible only be with the help of coastal navigation along the Caucasus on those capacious boats that in the North-Western Caucasus in ancient times were known as “camaras”.

According to the above-mentioned data, we suppose that there is a connection between the ethnic name of the Cimmerians, the name of the type of ships Camara and the Chechen name of the vessel Kema < \*kama (the presence in Turkish of a similar term gama is, apparently, a replica of an older era

associated with Asia Minor and the fact that there is coastal navigation in the Black Sea waters on ships of the camara type).

## 7. Conclusion

The discussion of the etymology of this term is open. Whether to trace the etymology of this term, as Vagapov does, to the Proto-Caucasus. (pranakh.?) \*gam- // \*stone- ‘a vessel, a bowl, a ladle, an ark, a ship’ or a coma/koma in the meaning of ‘lamb’ – is up to specialists in linguistics. This also raises the question of the etymology of the ethnonym Cimmerians, which was formed if we accept the Nakh stems proposed above (kam- + derivational suffix -r in the Chechen language, for example, Khildekhyaroy, tsiontaroy, Iallaroy, etc.) and can mean either “navigators” or “rams”.

The second option seems funny and ridiculous. However, if we take into account that in the Middle Ages in the Middle East there were two powerful Turkmen ethno-political associations called Ak-koyunlu (“white sheep”) and Kara-koyunlu (“black sheep”), then this version does not seem completely groundless. There is also a counterargument against the first variant: initially the Cimmerians lived far from the sea coast, and even their transition to navigation is doubtful. Let us bear in mind that the Phoenicians as one of the most famous seafaring peoples in antiquity were originally a semi-nomadic people who came from South Arabia on the shores of the Levant (Shifman, 1981; Tsirkin, 2003). The examples from later times are the Arabs and the Turks, originally nomadic peoples who later became navigators.

Did the type of ships that later became known as camara receive its name from the Cimmerians, in whose language kema/kama meant "vessel"? Did they decorate the prows of their ships with images of animal heads, in particular, rams? Or does the very etymology of the ethnonym “Cimmerians” go back to the designation of a (totem?) animal – a ram? It is not yet possible to answer these questions, but in our opinion this hypothesis may exist.

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