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## Georgian Traces in the History of the Chuvash

Anton K. Salmin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the RAS (3, Universitetskaya Emb., 199034 St. Petersburg, Russian Federation)

Dr. Sc. (History), Leading Research Associate

 0000-0002-1072-9933. E-mail: [antsalmin\[at\]mail.ru](mailto:antsalmin[at]mail.ru)

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**Abstract.** The paper deals with the Transcaucasian prehistoric period in the history of the ancestors of the Chuvash people. Goals. The study aims to identify and analyse the sources and literature on the topic relating to events of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. *Materials and methods.* The work employs a complex approach to the examination of the material, which made it possible to analyse the sources and the thoughts of predecessors consistently and systematically. The study focuses on works of historians, ethnographers and linguists about the ethnic groups that previously inhabited and now inhabit the areas to the south of the Greater Caucasus. The sources that proved important include the works by such historians as Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century BC), Apollonius of Rhodes (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC), Pseudo-Orpheus (4<sup>th</sup> c. AD), Priscus Panionensis (5<sup>th</sup> c.), Menander Protector and Stephanus of Byzantium (both 6<sup>th</sup> c.). The paper also makes use of some pronouncements by such remarkable researchers as Andrey Golovnev, Sergey Arutyunov, Alikber Alikberov, Nicholas Berdzenishvili, Vera Budanova, Murtazali Gadzhiev, and David Muskhelishvili. Results. Impartial investigation shows that the ethnonym of the Chuvash has undergone a lengthy course of transformation through history in the form of *Savir* (*Saspir/Sapir*, *Savar*, *Sabir*) → *Suvar* (*Suvas*, *Suvan*) → *Suvash* → *T'shāvaš* (*Chuvash*). As far back as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, to the southeast of Colchis a large confederation of tribes headed by the Saspirs came into being. The study reveals and confirms traces in the pre-history of the distant ancestors of the Chuvash that are shared with the peoples of Georgia. In the period under examination, the historical forerunners of the Chuvash lived in a territory between Media and Colchis, between the Medes and the Colchians. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, they were recorded to inhabit the Chorokh River valley. Alongside historical events, the publication traces ethnographic parallels with the ancient Georgian peoples and some shared elements of vocabulary.


**Keywords:** historical ancestors of the Chuvash, Transcaucasia, prehistory, Georgia, history, ethnography, language

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## Грузинский след в истории чувашей

Антон Кириллович Салмин<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Музей антропологии и этнографии имени Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН (д. 3, Университетская наб., 199034 Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация)  
доктор исторических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник  
 0000-0002-1072-9933. E-mail: antsalmin[at]mail.ru

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Статья посвящена изучению Закавказского доисторического периода истории предков чувашского народа. *Целью* исследования является выявление и анализ источников и литературы по теме, посвященных событиям VII–I вв. до н. э. В качестве методологии автором выбран комплексный подход к изучению материалов, что позволило анализировать источники и мысли предшественников последовательно и системно. *Материалами* для изучения явились труды историков, этнографов и лингвистов о народах, населявших и населяющих территории к югу от Большого Кавказского хребта. Среди авторов важными оказались труды таких историков, как Геродот (V в. до н. э.), Аполлоний Родосский (III в. до н. э.), Псевдо-Орфей (IV в.), Приск Панийский (V в.), Менандр Протектор и Стефан Византийский (VI в.). В статье были использованы высказывания таких выдающихся исследователей, как А. В. Головнев, С. А. Арутюнов, А. К. Аликберов, Н. А. Бердзенишвили, В. П. Буданова, Д. Л. Мухелишвили. *Результаты.* Как показывает беспристрастное исследование, этноним чуваш прошел длинный исторический путь трансформации в виде *савир (саспир / сатир, савар, сабир) → сувар (сувас, суван) → суваши → чйваши*. Еще в VII в. до н. э. к юго-востоку от Колхиды образовывается крупная конфедерация племен во главе с саспирами. В ходе исследования раскрыты и подтверждены общие с народами Грузии треки в доистории исторических предков чувашей. В изучаемый период исторические предки чувашей обитали на территории от Мидии до Колхиды между мидянами и колхами. В III в. до н. э. и в III в. н. э. они были зафиксированы в долине р. Чорох. Наряду с историческими событиями в публикации прослежены общие с древнегрузинскими народами этнографические параллели и общая лексика.

**Ключевые слова:** исторические предки чувашей, Закавказье, предыстория, Грузия, история, этнография, язык

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### 1. Introduction

“Ancestral peoples had a strong individuality and differed from one another more clearly than present-day communities”

[Головнев 2009а: 122].

Leading researchers in the historical-ethnographic field point to the necessity of a complex (i. e., trans- and interdisciplinary)

approach to the exploration of ethnogenetic processes. It is a question of the need for researchers to go beyond the bounds of their own specialist subject. “Of course, interdisciplinary in this instance is not an end in itself but rather has practical significance: immense importance attaches to the still not fully investigated cognitive potential of borderline spheres of learning, especially in areas of interpenetration with other fields where fresh knowledge is

being formed” [Аликберов 2019: 154]. This is “the normal state of scholarship because where everything is clear and fully settled stagnation sets in” [Гуревич 2000: 125].

There are many hypotheses about origins of the Chuvash. Those peoples who have been named as their ancestors include the Xunyu, Xiongnu, Xianbei, Wuhua, Onogurs, Ugrians, Huns, Bulgars, ancient Turks, Iranians and Sumerians. All this long, yet still incomplete, list of tribes is indicative not only of a lack of study but also, and above all, of the complexity of the question.

In actual fact, the history of a people is a succession of regenerations. We should only write about the spatial-chronological parameters of tribes and peoples. Not only times changed, but ethnic groups also transformed. It is, for example, impossible to place an equals sign between the subjects of Modu and Attila. Because “the course of events regenerates ethnicity, which does not exist outside of movement” [Головнев 2009б: 53]. Ethnic components are impermanent characteristics. The replacement of culture-forming components helps them transform, overcome crises, and facilitates regeneration. Peoples become reborn in the broadest sense of the word. Turko-Mongol tribes — forming alliances at some times, disintegrating into hordes at others, on occasion drawing subjugated tribes into their military unions — were able to conquer the steppes. In that way, one set of peoples disappeared, and others emerged. At the same time, it is useful to abandon illusions and reconcile oneself to many newly discovered facts.

## 2. Ethnonymy

As far back as 1925, in a letter to Mikhail Petrov, the author of a brochure On the Origin of the Chuvash, Nikolai Ashmarin wrote that “the word t’sävaš [Chuvash] has still not been scientifically explained: all the existing explanations have been unsatisfactory” [Петров 1925: прил. 2].

The ethnonym Saspirs, in the various forms — Σάσπειρες, Σασπείρων, Σάσπειρσι and Θεσπιέες — appeared six times in Herodotus’ Histories in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC [Ηρόδοτ 1995: 1. 104, 110; 3. 94; 4. 37, 40; 7. 79]. The tribes mentioned also feature in the form Σάπειρες/Σάπειρας (Sapeires) in the Argonautica written by Apollonius Rhodius in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

“And beyond the island and opposite mainland dwell the Philyres: and above the Philyres are the Macrones, and after them the vast tribes of the Becheiri. And next in order to them dwell the Sapeires, and the Byzeres have the lands adjoining to them, and beyond them at last live the warlike Colchians themselves... Thence they sailed on, past the Macrones and the far-stretching land of the Becheiri and the overweening Sapeires, and after them the Byzeres; forever forward they clave their way, quickly borne by the gentle breeze” [Apollonius 1912: 43, 62].

In this passage, the blind seer Phineus tells the company of bold adventurers who intend to sail towards distant Colchis about the tribes they will encounter on the way. Those include the Sapeires (Sapirs). The Argonautica is an epic poem closely akin to the Iliad and Odyssey in subject matter. So, how did its author find out the real name of the Sapeires? The answer is simple: the central characters — Pelias and Jason — were historical figures. Pelias brutally usurped royal power in Iolcus, while Jason was his nephew, the son of the deposed King Aeson and Polymede (in other versions Alcimede). The whole plot of the poem is founded upon this pair and the intrigues for possession of the throne. Of primary significance for us, however, is the Greeks’ knowledge of the actual ethnic pattern of habitation on the southeastern shores of the Pontus Euxinus. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, mariners, followed by migrants established over 900 trading posts and settlements around the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. Some of the largest of these were in Colchis. In the 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the Greeks already had a precise conception of the boundaries of the regions that they had made their own. Besides, researchers write about intermarriage between the newcomers and local tribes people. It is at the very least possible to speak with certainty about the real-life existence of the Βεχίρες, Σάπειρες and Βύζηρας among those ethnic groups that Apollonius mentions in the Argonautica.

The practice of writing the ethnonym that interests us in a wide variety of phonetic transcriptions continued into the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. In the Ethnica of Stephanus of Byzantium, for example we can read: “The Sapirs [Σάπειρες], a people of the Pontic region now spelt with αβ — Sabirs [Σάβειρες]” [Stephanus 1849: 555]. In that same work we also find the

variants Σάπειο and Σάσπειο. That is to say, the same phonetic practices were at work as with Herodotus.

The Greek grammarian Herodian (Aelius Herodianus, early-to-mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) replaced the Ptolemaic Savar with σάπειο/σάσπειο [Guilielmus 1823: 51], i. e., the same as Herodotus. This is indicative of the persistence of the Herodotean version over a period of at least eight centuries. In his *Res Gestae* chronicling the history of Rome, Ammianus Marcellinus used the ethnonym in the form Sapires [Ammianus 1970: 26]. That was in AD 361–362. The Sapirs are also mentioned in the Orphic *Argonautica*, whose author (Pseudo-Orpheus) lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century [Псевдо-Орфей 1948: 268].

One of the ancient variants of the ethnonym survived in the form of Saviar, the name for Ossetians in the language of the Svans. A researcher into ethnonyms and tribal names in the Northern Caucasus believes that “this term is a reflection of the name of the ancient Savirs” [Волкова 1973: 109]. The Svans also use the similar word Sav’yar for Karachays and Balkars [Каракетов 2014: 96].

Roman, Greek, Iranian, Armenian, Georgian, Syrian and Arab authors wrote about this people, each distorting the ethnonym to fit the phonetics of their own language. In ancient and mediaeval manuscripts, it was conveyed using the consonants S–v–r, vowel sounds being added according to the consonantism of the given language. In Ibn Khordadbeh’s *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, in the writings of King Joseph of Khazaria and in an authentic document produced by the Khazar Jews of Kiev, it is written simply SWR.

Generally, historians consider the ethnonyms Σάπειρες, Σάσπειρες, Σάβριοι, Sapires, Savares, Saviri to be identical [Буданова 2000: 335, 342, 345].

In a long series of linguistic distinctions between r and z and the ethnonym Suvar/Suvaz itself, Andrei Kovalevsky erroneously termed them dialectal differences [Ковалевский 1956: 21, 35]. They are, rather, two different linguistic markers: Suvar and Turkic. In Arabic script r and z might also be taken for the n sound. Svan is one further variant on the ethnonym. However, this version, found in the manuscript of Ibn Fadlan’s *Risalah* (Account, Journal or Report), is considered authentic by some Kazan-based scholars who regard it as

the actual endonym [Фахрутдинов 1986: 97]. Similar instances have indeed been known in history, for example Tatar and the Chinese Datan or Tan-Tan; Тахwär and the Chinese Davan or Dayuan for Tocharian. The Middle Chinese ending –n is often conveyed by –r. The form Suani exists in the writings of Priscus of Panium. The Suani [Σουανῶν] also occur in the works of Menander [Menander 1829: 225, 407]. Commentators on Menander call the Suani a tribe close in origin to the Lazi [gens Lazis finitima]. It is interesting to note that the form Suani is also a variant of the name of the Georgian Svan clan. The same applies to the toponym Suania – Svaneti(a). In my opinion, Gerard Friedrich Miller was not justified in considering Philip Johan von Strahlenberg in error for having written *runder aurbis Bulgan* – “remnants of the city of Bulgan”. He assumed that Strahlenberg had made a slip and should have used Bulgar like eastern authors [Миллер 1791: 4–5]. However, Strahlenberg in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century most probably recorded the actual pronunciation of the name of the capital of Volga Bulgaria in the form Bulgan. That is to say, we have here an instance of the phonetic variation of consonantal sounds r ↔ z ↔ n. In Arabic script, moreover, all three letters have similar shapes. A similar case occurs with two names for the river now known as the Kuban: Κωφῆν – Kofin (according to Menander); Κουφης – Kufis (according to George Kedrenos).

In the Svan language there are several ways of forming the plurals of nouns. The endings most frequently used are ær and its variants: –æł, –æ → r; –æ → l; –i → r, and also –ar/al/–a → r/–e → l [Tuite. A short]. For example, the endonym Svans mainly occurs only in the plural – šwan-är; the singular form is mæ-šwan. The suffix –är as the chief form of the plural is, however, also usual in Georgian-Zan languages [Дондуа 1975: 72]. Other scholars, such as Murtazali Gadzhiev, have also written about the plural suffix –ar in Caucasian languages [Гаджиев 2019: 22]. The core lexicon of the Chuvash language includes a large number of words ending in –ar, –ir, –as or –ash. The ethnonyms of the Avars, Kabars, Sapirs/Savars/Savirs, Bulgars, Khazars, Balkars and Magyars all follow that same pattern. Each of these ethnic groups inhabited the Caucasus or Pre-Caucasus at one time.

Impartial research shows that the ethnonym Chuvash underwent a long historic course of



transformation along the lines of Savir (Saspir/Sapir, Savar, Sabir) → Suvar (Suvas, Suvan) → Suvash (Sāvaš) → Čāvaš (T'šāvaš).

### 3. Historical-Geographical Analysis

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, a large confederation of tribes headed by the Saspirs formed to the southeast of Colchis [Кудрявцев 1956: 156]. This circumstance presented a number of difficulties to would-be conquerors seeking to advance northwards. By the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Cimmerians' invasion had significantly reduced the might of the Urartian state, and the Saspirs exploited this situation to gain control over the region between Colchis and Media.

In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Saspirs managed to put a complete end to Urartian dominance in Transcaucasia. "Southern Transcaucasia soon found itself within the Saspirs' sphere of influence" [История Грузии 1962: 15]. Together with the Colchians, they also played a leading role in the lands of western Transcaucasia. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Colchis was only formally subordinate to the Persian Achaemenids. The Colchians determined administrative matters, domestic issues and trade with other countries for themselves. They also maintained habitual economic and social ties with the Achaemenid state. Furthermore, there was a well-travelled route in western Iran that also passed through the lands of the Saspirs.

Georgian colleagues consider that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the Saspirs' southern borders extended as far as the Aras (Araxes) River, while their centre "was perhaps located in the Chorokh gorge. Disposed to the north of them were the united tribes of Colchis (Qulḥa)" [Мусхелишвили 2015: 23–24].

From Herodotus, it is possible to precisely determine the location of the Saspirs geographically and in relation to other ethnic groups: "Now from the Maiotian lake to the river Phasis and to the land of the Colchians is a journey of thirty days for one without encumbrance; and from Colchis it is not far to pass over to Media, for there is only one nation between them, the Saspeirians, and passing by this nation you are in Media" [Геродот 1995: 1.104.1]. This means that the Saspirs occupied the lands between the Medes and the Colchians. Herodotus states this unequivocally: "The Persians inhabit Asia extending to the Southern

Sea, which is called the Erythraian; and above these towards the North Wind dwell the Medes, and above the Medes the Saspeirians, and above the Saspeirians the Colchians, extending to the Northern Sea, into which the river Phasis flows. These four nations inhabit from sea to sea" [Геродот 1995: 4.37.1].

What interests us in Herodotus' information is the fact that the Saspirs are considered to be a large coalition of peoples whose territory extended from Media to Colchis, and also included a considerable part of the former Urartian kingdom.

More precisely, the Saspirs were the northwestern neighbours of the Matieni, who belonged de facto to the satrapy of Media [Сафарова 2009: 12, 14]. Hovhannes Khorikyan mentions that they had a border with the Medes in the area of the lower reaches of the River Kura (Cyrus), while the road from Colchis to Media ran through the regions west of the Caspian and by way of the Kura valley. "The Saspirs could not have been located to the south of the Colchians, because the Moschoi (Eastern Chalybes) lived there... Therefore the Saspirs were to the east of the Colchians and lived between the Matieni to the west and the Alarodi to the south" [Хорикян 2015: 199–200]. He elaborates further: the Saspirs did not occupy the Armenian highlands, but the lands between the Kura and the Greater Caucasus range – and subsequently Caucasian Albania, i.e., the region on the left bank of the Kura. Saspirs were also known in many other parts of the Iranian world, in near-inaccessible mountains and in maritime localities, such as the south coast of the Caspian.

Both the Colchians and the Saspirs were heavily dependent on the Persian Empire, right up until the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. "For example, when the Persian ruler Xerxes mounted a campaign against Greece in 480 BC, as well as Moschoi, Tibarenoi, Macrones, Mossynoiki, Mares and Saspeires, there were also Colchians in his forces" [История Грузии 1962: 17].

In circa early-to-mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Apollonius of Rhodes wrote about the Saspis [Σάπειρες] "who have long lived" next to the Bechyres and Byzeres. This suggests that the three peoples had been neighbours well before 300 BC. Which is all fully in accordance with the historical reality. To be even more precise, in this period the Saspis occupied the lands to

the southeast of the Chorokh River towards Lakes Sevan and Van.

Taken together, Herodotus' topographical coordinates leave no room to distrust the historical accuracy of the Saspirs' reported area of habitation in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Drawing on other sources, it is possible to enlarge that time span to cover the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. In that period, the Saspirs occupied a territory from Media to Colchis, between the Medes and the Colchians, with the former to the south and the latter to the north by the Phasis River. The Matieni mountains, alongside which the Saspirs dwelt, are considered to be those near Erzurum [Пиотровский 1959: 117]. Grigory Stratanovich, the translator and commentator on Herodotus, was in no doubt at all about these landmarks.

#### 4. Ethnography

Of course, Herodotus was not just a historian but also an ethnographer and ethnologist. On the basis of his writings, it is possible to peep behind the curtain that conceals the ethnic prehistory of many peoples of the Transcaucasia. From the quotation already mentioned, we know that the Saspirs lived between Colchis and Media. Herodotus added further: "And from Colchis it is not far to pass over to Media, for there is only one nation between them, the Saspeirians, and passing by this nation you are in Media." In another place, he reiterates: "beyond the Medes, the Saspeirians; beyond them, the Colchians" [Геродот 1995: 1. 104; 4. 37]. All these statements speak in favour of an autonomous ethnos living compactly.

An analysis of Herodotus' Histories provides serious grounds for considering the Saspirs to have been Indo-Europeans. Even the names of their chieftains – Siromitres and his son Masistios – are Iranian, although cited with Georgian vowelization. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Scythians launched an offensive towards Media, but in order to reach their desired goal they also needed to overcome such powerful states as Assyria and Urartu. And that is not counting the tribes located along the eastern seashore of the Pontus Euxinus, including first and foremost the tribal coalitions of the Colchians and the Saspirs. "And it is hard to imagine that all these large and small political and ethnic formations of settled agricultural peoples and tribes would give the nomadic Scythian warriors a delighted reception. Any

redeployment, even a peaceful one, of a large body of mounted warriors has a disastrous impact on the life of settled agricultural localities" [Сборник 2008: 14]. Consequently, the Saspirs cannot in any way be related to the Scythians in terms of ethnicity. Apollonius, however, wrote that the Bechyres were a Scythian tribe, and after them came the Saspirs – another Scythian tribe. I would presume that as an outside foreign observer, Apollonius may well have generalized and been unable to distinguish the Bechyres and Saspirs from the Scythians, considering them inhabitants of the regions that he was describing. This "canard" was evidently taken at face value by one Armenian colleague who writes that the Saspirs were located in (Caucasian) Iberia and "in terms of their origins were probably Scythian tribes" [Хорибян 2015: 200].

According to the Father of History, Persians dwelt in Asia all the way to the Red Sea. Beyond them were successively the Medes, Saspirs and Colchians. They occupied lands from the Pontus Euxinus to the Red Sea. Therefore, the Persians and Saspirs could not possibly be included in one linguistic group.

There are people who favour including the Saspirs among the ancient Georgian tribes [История Грузии 1962: 20]. Others believe that the Speri who lived to the north-west of the Saspirs, beyond the River Sper and the Saspirs were one and the same ethnos. The question of identifying the Saspirs with the Iberians has been at the discussion stage [Кудрявцев 1956: 155]. Of course, it has to be admitted that the Saspirs, along with other peoples, did make a significant contribution to the formation of a Georgian state but that gives no grounds to equate them on an ethnic level.

From Herodotus, we also learn that the Saspirs engaged in animal husbandry, grazing "cows on mountain pastures", for example. They were a differentiated society and also practiced slavery. The Saspirs equipped themselves for war the same way as the Colchians: they "wore wooden helmets, and carried small shields of raw hide, and short spears; besides which they had swords" [Геродот 1995: 5. 79].

Present-day researchers analysing the primary sources justly assert that the Saspirs were the only population between Media and Colchis [Мутафян, Лев 2012: 18], a large ethnic group that was an integral, independent community [Хорибян 2015: 194, 195]. In other

words, as of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Saspis possessed their own separate territory and constituted an autonomous and distinct ethnos. They were neither Colchians nor Medes, but rather an independent tribe of their own.

### 5. Language

In ancient times, all the tribes of the southern Precaucasus spoke one of the widespread languages. But which one was it? We still have no exhaustive answer to that question. At the same time, we ought to be speaking about the ethno-cultural diversity and polyethnicity of the population, or about the existence of dialects of some single ancient language, or a few languages. Evidently linguistic assimilation played a major role, while the gene pool remained the same. The fact that ancient Caucasian language shared common origins with now extinct languages of the Near East has today been proven. The region that interests us included eastern Anatolia, the Armenian highlands, and Iranian Azerbaijan. At the same time, we should remember that “the original ethnic territories of the ancestors of the Georgians and Armenians were in close proximity to each other” [Ап-  
тунюнов 2019: 177]. In essence, the ancestral homeland of the Indo-Europeans was located in these parts. The Anatolians were the first to branch off from the Indo-European “trunk”. It follows that the Saspis also belonged to this linguo-geographical area.

Incidentally, the correspondence between the Chuvash *r* and *l* — and the Turkic *z* and *š* is characteristic of the Mongols and Tungus as well. Linguistically, the Chuvash are considered the sole living descendants of the Onogurs as speakers of an *r*-Turkic language [Golden 2013: 49]. At the same time, the Chuvash and Yakut languages are known for deviating from the common Turkic system of consonants. This was already a feature of Chuvash back in early times, as is demonstrated by some words that have come down as loan words in Hungarian (the Magyars’ language), as well as the few remnants surviving from the languages of the Danube Bulgars and the Huns. The *r/l* sound shift occurs in Transcaucasian languages too, for example Hittite *ḫawarkina/ḫawalkina* “iron” (cf. Chuvash *kăvar* “burning coal”); Hittite *pur*, Georgian *pir*, Svanetian *pil* “mouth” [Иванов 1979: 112, 120].

Lexical correspondences between Georgian and Chuvash are naturally explained by the period of proximity in the Caucasus or, perhaps, an ancient language kinship. Scholars cite a whole list of such word pairs. For instance, Chuvash *sivě* — Georgian *.tsivi* “cold”; *chir* — *chiri* “illness”; *san* — *shen* “thy”; *man* “my” — *me* “I”; *kěpe* — *kaba* “dress, shirt”; *kachchă* “lad, young man” — *katsi* “man”; *çar* — *dzhari* “army”; *supăn* — *saponi* “soap”; *tupa* — *tapa* “frying pan”; *tări* — *torolo* “skylark”; *taka* — *tkha* “goat, ram”; *khalăkh* — *khalkhi* “people”; *chul* — *t'al* “stone, flint”. Also Chuvash *kart(a)* — Georgian *kart* “enclosure” (cf. *kart* → the ethnonym *Kartveli*, apparently from the Persian *kar*), and the Chuvash *çër* — Georgian-Svanetian *\*ser* “night” [Климов, Халилов 2003: 33–34].

The Georgian tribes’ adjacence to and contacts with the ancestors of the Hittites and other members of the Indo-European language family led to many lexical borrowings. Some words in this category also found their way into Chuvash, for example Hittite *tete* — Georgian *didi* “big, large” [Мухелишвили 2015: 12–13] — Chuvash *tete* (in phonetic transcription — *dede*) “elder brother, uncle”.

The Georgian (and Megrelian) word *bayana* “infant” may have an echo in the Chuvash *pukane/pokania/pukhanian* meaning “doll”. In any event, Vasily Egorov, the compiler of an etymological dictionary of Chuvash, confessed to being unable to find any related words in Turkic languages [Егоров 1964: 163]. There are also direct structural-semantic matches, such as the Georgian *ces-rigi* and the Chuvash *iăla-iěrke*, both meaning “rite, ritual”<sup>1</sup>. All this testifies as a minimum to close contacts between the Saspis and Georgian tribes.

### 6. Conclusion

Taken together, Herodotus’ topographical coordinates leave no room to distrust the historical accuracy of the Saspis’ place of habitation in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Drawing on other sources, it is possible to enlarge that time span to cover the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. In that period, the Saspis occupied a territory from Media to Colchis, between the Medes and the Colchians, with the former in the south and the latter to the north by the Phasis River. The

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my Teacher, S. A. Arutyunov, for pointing this out.

Matieni mountains, alongside which the Sapirs dwelt, are considered to be those near Erzurum. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and then in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the Sapirs are recorded by Apollonius of

Rhodes and Herodian respectively to inhabit the valley of the Chorokh alongside the Bechyres and Byzeres tribes.

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