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WHAT'S BEHIND AN EPIC NAME

The heroic Ossetian epos Nartiad is, undoubtedly, one of the oldest folk epics in the world. It has come down to us from times immemorial in two forms – in the form of kadags (epic songs, sagas) and tales. The roots of epos go back to Scythian times, but some plots, names of heroes and gods of the epos are of Aryan and even Indo-European origin.

A number of Caucasian peoples have their national versions of the epos, but its core is, as it was proved by Vsevolod Miller, Georges Dumesil, Vasily Abaev and other renowned scholars, Ossetian (Alanian).

Makharbek Tuganov was the first who noticed that Narta had had three social groups. His observation had a far-reaching effect. Later, professor G. Dumezil proved that this tripartite structure of society was characteristic of Indo-Iranian (Aryan) community and, still later, he came to the conclusion that the tripartition was an Indo-European feature.

Nartiad retained these features of Indo-European ideology. The Narta society consisted of three groups: the caste of the wise or priests (Alagata), the caste of warriors (Akhsartaggata) and the caste of cattle-breeders and cultivators (Borata). These three groups incessantly fought with each other for supremacy and, at last, the Akhsartaggata came out victorious.

The exceptional antiquity of Nartiad is supported by solid facts. The term kadag itself is undoubtedly of Aryan origin; cf. Sanskrit **gatha** "story", "legend", **gathika** "an epic song", "verse", etc.

Among the theonyms there are "pure" Aryan names. Afsati – god of wild Animals – is widely known in Aryan world; cf. Indian **Pashupati** "Lord of Wild Animals". Undoubtedly, the patron of Wild Animals was known throughout the Scythian World. For instance, on a large gold pendants from one of Afghanistan burials they found the type of «Mistress of Animals» which attracted the attention of Swati Ray, an expert in Scythian archeology (India). The name of the Scythian main goddess **Tabiti** of Herodotus (5th BC) has also

an old Indian analogue – **Tapati** "Heat", "the Hot One". Tapati was one of the daughters of the Sun-god, Suriya. In modern Nartiad **Safa** < **Tapati** is a masculine protector of Hearth.

The name of Zarathushtra's family was **Spitama**. According to popular tradition, one of the forefathers of Ossetic people was **Spitama** > **Sidamon**. Professor V. Abaev thinks that Spitama was a Scythian.

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One of the most conspicuous figures in Nartiad is Acamaz. He was a masterful player on the golden flute, which the Lord of Wild Animals Afsati had given his father. The historic prototype of this hero was Atamaz/Attamaz "Atei the Great". The latter was the most celebrated ruler of Scythia who reigned over his country for several decades. Gold coins with his name and portrait were in circulation for a long time. Ancient writers assert that Ateios captivated the famous Greek musician Ismenius, who used to play and sing at his court. In 339 BC the recalcitrant old warrior fell in a pitched battle. He was then ...90 years old. I maintain that Atamaz/Attamaz became a hero of popular songs and ballads and, later on, an epic hero, i.e. Acamaz.

One of the celebrated heroes of the Caucasus was Soslan. He was a well-known military leader and consort of Georgian ruler Tamar (12-13 cc). Later, Soslan became an epic hero, one of legendary Narta guppursars (axis lords, leading figures). Moreover, he was a protégé of the main god Safa (goddess?) and heavenly court. Accordingly, the celestials presented him with valuable gifts. (Another Scythian-Nartan common motif!)

One of the oldest kadags in Nartiad is "How Satana Became Uruzmag's Wife". It's about incest marriage of Uruzmag and his sister – sorceress Satana. The initiative of the marriage was with Satana. When Uruzmag found out that he had spent the night with his sister, he was deeply depressed. He thought that henceforth they would be a laughing-stock in Nartistan. So, Satana decided to bring relief to his brother-husband. She advised him to circumride the Narta village three times on an ass with his back to front, and bring an account of his observation. When people saw their leader in this wise they started roaring with laughter. His second ride they met rather indifferently. When Uruzmag appeared for the third time the people began to grumble at the foolery of their leader. Having returned home, Uruzmag gave Satana an account of what he had seen and heard. The sister told him that their marriage would be a subject of gossip only first days, that later it would be clean forgot.

Satana's words proved prophetic.

Sonya Fritz and Jost Gippert think that the story of Satana and Uruzmag go back to the period of Indo-European matriarchy. Cf. Indian Yama and his

twin-sister Yami. When Yama declined his sister's claim she forcefully asked: "Please embrace me, for we two are only human beings and if have no children, there will be no one left when we die". (The same motif is in old Iranian folklore: twins Yima and Yimak are also a married couple).

One more example. Satana went to the relatives of her mother to give birth to a boy. (Another feature of matriarchy!) Uruzmag had not the slightest idea of it. Later, father and son met and their meeting appeared fatal to the son. (Cf. the story of Persian Rustam and Suhrab in "Shah-Name" by Firdousi, the first genius among the seven masters of the Persian Parnassus, as R.W. Emerson states).

I have mentioned only several plots and themes of Aryan and Indo-European origin out of many. I am sure that the old Iron – Ossetic kadags are an invaluable source for students of comparative folkloric studies.

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The stormy events of the 13th century in Mongolia produced a great effect on the Alans of different regions, the bulk being in North Caucasus. (The Alans of other regions, in forms of national pockets around the Black sea, the Aral sea, Lower Volga, North Caucasus etc).

At that time the situation in Alania was aggravated by internecine contradictions and endless quarrels of princes. Later, during the Mongolian expansion, many Alanian feudal nobles deserted to the invaders to preserve their class interests. Generations of those nobles and their subjects faithfully served the Mongolian khans. The other Alans, according to Plano Karpini and Rubrouck, continued their courageous fight for their independence. For instance, the Mongols besieged an Alanian fortress and couldn't capture it during twelve years.

As to the pro-Mongolian Alans, we can state that they took part in many military operations in East and West. It's worthy of note that during Monke's reign "la Garde du Khan fut formée de 1 000 cavaliers Alanes", professor Georges de Roerich says. – si l'on concidère la sévérité au recrutement de cette Garde; ce choix fut un honneur exceptionnel".

The Asuds of today's Mongolian nation are the descendants of the military forces of those far-off days,

I've given these brief data in order to show the complexity of relations between Mongols and Alans (Assi, Asud).

The Chinese chronicles give ample material on Alans in Mongolian empire. Some of them held high administrative and military posts. Later, they were incorporated into the right wing of the Mongol nation (baraghun ghar) that is among the West Mongol tribes.

The subsequent fate of Alans (Asuds) in Mongolia is most interesting but it must be considered separately.

The Mongolian influence on Alanic folklore, language and customs is rather perceptible. Generally known epos Nartiad is an evidence for this statement.

In Nartiad we have found a number of Mongolian names. Some of them are historical names, the others were assimilated with the borrowed Mongolian legend of Genghis-khan's origin.

The names of the first group deal with well-known Mongolian leaders. These are **Qandzargas** <Mong. **Khan Genghis**; **Sainag-aldar** <Mong. **Sainkhan** (Batu); **Balgha** <Mong. **Berka** (Batu's brother); **Tari furt Nokar** < Mong. **Tatar's son Nokay**. The origin of the first two epic names was explained by professor V.Abaev. The etymologies of other names were substantiated by the author of these lines,

It is understandable that epic songs do not expound the history as it was, and the historic names in epic songs do not picture their bearers' exploits realistically. Epos depicts historical heroes and their exploits in accordance with the ideological and aesthetic needs of the society at the given epoch.

The Sacred Legend of Mongols compiled in the 13th century is one of the most important historical memorials, and it expounds the history of Mongols and glorifies Genghis-khan and his family.

One of the most interesting characters in Nartiad is above-mentioned Qandzargas < Khan Ghengis, a winged giant with seven heads. As the ruler of Universe, he flies all over his domain, kidnaps beautiful maidens to keep them as prisoners. He is depicted as a heartless tormentor who sucks the blood of his beautiful captives.

Once young Narta hero Batradz went out in search of Qandzargas. He found him sleeping; two beauties were sitting around him with fans. They warned him that their tormentor was practically weapon-proof: the giant could be killed only with his own sword, which was kept in a chest with a secret lock. Batradz addressed the chest in Khatiag (Chinese) and it opened. The hero snatched the magic sword of Qandzargas and dealt him a mighty stroke. It severed the giant's six heads from his body, but the seventh head reproved Batradz for his ignoble action:

Oh, illustrious Batradz, – he said, –
You shouldn't strike a sleeping man!
The young hero made of attempt to clear himself.
– That is true, – answered Batradz,
But you offended Narta terribly,
And I couldn't bear it any longer.

Then Qandzargas entreated his opponent to do him a favour and cut his last head off. The latter said that his clan's custom was to strike only once.

As we've seen, Qandzargas is blamed for kidnapping and torturing maidens. This motif is widely-spread and we think it had existed in Alanic tales long before the Mongolian expansion. In this Narta kadag (epic song, saga) the illustrious hero's assault is qualified as an un-knightly action and Batradz admits it, but excuses himself by saying he could not restrain himself. (A lame excuse!) It is interesting to note that Batradz killed Sainag-aldar < Sayin-khan, i.e. Batu in the same wise. It's an ordinary way of dealing with enemies in folklore: if the adversary happens to be invincible, he has to be overcome by magic, sorcery, deceit etc.

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As we have seen, in Alanic (Ossetic) kadags there are a lot of names of different origin. These names are meaningful in their own way. However, one shouldn't forget that the epic proper-names belong to art and aesthetics, not to History. But if a student of History ignores the names of olden days, he will lose the opportunity to comprehend ... the Truth of History.