

An Introductory Account of

Circassian Literature

АДЫГЭ ЛИТЕРАТУРЭ: ХЭЗЫГЪЭГЪУАЗЭ

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ORATORY had been a well-developed art in Circassia since time immemorial. Foster-boys were instructed in rhetoric from an early age, and many graduates went on to become past masters in this art. The word *Adigebze* [адыгэбзэ], Circassian language, acquired a specialized sense of a nice and serious speech. Toasts have maintained their role as important components of oral literature, besides their religious significance. These literary genres went through adverse circumstances starting from the end of the 18th century, but started to recover by the end of the 19th.

Western travellers and scholars have provided conflicting accounts as to the level of development of Circassian literature. According to the German scholar, F. Bodenstedt, who visited the Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century, for the Circassian, ‘Poetry is both a repository of national wisdom and sagacity, a guide to noble action, and the ultimate arbiter ... It is the moralizer and the preventer of evil deeds.’¹ Paul B. Henze wrote, ‘Circassians had a rich tradition of oral poetry. Oratory was a highly developed art. Leaders gained as much renown for their speechmaking ability as for their skill in battle’ (P. Henze, 1992, p71).² On the other hand, W. E. Curtis, who toured the Caucasus early in the 20th century, claimed that the Circassians had no literature, but ‘their poets have written many charming lines and there are two or three local histories of merit’ (1911, p255).³ His account of the Circassians was patronizing, to say the least, and dismissed literary traditions that stretched back for hundreds of years.

¹ Bodenstedt, F., *Die Völker des Kaukasus und ihre freheitskämpfe gegen die Russen: Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Geschichte des Orients*, Frankfurt-am-Main: Verlag Lizius, 1849 (second edition); reworked in 2 vols 1855. — *Les peuples du Caucase et leur guerre d’indépendance contre la Russie*, Paris, 1859.

² Henze, P., ‘Circassian Resistance to Russia’, in M. Bennigsen-Broxup (ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, London: C. Hurst & Co (Publishers) LTD, 1992, pp 62-111.

³ Curtis, W. E., *Around the Black Sea. Asia Minor, Armenia, Caucasus, Circassia, Daghestan, the Crimea, Roumania*, New York, 1911; reprinted: LULU PR, 2008.

It had been the official view during the Soviet period, that the Circassians had no literature whatsoever before establishment of Soviet power. The conception, birth and perfect development of Circassian literature took place under the guiding hand of the Russian 'Big Brother.' Communist ideology did not allow leeway for ideas that are incompatible with it. The procession of writers that started to emerge almost a century before were a source of embarrassment, and they were plain ignored or mentioned in passing when inevitable.

Soviet-era Adiga writers propagated this myth. In the foreword to his collection of poems *Starlit Hours*, Alim Keshokov (Ch'ischoqwe) wrote that 'more important still is the temporal factor, the fact that the conception and the entire development of Kabardian literature, of which this book is a part, has occurred within the last fifty years (1981, p15).⁴

For all his literary genius, Keshokov had done Adiga literature great injustice. He went further and almost demanded leniency of the Western reader on account of the 'youth' of the literary tradition to which his works belonged. There was also a trace of want of confidence. But it was also a case of a writer toeing Party line, aware that literary suffocation, and even liquidation, would be the lot of nay-sayers. Another giant, Khachim Teunov (Теунэ Хьэчим; Teiwine Hechiym), dedicated a whole volume, having the eerie title *The New Flood*, to this theme in 1952.⁵

In fact, as will be shown later, Circassian literature was written well before communist times, and certainly had attained a high level of development long before the Russians made their presence felt in the 16th century. It had been preserved in national memory thanks to the roving minstrels. Some extant tales go back almost 1,500 years, to the time of early Christianity in the Caucasus. In 1860, V. Kusikov published *On the Poetry of the Circassians* in Stavropol. In 1924, a collection of Adigean literary material was published in Moscow. By 1929, a work on the history of Kabardian literature had already been published by Chamozyokov.

Oral tradition consists of thousands of tales and stories that take up almost every theme in the life of ancient Circassians. There are accounts of the origins of the Adiga nation, the peoples with whom they established contacts, heroes and anti-heroes, historical events and so on.

When literature was formalized in the Soviet period, writers had a very rich tradition to fall back upon, and many mature works were produced early on. In fact, they can be regarded as a continuation of the old institution. Despite the limitations imposed by ideology and the narrow scope of permissible themes, classic works were penned that have kept their value to this day.

⁴ Keshokov (Ch'ischoqwe), A., *Starlit Hours*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981.

⁵ Teunov (Teiwine), Kh., *Novi potok* [The New Flood], Moscow: Sovetski pisatel, 1952.

The Nart Epos

The corpus of the Nart Sagas is arguably the most essential ingredient of Circassian culture. It is as important to the Circassian ethos as Greek mythology is to Western Civilization. In fact, NW Caucasians and Greeks on the Eastern Shore of the Black Sea co-existed for more than a thousand years, during which some cultural exchanges must have taken place. This would explain similarities in some of their mythical tales.

Though much less known than their Greek counterparts, the Nart epic tales are no less developed. The heroism, sagacity, guile and oftentimes naked brutality of the Nart heroes and demi-gods are more than matches to those of the Greek Pantheon. In the first stanza of the ‘Song of the Narts,’ the double-edged sword is likened to a rabid dog, a graphic illustration of unbridled ferocity:

My great sabre is as fearsome as a crazed hound,
Streaming crimson blood down its twosome fangs.

Си джатэжьурэ, уой дуней, хьэшхьэрылуэдзэ,
И дзэпкьитыmkIэ, уой, лъыр йожэxри.

The age of the Epos can be inferred indirectly from the themes broached. In the episode ‘Sosriqwe Maf’e Qeih’ («СОСРЫКЪУЭ МАФІЭ КЪЕХЪ»; ‘Sosriqwe Fetches Fire’) the hero of the tale takes council with his steed Tx’wezchey (Тхъуэжьей; literally: Little Dun). This takes us back to the times when animals were thought to have human-like characteristics:

— Мырмэ, си Тхъуэжьей ажэ, Жэрхэри зыщІэмыхъэж.	— ‘My Tx’wezchey, The fleetest of them all.
Мыр Инмэ и унэщ, И щхъэ-и лъэ зэгъэкъуащ.	This is the Giant’s mound, His feet are tucked under his head.
МафІэр и кум илгыжщ, Уэ, Инри мэжей.	The fire is in the middle, And the Ogre is asleep.
Уэ, си Тхъуэжьей ажэ, МафІэр сыткІи фІэтхъын? — жи.	Now, my fleet Tx’wezchey, Tell me, pray, how to steal a brand?’
— Армэ, СосрыкъуапщІэ, Армэ, лы фІыщІэ гъущІынэ.	— ‘Swarthy Sosriqwe, The iron-eyed darksome man.
Мыдэ, емынэ шу, Сэ си щІыб къэшэс.	Most dashing horseman, Ride on my back.
Сэ си шы лъэ макъым Хъэ лъэ макъ зезгъэщІынщ.	I shall turn the clatter of my hooves Into the tamer tread of a hound.

Сэ си хьэ лъэ макъым Джэду лъэ макъ везгъэщыныщ.	[As we draw nearer,] my hound footsteps I shall make as soft as a feline's.
Хьэлъэ-фIалъэ зизгъэуэнщи, Зы пхъэ дзакIи къэддыгъуныщ.	We shall sneak up And snatch a fire-brand.'

Sergei V. Rjabchikov traces a record of this legend to the third century BC on the Maikop Slab.⁶ According to Yuri Libedinsky, the Epos dates back to the period between the 12th and eighth centuries BC.⁷ In the 1950s, celebrations were held in the North Caucasus commemorating the millennium of the birth of the legends. The former hypothesis seems more probable because it allows possibility of interaction between Greek and North Caucasian civilizations. If there is truth in the hypothesis that the *Chints* (чынт) of the Nart era were none other than the historical Sinds, then the older date must be correct. In addition, dating the age of heroism and formation of the core Circassian culture to the great historical lacuna causes discomfort.

⁶ Sergei V. Rjabchikov, 'The Scythians, Sarmatians, Meotians, Russians and Circassians: Interpretation of the Ancient Cultures', in *The Slavonic Antiquity*, 1999, <<http://public.kubsu.ru/~usr02898/sl2.htm>>. 'It is known that the Circassian hero (*nart*) *Sosruko* (*Sausryk'u*) was connected with the solar myths (Kaloiev, B. A., Mizhaev, M. I., and Salakaya, S. H., 'Narty [The Narts]', in: S. A. Tokarev (ed.) *Mify narodov mira*, vol. 2, Moscow: Sovetskaya Ènsiklopediya, pp 199-201, 1992, p200). He returned the fire to other heroes as well (Mizhaev, M. I., 'Sosruko [Nart Sosriqwe]', in: S. A. Tokarev (ed.) *Mify narodov mira*, vol. 2, Moscow: Sovetskaya Ènsiklopediya, 1992, p464). The following record – *Mafa narata Sushe-riko* – is written down on the [Meotian=ancient Circassian] Maikop slab (the 3rd c. B.C.) with the help of the signs of the Linear B (Linear A) (Sergei V. Rjabchikov, *Drevnie texty slavyan i adygov* [Ancient Texts of the Slavs and Circassians], Krasnodar: Torgovo-promyshlennaya palata Krasnodarskogo kraja, 1998, p23). The text means 'The fire (day) of the hero (by the name) Dryness/Sun-King'. Here the name *Sushe-riko* (*Sosruko*, *Sausryk'u*) consists of the word *sushe* (cf. Russian *sush'* 'dry place', *suhoj* 'dry' and Old Indian *surya* 'the sun') and of the word *riko* (cf. Latin *rex*, Etruscan *luc-*, Old Indian *rajan* 'king', German *Reich* 'state', and even Polynesian *ariki* 'chief'). I think that *Sushe-[riko]* is a variant of the name of the Indo-Aryan god *Surya* 'The Sun' who is represented as the eye of the deities *Mitra*, *Varuna*, and *Agni*; sometimes this god is equal to *Savitar*. Interestingly, the fragment of a Tmutarakan' amphora contains the word *sush* 'dryness' and the picture of an eye (Sergei V. Rjabchikov, *Tainstvennaya Tmutarakan'*, Krasnodar: Torgovo-promyshlennaya palata Krasnodarskogo kraja, 1998, pp 22-3). On the other hand, the inhabitants of the ancient Russian town Tmutarakan' worshipped, by hypothesis, the god *Hors*. The name of *Tmutarakan'* (cf. Russian *t'ma* 'darkness, gloom' and *tarashchit* (*glaza*) 'to goggle') may be a symbol of the death and resurrection of the Egyptian/Scythian deities *Horus* and *Osiris*. In the Abkhazian mythology *Hudysh* is connected with *Sasrykva* (the Abkhazian variant of Circassian *Sosruko*). Alternatively, according to the Indo-Aryan mythology, *Surya* competed with *Etasha*. The names *Hudysh* and *Etasha* are similar. Several features of the hero *Sosruko* are preserved in the Russian fairytale character *Koshchei Bessmertny*. In the Circassian mythology there are *Thozhey* [*Tx'we-zchey*], the horse of the hero *Sosruko*, and his enemy, the old woman *Uorsar* [*Werser*] (Mizhaev, 1992). I read the name *Thozhey* as *T hozhey* 'This is a fast (horse) or the sun', cf. Russian *hod* 'motion; movement', German *heiß* 'hot', English *hot*, *heat*. The name *Uorsar* (*Werser*) can be divided into the two words, *Uor sar*, cf. Russian *vor zari* 'thief of the dawn'.'

⁷ In preface to *Narti: Kabardinski èpos* [The Narts: A Kabardian Epos], Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1951, pp 8-18.

The legends of the Narts had been transmitted orally by storytellers who acted as guardians of national mythology. Although these tales are undoubtedly of ancient origin, their language underwent some lexical changes that reflected the introduction of new technology and loan words. For example, the adoption of the musket by the Circassians incorporated it retroactively as one of the weapons of the Narts. In addition, the original significance of some terms has been lost. There might have also been some changes in the contents of the stories, perhaps to suit the purposes and styles of the storytellers. The existence of different and sometimes divergent versions gives credence to this view.

There is an ongoing dispute as to the true originators of the epic. The contention is between Ossetic and North Caucasian origins. Dumézil's verdict went in favour of an Indo-European descent, which was hotly contested by Adiga scholars, such as Asker Hedeghel'e. Even if a non-Caucasian origin were proved, the value of the Sagas would not be diminished in the least. As time went by, North Caucasian variants assumed a local character as they absorbed the customs and mores of the indigenes, and became a depository of their literary treasures.

Some students and scholars of Celtic culture are paying more attention to the Nart Epos as a possible connection to the Arthurian and Holy Grail legends is perceived.⁸ The presence of a Sarmatian legion in the Roman army in the British Isles gives credence to this hypothesis. The Iranian-speaking Sarmatians might have picked up a portion of tales during their sojourn in the North Caucasus and then spread it in Celtic Britain. The tests of strength and worthiness of two of the heroes in the two epics are similar. Sosriqwe (Сосрыкъуэ) used to sneak to *Lhepsch's* (Лъэпщ) smithy to try to lift the anvil, which was rooted down to the seventh layer of earth—a prerequisite feat for joining the council of the elders. Arthur, on the other hand, had to pull a sword, Excalibur, from a stone anchored by an anvil to prove his claim to sovereignty.

Both epics encapsulated the codes of chivalry of the Circassians and Medieval Europeans. Non-Celts, especially the French, whole-heartedly embraced the Arthurian legends, which gradually lost their purely Celtic character as they absorbed the knightly mores of the Continentals.

⁸ See for example:

Arbuthnot, N., *A Re-evaluation of the Proposed Connection between the Nart Sagas and the Arthurian Legends*, MA Thesis in Cultural Anthropology, McMaster University, Toronto, British Columbia, Canada, 1988.

Littleton, C. S., 'The Holy Grail, the Cauldron of Annwn, and the Narty-Amonga, a Further Note on the Sarmatian Connection', in *Journal of American Folklore*, 92, 1979, pp 326-33.

Littleton, C. S. and Thomas, A. C., 'The Sarmatian Connection: New Light on the Origin of the Arthurian and Holy Grail Legends', in *Journal of American Folklore*, 91, 1978, pp 513-27.

Collection⁹

The tales, which are of various lengths, have come down to us in prose and verse. The first serious attempt at collecting these tales was made by Shora Negwme (Нэрымэ Шорэ; Nogmov) in the first half of the 19th century.¹⁰ Sulht'an Khan-Girey, the famous Circassian scholar, published a series of stories from the Epos starting in 1841 in the *Russian Herald*, and later in 1846 in the newspaper *Kavkaz*. Kazi Atazhukin, a native Kabardian, published a collection of Nart tales in 1864 in Tiflis. Pagwe Tambiy (Tambiev) (1825-1891) collaborated with L. G. Lopatinsky in collecting and studying some tales. His collections of texts, proverbs, songs, and legends were published posthumously. Qazi Hetix'wschoqwe (1841-1899) also produced some fine works. Recently there has been a more systematic process of collection and publication by Circassian scholars who are cognizant of the role that these might play in effecting cultural renaissance. In addition, the orally transmitted music has been written down. Not only sources in the Caucasus were tapped, but also the considerable oral traditions preserved by the diaspora Circassians were drawn upon.

One of the most important 20th century scholars of the Nart Sagas is Ziramikw Qardenghwsch'. Born in 1918 in Kabarda, he embarked on collecting many tales and published a number of monumental works, thus rendering his native literature a great service. In addition, he recorded many Nart anthems and he is considered a latter-day bard. The seven volumes of *The Narts: Circassian Epos* compiled by Hedeghel'e, make the largest published work on the subject. Western scholars, such as the late Georges Dumézil and, more recently, John Colarusso, did much research on the subject and have published many tomes on it. However, more work still needs to be done in this regard.

⁹ There is a comprehensive bibliography of works on Circassian mythology published in the 19th and early 20th centuries in A. I. Alieva and A. M. Gutova, *Fol'klor adigov v zapisyakh i publikatsiyakh XIX—nachala XX v* [The Folklore of the Circassians in the Records and Publications in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries], Nalchik: The Kabardino-Balkarian Science and Research Institute of History, Philology and Economics, 1979, pp 398-402.

¹⁰ Nogmov, Sh. B., *Istoriya adikheiskogo [adigeiskogo] naroda* [History of the Circassian Nation], Tiflis (Tbilisi): Kavkazki kalendar [Caucasian Calendar], 1861; republished: Nalchik, 1947; Nalchik: Kabardino-Balkarian Book Press, 1958 (in Circassian and Russian); Nalchik: Elbrus Book Press, 1982, 1994. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.circassianlibrary.org/library.php?lang=en&mn=2&sbmn=1>> (accessed 1 January 2009); Online. Available HTTP: <<http://nogmov.kbsu.ru/>> (accessed 1 January 2009). [Compiled in accordance with the legends and oral traditions of the Kabardians]

— *Geschichte des Adygejischen Volkes. Die Sagen und Lieder des Tscherkessen-völks*, translated by A. Bergé, Leipzig, 1866.

— *АДЫГЭ НАРОДЫМ И ТХЫДЭ. Adige Narodim yi Txide* [History of the Adigey People], Nalchik: Kabardino-Balkarian Book Press, 1958.



Asker Hedeghel'e is an iconic researcher and folklorist.

It is markworthy that after World War II the Circassian and Ossetic versions of the Epos were withdrawn for some time for 'treatment' and removal of 'elements of an ideology foreign to the people.' (V. Astemirov, 1959, p94)

Qualities of the Narts

The collective qualities of the Narts were captured in the story 'We Choose to Die Young and Famous.' God sent an avian messenger to the Narts with the inquiry, 'Do you want to remain few and live short, but heroic and honourable lives, with the memory of your feats living forever and ay, or would you prefer to indulge in the pleasures of the body, multiply and live longer lives without dignity nor self-respect?' The Narts replied thus:

Ephemeral though our lives may be,
Our names shall forever resound.

—
Without forsaking our truthful ways,
May justice keep guiding our path!

—
May we live with free and easy hearts,
Unfluttered by adversity and woe!

The principal protagonists of the Epos encapsulate the characteristics most cherished by ancient Circassians and Abkhazians. Satanay, the matriarch, was the epitome of wisdom and physical perfection. Her beauty was legendary and she was sought after by notable Narts for marriage. A lovely flower still bears her name (the drop-wort, Filipendula). The story of the birth of Sosriqwe bears witness to the uncontrollable effect she had on men. As she sat on her haunches doing the laundry by the river, the cow-herd, Zhemix'we, who was tending his bevy on the other side of the stream, seeing her uncovered curvaceous and calipigian limbs, was

unable to hold back his semen (*nafsi*) as it was ejected across the water on the stone beside her. The stone later engendered Sosriqwe. This is the Circassian version of the Immaculate Conception, where Lady Satanay is distanced from sin.

She was also famous for her inventiveness. She discovered winemaking by planting the seeds snatched by Sosriqwe from the abode of the gods, thus giving the Narts their first taste of the elixir. It was she who discovered that plants needed water for life. The Narts turned to her for council and advice in times of national calamities, and she was able to avert many disasters that could have annihilated the Nart nation. Traditionally, North Caucasian matriarchism is considered to have reached its acme in her lifetime.

However, it is not in the nature of the tales to depict perfect characters, and despite the fantasticism, some measure of realism was injected by the originators and propagators in terms of emphasizing the dual nature of the protagonists. Satanay practised witchcraft and was the archetypal black magic woman. Although she was more associated with white magic, she invoked the black variety and its cunning to save her pet son Sosriqwe many times from certain death. She could also be as bitchy as the next vixen, as her acerbic invective against Lhepsch in the tale ‘How Satanay and Lhepsch fell out with one another’ so graphically illustrates.

Despite Sosriqwe’s puny stature and darkish hue, he proved to be the most cunning and resourceful amongst the Narts. The story of how he fetched fire is a graphic illustration of his quick wit and wile. In some stories, he is portrayed as an anti-hero, accused of machinations against the Narts. It is mostly in Shapsugh stories that these uncomplimentary traits are lamented. Although many Narts surpassed him in physical strength and military acumen, they always held him in great esteem and respect. The fact that he led them back after fetching fire is a good testimony to that effect.

Nisrenzchach’e was the Caucasian Prometheus. Like his Greek counterpart, the Nart hero was accused of hubris and he was chained to the top of one of the twin peaks of Mount Elbrus.¹¹ The vulture kept preying on his heart, and Nisren-beard shuddered every now and then trying to throw away the shackles. The Earth trembled, his chains knocked against one other sending sparks as if from striking spears, making thunderous noises. His breath issued forth like uncontrollable gales. His heart-rending moans and groans were like rumbles coming from the centre of the Earth. The hot streams running down the lofty Mount were his bitter tears.

Treachery and intrigue figured high among Nart themes. However, malfeasance always rebounded on the initiator—a case of evil coming home to roost. In a blood-curdling episode of the Epos, one of the most ferocious Narts, sensing the perfidy of a group of back-stabbers who wanted him out of the scene and his impending doom, went berserk and unleashed his rabid sword which severed the heads and limbs of the machinators.

The Nart Epic encapsulates the code of chivalry of the Circassians. The tales (of which more than 700 have been recorded) give the reader insights into the ancient culture and mores of the Northwest Caucasians (and

¹¹ In Circassian mythology, it was Nart Sosriqwe, minion of the gods and his doting mother, Lady Satanay, who stole fire from the abode of the giant.

the influences from other cultures that they have come in contact with). There were many Nart characters, the most famous of whom, besides those mentioned above, were: Bedinoqwe, X'imisch, Beterez, Yimis, Sibilshiy, Sosim, Zchinduzchach'e (Owl-beard), Areqshu, Toteresh, Ashe, Ashemez, Wezirmes, Wezirmej, 'Ediyixw, and her husband Psebide. Each one of these embodied unique attributes besides the common Nart qualities. There were also giants, pigmies, predatory enemies, anti-heroes, gods, anti-gods, demi-gods who combined both human and god-like characteristics, not forgetting Caucasian Medusas casting their petrifying eyes upon unwary fools and heroes, and so on.

Horses enjoyed a high status among the Narts, who bestowed upon them personal names. The steeds possessed extraordinary strength and powers of reason, capable of fantastic feats and rational counsel and advice. They engendered loyalty in their owners.

The Nart legends may be used as powerful means of inculcating desirable characteristics in young people. Being the major depository of Circassian Etiquette, positive aspects could be emphasized and used as exhortations. For example, in the story 'Sosriqwe and Toteresh,' the invincible Toteresh son of Albech gives Sosriqwe a leave of execution until the next morning, the time of their epic duel on Mount Hereme. 'He who forfeits a date was not born a man by his mother,' he said as he let Sosriqwe go. This expression could be used to counteract procrastination and indifference, two rampant maladies in backward societies. Sosriqwe was able to prevail over Toteresh by using ruse and magic invoked by his protective mother, Satanay.

In the tale 'Meeting of Sosriqwe and 'Ediyixw,' [*The Narts*, Nalchik, pp 124 ff], the self-conceit of Psebide (literally: 'Tenacious of Life') led to his agonizing death. A single word of gratitude for her help would have been enough to appease 'Ediyixw, his wife. But, no. He was blinded by conceit and refused to acknowledge her role, which forced her to withhold the light of her hand ('Ediyixw: 'edy = forearm and wrist, xw = white), which he previously used to gain advantage over his adversaries and thus obtain great plunder. After a lengthy and tortuous adventure sans the light of his wife's arm, the obstinate Nart found his death in the River Yinzhiy, which he thought he could cross, since Sosriqwe possessed the ability to cross the treacherous and violent river without difficulty, and he was not to be outdone by anyone in anything.

Just after his death, 'Ediyixw learned the shocking fact that her ex-husband was not only self-conceited, but that he was narcissistic—his love for himself precluded any feeling for other people, including his adoring wife. As she made to undo the majestic tumulus she erected on his grave, Sosriqwe stopped her saying: 'You toiled to build it. Now, he's simply not worth the bother to remove it.' The lifeless dark mound was left as a stark reminder of the fate of self-centred people.

In a reminder of the relativity of our systems of morals and how wrong and right have been flitting across the ethical divide, some practices, which nowadays would be considered utterly repulsive, were in the usual run of affairs. For example, there was nothing morbid about necrophily. On at least two separate occasions, Sosriqwe committed the creepy act with his dead paramours, after digging them up from their graves. According to the tale 'Thus did Sosriqwe pass through the hole of the hip bone riding his steed,' the warped offspring of necrophilia belonged to the Underworld, unable to join Nart society (A. Hedeghel'e, 1968-71, vol. 2, pp 193 ff).

'Historical' Poems & Tales

Many of the ancient poems and stories were on historical and heroic themes. Nogmov collected specimens of these works to reconstruct a skeletal treatise on Adiga history. Some pieces of poetry go back to hundreds of years. An epic poem recounts one episode of the bloody wars the Circassians waged against the invading Goths:

Oh, Fatherland of Bakhsan son of Dow!
Though his soul has left his body,
Do not allow the Goths to ruffle your dignity!
And if they make to enthrall you,
Throw their yoke off your shoulders!

It was this self-same Bakhsan whose sister commissioned a statue to be erected in his memory.



The first modern Circassian historian and folklorist, Shora Negwme preserved many of the legends and tales of the Circassians.

The horrible memory of the Huns and their leader, Attila, was preserved in the following stanza:

And the Lord did not forsake us,
He bestowed his mercy upon us,
He restored our mounts and vales
After the 'Scourge of God' was no more!

Legend has it that in celebration of this event, Mount Shad (Elbrus) was renamed the 'Blessed Hill.'

Bayan, the treacherous khan of the bloodthirsty Avars, received an ample share of polemic on account of his massacre of the cream of Circassian elders:

Our Saint and Saviour Elija,
Mighty and Benevolent!
Send your scourge from above,
And undo Baykan's steed
With your pious hand,
Purer than our eternal snows.

Classical Literature

One of the principal milestones in the development of literature is the birth of plot. According to the Circassian scholar and writer Askerbi T. Shortan, the first evidence of plot can be found in the mythological motifs of the tale ‘Psherihizchatse’ («ПШЭРЫХЫЖЬБАЦЭ») a mixture of prose and verse. In a capsule, the evil hunter Psherihizchatse, who lived in the forest, was so capricious that he slew all the village boys who were sent to cook for him because they did not wake him with due care. One mangy, but clever lad was able to escape this mortal fate. When the deer came weeping to the yard, he did not call the hunter; instead, he chanted the song of the chase to awaken him. Psherihizchatse arose and hunted. He kept the considerate boy as his menial.¹²

One of the first instances of dialogue in Circassian literature is in the ancient tale ‘The Elegy of the Maid who Refused to Marry her Brother’ («Дэльхум дэКІуэн зымыда хьыджэбзым и уэрэдыр») which gives us a glimpse of those far away days when incest was not yet tabooed. The poor girl begs the members of her family in turn to let her inside the house. Such stories are considered the forerunners of Circassian drama.

— А си анэ дыщэурэ,
А си дыщэ плъыжь,
Мы бжэр нысхуІупхыркъэ,
ЩыІэм сегъалІэри.

— My dearest Mother,
Radiant as red gilt!
I beseech you: Open this door.
The chill is killing me.

— Си гуащэжыр жыпІэтэмэ,
НыпхуІусхынт.

— If you would just call me mother-in-law,
I would open it for you.

— Си псэ тІэкІур пытурэ
Дауэ пхужысІэн.

How can I call you thus,
Whilst there is still life in my bones.

Simile was extensively used. Female characteristics were compared to those of animals: body and gait of a doe, colour of swallow, gentle as a lamb, fertile as a cat, famous as a good horse. Symbols included: mist = oppression and fear; stone = home, security; garden in bloom = thriving; pear, pear-skin = success and progress; sprinkled water = indigence, sadness; gold, silver = wealth, status of women (wedding-dress was decorated with silver); corn = blessing; snow-peaked mountain = cleanliness, timelessness; horseshoe = good luck; broken horseshoe = misfortune, woe; dove = love; fox = cunning; eagle = warrior, hero; turkey = hubris; raven = foe, death. Colours also had special significance: yellow = person gets what he wants; green = hopes and wishes; black = bad luck, and so on.

¹² ПшэрыхыжьбацэКІэ зэджэ щакІуэ бзаджэр мэзым щІэсщ. Ар апхуэдизкІэ къанлыщи, пщафІэу къуажэм къыхуагъакІуэ дэтхэнэ щІалэри еукІ, сакъыу къызэрамыгъэушым папщІэ. Абы Іэмал хуекІуэфар щІалэ къуий гуэрщ. Щыхъэр гъуэгыу хьэмым къыщытехьэм, ар Пшэрыхыжьбацэм еджакъым къыгъэушыну, атІэ щакІуэ уэрэд къыхидзэри абыкІэ къыгъэушащ. Пшэрыхыжьбацэ къэтэджди щэкІуащ, щІалэри имыукІыу пщафІэу къыгъэнащ.

Parables and allegories were used to circumvent direct answers and for show. Some memorable dialogues have come down to us demonstrating wit and linguistic skill. These are mainly between girls and their suitors. Many a girl declined offers of marriage using indirect language:

— Си Іэгу из мэракІуэ, СрикІуэну зы льягъуэ, Сигу ильыну зы псалъэ, Лъэпкъ сыхъунуц, КъыздэкІуэ.	— <i>Siy 'egw yiz merak'we,</i> <i>Sriyk'wenu zi lghagwe,</i> <i>Siygw yilhinu zi psalhe,</i> <i>Lhepq six'wnusch,</i> <i>Qizdek'we.</i>	My hand is full of berries, I have but one path to take, A single word shall remain in my heart, I shall have a large progeny, Marry me.
— Махуэм зыужьу, Акъужьым зиудэу, ПщІэгъуалэр дэжейуэ, ПщІэгъуэплъыр къежэхьу, Джэдыр къелъыхьу, Къазыр дэльейуэ— Апхуэдэ махуэм СыныбдэкІуэнщ.	— <i>Maxwem ziywizchu,</i> <i>Aqwzchim ziywidew,</i> <i>Psch'eghwaler dezheywe,</i> <i>Pts'eghwephlir qeizhexiu,</i> <i>Jedir qeilhixiu,</i> <i>Qazir delheywe—</i> <i>Apxwede maxwem</i> <i>Sinibdek'wensch.</i>	As the day progresses, The south wind flinches, The grey horse gallops up, The bay trots down, The hen leaps down, The goose perches up— On such a day I shall betroth you.

Although it is impossible to do justice to the symbols used and to convey the shades of meanings intended, the turn-down is obvious. On the other hand, in the expression «КъуанщІэ фІыцІэ дамагуэм сырытемылхъэ» (*Qwansch'e f'its'e damagwem siriteimilhhe'*), literally, 'Do not join me to the wing of a black raven', the unkind words are designed to convey the vehemence of rejection (5).

A nosy question was answered thus: «Тэрч кхъуэ исыкІащ» (*Terch q'we yisich'asch'*)—'The pig swam across the Terek.' One elaborate way of expressing 'Don't soil my name with your tongue,' was rendered thus:

Си джанэ хужь пщампІэм Іуданэ фІыцІэкІэ УкыкІуэцІрымыкІ.	<i>Siy jane xwzch pschamp'em</i> <i>'Wdane f'its'ech'e</i> <i>Wiqik'wets'rimich'.</i>	Through the collar of my white shirt Do not pass A black thread.
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Examples of hyperbole abound. Two segments from episodes involving Theghelej, god of flora, are selected:

Іэ кІуэцІищэр зы пхыру,
И пхырищэр зы мэш Іэтэу,
Мэш Іэтищэр зы гъэсэгуу,
Гъэсэгуищэр зы щэджыжъу,
Щэджыжъ щий кърихаш.

Hundred handfuls make one sheaf,
 Five score sheaves one rick,
 Hundred ricks make one stook,
 Hundred stooks one stack.
 He reaped eight hundred stacks.
[giving 80,000,000,000 handfuls in total!]

ВитЫм Лабэрэ Псыжърэ я кур жэщым яхъурт.
 Пщэдджыжьым Лабэ ирафырти, ягъэгъурт,
 Пщыхъэщхъэм Псыжь ирафырти, ари ягъэгъурт.

At night, the two bullocks fattened up on the lands 'twixt the Laba and Kuban.
 In the morrow they drank the Laba, and dried it up,
 In the even they drank the Kuban, and drained it too.

Rhythm and foot were very important in poetry and song. Many techniques were used to bring balance to asymmetric stanzas. Among these was the insertion of syllables, such as «жи» ('zhiy'), «уэ» ('we'), «уэй» ('wey'), «уэйжи» ('weyzhiy'), «армэ» ('arme'), «уйй» ('uiy'), «гушэ» ('gwsche'), «мыгъуэ» ('mighwe'), and «мыдэкIэ» ('midech'e'). Although these 'additives' do not interfere with the meaning, they add mood to the songs, «мыгъуэ» ('mighwe'), for example, being used in dirges, «уэйжи» ('weyzhiy') in 'joyful' airs.

[Армэ,] СосрыкъуапцIэ,	[Arme,] Sosriqwaps'e,	Swarthy Sosriqwe,
[Армэ,] лы фIыцIэ гъушIынэ,	[Arme,] l'if'its'e ghwsch'ine,	The iron-eyed darksome man,
[МыдэкIэ,] емынэ шу...	[Midech'e,] yemine shu...	Most intrepid knight... ¹³

An assortment of rhythms was used. The most widespread was the mixed rhythm, whereby the final syllable of a line was repeated at the start or middle of the next. The toast to abundant crop affords an example:

Я дэ ди тхъэ,	<i>Ya de diy the,</i>	Our God,
Тхъэгъэлэдж,	<i>Theghelej,</i>	Theghelej,
Тельыджэр зи Iэужь,	<i>Teilhijer ziy 'ewizch,</i>	Of wonderful blessings,
Едгъэжьа Iуэхур гъэбагъуэ.	<i>Yedghezcha 'wexwr ghebaghwe.</i>	Do multiply our yield.

Final rhythm was also in use:

Вабдзэм и махуэр щIэдгъэлъауэ,	<i>Vabdzem yi maxwer sch'edghelhawe,</i>
Гъунэм и махуэр итлъауэ,	<i>Ghwnem yi maxwer yithawe,</i>
ЩIыльэм и хуабэр хыхъауэ,	<i>Sch'ilhem yi xwaber xihawe,</i>

¹³ From the tale «Сосрыкъуэ мафIэ къехъ» ('Sosriqwe Fetches Fire').

Бэвым и кыпIэм дьтэхъауэ,
Я ди тхъэ кыщIэукI.

*Bevim yi ch'ip'em diteihawe,
Ya diy the qisch'ewich'.*

Classical poems and traditional songs used mostly consonants for rhythm. In general, rhyme brought words in harmony with the tune. It is thanks to rhyme, and of course to the high quality of the lyrics, that the ancient songs managed to survive. In the 1930s, Ali Schojents'ik'w experimented with mixing classical rhythm with Western forms thereof, for example in his poem 'Off the Threshold':

Махуэр уейщи жьы зэпихум	<i>Maxwer weyschiy zchi zepiyxwm</i>	The day so bad,
Хуарзэу уэсыр кырехъэкI,	<i>Xwarzew wesir qireihech'</i> ,	The wind carries the floating snow,
КъуакIи тафи кымыгъанэу	<i>Qwach'iy tafiy qiymighanew</i>	All vales and steppes
Джэбын хужьыр кырешэкI.	<i>Jebin xwzchir qireishech'.</i>	Are covered by the white shroud.

Most modern poets use final rhythm. Among those who took this form to uncharted heights were Alim Keshokov, Beit'al K'wasch, Adem Schojents'ik'w, Boris Taw.¹⁴

Epithets throw light on many aspects of the classical Circassian society, and certainly give us a glimpse of the way the Adiga viewed the world, and the ideals they cherished. Embroidery was a skill much esteemed in a daughter-in-law. Many expressions were employed to extolling it, for example, «мастэ зыгъэфий зи Iэпэ» (*maste zighefiy ziy 'epe'*)—'she whose fingertips make the needle whistle.' Courage and fortitude were expected of young men:

Лым я лейуэ щхъэ хъьжъэ,	<i>L'im ya leywe schhe x'izche,</i>	He is the most daring of them all,
Зауэ къэхъум лы хахуэ,	<i>Zawe qex'wm l'i xaxwe,</i>	He is the first to battle,
Iэщэ ипхым шынагъуэу,	<i>'Esche yipxim shinaghew,</i>	Terrifying in his full armour,
Бийм и гущIыIур зи гъуэгу...	<i>Biym yi gwsch'i'wr ziy ghwegw ...</i>	His path runs over his supine foe ...

¹⁴ See A. Hek'wasche, 1984, pp 166-96, for an account of rhythm in ancient and modern Circassian poetry.

Traditional Literature

Folkloric stories and tales broached many themes. Fables and apologues were used to convey morals and useful lessons. In many of these the actors and speakers were animals, taking us back to the age when man thought that animals were rational beings capable of speech and reasoned thinking. Allegory was also used. The eternal struggle between good and evil was one of the principal themes of the Circassian oral tradition being extensively used in allegorical tales. In Western Circassian tales, evil was always undone, which was a reflection of the healthful state of mind of the people.

In addition to being reflections of the mores of a people, proverbs and sayings have an intrinsic literary value. Many of these are rhymed and enveloped in elevated language. For example: «Шэми сес, шхуми сес» (*Shemiy seis, shxwmiy seis*) 'Between Scylla and Charybdis'; and «КъэмыкIа пабжьэм къэмыльхуа тхъэклумэкIыхьыр хэщ» (*Qemich'a pabzchem qemilxwa thek'wmech'ihir xessch*) 'The unborn hare hides in the ungrown bush,' which is said of a barefaced lie. One of the most popular sayings, «Гупсыси псалъэ, зыплъыхьы тIыс» (*Gwpsisiy psalhe, ziplhihiy t'is*) 'Think today and speak tomorrow, look around and then take your seat,' combines economy of expression with pregnant meaning, almost encapsulating the gist of Circassian Etiquette.

Nice and simple rhythms are also evidenced, for example in «Такъуэр закъуэ пальэщ(и), закъуэр лIа пэлытэщ» (*T'aqwer zaqwe palhesch(iy), zaqwer l'a pelhitesch*) 'one man, no man.' There is even music in some of them, e.g. in «Тэм тэ и цIэщи, щэм щэ и цIэщ» (*Tem te yi ts'eschiy, schem sche yi ts'esch*) 'keep friendship and money apart.' Usually the gist of the saws is expressed in a direct manner, allegory being seldom used.

Riddles and enigmas are the most entertaining of the literary forms and the richest linguistically. They still bear traces of the mystical age. In some of these the forces of nature are compared to inanimate beings, in others to animals, in a third class stars and other natural phenomena are given human forms and endowed with personalities.

Examples: 'In the skies there are gilded patterns'—'Stars'; 'The ocean is covered with a carpet'—'Ice'; 'A golden cane lies on our roof'—'Sunrays.' Conundrums and posers were also used by some discerning girls to gauge the quick wit of their suitors. Some of the classics of this genre include 'Pithy Girl' («ПIЦАИЦЭ ШЭРЫУЭ»), (*Pschasche Sheriwe*), 'Little Tram', 'The Maid's Betrothal', and 'The Maid and the Bridegroom'.

Children's Literature

Fables and allegories spilled over into children's literature. Among best known tales, which have become classics, are 'The Hare, Fox, and Wolf' and 'The Little Old Man, and the Little Old Woman.'

Most nursery rhymes use mixed rhythm. An example is afforded by the popular 'Yinemiqwe', which also serves as a children's game:

Инэмыкбүэ	Yinemiqwe
Инэ-инэ,	Yine-yine,
Инэмыкбүэ,	Yinemiqwe,
Мыкбүэ шхьэл,	Miqwe schhel,
Щхьэл кбүтэ,	Schhel qwte,
Кбүтэроу,	Qwterow,
Щомыхбү,	Schomix'w,
Щохбурзэ,	Schox'wrze,
Хбурзэ натІэ,	X'wrze nat'e,
Хэ натІищ,	He nat'iysch,
Лищ зыукІ,	L'iysch ziwich',
ЗыукІыж,	Zizuch'izh,
Льэрыгъагъ,	Lherighagh,
Льэрыгъыпс,	Lherighips,
Хэнтхъупсафэ,	Hentx'wpsafe,
Псафэ егъу,	Psafe yeghw,
Хбурей накІуэ,	X'wrey nak'we,
НакІуэ тЫс,	Nak'we t'is,
ТЫс, Аслъэн!	T'is, Aslhen!
Аслъэныкбүэ,	Aslheniqwe,
Льакбүэ кЫхь,	Lhaqwe ch'ih,
КІэн кбэхьи	Ch'en qehiy
Дыгъэджэгу,	Dighejegw,
Шатэ кбэхьи	Shate qehiy
Дыгъэшхыж.	Digheshxizh.

Patter and tongue-twisters have always been indispensable pronunciation teaching tools, besides being amusing components of children's literature. The richness and compactness of consonants and dearth of vowels combine to produce veritable tongue-knotters, perhaps unparalleled in any other language. Three twisters are given as examples:

Шыбжиипль — псы плъыжьыбзэ, шыбжиипль — псы плъыжьыбзэ.

Shibzhiyyiplh — psi plhizchibze, shibzhiyyiplh — psi plhizchibze.

Red pepper — bright red water, red pepper — bright red water.

ГьукIэр бгьукIэ кьапкIэри пкIэльейм дэлейжащ.
Ghwch'er bghwch'e qapch'eriy pch'elheym delheyzhasch.
The smith leapt nine times and climbed up the ladder.

Мо тIы фIыцIэ цы фIыцIэр уи закьуэ уи тIы фIыцIэ цы фIыцIэ?
Мо тIы фIыцIэ цы фIыцIэр ди зэхуэдэ тIы фIыцIэ цы фIыцIэщ.
Mo t'i f'its'e tsi f'its'er wiy zaqwe wiy t'i f'its'e tsi f'its'e?
Mo t'i f'its'e tsi f'its'er diy zexwede t'i f'its'e tsi f'its'esch.
Is that black-woolled black ram your own black-woolled black ram?
That black-woolled black ram is a black-woolled black ram for all of us.

Урыхужьыр мывэ хужьым губжьауэ жьэхэуэри ирихужьэри ежьэжащ.
Wirixwzchir mive xwzchim gwbzchawe zchexeweriy yiriyxwzcheriy yezchezhasch.
The great river Uruk¹⁵ banged the white stone on the face with fury, kicked it out of bed, and then went on its way.

In 1956, Nikolai Bagh [Багъ Николай] published a book on methods of teaching Circassian, which included a collection of short rhyming poems of high calibre for each of the letters of the alphabet. The one for 'A' ran as follows:

Ажэм жьакIэр егъэсыс,	<i>Azhem zchach'er yeghesis,</i>	Billy-goat shakes his goatee,
Ар хуэщIыну хуейщ нэмыс,	<i>Ar xwasch'inu xweysch nemis,</i>	As is dictated by habit,
Ауэ мэлхэм гу зыльатэр,	<i>Awe melxem gw zilhater</i>	But the sheep consider
Ажэм и бжьэр зэрыджатэрщ.	<i>Azhem yi bzcher zerijatersch.</i>	Billy's horn a rapier.

There has been a considerable body of published works on children's literature. A collection of tales, *Lhapschaghwe Son of Negey: Circassian Tales* [НЭГЕЙ И КЪУЭ ЛЪАПЩАГЪУЭ: Адыгэ таурыхъхэр], written by literary masters specifically for children was published by Elbrus Press in Nalchik in 1981, the gems selected by 'Eziyd K'want'e (КIуантIэ Iэзид). Many of the works of the well-known writer Zawir Nalo [Нало Заыр] were dedicated to children, including his collection of poems and pater *Jegwzexeshe* [ДЖЭГУЗЭХЭШЭ], published in Nalchik in 1972. A monthly magazine dedicated to children, *Nur* [Нур], first issued in January 1982, is published by the Union of the Writers of the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR and the Regional Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union. About 10,000 copies are printed by Elbrus Press. In Adigea a children's magazine, *Zchweghbin* (Жьогъбын [Вагъуэбын]; Constellation), is published in Adigean.

¹⁵ According to popular tradition, the large stones in the bed of the Uruk River are the Abre Stones (абрэмывэ; stones of enormous size and immense weight) of the Narts. The poem 'Abremive' «АБРЭМЫВЭ» by the 20th century Kabardian literary giant Alim Ch'ischoqwe (Keshokov) is a literary manifestation of this belief.

Romanticism

The Russian literary giants of the 19th century, like Pushkin, Tolstoy and Lermontov, were profoundly influenced by the North Caucasus and its inhabitants. Their writing coincided with the protracted conflict that raged in the area. They portrayed the native North Caucasians as noble savages, which image did re-enforce the principal tenet of Russian colonial policy that these nations were in dire need of Russia's 'civilizing' mission.¹⁶

Not only Russian writers were infected, but also Western writers were not immune from the romantic influences of the Caucasus. A large corpus of works appeared in the first half of the 19th century, spurred by the heroic feats of the North Caucasians. Some researchers even collected some legends and tales. Among these works, one may mention *Circassian Tale* by Saunders, *Contes et légendes du Caucase* by Jules Mourier, and *La Circassienne* by Alex. Marie Anne de la Vaissier de Lavergne.

Early writers

Curiously enough, the spirit of romanticism even infected the Circassians themselves. In the first half of the 19th century, a new breed of Circassian writers began to appear on the scene. Educated in Russian schools and steeped in Russian culture, they went on to produce literary gems in Russian that were almost on a par with the classic works of the Russian romantic writers of the time. The first writer of this genre was Sulht'an Qaz-Girey (1807-1863) who was born to a family belonging to the X'imisch clan. On April 1st 1836, he published 'Hezhit'eghwey Village' in the journal *Sovremennik*, alongside works by Gogol, Pushkin and Zhukov.

Adil-Girey Ch'ashe (1840-1872), alias Qalembiy (Kalambi), produced some novels based on realism, treating of some aspects of Circassian customs. In his novel *The Abreks* he selected blood-revenge and outlaw horsemen as his themes, which were seized upon by later writers in the Soviet period like Tembot Kerashev, Alim Keshokov, Khachim Teunov, and others.¹⁷

Tsarist literature

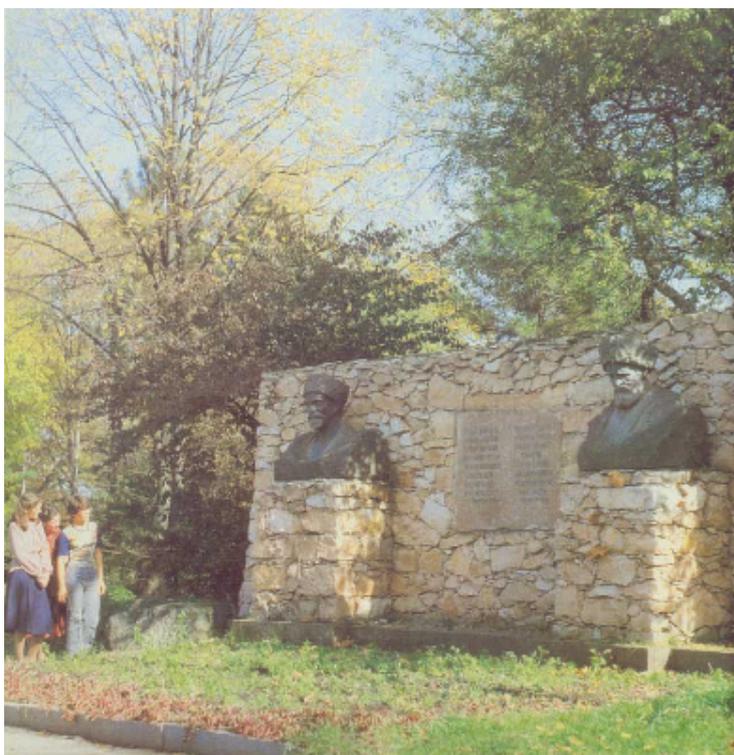
After the Russian conquest, many traditional cultural institutions fell into ruin, literature being a principal victim. The mass exodus meant that many of the literary traditions were either lost or suffered major setbacks. The immigrants took with them a significant portion of national lore. The literary tradition of

¹⁶ See, for example, S. Layton, 1995, 1999, and 2001.

¹⁷ *Abrek* (абрэдж; *abrej*) originally designated a person who lived without the canons of Circassian customs and traditions (адыгэ хабзэ; *Adige Xabze*); therefore, an outlaw. For example, a murderer who wanted to escape the revenge of the kin of a slain person would hide in deep forests or high mountains in the light of day, and roam the land in the safety of the night. In the Russian and later Soviet ethos, the *abreks* were hunted down as inveterate criminals by the authorities. Two songs that glorify famous *abreks*, 'The Song of Wezi Murat' («УЭЗЫ МУРАТ И УЭРЭД»; 'Wezi Murat yi Wered'), and 'The Song of Yismeil Cherti' («Чэргы [Черти] Исмел и уэрэд»; 'Cherti [Cheirti] Yismeil yi Wered') can be found on this page, both sung by Zhiraslhen Ghwch'el' (ГъукIэлI Жыраслъэн).

whole tribes was displaced, to be gradually lost through assimilation. The rump of the nation left in the Caucasus was puny, and was able to produce only a pitiable number of literary figures.

Kazi Atazhukin was one of those who kept the torch aflame. He collected many legends, published excerpts from Sosriqwe's and Bedinoqwe's epic poetry and other tales. He also translated Lermontov's *Ashik-Kerab* into Kabardian. Another literary figure of the period was Bechmirze Pasch'e (Пашцэ Бэчмырзэ; Pachev) (1854-1936), a poet of considerable talent, who still holds a special place as one of the prominent figures of national culture, and is accredited with founding modern Kabardian poetry. He was able to render oral traditions into literary language. He devised an alphabet for Kabardian and taught it to the common folk. In addition, he wrote lyrics for many songs. Pasch'e immortalized the Kabardian revolt of 1913 against Tsarist rule in the famous song 'Dzeliqwe War' («ДЗЭЛЫКЪУЭ ЗАУЭ»). Apart from being the founder of modern Kabardian poetry, Pasch'e was a very versatile songwriter, in the best tradition of the Circassian bards (джэгуакIуэ). He made use of the traditional heroic song genre to convey his ideas, as in 'The Song of Wezi Murat' («УЭЗЫ МУРАТ И УЭРЭД»); 'Wezi Murat yi Wered'.¹⁸ Of him Shortanov wrote: 'The works of this great poet are intimately connected with the fatherland. They throw light upon the yearnings, history, and current situation of his people. He is verily the poet of the masses.' In recognition of these contributions, a bust of Pasch'e was erected at the City Park in Nalchik.



Bust of Pasch'e (on the right) at the City Park in Nalchik.

¹⁸ An audio recording of 'The Song of Wezi Murat' («УЭЗЫ МУРАТ И УЭРЭД») can be found on this page, sung by Zhiraslhen Ghwch'el' (ГъукIэлI Жыраслъэн).

Among those who were born in the tsarist period, Amirx'an As-hed Hex'wrasch'e (ХьэхъупащӀэ Асхьэд и къуэ Амырхъан), born in 1882, stands out as a master of comic poetry. He went on to become one of the most famous Circassian literary figures of the early Soviet years. He was also a talented songwriter.

The works of Ibrahim Tsey (1895-1936) span both the Tsarist and Soviet periods. He wrote two novels: *Kochas*, about a Circassian martyr in the Russian-Caucasian War, and «Узышхуэ» (*Wizishxwe*), 'The Great Scourge,' depicting the life of Circassian peasants, and some poems and real-life tales. He was also known as a writer of fables, including 'The Wolf and the Lamb,' 'The Frog and the Ox,' and 'The Two Mice.' Some of these fables were collected and published by Dumézil and AYTEK NAMITOK. According to A. Ashemez, 'Tsey, as regards richness of style, colourfulness, national consciousness, and the sheer gift of how to treat fables was unsurpassed.' His works were characterized by variety in subject matter and employment of different genres.

By the end of this period, a class of accomplished literary writers had emerged, which published works in the native language. Circassian literature had survived and even began to thrive. However, a twist in Russia's history was to fling it off-course for almost 70 years.

Soviet Period

In the Soviet era, there was a shift of emphasis in literature from the traditional and folkloric themes to dissemination of Communist dogmas and concepts in 'modern' settings. However, literary genres and rules associated with the oral tradition were used extensively in the new drive, especially in the 1920s. Even to this day, no writer can really divorce his work from the rich traditional themes. However, the development of concepts and ideas had gone one step beyond.

Early works were characterized by a symbiosis between epic and mundane themes. Cosmic ideas of the Nart era, feats of heroism, the sagacity and moral rectitude of the olden times were juxtaposed against ordinary everyday themes. Ancient similes, symbols, and denotations spilled over into the new writings. For example, Alim Keshokov used *Broken Horseshoe* and *Pear-skin* as titles of two of his works of fiction to signify 'misfortune' and 'success,' respectively. People versed with the oral tradition would have immediately appreciated the meanings intended. Among the fiction writers of the 1930s whose works were greatly influenced by the oral tradition were Zhansex'w Nalo, Sosriqwe Qwezhey, Tembot Ch'erashe (Kerashev), and Muhemed Dischech'.¹⁹

The 1950s witnessed a revival of interest in traditional themes, after the turbulence of World War II. The two literary giants of the latter half of the 20th century, Yis-heq Meshbash and Alim Keshokov, are the protagonists of the inbreeding of the old with the new. Perhaps this could partly explain their greatness. The authorities effected a dramatic literary transformation, raising the educational level of the masses. This was a prelude to inculcating them with the new ideology. Many of the writers born just before or during the Soviet period were bilingual in their literary output, Russian being the second language. Some Circassian writers, including the poet and dramatist Nalo(ev) and Pschinoqwe, were persecuted during the 1936-38 purges, being accused of counter-revolutionary activities, including denigrating the collective farm system.

The writers who emerged in this period were obliged to toe the line and use their works to promulgate, among other things, Soviet historiography. The classic example of this 'genre' of writing was Shortan's *The Mountaineers* (*БЫРЫЦХЭР*), in which the Russian-Caucasian War was reduced to a struggle between the evil princes and nobles, and their nefarious allies, the Turks, Tatars, British, on the one hand, and the masses who wanted to rid themselves of the oppressive yoke. And who were the deliverers of these 'poor buggers'? Yes, you guessed it. It was the magnanimous and chivalrous Russians! This once seminal work, commissioned by special order from the Kremlin, could have been thrown on the rubbish heap of history, had it not been for the exquisite beauty of the language and mastery of the 'misguided' author, which have made the work a classic.²⁰

Another yoke thrown round the necks of the new breed of non-Russian Soviet writers was the obligation to portray the state of bliss brought about by the revolution and pay tribute to the guiding hand of the Russian 'Big Brother.' The work that epitomizes this thrust of Communist propaganda is Asker Yevtikh's work *In*

¹⁹ For a full treatment of influence of oral traditions on the modern Circassian novel, refer to A. Musukai, 1992, pp 114-17.

²⁰ This work is reviewed by G. Deeters in *Caucasian Review*, no. 2, 1956, pp 110-11.

Our Village, in which blissful life in a typical village in Adigea is depicted. The head of one of the kolkhozes boasts that, whereas many people in the United States do not find enough bread to eat, the workers in his concern never go short. Some Russian characters provide role models to the ‘half-civilized’ Adigeans. It was translated into Russian and published in the exclusive literary magazine ‘The New World’ in 1953. According to one critic, Yevtikh came to reflect the new face of post-War Adigea. However, the self-same reviewer is troubled by the lack of enemies to contend with, as Soviet ideology thrived on finding bugbears and bogeys to justify the existence of the state and institutionalize repression. In 1941 he wrote *My Elder Brother*.

An unlikely ‘literary hero’ of the era was the illiterate herdsman Tsighw Teuchezh—a gainsay only the Soviet System was capable of producing. Teuchezh, born in 1855 in the village of Ghwabeqwaye in present-day Adigea, was a skilful storyteller, in the best Caucasian tradition. In his mid-sixties at the establishment of Soviet power, he was used as a pawn in a propaganda game that had him squander his considerable talent on senseless falsification of national history. In 1937-38 he ‘wrote’ the epic poem ‘War of the Princes and Nobles’ («ПШЫ-ОРКЪ ЗАУ»; *Pshi-Werq Zaw*), which depicted the tyranny of the feudal ruling classes and how the people struggled to rid themselves of their injustice.²¹ He dictated many a poem dedicated to ‘Stalin the Great,’ in accordance with Party instructions.

In all the examples presented, great talent was wasted on frivolous causes and futile pursuits. Misguided ideology works like venom in the innards of a people, and they suffer for it. It is a great credit to the skill and mastery of the writers of the time that their works are still read with avidity, despite overdoses of drivel.

One of the most prolific Circassian writers of the 20th century was Kuba Csaban whose work spanned two periods, early Soviet and diaspora. He taught Circassian language and literature in Maikop from 1919 to 1936, and later held a teaching position at the Lokhanersky Theatrical Institute in Moscow. Upon his return to Maikop, he indulged in studying and collecting Circassian folklore at the Adigean Research Institute, leading a team of specialists. He immigrated to Jordan after World War II, where he continued writing and doing research. He worked with the New Generation Club (НыбжьыщӀэ Хасэ) in Amman. He effected a kind of a cultural renaissance among the Circassian youth, attracting a number of disciples who were exposed first-hand to the recent developments in national literature. His output included works of fiction, folkloric collections, poems, children’s pedagogical books, historical accounts, plays, two operettas, dictionaries and grammar books. Unfortunately, after his death, no one was able to take up the torch, and thus a golden opportunity was missed to propagate his heritage.

²¹ Original was published in Maikop, 1939. It is also included in a collection of his works «НАСЫП ІАХЪ» (*Nasip 'Ah*) [*Lucky Lot*], published in Maikop in 1980.

Ali As-hed Schojents'ik'w (1900-1941) wrote and published many collections of poems and works of fiction, like *The Young Hero*. His classic poem 'Off the Threshold' was the theme of F. A. Silyakhin's short cantata *Fortune is Nigh*. A dictionary of his literary language was compiled by Liywan Zex'wex'w in acknowledgement of his linguistic mastery.²²



Ali Schojents'ik'w's early death at the age of 41 was deemed a great loss to Circassian literature.

[Alim Pschimaxwe Ch'ischoqwe](#) (Къыщокъуэ Пщымахуэ и къуэ Алим; Keshokov) (1914-2001) who was born in Kabarda in eastern Circassia (now the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic) into a peasant family of average means, was one of the most influential Circassian literary figures of the second half of the 20th century. Born in the village of Schheliqwe (Щхьэлыкъуэ; aka Shalushka) in the Chegem (Шэджэм) Region at the foot of 'Waschhemaxwe (Уашхьэмахуэ), or Mount Elbrus (5,643m), Ch'ischoqwe had a meteoric rise up the echelons of the Union of Soviet Writers, occupying the influential post of secretary for many years. He penned many works of prose and has more than 20 collections of poems and also won the prestigious Maxim Gorky Literary Prize and the Russian Federation State Prize. He was named People's Poet of Kabardino-Balkaria for his services to Soviet and Kabardian literatures. Some of his poetical works were translated to English. His verse breathes the air of the sunlit valleys and stern summits of his native

²² Zex'wex'w, L. H., *Dictionary of the Literary Language of Ali Schojents'ik'w*, Nalchik, 1975.

land and sings the rich inner world of a man of labour, his life, valour and love. The following snippets from different poems were culled from his work 'Starlit Hours', interpreted by various translators:

I heard the call of mountain peaks.

My path was crossed by the raging stream.
I ventured in and fought towards
The cloudy mountains of my dream.

Not always have I followed strictly
The rules my forebears held so high.

Imagined things do move me deeply
Yet never have I stooped to lies.

It might be white, like a field in hoary frost,
Or black as a furrow in the dale,
But the name '**Cherkesska**' never will be lost.
To change it tongues will ever fail.

'The Colour of Joy'

And so, if my hair has begun to go white,
It means that in broad light of day
The herald of grief, from the herald of joy,
Once stole his swift stallion away.

You will not start to vainly swear;
You live, and count hot words not worth.
To me, a true Caucasian here,
My native land, you've given birth.



Alim Ch'ischoqwe has preserved a considerable portion of (East) Circassian literature and folklore. His monumental works form one of the pillars of Circassian literature.²³

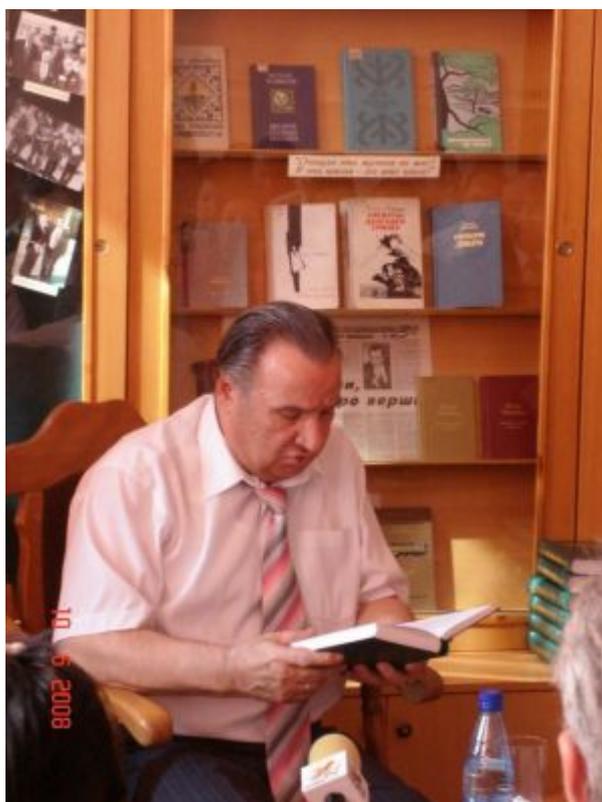
Adam Schojents'ikw (1916-1995) was an important writer, poet and playwright. he published works in both Circassian and Russian.

The People's Writer of Adigea and Kabardino-Balkaria, Yis-heq Meshbash (Meshbesch'e), has produced many seminal works including 'Bziyiqwe War,' which was translated to Russian, Turkish and Arabic. The following extracts are from his poem 'Invitation':

Ask History about us.
She remembers dashing Circassians,
She will tell how once in olden times
Chestnut horses galloped and steel jingled.

Ask the sun and the dawn.
But you'd better see yourself—
Better to see once than hear a hundred times.
Just come and be a welcome guest.

²³ The definitive collection of Ch'ischoqwe's works (in Circassian) is available on <<http://iccs.synthasite.com/circassian-literature.php>>.



Yis-heq Meshbash's (Meshbesch'e) name is synonymous with Adigean literature.

Other important writers included Tembot Kerashev, receiver of the Stalin Prize of the First Order. His first work «АРКЪ» (*Arq*) ('Vodka') came out in Krasnodar in 1925. It was written in Arabic script. He wrote many historical tales and three novels, *The Tempest*, *The Road to Happiness* (1932), which was translated into Russian in 1948, and *Lonely Rider*, also translated into Russian. Akhmad Hatko (Ahmed Hatqwe), born in 1902, composed chants and historical novels. He received the Olympic Prize of the North Caucasus for National Culture in 1935.

Khusain B. Andrukhaev, a distinguished poet who was killed in action in the World War II, was dubbed 'Hero of the Soviet Union.' The story of his life *Read My Life* was published in Maikop in 1984. Ahmedx'an Nalo penned the novel *Dawn Rider*. Askerbi Shortan wrote a biographical account of Zhebaghi Qezenoqwe, the 18th century statesman and sage. The classic historical epic 'Khimсад,' set in the Caucasian War period, was written by B. Koble, who was born in 1902.

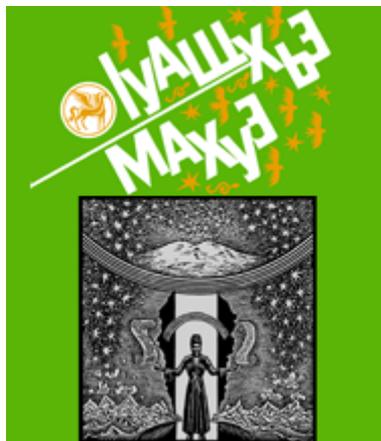
Although literary criticism was developed and formalized in the modern era, tradition has it that when a bard finished a commissioned song, he presented his work to a jury of minstrels, which had to approve it for release. Oftentimes the work was sent back for revision. In this manner, literary standards were kept which ensured that only works of merit were produced. The most influential critic of recent years is Muserbiy

Soqwr (Сокъур Мусэрбий). According to Boris Qaghirmes (Къагъырмэс Борис), 'his diligent work, which spanned almost 40 years, brought good form to many aspects of modern Circassian literature.'²⁴

²⁴ See '*Waschhemaxwe*, no. 3, 1992, p109.

Literary Journals

The literary and cultural almanac *Qeberdey* («Къэбэрдей»; 'Kabarda') was the organ of the Union of Soviet Writers of Kabarda. It was published in Nalchik starting from 1948 in Kabardian. The most prestigious and influential literary journal is '*Waschhemaxwe* («Иуашхьэмахуэ»; Mount Elbrus), published by the Union of the Writers of the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR. The first issue of the monthly came out in 1958. The journal also deals with historical and artistic matters. Since 1991, it has been published by the Union of the Circassian Writers of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic once every two months. Less than 3,000 copies of each edition of the Journal are published. Thenceforth, taboo subjects were forcefully breached. *Literary Kabardino-Balkaria* was the Russian language organ of the Union. All these journals, *Nur* included, were subsidized by the government. All writers were members in the Union and were paid salaries.



The emblem of the '*Waschhemaxwe* («Иуашхьэмахуэ»; Mount Elbrus) Journal.
The spread of literacy in Circassian amongst the diaspora Circassians would boost the circulation of the literary outputs in the Caucasus.

In Adigea, «Зэжъошныгъ» (*Zeqweshnigh*) [Friendship] and its Russian version *Druzhba*, are the literary almanacs of the Adigean branch of the Union of Soviet Writers Adignatsizdat. They were first issued in Maikop in 1946. These Journals broach literary, artistic, political and social subject matters and issues. About a thousand copies of each edition of the quarterly *Zeqweshnigh* are published. Another journal published by the Union is *Literaturnaya Adigeya* ('Literary Adigea').



Svetlana Skhaplok and Kazbek Khut, editors at the Adigean Book Press.
In the post-Soviet era literature has become mostly a labour of love.
(Z. Khuako, 1998, p45).

Translations

Many works of literature were translated from Circassian to Russian, and vice versa. Few literary products were rendered into Western European languages. Some of these were issued by the local publishing houses, like 'Elbrus' in Nalchik. Works from Circassian to Russian include *Molodie zhuravli* ('Young Crane'), by Beit'al Kwesh, in 1972, *The Pear-tree in Bloom*, Moscow, 1973, and *Invitation*, Nalchik, 1973, by Petr Misache.

Many works of Circassian writers, including Meshbash, Kerashev, Hex'wpasch'e, Teiwine, Adem Schojents'ik'w and Hedeghel'e, were also translated to Turkish and published. The journal *Kavkaz*, which is published in Ankara, devoted much space to Circassian literature.

The first instances of translation of Russian literature into Circassian were evinced in the middle of the 19th century. One of the earliest translators was Kazi Atazhukin, who rendered a few works by Lermontov into Kabardian. In the Soviet period, most of the works of the major Russian writers were translated to Kabardian and Adigean. In addition, Marxist literature was painstakingly rendered into the languages of the 'newly-lettered' peoples. Translations into Western European languages were very few.

Publishing Houses

When Nogmov wrote his pioneering works, he had to petition Russian authorities to publish them. In fact, he died before he saw any of his works in print. His first book on Adiga history saw the light in 1861 thanks to the efforts of his son Arostan, who published it in Pyatigorsk. Five years later Bergé, in acknowledgement of its epic qualities, translated it to German and published it in Leipzig. This might have been the first work by a Circassian to be translated into a Western European language.

During the tsarist period literary works were published in Russian press-houses, as there were still no local ones in Circassia. The first local publishing houses were established in the Soviet era. Elbrus Book Printing House played a major role in publishing many of the works of the local writers, both in Circassian and Russian. Many books in Russian and English were published in Moscow.

In Adigea the publishing centre was first in Ekaterinodar (later Krasnodar), then it moved to Maikop as it became the political and cultural capital of the republic. Since 1918, the state publishing house, in its various nominal designations, has put out more than 3,000 book titles, mainly in Circassian and Russian. This excludes some works published in Moscow and St Petersburg. In 1998, Professor Zawir Khuako published a seminal work on the history of publishing in Adigea with a complete list of books published therein. In the last years of the 1990s, the Meoty Publishing House came into existence. It specializes in issuing works on Circassian language and culture, having the apt name of the ancestors of the Adiga.

The number of publications in Adigea dropped dramatically starting in 1995. From almost 60 in 1994, it went down to 28 in 1995, ten in 1996, nine in 1997! It would seem that bad times had caught up with the literary world.

Post-Soviet Literature

Although the breakdown of the Soviet Union was a sharp departure from the past, there was already some shift away from the bleak ambience of Communist ideology at the end of the 1980s. However, the clean break of 1991 allowed literary workers to throw away the remnants of the straitjacket. Writers began to reappraise the Soviet period and started to question some of the events of the time. They also lamented the neglect of Circassian culture. Many of the established edifices of the period were taken down, much like when the statue of Lenin which ‘adorned’ the main square of Nalchik was ceremoniously removed to oblivion. One negative aspect was that the Union and its members were left to fend for their own. The subsidy system was scrapped. Market forces became important factors in shaping the literary life.

A poem published in 1992 had a young man having a tête-à-tête with History and confronting him with the dark fate of his people:

‘I have been in this life for a score years,
Yet, not a single blessing have I enjoyed.
My Lord!²⁵ I sacrifice my life to you,
If only you have mercy upon my people.’

...

The beautiful green tree of the Ubykh,
Was washed away by the flooding Sea,
Freedom in Circassia ended,
It was lost without a trace.

«Сэ сызэрыхъур илъэс тЮщИщ,
Ауэ фЫ гуэр си нобэм хэлькъым.
Къурмэн си гъащІэр уэ пхузощІ,
ГущІэгъу кыыхуэщІи уэ си лъэпкъым».

...

Жыг щхъуантІэ дахэу щыта Убыхри
Хыр зыщІэуауэ псым ихъыжащ,
Щхъэхуитыныгъэр Хэкум щиухри
Ар лъэужьыншэу хэкІуэдэжащ.

History has this to say in his own defense:

My secret is made so by man,
I am abused as a place where secrets are hid.

²⁵ Addressed to the Circassian supreme god Theshxwe.

Your good and bad I preserve for posterity.
My records are yours, not only mine to keep.
For the queries you have for me,
I am ready to give you truthful answers.

— Сэ си щэхур цыхурщ щэху зыщыжыр,
Сэ сывигъэпщкIупIэу аркъудейщ.

ФЫми Iейми, фэ влэжьар сотхыжыр,
Ар фэращ — сэракъым псори зейр.
УпщIэу уэ къызэптым и жэуапыр
Пэжу уэстыжыну сыхъэзырщ...

The two protagonists part as the poet comes to terms with his past.

A heart-rending and sobering encounter it was, but it just failed to name the culprit. Written by Hesén Qwedzoqwe (1992), 'The Poet and History' became very popular. It was dramatized and shown on TV (shot and directed by Mohy Quandour). Videotapes were distributed in the diaspora.

The spirit of the new age was succinctly comprehended by Boris Qaghirmes writing in *'Waschhemaxwe* (no. 3, 1992, p111), now the organ of purely Circassian writers, as opposed to being a joint Kabardian and Balkar venture:

Circassian literature is a branch of world literature—let us never forget this! We must endeavour to enter the international stage with our literary products. True, this is heavy load. But who said that the yoke on our shoulders should be lightened?! Rather than win the easy battle, it is better to struggle eternally against the seemingly impossible: if you prevail, the mark is forever etched; otherwise—no shame in coming second to a colossus!

Адыгэ литературэр дунейпсо литературэм и зы къудамэу зэрыщытыр зэи зыщыдгъэгъупщэ хъунукъым. Дэри дыхущIэкъун хуейщ дунейпсо утыку ихъэфын тхыгъэхэр ди къалэмым къыщIэкIыным. Пэжщ, ар къалэнышхуэщ, ауэ хэт жызыIар тхакIуэм зыхуигъэувыжын хуейр нэхъ къалэн цыкIухэр арауэ?! ЦыкIум утекIуэ нэхърэ, иным махуэ къэс уезауэмэ нэхъыфIщ: утекIуэмэ — уи насыпщ, къыптекIуэмэ — иныращ къыптекIуар!

Although this is positive thinking at its best and a reflection of the new optimism, one cannot help but suspect that there is a fundamental point that keeps being missed. Veritable literary masterpieces were penned before, during, and after Soviet times, starting with the colossal corpus of the Nart tales and ancient epic songs and compositions, to the liberating and animating post-Soviet literature. The challenge is not in

the production, but rather in the presentation of these products to world readership. In the West, considerable investment is made to make the works of its talented writers accessible in different languages. In the same manner, a number of outstanding works in Circassian could be rendered into world languages at the highest of standards, published and distributed with the support of the machineries of government and literary institutions in the Circassian republics. It is then up to international readers to pronounce their judgements.

Qaghirmes is best known for his short tales, such as ‘The Needle and the Button’ and ‘The Letter which Came to the Village.’ Asked by a friend why he chose this genre, he said, ‘Why does a person choose the short way?’ The minuscule ‘Missed Life’ is presented here (*ИУАЦХБЭМАХУЭ*. ‘*Waschhemaxwe*, no. 4, 1992, pp 15-16):

Missed Life

Barely finishing fifth grade, she forfeited learning and chose instead to sell apples from her tree-garden in the bazaar to help her folks. She did justice to herself and became a bazaar (bizarre) person. Then she engaged in speculation. Now you cannot get her to leave the place.

Time of marriage arrived, the suitor cannot find her.
‘Where is she?’
‘In the market.’
‘Keep her there forever!’ he said, and married another.
Days went by, her youth withered.
Old Age came for her: ‘Where is she?’
‘In the bazaar.’
He went and made (painted) her old.
Though decrepit and hoary, she never quit her work.
Then (in due time) Death asked, ‘Where is she?’
‘In the bazaar.’
Is there escaping the Grim Reaper?!
He went and claimed her soul.
‘The poor thing is dead!’ it was said.
‘Where is her body?’
‘It is lying in the bazaar ...’

ГЪАЦІЭР ЗЫІЭЦІЭКИА

Абы, хъыджэбз цыкIуу, етхуанэ классыр кьиуха кьудейуэ, еджэныр хыфIидзэри бэзэр Iуэхум зритауэ шытащ. Жыг хадэ яIэти, мыIэрысэ ищэрт. Унагъуэм сэбэп хуэхьурт, езыми зихуэпэжырт. Апхуэдэурэ ар хьуащ бэзэр цIыху. ИужькIэ хыхьат сондэджэрынми. Иджы ар бэзэрым кьытекIыжьыххэртэкъым.

И шэгъуэр къосри, къылыхъу шIалэм къыгъуэтыркъым. «Дэнэ шыIэ?» — «Бээрым тесщ». — «Трырес-тIэ быдэу», — желэри нэгъуэщI къешэ.

Апхуэдэу бээрым тес зэпытурэ, и шIалэгъуэр йокI.

Жьыгъэр къыхуокIуэ: «Дэнэ шыIэ мыр?» — «Бээрым тесщ». МакIуэ, къегъуэтри жьы ещI.

Ауэ, жьы зэрыхъуауи, и Iуэхур къыгъанэртэкъым абы.

Иужьу къыщIоупщIэ ажалыр: «Дэнэ шыIэ?» — «Бээрым тесщ». Ажалыр пфIэкIын?! МакIуэри и псэр хех.

«ТхэмыщкIэр лIащ!» — мэлIу хъыбар.

«Дэнэ шыIэ и хьэдэр?»

«Бээрым тельщ...»

The new generation of Circassian writers and poets is well represented by Dr. Luba Belaghi (Бэлагъы Любэ), who is working diligently to bridge the gap between the Circassian writers in the Caucasus and the outside world. She has published a number of books in Circassian Russian and English. ‘Let there be light!’ (ГЪЭУНЭХУПЭ) (Nalchik, 2008) is available on this webpage.



Luba Belaghi at one of her book presentations. Solid grounding in Circassian language and culture and an open-minded perspective on the outside world are the requisites for the long-term survival and development of Circassian language and culture.

Islamic & Diaspora

The *mawlid*, or *mevlid* in Turkish, a celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad, is one of the most important genres of Islamic literature. It has flourished among the Circassians in the diaspora in consequence of their contact with the host peoples in the Middle East. A specimen of a Shapsugh hymn, about 1,000 lines long, is presented. It was written, edited and printed by Circassians in the early part of the 20th century and part of it was translated by Rieks Smeets (1980):

(1) Day and night she kept crying, (2) Crying, she made heaven and earth cry, (3) Reaching for neither food nor drink, she stayed there, (4) She became like drunk, not knowing herself anymore. (5) And she said: ‘*Wa hasreta, wa firqeta*, (6) What will I do with myself, oh, my father, *wa firqeta*?’ (7) She said: ‘Wherever he went, oh, melancholy, (8) Wherever he dwelled, my beautiful father, our prophet, (9) He always took mercy upon us, (10) He always guided us to the straight path.’

The following quatrain is representative of Circassian traditional poetry in Turkey:²⁶

1. Хышхуэу лъагъуныгъэр къегъагуэу бэгауэ,	<i>Xishxwew lghawnigher qeigha 'wew begawe,</i>
2. Си гур кхъуэфэжъейуэ къырехукI,	<i>Siy gwr q 'wefezcheywe qireixwch',</i>
3. Дуней сызытетым симыгъэбэяуэ,	<i>Duney siziteitim siymighebeyawe,</i>
4. Уэ сызырыпшыщIэр къыззукI.	<i>We siziripschisch 'er qizewech'.</i>

Love, like a great ocean which roars and swells,
Tosses here and there my heart as if it were a small boat,
While nothing in the world can appease me,
I miss you, and this torments me.

Very few of the writers in the Diaspora use Circassian in their literary writings, the majority using local or Western European languages. The small number of texts in Circassian usually consists of short poems on the theme of a lost homeland. Among writers of this genre are Yizdin Stash, some of whose works were published in *Lenin Path*, Fuad Dighwzch, now back in the Caucasus, Nadia Herbiy (X'wnegw), many of whose poems were published in journals and magazines in the Caucasus.²⁷ Perhaps the following stanza captures the nostalgia evoked by this genre:

I saw many a sea and towns innumerable
On my journeys overseas!
But now, I tell you this:
I would rather spend one freezing day
In the fatherland
Than a hundred springs in a foreign land.

²⁶ See E. Provasi, 1982, p171.

²⁷ See, for example, *The Word Heals: Poems and Short Stories*, Maikop, 1992.

No account of émigré literature is complete without citing one of the works of Csaban (Gebelli). It is difficult to choose a sample given his large output, but on account of its emotional intensity ‘Song of the Caucasus’ has become a classic:

Our Caucasus is a mirror of the world,
It is the depository of our soul.
Mount Kazbek and ’Waschhemaxwe,
Like the moon in heaven, cast their lights upon us.

Дунеишхуэм ищхьу ди Кавказу,
Ди псэм хуэдэу,
Казбек Iуащхьи Iуащхьэмахуи,
Уафэгу мазэу кьытцытопсэ.

There have been a large number of diaspora writers. The first Ottoman novelist, Ahmed Midhat (1844-1913), was a Circassian from the family Pshechech. Tewfik Fikret (1867-1915), who is considered as the father of modern Turkish poetry, penned many works, the best of which are included in his anthology *The Broken Lyre*. Abd al-Haq Hamid composed a poem on the great exodus, in which his mother was obliged to resettle in Turkey. Nazim Qarden published a collection of Nart tales in Arabic in 1977.²⁸ *The Kavkas Trilogy* published in 1994 by Dr. M. I. Quandour is an epic tale in English that tells the story of three Caucasian generations spanning the periods before, of, and after the Russian conquest. Quandour is considered one of the most prolific diaspora writers of recent times. Kadir I. Natho, who is based in the United States, has published novels in English using Circassian themes. His *Old and New Tales of the Caucasus* purports to convey Circassian history from ancient times to World War II in short story form, and *Nicholas and Nadiusha* is probably the first novel of a Circassian author in English.

²⁸ Qarden, N., *From Circassian Legends: Nart Sosriqwe*, Amman: The Circassian Charity Association, 1977. [In Arabic]



Mohy Quandour in the Circassian Charity Association in Amman (second from left).
The prolific 'renaissance man' has authored many books on Circassian themes.

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