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The Origin of the Chechen and Ingush: A Study in Alpine Linguistic and Ethnic Geography

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Abstract. A general model is proposed for language and dialect spreads and population movement in mountain societies. Languages (and societies) are vertically distributed and often discontinuous. Isoglosses and language spreads move downhill during warm periods and uphill during cold periods. Population movements go in the opposite direction. The ethnic scope and degree of mythologization of origin legends correlate well with chronology and vertical directionality of movements, so that even highly mythologized legends are reliable evidence of movements. This model is demonstrated on the ethnolinguistic history of the Chechen and Ingush peoples of the central Caucasus.

1. Introduction. Mountains are as distinctive linguistically as they are geographically and biologically. When inhabited by settled farming and herding people, they harbor unusual diversity of language families and grammatical structures relative to nearby lowlands. The considerable ecological diversity of mountain landscapes varies vertically, and well-adapted societies take advantage of it by spanning a large vertical range and practicing transhumance at least to some extent. Verticality of social and economic organization leads to verticality of linguistic distributions and language spreads, a fact which has not been fully utilized in tracing the linguistic and ethnic prehistory of the Caucasus.

This article reviews the evidence from linguistics, folklore, and historical climatology for the linguistic and ethnic origins of the Chechen and Ingush, neighboring peoples speaking closely related languages of the Nakh branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian or East Caucasian family.¹ Nakh languages are now spoken chiefly on the north slope of the Caucasus, but outliers on the south slope and other evidence testify to a former Nakh presence there as well. All forms of evidence point rather consistently to an ultimate origin of Proto-Nakh on the southern Caucasus slope and a dispersal of Chechen-Ingush in the southern highlands. Linguistic and historical works on the Caucasus have generally seen the central Caucasian highlands as a place of disadvantage and retreat, occupied as a refuge from lowland powers (chiefly the Golden Horde, which ruled the steppe to the north), under constant pent-up population pressure, and abandoned for the lowlands at the first opportunity (e.g., Anchabadze and Volkova 1993:64–82; Arsaxanov 1969:16; Desheriev 1963:15; Jandieva 1999:52; Muzhuxoev 1995:9, 21; and many other sources). In this view a large-scale descent, or even return, of highlanders to the lowlands began in the sixteenth century after the defeat of the Golden Horde by Russia.

Consideration of historical climatology, however, suggests a different interpretation of highland population and language movements. During the Little Ice Age, a period of global cooling that began about 1400 A.D. and ended about 1850, some highlanders of the central Caucasus were forced to abandon pastures and villages to the advancing glaciers and shortened growing season, as mountain farmers and herders did worldwide, but this was only coincidentally related to political developments in the northern plains. (For the Little Ice Age, see Grove [1988]. For the warmer medieval period, see Bradley, Hughes, and Diaz [2003].) The reconstructable political economy and dialect geography for the preceding warmer period point to a culturally and linguistically strong southern highland with a southerly cultural orientation, and dialect or language spreads from highland centers to foothill peripheries. Meanwhile, the demographic and social structure of the north central Caucasus, which consisted of descent-based clan and tribal groupings with highland centers and lowland outposts, was essentially unaffected by language shifts and dialect spreads and can be said to be ancient and indigenous. This account of Nakh origins ties in well with the reconstructable broader picture of Northeast Caucasian origins and spreads.

2. Population structure and the Chechen-Ingush theory of ethnicity. The essential elements of a native Chechen-Ingush theory of ethnicity can be derived from traditional narratives and native descriptions of social structure. Russian and Western scholars have debated whether the Chechen and Ingush are one people or two, whether the modern national identities are native at all rather than a Soviet-imposed division, whether the Chechen and Ingush have any notion of national identity as distinct from religious or clan identity, and whether any concept of national identity below the generic “mountaineer” or “North Caucasian” was or is traditional (see, e.g., Wixman 1980:100–107; Bennigsen and Wimbush 1986:181–89). In fact, there is a clear traditional Chechen-Ingush system of ethnicity. It is a hierarchical system in which no one level is an exclusive or even preferred locus of ethnic identity and not all levels have explicit labels, but all have identifiable social functions. The levels include the family, subclan, clan, clan group or confederation, tribe or ethnolinguistic group, and language group, of which this article deals primarily with three: the clan (Chechen *taipa*, Ingush *teipa*), the maximal obligatorily exogamous group; the ethnolinguistic group (Chechen *q'aam*, Ingush *q'am*, now usually translated ‘nation’), the focus of a roughly national ethnic consciousness and typically endogamous; and the language group, comprising more than one ethnolinguistic group joined in a single speech community (Chechen, Ingush, and the Kisti of the southern Caucasus slope in Georgia). All groupings are descent-based in origin, though secondary assimilation is always possible and, in any case, actual descent is traceable at most only up to the subclan level.

The native theory recognized not just Chechen and Ingush, but four or five groups: Chechen (Noxchii); Ingush (Ghalghaai); the Melxii or Maelxii (the respectively Ingush and Chechen terms)² of southwestern Chechnya and southeastern Ingushetia; the Kisti of the upper Armxii (a tributary of the upper Terek) in the Ingush highlands and the upper Argun on the southern slope in Georgia;³ and possibly also the Arshtxoi or Orstxoi or Karabulak of western lowland Ingushetia. Of these, the Melxii are linguistically and ethnically not clearly either Chechen or Ingush, but intermediate or transitional between them, and ethnically Chechen now. (Genko [1930:684] also indicates that the pre-Soviet Chechens did not consider far southwestern Chechens, in particular the Melxii, to be Noxchii.) The Arshtxoi, who originated in the Melxii dialect area, seem to have also been linguistically transitional and were not considered ethnically Chechen (so many of them left or were deported after the Russian conquest of the Caucasus that little is known about their dialect). The Armxii Kisti have assimilated ethnically and linguistically to the Ingush, while the Kisti of Georgia are ethnically distinct, though now linguistically Chechen. Both the Chechen and the Ingush now recognize themselves and each other as separate nationalities.⁴

Linguistically, the Noxchii, Melxii, and Kisti speak dialects of Chechen and the Ingush (including assimilated remnants of the Arshtxoi) speak a distinct language which is not mutually intelligible with Chechen. Ingush and Chechen are very similar languages, however, and there is much passive bilingualism between their speakers, so the two languages function as a single speech community. All five of the traditional ethnolinguistic groups are collectively recognized as *vai naax* 'our (inclusive) people' and all the language varieties as *vai mott* 'our (inclusive) language' or Ingush *vai neaxa mott*/Chechen *vain neexan mott* 'our people's language'. In addition to forming a single speech community, all of them are united by common customs and traditional law. The Batsbi or Tsova-Tush of Georgia, whose language is related to Chechen and Ingush roughly as Czech is related to Russian and Ukrainian, do not belong to *vai naax* nor their language to *vai mott*, though any speaker of Chechen or Ingush can immediately tell that the language is closely related and can understand some phrases of it. The Batsbi have not traditionally followed Vainakh customs or law, and they consider themselves Georgians. (A recent survey of linguistic and ethnic groups, both Nakh and Georgian, on the central south slope is Kurtsikidze and Chikovani [2002].)

Among the highland Ingush and on the south slope, we find apparently ancient geographically based ethnonyms for several Nakh groups larger than the clan. The Feappii were residents of the southern (i.e., higher) part of the Mecxaloi tribal territory in highland Ingushetia, and the Ingush called the Batsbi *Feappii-baaca* (Genko 1930:686; Mal'sagov 1963:144–45). (Some sources consider the term *Kisti* equivalent to *Feappii*, e.g., Axriev [2000:127], Krupnov [1971:37].) In northern Chechen, the cognate term *Vaeppii* refers to people from

parts of southern Ingushetia (Maciev 1961 s.v.), while in southern (Kisti) Chechen it refers to the Batsbi (Aliroev 1962:68). This term may have been a self-designation of some Ingush, but for the most part it appears to have been used by southern Nakh speakers to refer to other, more southerly Nakh speakers. Another geographical term is *Ghalghaa*i, which referred to some or all of the eastern Ingush tribes Xamxoi and Cwuoroi and was centered in Ghalghaaichie, a large highland valley along the upper Assa that was a cultural and economic center of the Ingush from ancient times to the late Middle Ages (Xaradze and Robakidze 1968:34). *Ghalghaa*i appears to have been used beginning at least in the late Middle Ages as a general Ingush ethnonym in the piedmont, by descendants of different highland groups. (The term is an old one, attested in Georgian historical sources and used in highland Georgian dialects, in both cases referring to all Ingush [Xaradze and Robakidze 1968:20–22].) Today, *Ghalghaa*i is the Ingush self-designation and *Ghalghaaichie* is 'Ingushetia'.

Kisti is the self-designation of the Kisti, though it is not used of them by the Chechen or Ingush (Xaradze and Robakidze [1968:16]; confirmed by my fieldwork). The term is attested in Georgian historical sources going back at least to the Middle Ages, and is used by highland Georgians to refer to all Chechen and Ingush, though in standard Georgian it refers only to the Kisti of Georgia. Xaradze and Robakidze consider the term originally Georgian, since it is old in Georgian but not used by Nakh speakers other than those adjacent to Georgians.

These traditional ethnonyms are opaque and sometimes noncanonical in phonological form. Ingush *Feappii*, Chechen *Vaeppii* is outlandish, with labials both root-initially and root-finally and with a geminate *-pp-* which does not occur in native roots. This cannot be a native Proto-Nakh word. *Maelxii/Melxii*, *Ghalghaa*i, *Arshtxoi*, *Kisti*, and *Noxchii* are all opaque, though canonical in form. *Noxchii* ends in a regular noun-forming suffix (sg. *-chuo*, pl. *-chii*), but its root is opaque.

These are all ethnonyms for groupings at a higher level than the clan, groupings whose identities were both geographical and ethnic. *Veappii/Feappii*, *Maelxii/Melxii*, *Kisti*, and *Ghalghaa*i appear to have referred to the largest groups (possibly larger than tribes) and to have been ancient geographically based terms. All four come from the southern part of the modern Nakh range, a significant fact, as discussed below.

3. Origin legends and their ethnic scope. All of these ethnic groupings are hierarchical, but establishing equivalent rank between groups other than clans is problematic. Traditional narratives and legends are useful for working this out. I will speak of the "ethnic scope" of folklore and mythic elements. By establishing a relative chronology and geography of legend motifs in relation to their ethnic scope, we can reconstruct parts of an ethnohistory.

For instance, in an Ingush clan origin legend I have recorded, the clan ancestor Mawas journeys from his home in Arabia to the highlands and is adopted by the Jouloi, who arrange for his marriage; the Jouloi are an Ingush clan, so the clan progenitor has come to an already-Ingush area. Mawas sets out following a bird,⁵ having vowed to settle down only where the bird nests; the bird nests, Mawas begets four sons, and they found highland villages. Axriev (2000: 127–29) summarizes a Kisti origin legend in which an ancestor named Kist journeys from Syria via Abkhazia and Georgia to Ingushetia to found the important highland town Earzii, and another in which the ancestor came from Persia. (Another version of the founding of Earzii, whose name means ‘eagle’ in Ingush, is reported by Markovin [1994:30] and Xaradze and Robakidze [1968: 32]: woodcutters in the forest chop down a tree and find an eagle’s nest in its branches, and, taking this as a good omen, found a new town there. Krupnov [1971:54] cites a similar local tradition that Earzii was founded in the ninth century at the place of an eagle’s nest by a clan ancestor who had come from Arabia.)⁶ Aliroev (1962:4) cites a legend about the founding of Omalo, a Kisti village in the Tusheti highlands of Georgia: two men of the Xildiehwari (central highland Chechen, sometimes including Kisti) go out in search of two lost children, and after a night en route awaken to find that a bird has nested on the staff that one of them had left stuck in the ground; they take this as a favorable sign and settle there. In these legends, settlement in the far southern highlands is associated with two obviously mythic motifs: the bird’s nest as favorable omen for settlement and a journey to an unknown, unchosen destination. In the case of Mawas (the Ingush clan ancestor), an immigrant progenitor travels to an already inhabited area and takes a wife from a presently known local ethnic group. These mythic motifs are associated with the earliest foundation narratives, which are southern in orientation.⁷

An origin legend reproduced by Semenov (1895) traces all the Chechens to a progenitor from Syria, whose successive generations of descendants move to Nakhichevan, then Erzurum, then Kabardia, after which they found villages in the Chechen foothills, moving from west to east. Here and in other legends of Chechen foothill settlement (Maksimov 1893:40; Vertepov 1892:82), the founder undertakes a deliberate move with an established family to previously uninhabited, heavily forested land which he claims and clears. These texts show the Chechens interacting with the historical powerful peoples of the foothills and plains—Kabardians, Avars—and they are bound up with Islamic religious identity, which was acquired (albeit later than the Chechen lowland spread) from the Kumyk of the plains. The cultural orientation here is thus toward the northern lowlands.⁸

The ethnic scopes of the foundation narratives are different: the Ingush and Kisti ones pertain to a single clan or village, while the Chechen one pertains to the entire Chechen nationality. That is, Ingush and Kisti clans, on the one hand, and the entire Chechen nationality, on the other, are functional equivalents.

This implies that *Noxchii* ‘Chechen’ may once have applied to a clanlike or tribe-like group, which in turn suggests that the Chechen spread in the lowlands was originally the expansion of a local clanlike or tribelike group. As seen below, other evidence points in the same direction. Table 1 is a preliminary listing of motifs that can be extracted from these narratives and the ways they can be used to taxonomize narratives.

Table 1. Motifs in Chechen and Ingush Origin Narratives

MOTIF	INGUSH	KISTI (OMALO)	CHECHEN (N. FOOTHILLS)	CHECHEN
	[JN]	[Aliroev 1962]	[Semenov 1895]	[Vertepov 1892; Maksimov 1893]
ORIGIN AS JOURNEY	+	+	+	+
JOURNEY FROM SOUTH	+	-	+	+
ORIGIN OF JOURNEY	Arabia		Syria, etc.	
MYTHIC INTERACTIONS	Georgia		Kabardia	
UPHILL OR DOWNHILL	up	down	up	down
TIME FRAME	mythic	historical	mythic	medieval
KNOWN DESTINATION	-	-	-	+
BIRD NEST AS SIGN	+	+	-	
ANCESTOR IS FOREIGN	+	-	+	-
DESTINATION IS INHABITED	+	-	+ / -	-
INHABITED BY CHECHEN-				
INGUSH CLANS	+		n/a	+/-
ETHNIC SCOPE	clan	village	pan-Chechen	Chechen

NOTE: Bracketed names are sources (JN = my own text collection). + = present, - = absent, blank = unknown.

Let us take more or less at face value the scenario whereby a progenitor journeys from the south, marries into a preexisting ethnic group, and founds a new highland village among the prior inhabitants. The linguistic consequences of such an event might be the absorption of the newcomer into the preexisting speech community with minimal linguistic impact; or, especially if he founded a new village and was later joined by other relatives from the lowlands, an enclave of lowland speech in the highlands. The enclave would be most likely to shift to the local dominant language, but if the town happened to prosper its language or dialect could increase in sociolinguistic status and spread.

Those are the oldest foundation legends; there are later ones, with fewer mythic elements and more references to local Ingush places rather than distant ones, most of which involve movements downhill. A chain of movements in legends reported by Xaradze and Robakidze (1968:32) describes the distant ancestors of the population of Oaljgat’ie as coming originally from an inaccessible highland town of Kiralt to long-uninhabited Kerbit to recently inhabited Earzii to presently inhabited Oaljgat’ie. (See n. 6, where the founders of Earzii are traced to a different, but also higher, town.) These legends appear to be subclan-sized or smaller in ethnic scope, they refer to local towns, and they

seem to have no mythic elements, except for the occasional motif of founding a town where a bird has nested.

Finally, most knowledgeable lowland Ingush of older generations know family oral traditions dealing with the arrival, a few generations back, of a known ancestor who brought his family from the highlands or piedmont to an existing lowland town, bought land, and built a house which in many cases still belongs to the family. I. Daxkil'gov (2000:42–43) describes a tradition of how the Ingush lowland town of Nazran was founded by a selected large colonizing group from the main piedmont town of Ongusht in the mid-eighteenth century. These narratives are obviously recent, local, and not at all mythologized.

4. Nakh dialect geography. One of the fundamental principles of dialect geography is that innovations emanate from a center and spread outward, and consequently archaisms are likely to be found at or near the periphery, often with a discontinuous distribution. The center is a point of cultural and economic importance, and its prestige impels the spread of its dialect features at the expense of other dialects. Therefore, reconstructing central and peripheral areas for earlier periods can help establish where cultural and economic power were centered in earlier times.

One important early Nakh sound change for which there are some peripheral archaisms is postvocalic lenition. Ordinarily, Proto-Nakh postvocalic voiced consonants are lost entirely or turn into glides in Chechen-Ingush, remaining intact in Batsbi. Table 2 shows a few examples of this process; for more discussion see Nichols (1997a). There are isolated lexical exceptions in which the process has idiosyncratically failed to apply. Most of these appear to cluster in the Aeqqii dialect of Chechen (spoken in the northeasternmost Chechen lowlands, an area now part of Daghestan); examples are in table 2. The exceptions are then archaisms indicating that the northeastern lowland part of the Chechen-Ingush dialect area is peripheral. Postvocalic lenition is one of the earliest Chechen-Ingush sound changes, so the peripheral status of the northeast pertains to earliest Proto-Chechen-Ingush times.⁹

Table 3 displays the major processes of umlaut in Chechen dialects and in Ingush. Umlaut is the assimilation of a tonic or root vowel to the height or rounding of the vowel in the next syllable. It creates morphophonemic alternations like those for the verbs shown in table 4. Figure 1 is a schematic dialect map showing the geographical distribution of the major umlaut types as well as postvocalic lenition and posttonic reduction. Their dialect distribution allows the sound changes to be grouped into a two-layer series of innovations. There is an early set of changes (postvocalic lenition, posttonic reduction, umlaut affecting **a*, and fronting of **o* and **u*) which affect most dialects, are centered in the southwestern highlands, and treat the east and northeast as the archaic periphery. There is a later set of changes (rounding of **e* and **i*, production of front rounded vowels) which affect only the lowlands; they arose in the northeast and

have spread minimally, so that all highland dialects constitute the periphery with regard to these changes.

Table 2. Dialect Features: Retention of Proto-Nakh Postvocalic Voiced Consonants

	PROTO-NAKH	BATSBİ	AEQQII	PLAINS	INGUSH
'child'	<i>*bader</i>	<i>bader</i>	<i>bier</i>	<i>beer</i>	<i>bier-</i>
'book'	<i>*zhagn-</i>	<i>zhagn-</i>		<i>zhaina</i>	<i>zhei</i>
'cap'	<i>*kud</i>	<i>kud</i>	<i>küda</i>	<i>kui</i>	<i>kii</i>
'spoon'	<i>*wabik'</i>	<i>wabik'</i>	<i>wabag</i>	<i>waig</i>	<i>wagj</i>
'scar'	<i>*moda(?)</i>		<i>moda</i>	<i>muo</i>	<i>(mu'a)^a</i>
'brain'	<i>*hwaad-u-</i>	<i>hwad</i>	<i>hwooda^b</i>	<i>hwie</i>	<i>hwoa</i>
'wolfhound'	<i>*eegar</i>		<i>iegar</i>	<i>ier</i>	<i>ier-</i>
'orphan'	<i>*badu</i>	<i>bad"o</i>	<i>badā</i>	<i>buo</i>	<i>buo</i>
'haunch'	<i>*ghoodagh</i>		<i>ghuodagha</i>	<i>ghuogh</i>	<i>ghuogh-</i>
'talk'	<i>*lev-ar</i>	<i>lev-ar</i>	<i>liv-ar</i>	<i>lie-r</i>	<i>lie-r</i>
'ripen'	<i>*qeC-ar</i>	<i>qe'-ar</i>	<i>qiv-ar</i>	<i>qie-r</i>	<i>qie-r</i>
'knead'	<i>*hwev-ar</i>	<i>hwev-ar</i>	<i>hwiv-ar</i>	<i>hwie-r</i>	<i>hwie-r</i>

NOTE: Ordinarily these consonants undergo lenition in Chechen-Ingush (as in the first two examples). However, the Aeqqii dialect of the northeast preserves a few archaisms (boldface). Aeqqii nouns are from Arsaxanov (1969:23–24, 34), except that 'child' is from my own fieldnotes; Aeqqii verbs are from Mal'sagov (1998:39, 42). *C = unknown consonant. (Recall that *w* = pharyngeal.)

^aIngush *mu'a* could be cognate to Chechen *muo*, but not to Aeqqii *moda*, and it cannot descend from **moda*. Chechen *muo* could be cognate to either the Ingush or the Aeqqii form, but not both. I am inclined to regard the Ingush form as aberrant—intervocalic glottal stop is generally lost in Ingush, so the word looks noncanonical no matter what its origin. Whatever the original Nakh form and whatever the explanation for the irregular correspondence, the Aeqqii form seems to represent an archaic consonant retention.

^bI assume on the Ingush evidence that the vowel in this form is *oo* and not *uo*. The very different vocalism in the plains dialect form is due to a difference in declension class: Ingush and Aeqqii have generalized what must have been an oblique stem form with an extension **-u-*; Batsbi has not; Chechen uses a different oblique stem extension in **-n-*.

Table 3. Chechen-Ingush Umlaut Processes

	UMLAUT / __ *i, u	UMLAUT / __ *e, o	POSTTONIC *e, o > *i, u	RAISING / __ *i, u	POSTTONIC neutraliza- tion to <i>a</i>	PHONEMIC <i>ö, ü</i>
CH'AABIRLOI						
DWAI ^a	?	(1)				
SHAROI	(2)	(2)		+		
ITUM-QALLE	(3)			+	partial	
AEQQII	(4)	(4)	+	+	+	+
PLAINS	(4)	(4)	+	+	mostly	+
INGUSH	(3)	(1)/ __ Co		partial	+	

NOTE: After Nichols (1997:959). (1) = rounding of **a*; (2) = (1) plus fronting of **a*; (3) = (1) + (2) plus fronting of **o*, of **u*, or of both; (4) = (1) + (2) + (3) + rounding of **e* and/or **i*; + = change occurs.

^aDwai is a subdialect of Ch'aabirloi.

Table 4. Verb Principal Parts Showing Umlaut

	INFINITIVE	PRESENT TENSE	PAST	PERFECT	GLOSS
PROTO-NAKH	<i>*aal-an</i>	<i>*aal-o</i>	<i>*aal-ira</i>	<i>*aal-ina</i>	'say'
CHECHEN	<i>aalan</i>	<i>oolu</i>	<i>eelira</i>	<i>aella</i>	
INGUSH	<i>aala</i>	<i>oal</i>	<i>ealar</i>	<i>eanna</i>	
PROTO-NAKH	<i>*toox-an</i>	<i>*toox-u</i>	<i>*toox-ira</i>	<i>*toox-ina</i>	'strike'
CHECHEN	<i>tuoxan</i>	<i>tuuxu</i>	<i>tyyxira</i>	<i>tyexna</i>	
INGUSH	<i>tuoxa</i>	<i>tox</i>	<i>tiexar</i>	<i>tiexaa</i>	

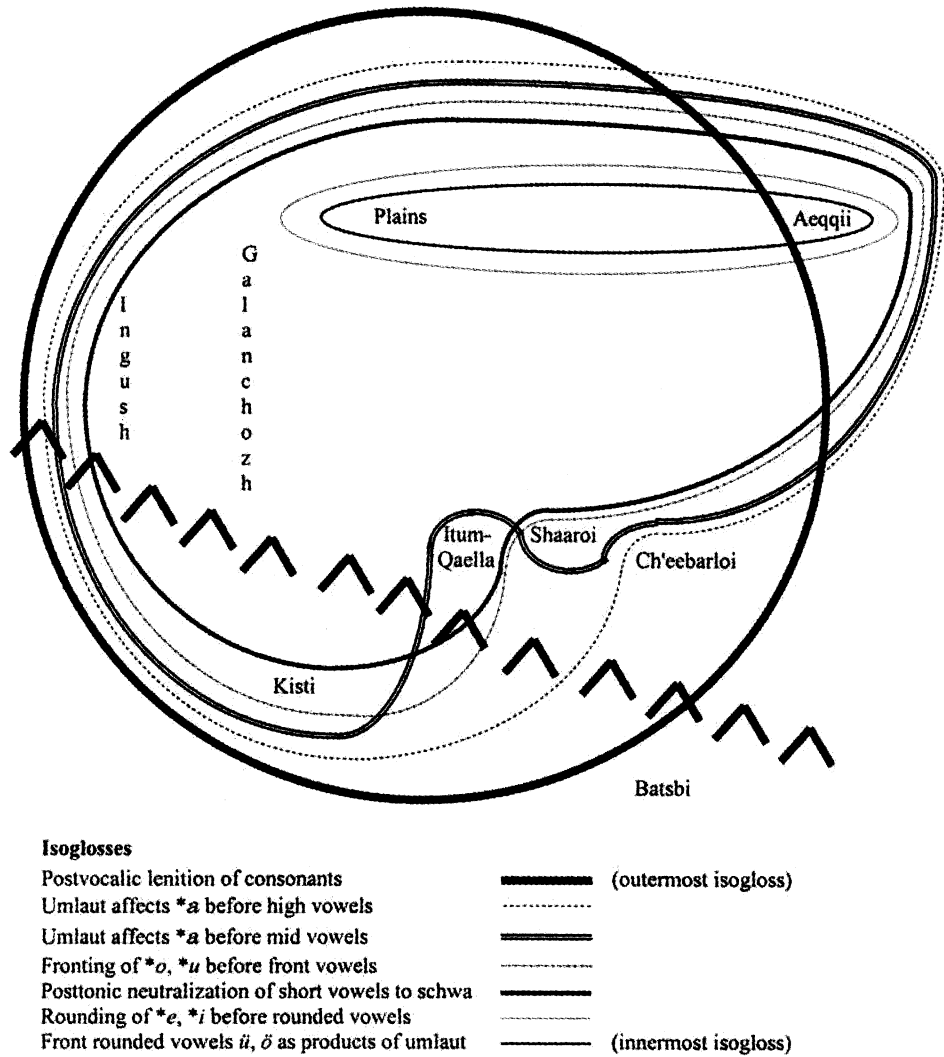


Figure 1. Isogloss map of the Nakh languages (Batsbi, Ingush, and the dialects of Chechen). The line of peaks represents the Caucasus crest.

The inference to be drawn is that the southwestern highlands were the dialect-geographical center for unified Proto-Chechen-Ingush, for early Pre-Chechen and Pre-Ingush, and during the entire time when the basic Chechen dialects formed. Postvocalic lenition, posttonic neutralization, and the early umlaut processes form isoglosses that spread from the western highlands and define the major dialects. Then, more recently, the eastern lowlands assumed the role of center at about the same time that northeastern Chechen dialects came under the influence of Turkic languages, the obvious source of the front rounded vowels. Front rounded vowels spread, wavelike, across a geographically continuous set of dialects which do not comprise a single phylogenetic branch. Thus, there has been a shift of the dialect-geographical center from the southwestern highlands to the northeastern lowlands, and, as argued in section 7, the shift occurred sometime around the Middle Ages. As this was the time of the onset of the Little Ice Age, a combined climatic and geographical reconstruction can be given which places the sociolinguistic and cultural center of influence in the southwestern highlands during the warmer period, followed by a shift of center to the eastern lowlands with the onset of global cooling. The beginning of the cool period saw not only the dialect-geographical marginalization of the Chechen-Ingush highlands, but also the rise of the Golden Horde in the lowlands and the beginning of Turkic influence on lowland dialects, manifesting itself in loan vocabulary as well as front rounded vowels. The premedieval central position of the southern highlands is consistent with the origin legends that center on the southern highlands, which on independent evidence appear to be the most archaic. The later lowlands center is consistent with the later phases of the Chechen origin legends. Decline of the highland center is consistent with Ingush oral traditions such as the founding of Earzii cited in section 3 above.

Similarly, the highlands of the central south slope were mostly Nakh-speaking until about the sixteenth century, when highlanders began to descend, founding or joining lowland towns, and Georgian began to spread uphill eventually to displace Nakh speech, a process that was mostly complete by the end of the eighteenth century (Anchabadze and Volkova 1993:69–72; also K'ik'nadze 1996; Ochiauri 1967; Uturgaidze 1966).¹⁰ Ch'inch'arauli (1975, 2003) presents some Georgian-Nakh and Nakh-Georgian cultural loan vocabulary. The Nakh forms he adduces have not undergone postvocalic lenition or umlaut, changes which spread through early but dialectally differentiated Chechen-Ingush, leaving northern and eastern dialects on the periphery as just argued. Evidently, the first Georgian-Nakh contacts date to just after the Chechen-Ingush diversification or they involved southern foothill to lowland dialects which were peripheral and had not yet undergone the change, or both. It may be these peripheral Chechen-Ingush varieties that shifted to Khevsur Georgian.

5. Family tree structure. The structure of the Nakh and Nakh-Daghestanian family trees supports the evidence from myth, ethnonyms, and dialect geo-

graphy pointing to a southern highland origin for Chechen and Ingush. A well-known principle of linguistic geography is that the homeland of a language family is to be sought in or near the area where the deepest branches of the family tree come together on a map of daughter language distribution. (This is sometimes called the “age-area hypothesis,” and the projection of deepest branches onto a map is called the “center of gravity” [Diebold 1960; Dyen 1956; Sapir 1949].)

A Nakh linguistic family tree is shown in figure 2. The deepest divergence in this tree is between Batsbi and Chechen-Ingush. (The entire Nakh family, be it noted, is a shallow one, at most about like Slavic in its degree of divergence.) These two branches meet on the southern Caucasus slope, in the upper Alazani Valley above the Pankisi Gorge of Georgia, where both Batsbi and Kisti are indigenous, and therefore this region can be assumed to lie in or near the proto-homeland. The Nakh speech of the southern slope included Ingush until the twentieth century, when Ingush yielded either to Georgian or to Kisti Chechen (Anchabadze and Volkova 1993:72; Genko 1930:682–85). Hence, the split of Chechen from Ingush was also evident on the southern slope. In Chechen and Ingush, as was shown in sections 2–4, the ancient dialect divisions and the ancient tribal territories spread from east to west along the southern highlands, and isoglosses show that early innovations spread from west to east. Thus, the centers of gravity for Proto-Nakh and Proto-Chechen-Ingush are on the high southern Caucasus slope, and that for early Chechen-Ingush is in the western highlands of the northern and southern slopes. The entire Chechen lowland area is now linguistically homogeneous, the result of the relatively recent Chechen colonization of the foothills and the formation of the lowland center of innovation shown in figure 2.

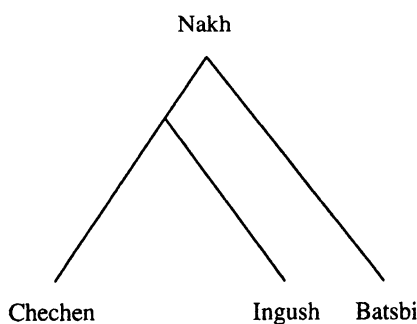


Figure 2. Nakh family tree (dialects of Chechen not shown).

An ultimately southern origin for Chechen-Ingush and Nakh is consistent with the general trend in the major branches of Nakh-Daghestanian. A schematic family tree for Nakh-Daghestanian is shown in figure 3. The earliest division

is between Nakh and Daghestanian. The Nakh branch then shows no subdivision until very recently. The Daghestanian branch develops quite differently, diverging very early into several old and deep branches, some of which themselves diverge early. The two Daghestanian branches with deepest subdivision are Avar-Andic-Tsezic and Lezgian, and in each of them the deepest branching occurs in the southern range. For Avar-Andic-Tsezic, the deepest branching is between Avar-Andic and Tsezic, whose present meeting point is in the southern highlands where Andic and Tsezic meet. For Lezgian, the deepest and most divergent offshoots are Khinalug and Udi, both spoken to the south of the Great Caucasus range.

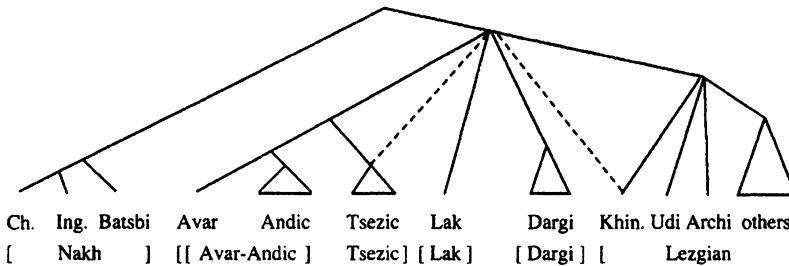


Figure 3. Nakh-Daghestanian family tree. Triangles represent subfamilies; dashed lines represent possible alternative attachments. The major branches are labeled in brackets on the bottom line. Ch. = Chechen; Ing. = Ingush; Khin. = Khinalug.

Let us now consider where the Nakh and Daghestanian branches meet on the map. Literally and superficially they now meet near the border of the Chechen Republic and Daghestan, where eastern Chechen abuts Avar and the western Andic and Tsezic languages. But there are three reasons to doubt that this border represents the true historic center of gravity. One is that, as shown above, the internal Nakh center of gravity lies to the south of the Caucasus crest. The second is that what work has been done on earliest Nakh-Daghestanian contacts and isoglosses points to closer ancient connection of Nakh to the eastern branches Lak (Fähnrich 1983, 1984) or Lezgian (Nichols 2003) or both than to adjacent Avar-Andi-Tsez. The third is that Nakh obviously represents not an entire intact branch, but a severely pruned one. Its own internal differentiation is quite recent, and if Proto-Nakh as we reconstruct it represented an entire branch, it would have been an isolate branch surrounded by non-Nakh speech for several millennia. However, Proto-Nakh is a very conservative Nakh-Daghestanian branch and does not give the appearance of having been a frontier language. These are reasons to suspect that the original Nakh-Daghestanian center of gravity lay to the south of the Great Caucasus range, and that it has been obscured by family-tree inversion, which frequently occurs where a later language spread (in this case, the spread of Kartvelian) has overrun the original root of a family tree (for this process, see Nichols [1997b]).

Other ancient sisters of Proto-Nakh, now extinct, must have once surrounded Proto-Nakh on the southern Caucasus slope and foothills and quite likely to the north and west as well (some evidence is given in section 7 below; for the west, see Gamrekeli [1961] and Thordarson [1984]).

6. Verticality. Despite the Chechen legends of descent into previously uninhabited land, what concrete historical evidence we have indicates that descents to the lowlands over the last few centuries have involved movements to previously inhabited and previously Nakh-speaking towns. As mentioned just above, the shift from Ingush to Chechen speech in the Pankisi Gorge of Georgia was evidently caused by Chechen descents which brought about swamping of an Ingush speech area by Chechen. Batsbi tradition as recorded by Desheriev (1953:349–51, 1963:62–65) preserves memory of a two-stage descent: first, abandonment of the original highland area in northern Tusheti, settling of villages lower in the mountains, and a period of transhumance plus permanent descents of a few families; then, complete abandonment of the highlands and year-round settlement in the lowlands after a flood destroyed one of the secondary mountain villages in the early nineteenth century. That is, Batsbi lowland outposts were established by a combination of transhumance and individual resettlements, and some time later there was a sizable migration into an established outpost. Ingush lowland town and clan histories indicate that highland clans descended to lowland towns that had some prior Ingush inhabitants (some are mentioned by Xaradze and Robakidze [1968:36–37]). As a result of these descents and founding of further lowland towns from earlier ones,¹¹ Ingush speech replaced Kabardian in the foothills and lowlands. All of these pieces of evidence indicate that highlanders had connections and outposts in lowland towns prior to their descents.

Settlement patterns in lowland Ingush towns point to the same conclusion. In the highlands, each clan has a village of origin which was associated with and in some cases inhabited exclusively by that clan. In the lowlands, each village or town has families from more than one clan (usually families of the same clan live together in the same neighborhood) and typically each clan has families in more than one village. That is, highland settlement is linguistically and clanwise compact and continuous, while lowland settlement is distributed and discontinuous. This suggests that descents were made by individual families (and not whole clans) and that at least some of them moved to villages where some Ingush (of their own and other clans) were already present. Desheriev (1963: 71–73) gives a similar picture of lowland and highland Chechen clan distribution and traces all clans to the southwestern (Galanch'ozh) Chechen highlands. Piedmont Kisti towns of the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia consist of several one-clan neighborhoods just as piedmont Ingush towns on the north slope do, and in both Kisti Chechen and Ingush the word for such a neighborhood is *kup* (Kurtsikidze and Chikovani 2002).

That is the highland perspective: clans originate in particular places in the highlands, and families descend individually to outposts where they regroup in partial clans. The lowland perspective is that individuals, families, and clans know their places of highland origin and know which stone towers in which highland village belong to their clan. The northeastern Chechen Aeqqii trace their origins to the western Chechen mountains and to the local highland group known as Laam-Aaqqii (see n. 9) from the vicinity of Nashax on the upper Gexi in the Galanch'ozh dialect area (Arsaxanov 1969:16). The distribution of the original Aaqqii/Aeqqii is then quite discontinuous, and the discontinuity arose early, as the lowland Aeqqii belong to the northeastern periphery as defined by the earliest isoglosses (as discussed above). Apparently, then, at an early time a western highland group had an outpost in the easternmost lowlands. The mechanism of the later Chechen spread through the lowlands was successive foundation of a series of outpost villages (to interpret the legend reproduced by Semenov [1895] and summarized in section 3 above). Some lowland Chechen clans are known to be of foreign origin and lacked highland roots (Mamakaev 1973:23), as is consistent with language shift in the lowlands.

Thus, as judged from both highland and lowland perspectives, prior to the late Middle Ages the Chechen-Ingush highlands were culturally strong, economically prosperous, and dialect-geographically central, and highland villages or clans maintained lowlands outposts with which they maintained regular linguistic and family ties. Cultural and economic ties to the south were strong. There were at least occasional migrations of individuals and families from lowlands to highlands, and there was systematic dialect spread from highlands to lowlands. Let us now interpret this in the light of the Little Ice Age, which began in the late Middle Ages. Prior to the global cooling, lowland outposts were a means by which highland clans extended their influence (and probably their dialects) to the northern hinterlands. Outposts gave highland clans a foothold in the very different lowland ecosystem and access to winter pastures, trade, and other connections, and could serve as refuges to highlanders who needed to move for whatever reason.¹² Alpine lands are marginal: they are well watered and thus an asset in times of warmth and drought, but their altitude gives them a short growing season and makes them susceptible to frosts in cooler years. As the Little Ice Age set in, alpine farms and pastures failed, glaciers encroached on pastures, and harvests were reduced throughout the highlands, and families thereby impoverished could and presumably did move to lowlands outposts. Ordinarily, families would have begun to move back uphill in the late nineteenth century when the global cooling ended, but the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and then early Soviet collectivization ruined the traditional economy and destroyed established land-use patterns.

The Little Ice Age weakened the highland economy but strengthened the lowlands (which now received more rain), and the dialect geographical center shifted downhill; ties to the south were weakened, and the north became

economically important. Throughout the cool period, language spread was governed by one-way vertical bilingualism (Wixman 1980:57–59; cf. Èdel'man [1980] for Central Asia) whereby highland villagers know lowland languages but not vice versa. In this situation, lowland languages tend to spread uphill, and mountaintops are linguistic islands where remnant languages linger before being absorbed. Thus, the directionality of language spread during the cool period was the reverse of that during the warm period.

A similar picture has been reconstructed for the preconquest Andes, where empires with large populations and complex societies arose and spread in the highlands and maintained colonies at various lower elevations, often at some distance (Murra [1956, 1985] and other works, in which the terms “verticality” and “vertical archipelago” are advanced for this system of outposts; Masuda, Shimada, and Morris [1985]; Stanish [1992]; for the spread of Quechuan in the highlands, see Mannheim [1985] and Stark [1985]).

Similar distributions, with large compact highland territories and separate, even distant, lowland outposts, can be inferred for the distant linguistic relatives of Nakh in Daghestan. Lak is a language with a large highland distribution and smaller foothill outposts, two of them enclaves in Dargi lands and one at the Agul-Lezgi boundary along the Kiraxchaj River near the town of Duldug (the outposts are not shown on most maps, but are shown by Xajdakov [1973:173] and Smeets [1994:xii]). Avar, a “big” language with considerable dialect divergence and a distribution much like that of Chechen, ranges from the southern lowlands across the crest to the northern lowlands and has outposts in the highland Andic area. The major branches of Nakh-Daghestanian tend to have continuous distributions within river canyons, and both the internal consistency of the branches and the discreteness between them suggest that alternations of uphill and downhill spread have gone on throughout the many millennia that this language family has occupied its present territory.¹³ All of these spreads have involved language or dialect shift and some migration to outposts, but not population replacement.¹⁴

7. Dating of the Chechen-Ingush split. Chechen and Ingush have 83–84 percent retention of strict cognates on the Swadesh 100-word list, so their raw glottochronological date of separation is about six hundred years ago—that is about 1400 A.D.¹⁵ (Glottochronological dates are useful but very approximate.) Now, Chechen and Ingush, though separate languages, to some extent comprise a single speech community and presumably always have. A long history of interaction is indicated by the fact that the lowland Chechen include some families and subclans of known or probable Ingush provenience and vice versa (see Daxkil'gov 1991; Desheriev 1963). In this kind of situation, glottochronological dates can be presumed to be artifactually low, as the “cognates” actually include some undetected early borrowings, creation of “cognates” by speakers applying their own language’s phonological and morphological canon to words of the other

language, or both. That is, in this situation the cognate retention rate should be higher than ordinarily expected. Embleton (1986, 1991) proposes an adjustment in the glottochronological formula to handle situations of post-split contact. Table 8 below shows raw glottochronological dates, Embleton’s adjusted glottochronological dates, and actual dates (which are very close to adjusted glottochronological dates) for some European language splits, and raw versus adjusted glottochronological dates for one North American split, following Embleton. All of these are splits that were not “clean”: German and Low Saxon were adjacent and continued to interact after their split; the Romance languages probably have undetected early Latin loans, and, in addition, some of them were adjacent and continued to interact; Makah and its sisters (in the Wakashan language family of coastal Washington and British Columbia) maintained regular interaction after their split. The three cases in which splits were followed by contact and the newly split languages did not acquire separate national political status are asterisked in table 5; these are most like the Chechen-Ingush situation, although the uninterrupted participation of Chechen and Ingush in a single speech community to the present day makes this arguably the most intense of the post-split contact situations.

Table 5. Raw and Adjusted Glottochronological Dates for Some Language Splits

SPLIT	RAW GLOTTO- CHRONOLOGICAL	ADJUSTED OR ACTUAL	RATIO (ADJ/RAW)
	AGE	AGE	
German–Low Saxon*	600	1200	2.0
Portuguese-Spanish	400	900	2.25
Friulian-Italian*	800	1400	1.75
“Iberian”-French	900	1200+	1.33+
French-Italian	400	1400	3.5
Makah–Nootka/Nitinaht*	400	900	2.25

NOTE: The table follows Embleton (1991), except that French-Italian is from Trask (1996: 364). Adjusted = based on Embleton’s formula; actual = based on historical or linguistic attestation. All figures rounded to nearest 100.

* = splits that were sociolinguistically most like that of Chechen-Ingush. All ages are in years before present.

For all of these splits the adjusted or actual date of separation averages about twice that of the raw glottochronological date. It is most likely, then, that Chechen and Ingush actually separated not around 1400 A.D. but some six centuries earlier, around 800.¹⁶ That is, both the spread through the highlands and the establishment of lowlands outposts (including the Aeqqii dialect in the far northeast) probably date to before the Middle Ages. This time frame considerably antedates the beginning of the Little Ice Age, which is consistent with my proposal that the colonization of the lowlands was not a flight from highland impoverishment, but began as an expansion from an economic, cultural, and dialect-geographical center of power in the highlands.

What language was spoken in the present Chechen-Ingush northern piedmont and plains in the late first millennium A.D.? Three kinds of evidence suggest strongly that it was a Nakh-Daghestanian language and probably a Nakh or Nakh-like language. First, as already noted, Proto-Nakh and Chechen-Ingush are very conservative and, despite the near-isolate status of the Nakh branch within Nakh-Daghestanian, give no evidence of having been geographically isolated or in contact with exotic languages during their prehistory. Their conservatism would suggest that they have been nonfrontier languages, surrounded by sister languages, for most of their history.

Second, though for the most part Proto-Nakh reconstruction is very straightforward, with regular correspondences and transparent morphology and with identical derivational and inflectional morphology in many cognate sets, there are a number of words with phonological discrepancies which are not explainable as simple exceptions to known sound laws (as the occasional failures of postvocalic lenition discussed in section 4 above are). Three examples from the 100-word list are Chechen *new*, Ingush *nihw*¹⁷ 'hide, animal skin' (the *-hw-* : *-w-* correspondence is phonologically close but irregular; ordinarily, both **hw* and **w* display correspondences of identity); Chechen *chim*, Ingush *chil* 'ashes'; and Chechen *zhim*, Ingush *zwam-iga* 'little, small'. All three pairs must surely be cognate, but their discrepancies cannot be explained within known Nakh or as borrowings from known Daghestanian languages. Another example may be the discrepant set for 'scar' in table 2 above. It may be that one member of such sets has been borrowed from a now-extinct close relative of Nakh.

A clear case of borrowing from an unattested Nakh-Daghestanian source is Chechen *waazh*, Ingush *wazh* 'apple'. The word is clearly Nakh-Daghestanian, but the correspondences are irregular; the regular correspondent is Chechen *hwaach*, Ingush *hwach* 'plum' (Nichols 2003:239). No attested Daghestanian language has a form that could have been the source of the Chechen-Ingush word for 'apple'. This word shows that otherwise unattested Nakh-Daghestanian languages have interacted with their sisters and gone extinct, and it is consistent with the hypothesis of now-extinct Nakh-like languages on the Nakh frontier, though, of course, its source cannot be pinpointed geographically or in terms of the family tree.

Third, some of the important ethnolinguistic boundaries in the Caucasus appear to have been surprisingly stable for a long time. As has been noted in the archeological literature, the Koban culture (a culture of lowlands origin which spread across the north central Caucasus in the first millennium B.C. and spanned the late Bronze and early Iron Ages) falls into three regional variants whose ranges are strikingly similar to those of historically attested (pre-Russian) Circassian (West Caucasian family), Ossetic (Iranian), and Chechen-Ingush, though the age of the Koban culture is much greater than the internal time depths of any of these three branches. (Kozenkova [1989] gives a map and a survey of the Koban culture, with bibliography.) The succeeding pre-Alanic and

Alanic culture is less studied, but Abramova (1989) sees essential ethnic and cultural continuity from Koban to Alanic to attested early modern north central Caucasian ethnolinguistic groups. Krupnov (1971:55–57) reviews archaeological evidence for a distinctive, autochthonous Ingush culture in historical Ingush lands going back to at least the first millennium B.C. On the south slope, the part of Georgia known in historical sources as Dvaleti seems to have harbored people culturally, and probably linguistically, related to the Nakh peoples in early historical times and now corresponds approximately to South Ossetia (Gamrekeli 1961; also Thordarson 1984).

None of the three pieces of evidence demands this interpretation by itself, but taken together I believe they bear the following interpretation. Descent-based groupings in the north central Caucasus—clans, tribes, and larger nationlike groupings, each with a specific highland origin and the entire set with behavioral correlates including clan exogamy and tribe endogamy—are remarkably durable and remarkably old. The general institution of verticality-highland centers, lowland outposts, and transhumance—and with it the discontinuous distribution of clans in the lowlands, is also ancient, although whether the association of particular outposts with particular highland origins is a long-standing one is an open question. Language shifts, culture change, and the spread of new technology have moved over the land for millennia without changing this ancient social structure.¹⁸ The movement of language and culture has probably been mediated and even facilitated by that social structure; language spreads, in particular, have probably occurred most easily within (and less easily between) large descent-based groupings and have almost certainly been facilitated by the system of verticality and outposts.

8. Conclusions. In summary, the epicenter of the Nakh linguistic homeland lay in the southern highlands of the central Caucasus, in today's Khevsureti and Tusheti. This region is south of the highest crests of the range (which is marked today by the Georgian border) and hence on the southern slope, but north of the divide, as the Terek, the Assa, and the Andi Koisu all have their headwaters to the south of the highest peaks. The Proto-Nakh territory then included the headwaters of all the Terek tributaries: the upper Terek, the Armxii, the Assa, the Argun, and the Andi Koisu (specifically, the Pirikiteli Alazan and Tush Alazan). Proto-Chechen-Ingush was centered in Khevsureti, in the upper Terek, Assa, and Argun drainages, and Proto-Batsbi to the east in Tusheti. This location allowed connections to both the north and south, and the early Nakh highlanders almost certainly had trade relations, winter pastures, outposts, and other connections to both the northern and the southern lowlands. In the warm period of the early Middle Ages, Proto-Nakh and then Proto-Chechen-Ingush expanded from the highland centers to lowland outposts on both sides of the slope. Ancestral Para-Nakh had expanded from the same centers before that, so that the early Nakh expansion proceeded by language shift from Para-Nakh to Nakh at least on

the north slope, and probably on the south slope as well. The same process is likely to have recurred for millennia. While isoglosses spread downhill, people moved uphill, forming new highland towns whose origin legends are now heavily mythologized. With the onset of the Little Ice Age, the highest towns were abandoned, lowland outposts became permanent settlements, and lowland towns became dialect-geographical centers. On the north slope this brought about the spread of lowland Chechen dialect features into the mid highlands and the gradual ethnic unification of the Chechen tribal groupings as Noxchii. On the south slope it meant the spread of Georgian and the reduction of southern Ingush, Chechen, and Batsbi to enclaves (and the extinction of any southern Para-Nakh languages). Meanwhile, as isoglosses and languages moved uphill, people moved downhill, increasing the Ingush, Chechen, Kisti, and Batsbi population in the lowlands.

The formation of the early alpine Chechen-Ingush centers is described in the earliest stratum of legend as a journey from urban centers in the south to an unknown destination, with a bird's nest as sign and marriage into a preexistent local clan by a progenitor who is not himself Chechen or Ingush. A possible interpretation is that Vainakh speech was adopted, in language shift, by preexistent tribes or clans whose composition and territory did not otherwise change—i.e., that the still earlier origin of Proto-Nakh (including now extinct sisters of known Nakh) involved language spread from the southern foothills. The ancient eastern and southern neighbors of greater Nakh are likely to have belonged to the Lezgian branch of Daghestanian and probably included Caucasian Albanian (ancestral Udi or its near relative [Greppin 1982; Schulze 1982:279–93]), a lowland language. Whether or not the literal origin of Proto-Nakh involves spread uphill from southern lowlands, the mythic origins of Chechen and Ingush clan and tribe ancestors in the great cities of the southern lowlands show that the cultural orientation in the Middle Ages and before was to the south.

Proto-Chechen-Ingush split into Ingush and Chechen in the western highlands, and phonological innovations spread from west to east to create a highland isogloss fan. Later, western Chechen speakers colonized the forested northern foothills, spread rapidly over the forested belt, and began to move into the plains; the result was a single dialect spoken over the entire forest and piedmont, and the spread of the ethnonym Noxchii to all of today's Chechen. Legendary depictions of this process speak of purposeful settlement of previously wild land, trace the Chechen spread to a center at Nashax in the western highlands, and purport to explain the origin not of a clan or tribe, but of all Chechens. This was a time when the center of sociolinguistic gravity had shifted to the lowlands, so that highland clans could be attracted to the ethnic identity of a lowland clan.

Still later, in the late Middle Ages and especially the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries when the Little Ice Age peaked and shortened growing seasons, caused glacial advances, and generally imperiled the highland economy, many

highlanders descended to the foothills and plains, causing dialect mixture and swamping the Ingush speech communities of the southern slope with Chechen. The final Batsbi descent to the piedmont took place in this time frame. Narratives from this period trace highland villages to still higher villages, now abandoned, and they trace piedmont villages to particular highland tribes that are often consistent with the dialect evidence. Deportations and highland clearances at the hands of Russia went on at the same time, making it difficult to judge the extent to which the descents were triggered by the worsening climate.

The general model of diachronic linguistic geography in mountain regions proposed here involves three elements. The first is verticality: languages, dialects, societies, and components of societies as small as clans or families all have vertically distributed geographies with compact highland centers and distributed lowland outposts. Second, language and population movements are inversely correlated and determined by climate: during warm periods, languages and dialects spread downhill from highlands while people move uphill; during cold periods, languages and dialects spread uphill from lowlands while people move downhill. This is because, for agriculturalists, highlands are secure and economically strong in warm periods, but marginal or unproductive in cool periods. People move to centers of economic strength and linguistic influence emanates from those centers. Both kinds of movement are facilitated in mountains because there is generally some degree of transhumance. Third, while origin legends cannot be taken literally in their entirety, aspects such as their ethnic scope and degree of mythologization can correlate well with the age of the movements they describe, and their vertical directionality—uphill or downhill movements—can be taken literally. The elements of this model for the Central Caucasus are summarized in table 6. What evidence I have found indicates that the model applies across the entire Caucasus.

Table 6. Summary of Linguistic and Ethnic Consequences of Climate Change in the Central Caucasus

TIME	CLIMATE	LANGUAGE MOVEMENT	POPULATION MOVEMENT	ORIGIN LEGENDS: SCOPE	MYTHOLOGIZATION
MEDIEVAL AND EARLIER	Warm	Downhill	Uphill	Wide (nation, tribe)	Much
1400–1700	Cold	Uphill	Downhill	Clan, subclan	Some
1700–1860s	Very cold	Uphill	Downhill	Family	Little or none

Today’s Chechen and Ingush see themselves as forming a single speech community bound by nearly identical customs and traditions of interclan relations, but different national identities and international profiles. The Ingush entered the modern era with a native concept of linguistic and probably also ethnic unity. *Ghalghaai* may have been the traditional label for the entire ethno-

linguistic group; or, alternatively, if it referred only to the main highland clan confederation, it spread in the piedmont and was readily accepted as a national ethnonym. The Chechens of the lowlands and foothills shared the ethnonym *Noxchii*, which probably did not originally apply to the southern highlanders and still does not apply to the Kisti. Ethnic identity as *Noxchii* spread and solidified as Chechens unified to resist Russian conquest. It did not, however, spread into Georgia to apply to the Kisti.

Thus, the linguistic evidence indicates that Chechen and Ingush society and descent groups are indigenous and ancient, going back for millennia and centering on the highlands. They may have spoken other languages (though still probably Nakh or Nakh-like ones) at some very early time, but the societies, the people, the verticality of economic and social connections, and the tie of the people to the land are millennia old.

Notes

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Transcription. Ingush and Chechen words are spelled here in the all-Latin diacritic-free phonemic transcription used by the Berkeley Chechen-Ingush language project as its practical orthography. It uses *ch* and *sh* as in English, and *j* and *c* as in most east European orthographies. Vowels and diphthongs are spelled much as in Finnish. The character *w* indicates either the voiced pharyngeal segment [ʕ] (actually an epiglottalized glottal stop) or (when it follows a consonant) pharyngealization; *hw* is the voiceless epiglottal fricative. The system is described at <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~chechen> and <http://ingush.berkeley.edu.7012/> and by Nichols and Vagapov (2004) and Nichols (2004).

1. For a language map of the Caucasus (as of the late twentieth century) and list of indigenous languages and language families, see <http://titus.fkidg1.univ-frankfort.de/didact/karten/kauk/kaukasn.htm>, and National Geographic Society (1996).

2. The vocalic correspondence in *Maelxii* : *Melxii* is the same as in Chechen *beer* : Ingush *ber* (Ingush oblique stem *bier-*), Batsbi *bader* 'child'. The shortened allophone of Chechen *ee*, which occurs in any syllable closed by two consonants, is [ae]. A table of correspondents is:

	CHECHEN	INGUSH
OPEN SYLLABLE	<i>ee</i>	<i>ie</i>
CLOSED SYLLABLE	<i>ae</i>	<i>e</i>

Thus, the original form of this ethnonym must have been approximately **maCel-* or **maCelx-*, where **C* is a voiced obstruent such as **b*, **d*, or **v* (postvocalic lenition of these consonants, a regular sound change in Chechen and Ingush, will be discussed again below). The stem-final *-x-* could be the Nakh noun-forming suffix *-x-*, or **-lx-* could

be an original root-final consonant cluster. The vowel correspondence, and the firm evidence it gives of the lenited intervocalic *C, prove that this ethnonym has nothing to do with Chechen and Ingush *maalx* 'sun' (though Chechen folk etymology makes this association).

3. Krupnov (1971:36–37), following Berzhe (1859:81), describes the ranges of the two groups of Kisti and places both of them ethnically with the Ingush.

4. Crosscutting these ethnic classifications is a distinction between highlanders and lowlanders that is found in all Nakh-Daghestanian societies. There is an economic basis to this distinction: for highlanders the economic staple is shepherding, while for lowlanders it is grain farming and cattle. The ideological distinction does not, however, quite coincide with the economic one (which, in any event, is gradual and not abrupt). Highlanders are believed to be expansive, talkative, and quick to react; lowlanders reserved and taciturn. Lowlanders often regard highlanders as country bumpkins, while at the same time tracing their clan ancestry to the highlands with pride. Highlanders regard themselves as preserving the ancient Vainakh traditions in purer form and as living in the millennia-old cultural and religious centers of their vertically distributed ethnic groups. The Ingush are all considered highlanders, while the Chechen include highlanders and lowlanders. Had the Arshtxoi not been so extensively removed in the nineteenth century, they might by now have come to form a lowland component of Ingush society.

5. He brings with him, or acquires on the way, three mythic companions identified by their names as a bird, a serpent, and an entity called "Wind-Star." The text is ambiguous as to whether the bird he follows is that same mythic bird.

6. Anchabadze and Volkova (1993:69) note that the now-uninhabited town of Earzii—one of the best-known towns of highland Ingushetia because of its several intact towers belonging to different subclans—is one of two towns so named; the other, abandoned in about the eighteenth century as highland Georgian Khevsurs pressed on the Kisti, was farther south. One of these may have been a secondary settlement from the other. Multiple founding legends attributed to the the one town now known as Earzii are not surprising in this situation. Xaradze and Robakidze (1968:32) report a legend in which the founders of Earzii come not from another Earzii but from Kerbit, an uninhabited town now in ruins.

7. The same motifs are found in shrine foundation legends in the Georgian Khevsur highlands that are adjacent to the Kisti (Tuite 1996), and their upward trajectory reflects the opposition of spiritually polluted lowlands versus pure highlands rather than literal migration (Kevin Tuite p.c. 2004). In Nakh oral tradition, however, they seem to be exclusively associated with foundation of towns and with genealogies, both of which involve actual migration.

8. Islamic elements are anachronisms, as may be the references to Kabardia (the Kabardians moved to their historical territory from farther east in the Middle Ages). I assume that modern names of places and their inhabitants have been added to an older text by recent narrators.

9. Arsaxanov (1969:114, 136) cites a word for 'stump' without postvocalic lenition in the Laam-Aaqqii dialect (the southwestern highland dialect to which the Aeqqii community traces its origins; see section 6) and Ingush. (He does not give an Aeqqii cognate and I have not been able to elicit one.) This word seems to be a loan from Georgian *guduri*. The word for 'chisel' is another conservative trait in Ingush.

	PROTO-NAKH	BATSBI	LAAM-AAQQII	PLAINS	INGUSH
'stump'	* <i>gudur-ig</i>	<i>gudur</i>	<i>gudarg</i>	<i>güürig</i>	<i>gudarjg</i>
'chisel'	* <i>zagal</i>			<i>zail</i>	<i>zagal</i>

These words are too few to be considered systematic, but they at least suggest that the Aeqqii archaism was still shared with nearby southwestern dialects at the time when the Aeqqii left the highlands.

10. I thank Kevin Tuite for the last three references, works in Georgian which I have not read.

11. Little is known about either the history or the archaeology of lowland towns in the Ingush piedmont. The early eighteenth-century Georgian geography of Vaxushti Bagrationi describes the important Ingush lowland town of Ongusht as large and the Sunzha Valley around it as well populated, which indicates long Ingush settlement in the area (Xaradze and Robakidze 1968:15). Ongusht was the cultural and economic capital of lowland Ingushetia, and from it Nazran was founded in the mid-eighteenth century and had a sizable population by the late eighteenth century (Daxkil'gov 2000:42–43, 46). Incidentally, Bagrationi calls the town *Angusht'i*, with a Georgian ending *-i* and preumlaut vocalism (see tables 3 and 4), which means that the town name became known to the world before the earliest umlaut processes occurred.

12. Common reasons for moving were blood feuds and excessive growth of herds. In the highlands, pasture land was generally common land, and limits were set on the size of household herds; if the limit was exceeded, the village elders were entitled to confiscate the entire herd. Some households facing imminent excessive growth chose to resettle downhill rather than sell off the excess stock.

13. The southernmost Lezgian languages—Xinalug, Qryz, and Budux—are now reduced to small highland enclaves at the far southeastern periphery of the range of the Daghestanian branch. Udi, once an important language widespread in Azerbaijan, is reduced to two enclaves, one in eastern Georgia (settled in 1922) and one in Nidj, Azerbaijan. The Udi population of the former third enclave, Vartashen in Azerbaijan, was scattered in the ethnic violence of the early 1990s (Harris 2002:ix).

14. There were also Soviet-era resettlements of highlanders to the northern plains of Daghestan, not considered here.

15. For the several Chechen-Ingush words that have suppletive forms of stems, I counted each of the forms as one entry, and counted cognate forms as strict Swadesh cognates if their functions were identical. Thus, for example, Chechen *mila* (nominative), *stien-* (oblique) and Ingush *mala*, *sien-* 'who' counts as two cognates for purposes of the test. Where two different Chechen or Ingush words translate one Swadesh list gloss, I used both of them. For example, the English glosses 'sit' and 'stand' correspond to two distinct verbs each in Chechen and Ingush, one stative and one ingressive. The effect of all the suppletive paradigms and lexical subdistinctions was to bring the total number of entries on the 100-word list up to 119.

16. The average ratio of Embleton's raw and adjusted dates is 2, which would put the separation at 800 A.D. Embleton's formula is complex, and using it requires working out some additional historical and typological points, so a detailed application of it to the Nakh family lies outside the scope of this article.

17. Here and below, recall that *w* is voiced pharyngeal and *hw* is the voiceless pharyngeal fricative.

18. Or its onomastics; recall that almost all of the important Chechen-Ingush onomastic lexicon—clan names, tribe names, highland place names—is opaque, and some of the names are phonotactically odd. These are likely to be pre-Chechen-Ingush names, not names brought in together with Chechen-Ingush speech. Perhaps these onomastica are from Para-Nakh, or perhaps they are still older and were substratal in Para-Nakh.

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