

THE SMALL NATIONALITY OF THE ANDIS: A PART OF THE AVAR ETHNIC GROUP IN DAGHESTAN

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The name of the country—“*Daghestan*”—can be translated from the Turkic as “the land of mountains.” *Daghestan* is sometimes called “the mountain of languages” or “a museum of peoples” due to the large number of nationalities and ethnic groups inhabiting this part of the Caucasus. There are more than thirty indigenous peoples (that is of Caucasian origin) here, with five major and several minor nationalities. The subject of this article is the Andis who form the largest group among the national minorities of *Daghestan*. Since 1959 this group has been officially registered as part of the Avar ethnic group, though earlier it had been considered as a separate national minority with the name of “*Andis*.” At present the size of the Andi population is about 30,000. In 1938 the Andis officially numbered 9,750. By 1990 the population had grown to over 25,000.

The Andis live in western *Daghestan*. Their neighbours to the north-west are the Chechens, and to the south-east small ethnic groups speaking other Andian languages, and the Avars. The Andi language belongs to the Andian subgroup of the Andi-Avar-Dido Group, itself a subdivision of the *Daghestanian* branch of the Northeast Caucasian (Nakh-*Daghestanian*) language family.

The traditional administrative centre of the Andi territory is the village of Andi, laid out like a medieval mountain town; it is divided into quarters (*rekhhun*) with a central square (*kaw*) and a mosque for Friday services. Each quarter also has its own *kaw*. Such quarters and squares are likewise found in all other Andi villages. The Andi settlements are arranged as in an amphitheatre along the western and northern slopes of the Andi ravine (the villages of Andi, Gukhna, Gagatl, Rikvani, Ashali, Zilo, Chanko, Rishukha) and in the valleys of the larger rivers (the villages of Muni and Kvankhidatl). The older type of Andi settlement was a tightly packed cluster of buildings. Each village had a territory reserved for its exclusive use, the boundaries of which were clearly marked and respected. The Upper Andi settlements were twice destroyed and burned down: after the invasion by Tamerlane, and during Vorontsov’s campaign of 1845.

Archaeological evidence from the Kuro-Araxes culture (fourth to third millennia B.C.) excavated on Andian territory near the villages of Gagatl and Ashali, along with linguistic evidence, link the Andis with the Caucasian world. In addition, there is a tradition based on sources from the ninth century B.C. that the Andis, after having been routed by the Assyrian King Sargon II, migrated to the Caucasus from the Near East. There is reliable testimony from Pliny the Elder (first century A.D.)

that the Andis had already settled in the Eastern Caucasus at the beginning of the Christian era. According to toponymic evidence, the Andis once occupied a wide expanse of territory by the Andiskoe Koysu River, but evidently they were assimilated by an Avar-speaking population. Another segment of the Andi people, along the middle and upper Andiskoe Koysu River, were later subdivided into seven ethnic groups, each with a distinct language: the *Botlikhs*, *Ghodoberins*, *Akhvakhs*, *K'arat'ins*, *Bagvalals*, *Ch'amalals*, and *T'indals*. Historical accounts and chronicles record the incursion of Tamerlane's troops into Andia and their destruction of the home of Khan Yoluk at Gagatl and the establishment of Islam there at the same time.

Documents describe Andi society as having an established political system. In the seventeenth century the Andis won a decisive victory in the battle at Akhkhulatly over the militia of the Avar *nutsal* Turulava, who had disputed the right of the Andi lords to collect tribute and exercise control over the neighbouring communities of Avaria and Mountain Chechnia. The Andis became Russian subjects in 1731, but shortly afterwards they broke away to support the Chechens against the Russian General von Frauendorf. The Andis also participated in the victorious pan-Daghestanian campaign against the forces of the Persian ruler Nadir Shah in 1741. The Andi cavalry took an active part in the Caucasus Wars (1817–1864) from the beginning and distinguished themselves by their bravery. Among the better-known participants in this fight for independence were the Andi *naibs* Gaziyav and Labezan.

The Andis are Sunni Muslims. They definitely adopted Islam in the fourteenth century; the Muslim faith supplanted a form of Christianity syncretized with more ancient religious beliefs. The pre-Islamic Andis had a cultic centre on the peak of the mountain of Bakhargan, which was associated with their chief deity, Ts'ob. The Bakhargan cult declined after the propagation of Islam but did not disappear entirely. Even now, in times of summer drought, men and women ascend the mountain to perform rain-making rites. They offer thanksgiving there and perform a ritual dance (*zikh*, a term also used for Sufi rituals). This type of *zikh* was founded by Kunta Haji, a Chechen religious figure of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Andia has been referred to as a "federal republic" (S. Bronevski) comprising seven self-governing communities: Andi, Gukhna, Gagatl, Rikvani, Ashali, Zilo, and Chanko. The villages of Muni and Kvankhidatl were part of a neighbouring political entity (*tekhnutsal*). The Andian alliance was once the strongest in Western Daghestan, particularly in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, at the time of the *shamkhalate*, the authority of which extended to the neighbouring Avarian and Chechen communities. Administrative and judicial powers were exercised by governors called *khan* or *hilatabul* and a council of elders (*jamati*) representing the populace. The most general powers and functions were delegated to the government of the federation. The governors were selected and sworn in annually. The police

function was fulfilled by appointees of the council of elders (*dorghaqol*), and military matters devolved upon the leaders called *seduqan*.

The courts based their decisions on the traditional code of laws (*adat*), custom, and the Sharia. Justice (according to the Sharia) and spiritual authority were upheld by the *qadis* (judges), present in each village, from among whom was chosen the chief *qadi* Ali Mirza alAndi, who bore the title “*Sheikh-ul-Shyukh*.” Because of this juridical pluralism, a plaintiff could choose among different juridical systems. Public opinion exerted an important regulatory constraint, as did the *maslaat* (mediatory) courts. In many instances the parties settled matters without resort to the courts, on the basis of tradition and negotiation. According to Charles de Montesquieu’s classification, this political system has been referred to as an “aristo-democratic republic” in historiography, since before the Caucasian war only persons of the first estate were admitted to the government. During the time of the *imamate* (mid-nineteenth century) and annexation to Russia, an Andian *naibate* (part of the Andi *okrug*) replaced the earlier federation and was subsequently liquidated with the establishment of Soviet power. At the present time, village soviets exercise local authority.

Traditionally, the Andis manufactured noteworthy Caucasian felt cloaks (*burkas*) of long, durable black or white wool, from a local breed of sheep. The manufacture of *burkas* goes back to ancient times. Historical records mention black felt cloaks as part of the battle garment of mountaineers at the time of the campaign of Alexander the Great in the Near East. Andian *burkas* were in great demand in the Caucasus and in Russia, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the profits of this handicraft were an important element of Andian traditional economy.

The most special Andi feast day was the festival of the “bull’s departure,” celebrated on New Year’s Day, which traditionally occurred around the spring equinox. Twin bulls were yoked to a plough, and the first furrow was ploughed by a person who had volunteered for that task on the previous holiday. During the festival, champions in running, wrestling, and stone tossing were elected, and horse races were held, with prizes awarded. An especially impressive ceremony is the reconciliation of the parties in a blood feud, accompanied by oratory and speeches, an offering of thanksgiving, and so on.

As mentioned above, the Andian ethnic group that had been much more numerous in ancient times was considerably reduced as a result of assimilation by the Chechen substratum in the West, and by the Avars in the North and the East. The main kernel of the population consisted of eight ethnic units. In our time, these are separate ethnic and language groups, which belong to the so-called Andian subgroup of nationalities. Not only in Daghestan but in the whole Caucasus, the territory of Andian residence is the most variegated in ethnic and language peculiarities. The reasons at the bottom of such an intensive ethnic divergence was often searched for

in this part of Daghestan. In the scholarly literature there are two different approaches to explain the phenomenon. The first and the earliest is connected with the theory of the heterogeneous nature of languages and peoples. According to the second approach, diversity proceeds from the natural and geographical factors (i.e. the mountainous landscape which isolated communities).

Both versions are obviously false, they can easily be refuted by a rough analysis of the facts. A special study directed by the author towards the understanding of the phenomenon points to the *politogenesis* as the principal agent of the ethnic divergence. Individual phases of ethnogenesis and formation of languages were closely connected with the peculiarities of *politogenesis*. (The results of this study were reported at the XII ICAES in Zagreb.) A very short summary of this new explanation can be presented as follows: the ethno-linguistical pluralism of Daghestan has its fundamental explanation as a phenomenon of cultural response to the forms of political organisation of the society. Individual communities at the level of sovereign micro-political entities took on the appearance of small nationalities, while some other communities set up unions and formed political entities of federal types, being thus distinguished as bigger nationalities (individual communities, which constituted unions are only ethnographically “stretched” here). The next tier of entities were unions of unions or federal compounds, with big territories and population—even larger ethnic compounds of Daghestan.

Though the Andis are formally registered as Avars, they retain their language, way of life and self-consciousness. Students at high schools and universities are mastering European and Oriental languages. In addition, a script has been developed for the Andi language, which is used for local communication and correspondence, but not in publications. Folklore and literary works have been written in Andi: e.g. the translation of the Gospel by Luke into Andi language has just been finished. This is the only extensive work written in the Andi language. The official written languages before the Revolution were Arabic (for clerical and religious matters) and Avar (for literature, press, and religion). In the 1930s Avar became the medium of instruction in primary schools, with subsequent education being conducted in Russian. The Arabic script was used until 1928, when a Latin-based alphabet was promulgated, followed by the introduction of a Cyrillic orthography in 1937. The Andis have long been a polyglot people: most have a good command of Avar, and some speak Chechen. Since the 1960s the majority can speak Russian as well. Andi folklore and literature is marked by bilingualism (Andi and Avar).

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