

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2024.2.2>UDC 39/94  
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Accepted: 17.07.2023**THE ARMENIAN TRACKS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHUVASH****Anton K. Salmin**Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera)  
of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation

**Abstract.** The *introduction* provides brief information to acquaint the reader with the history of the study of the topic in the title. It points to the difficulties in identifying the original homeland of the historical ancestors of the Chuvash. It also provides an ethnonymic picture. With regard to the *methodology* of the study, the author gave preference to a complex, cross-genre approach. This is most suitable for tackling questions of ethnic history because it makes it possible to draw on conclusions provided by allied disciplines. In this way, new knowledge emerges. Such a methodology also helps to get away from stagnated views. The *materials* subjected to analytical examination were primary sources (the authors of al-Kūfī, aṭ-Ṭabarī, al-Beladsori/al-Balāḍurī, Lewond (Leontius), Zacharias Rhetor, Xenophon, and Apollonius of Rhodes), as well as the works of prominent 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century scholars (A.V. Golovnev, M.S. Gadjiev, A.S. Kassian, M.L. Khachikian, and A.K. Shahinyan). *Analysis.* Attention is chiefly devoted to an examination of historical and geographical facts, ethnographic matters, and linguistic analogies. The paper includes a series of lexical correspondences between Chuvash and Armenian. For example, Armenian *dzor/tsor* and Chuvash *çyr* mean “bank, steep slope”; *kh’yar* and *khāyar* mean “cucumber.” There are instances when Chuvash and Armenian *homophones* have similar meanings. *Kin* refers to “daughter-in-law” in Chuvash and “wife, woman, lady” in Armenian. *Results.* The author’s previous publications as well as the present paper make it possible to conclude that the ethnonym of the *Chuvash* has undergone a lengthy course of transformation through history in the form of *Savir* (*Saspir/Sapir; Savar; Sabir*) → *Suvar* (*Suvas, Suvan*) → *Suvash* (*Sāvaš*) → *T’šāvaš*. In the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, the Saspirs occupied a territory from Media to Colchis, between the Medes and the Colchians, with the former to the south and the latter to the north by the River Phasis, i.e., the territory of the Armenian Highlands.

**Key words:** prehistory, Chuvash, Armenians, South Caucasus, history, geography, ethnography, language.

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УДК 39/94  
ББК 63.5Дата поступления статьи: 28.02.2023  
Дата принятия статьи: 17.07.2023**АРМЯНСКИЕ ТРЕКИ В ИСТОРИИ ЧУВАШЕЙ****Антон Кириллович Салмин**Музей антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН,  
г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация

**Аннотация.** В *вводной части* даются краткие сведения для ознакомления с историей изучения вынесенной в заглавие темы. Указывается на сложности по выявлению прародины исторических предков чувашей. Также дается этнонимическая картина. В качестве *методологии* изучения автор предпочел комплексный (= кроссжанровый) подход. Это – наиболее приемлемый подход для решения вопросов этнической истории, ибо позволяет вовлекать в исследование выводы смежных дисциплин. Так формируется новое знание. Применяемая методология помогает уйти от застойных взглядов. *Материалами* для аналитического разбора послужили первоисточники (сочинения ал-Куфи, ат-Табари, Баладзори, Гевонда Вардапета, Захария Ритора, Ксенофонта, Аполлония Родосского), а также труды выдающихся исследователей XX–

XXI вв. (А.В. Головнёва, М.С. Гаджиева, А.С. Касьяна, М.Л. Хачикяна, А.К. Шагиняна). *Анализ.* Основное внимание уделено анализу исторических и географических фактов, этнографических сюжетов и языковых аналогий. В статье приводится лексический ряд чувашско-армянских соответствий. Например, армян. *ձոր/ւոր* – чуваш. *сыр* ‘берег, обрыв’. Имеет место совпадение значений чувашского и армянского слов *кин*: у чувашей в значении ‘невестка, сноха’, у армян – ‘жена, женщина, дама, супруга’. *Результаты.* Предыдущие публикации автора, а также настоящая статья позволили сделать вывод о том, что этноним *чуваши* прошел длинный исторический путь трансформации в виде *савир* (*саспир/сапир, савар, сабир*) → *сувар* (*сувас, суван*) → *суваши* (*сăваши*) → *чăваши* (*t’šăvaš*). В IX–I вв. до н.э. саспиры занимали территорию от Мидии до Колхиды между мидянами и колхами. Притом мидяне находились к югу, а колхи к северу у реки Фасис. Получается на территории Армянского нагорья.

**Ключевые слова:** доистория, чувашы, армяне, Закавказье, история, география, этнография, язык.

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“Ancestral peoples had a strong individuality and differed from one another more clearly than present-day communities” [7, p. 122].

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

In actuality, the history of a people is a succession of regenerations. We should only write about the spatial-chronological parameters of tribes and peoples. Not only have times changed, but ethnic groups have also transformed. It is not possible, for example, to place an equals sign between the subjects of Modu and Attila because “the course of events regenerates ethnicity, which does not exist outside of movement” [8, p. 53]. Ethnic components are impermanent characteristics. The replacement of culture-forming elements helps them to transform, overcome crises, and facilitate regeneration. Peoples become reborn in the broadest sense of the word. Turko-Mongol tribes, combining at some times, disintegrating into hordes at others, and on occasion drawing subjugated tribes into their military alliances, were able to conquer the steppes. In that way, one set of peoples disappeared, and others emerged. At the same time, it is useful to abandon illusions and reconcile oneself to many newly discovered facts.

Impartial investigation shows that the ethnonym of the *Chuvash* has undergone a lengthy course of transformation through history in the form of *Savir* (*Saspir/Sapir, Savar, Sabir*) → *Suvar* (*Suvas, Suvan*) → *Suvash* (*Săvaš*) → *T’šăvaš* (*Chuvash*) [22]. In Xenophon (circa 430–355 BC), we find the Armenian anthroponym *Sabaris*. It is the name given to a younger son of the Armenian ruler [15, p. 58]. Here we need to take a Persian influence into account, as well as the Greek ending *-is*. Roman, Greek, Iranian, Armenian, Georgian, Syrian, and Arab authors wrote about this people, each distorting the ethnonym to fit the phonetics of their own language. In ancient and mediaeval manuscripts, it was conveyed using the consonants *S-v-r*, with vowel sounds added according to the rules of the given language. In Ibn Khordadbeh’s *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* (ca. 895 AD), in the writings of King Joseph of Khazaria, and in an authentic document produced by the Khazar Jews of Kiev, it is indeed written simply *SWR*. Etymologically, the word *Savar/Sapir/Savir/Sabir/Suvar* derives from the Persian *saver*, “horseman”, “rider”, “dexterous” [18, p. 294], in classical Persian *savār*. The Sasanid forces included a privileged corps of *asawīra* (Modern Persian *sawār/suwār, asâwira*). These were recruited from the aristocratic class and formed the army’s main strike force. They maintained a state of constant preparedness for action. In AH 32 (AD 652/3), the Islamic commander al-Ahnaf ibn Qays wrote to Bazan, the Persian shahs’ governor in Armenia, and also to the horsemen (*asâwira*) and Iranians, proposing that they adopt Islam together with the horsemen

[25, p. 34]. From the letter, it is clear that the *asawîra* cavalry occupied a privileged position in Persian society and that the fortunes of the state depended on their loyalty. From the history of Persia, it is also clear that *asawîra* and *asavar* are grammatical variants of one and the same word.

**Methodology and materials.** The author employed a transdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the materials used. The works of al-Kūfī, aṭ-Ṭabarī, al-Beladorsi/al-Balāḍurī, Lewond Vardapet, Zacharias Rhetor, Xenophon, and Apollonius of Rhodes were used as historical sources. As a historiography, studies of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are involved: A.V. Golovnev, M.S. Gadjiev, A.S. Kassian, M.L. Khachikian, and A.K. Shahinyan.

**Analysis.** Data from published sources on the topic were subjected to analysis, in addition to the most prominent works by historians, geographers, ethnographers, and linguists.

***Historical and geographical analysis.***

In the late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, four ethnic groups lived in the Urartian state: the Alarodians, Matieni, Saspirs, and Armenii [30]. The Urartians were located on the territory of the Armenian Highlands. On a present-day map, that would be Armenia, eastern Turkey, north-western Iran, and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, a large confederation of tribes formed to the south-east of Colchis, headed by the Saspirs. This circumstance presented a number of difficulties to would-be conquerors seeking to advance northward. By the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Cimmerians' invasion had significantly reduced the might of the Urartian state, and the Saspirs exploited this situation to gain control of the region between Colchis and Media.

More precisely, the Saspirs were the north-western neighbours of the Matieni, who belonged *de facto* to the satrapy of Media [21, pp. 12, 14]. Ogannes Khorikian states that they had a border with the Medes in the area of the lower reaches of the River Kura (Cyrus), while the road from Colchis to Media ran through the regions west of the Caspian and by way of the Kura valley. "The Saspirs could not have been located to the south of the Colchians, because the Moschoi (Eastern Chalybes) lived there... Therefore, the Saspirs were to the east of the Colchians and lived

between the Matieni to the west and the Alarodians to the south" [14, pp. 199-200]. He elaborates further: the Saspirs did not occupy the Armenian Highlands, but the lands between the Kura and the Greater Caucasus range – and subsequently Caucasian Albania, i.e., the region on the left bank of the Kura [14, p. 195]. Saspirs were also known in many other parts of the Iranian world, in near-inaccessible mountains and in maritime localities, such as the south coast of the Caspian [20, p. 347]. Along with the Alarodians, towards the end of the Achaemenid period, the Saspirs formed one of the two Armenian satrapies. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, they were part of Greater Armenia. It therefore follows that in prehistoric times, the destinies of the Saspirs and Armenians were closely connected, at least geographically.

Around the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Apollonius of Rhodes wrote about the Sapirs (Σάπειρες) "who have long lived" next to the Bechyres and Byzeres [1, pp. 75, 110]. This suggests that the three peoples had been neighbours well before 300 BC. That is all fully in accordance with historical reality. To be even more precise, in this period, the Sapirs occupied the lands to the south-east of the River Chorokh, towards Lakes Sevan and Van.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Sasanids constructed a number of fortresses in the Caucasus region. These were supposed to cow the "northern barbarians" (Hunno-Savirs, Barsils, Khazars, Alans, and so on). In the opinion of Daghestani scholars, taking account of military and political events and the situation with clashes between Iran and the Byzantine Empire, "the period from 522 to 526 would seem to have been most suited to large-scale construction" [4, p. 82; 5, p. 100]. Kavad I (r. 488–531) constructed a rammed earth wall between Shirvan and the Darial Gorge with a series of forts along it. Then, in the late 560s, his son Khosrow I, known as Anushirvan, constructed the famous Derbent Wall (this time of large stone blocks) and several fortresses. Evidently, the threat against which the wall was built came from the nomadic "Huns" (i.e., Savirs) living to the north. They disrupted the economy and life in the Sasanid border areas of Armenia and Caucasian Albania. The Sasanids populated these frontier lands with immigrants who considered themselves far freer than their neighbours to the south [24, p. 15].

Zacharias Rhetor indicated the locations of the tribes in the year 555. He listed them from south to north: Armenia, including Arran, Sisgan, and then the Bazguns, whose land extends as far as the Caspian Gate and the sea. There, the Huns lived. Then the Unnogurs came, and subsequently, the Ogors and Sabirs followed. These are all “of the race of Dadu” [28, p. 595]. Located further to the north were the Burgars, Alans, Kurtargars, Avars, Khasars, and more. In other words, the Bulgars dwelt to the north-west of the Savirs. In the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, the Savirs were in possession of the Derbent Passage, the pinch point on the route along the western shores of the Caspian that Armenian historians call Chora. In 571, sporadic advance detachments of Turki reached the peripheries of the Northern Caucasus. Before them, in 558, there was an invasion by the Avars, who also consisted for the most part of Turkic warriors, as well as enemy captives and deserters [11, p. 19].

By the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Western Turkic Khaganate was practically disintegrating. At the same time, in the north-eastern foothills of Daghestan, a Suvar state was forming on the basis of early feudal relations with Varachan as its capital. By inertia, the Armenian sources continued to call it the Kingdom of the Huns, and Arab chroniclers still used Jidan.

According to al-Beladsori/al-Balāḍurī (9<sup>th</sup> c.), in AD 737, the Arab commander Marwan took his forces into the Sabir domains of Khamzin-Varachan, but the inhabitants refused to conclude a peace treaty with him. The stronghold was taken by assault after a month-long siege, burned, and razed to the ground. The treaty that was then imposed required the one-time delivery to Derbent (al-Bab) of 500 youths and maidens, as well as 30,000 measures of grain every year [2, p. 18]. Other sources also wrote about the Arabs capturing Khamzin. Al-Kūfī (9<sup>th</sup> c.), for example, asserted that the defenders of the fort actually engaged the Arab army: “Marwan and the governor of the fortress fought a heated battle, and the Muslims suffered many dead” [16, p. 55]. Armenian sources stated that the Marwan undertook a campaign into the land of the Huns with the support of the Armenian prince Ashot III Bagratuni. Marwan took the city of Varachan and returned from there victorious, having seized much booty [6, pp. 81-82].

**Religion.** D.E. Eremeev is inclined to detect an Indo-European substrate in the word *tur/tor/tar*. In support of this, he cites the name of the Armenian god of war, *Torg/Tork/Turk*, and the name of the Ancient Anatolian god of thunder, connected with the Hittite verb *tarkh*, “to defeat” [27, pp. 132-133]. As researchers correctly note, the Armenians adopted this name from the Hittite-Hurrian deity of fertility and vegetation, *Tarkhu*. Precisely those functions were also attributed from the earliest times to the Chuvash deity *Tur/Tor*. Let me add here the name of the Abkhazian deity, *Ai-Tar*.

Great importance for the study of the Urartian religion attaches to an inscription on a rock near Lake Van. This late 9<sup>th</sup>-century BC monument lists Urartian deities with an indication of the offerings to be made to them. These include one named *Kuera*, who is supposed to receive one bull and two sheep.

Through the Cimmerian Bosphorus, the Byzantine Empire established close contacts with the peoples of the steppes. This was a safe and convenient means of reaching the region. Orthodox and Monophysite Christian missionaries from Byzantine territories also engaged in extensive evangelising activities in both the Crimean and Caucasian steppes. Naturally, through this channel, they gradually accumulated precise information about their pastoral neighbours. One of the most important instances deserving of mention was the mission undertaken by Bishop Qarduṣaṭ to Caucasian Albania, where he and six more of his priests not only provided aid to Byzantine and Syrian captives but also engaged in missionary activities among the local “Huns”, i.e., “Savirs known as Huns”. They even drafted a few texts in the language of the Hunno-Savirs. The Armenian bishop Makar replaced them around the year 537, likely marking the end of their visit. During his time with the Huns, Qarduṣaṭ met Probus, the nephew of Emperor Anastasius (491–518). Emperor Justin I (518–527) had sent Probus to recruit Hunnish mercenaries between 525 and 527. Since his endeavours failed to meet with a positive response, he moved on to the Hunnish tribes living to the north of the Caucasus. Byzantine efforts were crowned with success only in 528, when Boa(r)ex, a widowed princess of the Savirs (or Sabiro-Huns), concluded an alliance with the empire. The Byzantines’

position was weakened again soon after, as a result of the conversion to Christianity of Gordas, the ruler of another Hunnish tribe, who was later overthrown and killed by his brother Muageris.

**Ethnography.** Since in the twilight years of the Achmaenid Empire (the 330s BC), the Saspirs and Alarodians belonged to one of the two satrapies of Greater Armenia, it is tempting to call the Saspirs Armenians. Individual groups of Savirs who dwelt in Armenia in the 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD were referred to by the local people as the *Sevordik'* – “black sons”. In the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, part of them moved to the Utik Greater-Armenian region of the Utik region, located in the interfluvium of the Araxes and the Kura. In the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, they formed their own principality of *Sevordik'*, centred on the stronghold of Tus (Tavush). Over time, the *Sevordik'* became Armenianized [23, pp. 223, 282–283]. They lived along the road that ran from Ganja towards Tiflis, on the rivers Shamkur (Shamkirchay), Tavush (now Tavus), and Aghstafa. An interesting fact about the *Sevordik'* is that, according to al-Mas'ūdī (10<sup>th</sup> c.), they made celebrated battle axes (*tabar, tabarzin*). This indicates that they extracted copper from the Getabak (now Gedabek) mines located west of the River Shamkur [19, p. 26].

Later, on the Atil (Volga), the Bulgars had “a great trading place, at which (there is) a permanent market where many important goods are sold” [10, p. 39]. The Bulgar state was primarily a mercantile entity. Khazaria and Rus' traded with it, as did all the tribes living either side of the great river. The main commodities were furs: sable, ermine, and squirrel. Visiting merchants had to pay a tariff of one tenth of their goods. Locals accepted imported minted coins in exchange for their chief source of wealth – marten pelts. Expensive furs of various sorts were sent off to southern lands, such as the Crimea. Armenian carpets were used in Volga Bulgaria. Such flooring could also be found, for example, in Khan Almush's own dwelling: “All of them (live) in yurts, with the only difference that the yurt of the king is very large, accommodating a thousand souls, covered in most of the Armenian carpets” [10, p. 137]. Of course, Armenians, who had their own colony there, supplied Bulgaria with silk. Tales of Armenian silk – *ermen purçăně* – purçăně –

persisted among the Chuvash and were recorded as late as the 1970s.

The events of 922 prompted a rise in the sense of identity as a single tribe, although differences between northern and southern groups became pronounced later as well. These characteristics, in the form of two main cultural dialects – forest and steppe Chuvash – have survived in rudimentary form to the present day. This did not, however, in any way hinder the emergence of a united ethnos. The year 922 should be considered the start of the formation of the ancestors of the Chuvash as a people and their acquisition of a new homeland. The place that should be called their first homeland is the territory in the Southern Caucasus between the River Chorokh and Lakes Sevan and Van. That was between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. The second was located on the shores of the Caspian, with Varachan as a capital (until AD 737). The third homeland would be the Cheremshan basin and the northern parts of today's Ulyanovsk region, while the Suvar site should be considered its centre (895–922). The fourth capital (after 922) would be the Tigashevo site on the River Bula, across on the right-bank side of the Volga. The fifth capital (from 1236) was *Veda Suar, Shupashkar*, now Cheboksary. The period between 922 and 1469 saw the emergence of the Chuvash as a people and the consolidation of their ethnic self-awareness. Here I should agree once again with the opinion that the Saspirs/Sapirs/Savars/Savirs/Suvars made up the substrate basis for the formation of the modern-day Chuvash. In writing of events in the forest-and-steppe area around the Volga in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the archaeologist Yury Zelenev considers that it was precisely at that time that the Chuvash ethnos formed [29, p. 42]. The matter of the motives that propelled this people over the course of its long and complex history is no simple question either. After all, “the drift of ethnicity resembles a chain of situational reactions rather than a linear evolution, and its direction does not follow the zigzags of political history: the rise of ethnicity often begins in political turmoil, while the decline occurs in a phase of social prosperity” [7, p. 120]. Paradoxical, yet true. One thing is clear: tribes and peoples survive for as long as they retain their own ethnic identity.

**Language.** A review of publications shows that references cited for the history of the Chuvash language are nearly all from sources no earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> century, more from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and most from the 1700s and later. In other words, what scholars are examining is the language of Chuvash people who have been assimilated to a significant degree (Iranianized, Ugricized, Turkicized, and so on). The task, though, is to try to dig down to the most ancient state of the language and identify its original strata. Many historical neighbours of the Chuvash belonging to closely related linguistic families either adopted other languages (the Bulgars) or merged into other tribes (the Khazars and Esegels). It is still harder to reconstruct the common vocabulary shared even earlier with other nearby peoples in the South Caucasus. The remoteness of the historical neighbours of the Chuvash (Hittites, Armenians, and Iberians), both chronologically and geographically, increases the difficulty of not proving but even showing similarity at a minimal level. Such a connection certainly did exist, however. We most probably should seek the Savirs' linguistic kin in the South Caucasus. At the same time, the Savirs cannot be assigned to the Colchians in terms of language. In any case, there are grounds for placing the Saspirs/Sapirs/Savars/Savirs/Suvars among the Anatolian linguistic family. So far, we are still at a stage of knowledge that the existence of such shared linguistic coincidences "in the modern-day Chuvash language represents a highly strange and mysterious phenomenon evoking great bewilderment and confusion among researchers" [26, p. 81].

In ancient times, all the tribes of the southern Pre-Caucasus spoke one of the widespread languages. But which one was it? We still have no exhaustive answer to that question. At the same time, we ought to be speaking about the ethno-cultural diversity and polyethnicity of the population or about the existence of dialects of some single ancient language or a few languages. Evidently, linguistic assimilation played a major role, while the gene pool remained the same. The fact that ancient Caucasian languages shared common origins with the now extinct languages of the Near East has today been proven. The region in which we are particularly interested includes today's eastern Anatolia (i.e., the Armenian Highlands)

and Iranian Azerbaijan. In essence, the ancestral homeland of the Indo-Europeans was located in these parts. The Anatolians were the first to branch off from the Indo-European "trunk." It follows that the Sapirs also belonged to this linguistic geographical area.

The migrations reconstructed on the basis of archaeological data generally correspond to the routes of the spread of genes from the Middle East into Europe, into the Eurasian steppes, and eastwards into Iran and India. We can also observe repeat migrations into regions where Indo-Europeans had already appeared previously, reverse migrations, and areas of secondary contacts, which complicate the process of linguistic reconstruction. Judging by these data, the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans was in the Armenian Highlands, but subsequently, areas might have formed secondary homelands where the development or consolidation of individual Indo-European dialects occurred [9, p. 73].

Hurrian proper names of chieftains and notables recorded in Assyrian inscriptions from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC attest to the existence of a Hurrian-speaking population on the fringes of the Armenian Highlands at that time. They later merged into the Armenian ethnos. Of course, other local tribes speaking their own languages also inhabited the same region. Present-day linguistic scholarship has come to the conclusion that the Hurrian-Urartian and Northern Caucasian languages are two related but separate families. Those two families in turn formed a separate branch of a hypothesised macro-family [12, p. 39].

Striking in this context are such coincidences as the Hittite *ataj*, Hurrian *at'ay*, Urartian *ate*, Budukh and Dargin *ada* – Chuvash *atte* meaning "father", as well as *Attai* (a male name); Hittite *anna* – Chuvash *anne* "mother"; Hittite *man* – Chuvash *man* "my" (e.g., Hittite *tuikkam man*, Chuvash *man ȳt-pȳ* "my body"; Hittite *atta man*, Chuvash *man atte* "my father"); Hittite *ḫawar* "iron" Chuvash *kāvar* "burning coal, red-hot iron"; Urartian, Armenian *šo(w)a*, Hurrian *šiy* – Chuvash *shyv* "water"; Hurrian *šer*, also Nakh *seri*, *sayr(o)* "evening" – Chuvash *çēr* "night"; Hurrian *tayə* – Chuvash *taka* "male (animal), ram, man"; Hurrian-Urartian *\*bawr/pawr* "brown, grey, chestnut(-coloured), dark" Chuvash. *pāvār* "grey-haired, roan (of a horse's coat)". Here too,

we should include correspondences between the inner structures of lexica. Take, for instance, the word for “source, spring”: Lazic *kar-toli* (< water + eye); Hittite *šakuni* (← *šakuwa* “eyes”); Chuvash *çäl kuç* (spring + eyes). Hurrian-Urartian languages do not have words that start with an *\*r*-sound. The same is true of such Eastern Caucasian languages as Dargin, Lak, and Nakh [13, pp. 119, 120]. In Chuvash, too, there are no native words that begin with an *r*- sound, while borrowed words have a vowel added at the start. For example, the Arabic *rahat* → Chuvash *ërekhet* means “pleasantness.” These coincidences and others are not simply random. Apparently, the Hurrian words that recur in Chuvash belong to a shared Southern Caucasian lexicon. In any case, the links remain unclear to this day and have not been given an intelligible interpretation.

The area of Lake Van and Muşaşir in the valley of the Great Zab was inhabited by Urartians, who included Saspirs. After the fall of the Urartian state in the early 6th century BC, along with other ethnic groups living in the Armenian Highlands, a portion of the Saspirs gradually lost their own language and merged into the Armenian nation [13, p. 149].

A number of lexical correspondences between Armenian and Chuvash have survived. For example, Armenian *dzor/tsor* and Chuvash *çyr* mean “bank, steep slope.” The near-overlapping sense of the word *kin* in the two languages is intriguing: *kin* refers to “daughter-in-law” in Chuvash and “wife, woman, lady” in Armenian. Notice should also be paid to the negative prefix *an-* in both Armenian and Chuvash. For example, the Armenian *anmardarnak* “peopleless”, *anhusali* “hopeless”, and *anpaiman* “unconditionally”; Chuvash imperatives *an khăvar* “do not leave”, *an tun* “do not lie”, and *an man* “do not forget”. Iranian languages have a similar feature: the name of the goddess Anahit = not + “dirt, vice”. It remains to mention similar borrowings from Persian that can be found in both Chuvash and Armenian, such as *azhdaha*, Chuvash *açtakha*, “dragon,” and Persian *shirdan*, and Armenian *chortan*, Chuvash *shärttan*, “a sheep’s stomach stuffed with minced meat and baked in the oven.”

The period between AD 408 and 414 saw the invention of the Caucasian Albanian alphabet.

Its creators were Mesrop Mashtots, an Armenian who did not speak Albanian but already had experience devising an alphabet, and a priest named Benjamin, who was an expert translator and knew both Albanian and Armenian. The new script was made up of 52 characters and two ligatures that could help convey the subtleties of the spoken language. This writing system was in fact known not only as Albanian but also as Gargar. With regard to the latter, Murtagali Gadjeiev suggests “that the basis of this ethnonym is the root *garg-* followed by the plural suffix *-ar* characteristic of a number of languages in the Lezgian group” [3, p. 51]. This suggests the possibility of a link with the ethnonym *Suvar* and also potentially the use of this script by the Caucasian ancestors of the Chuvash who were living in the region at that time. Surviving “early Albanian manuscripts open up a new chapter in the study of not only the Albanian and Udi languages, but also the Nakh-Daghestani family as a whole” [3, p. 53]. On this basis, we should state that in the ethnonym *Suvar*, the root is *suw-*, while *ar* is a pluralizing suffix.

Josef Marquart wrote about the Savirs and Magyars as a single people – the *Sevordik’ (Magyaren)* [17, p. 428]. I would suggest that this version of the ethnonym contains the Armenian (or more broadly Indo-European) affectionate/diminutive affix *-ik’*.

**Conclusion.** The ethnonym *Chuvash* underwent a long historic course of transformation along the lines of *Savir (Saspir/Sapir, Savar, Sabir)* → *Suvar (Suvas, Suvan)* → *Suvash (Săvas)* → *Čăvaš (T’šăvaš)*. Such is the skein of names by which these people have been known through the labyrinths of time. Contrary to the widespread thinking that ethnonyms cannot serve as a reliable source in research on ethnogenesis, they do reflect the actual history of a people and even point to the chronology of decisive events.

Taken together, Herodotus’ topographical coordinates leave no room to distrust the historical accuracy of the Saspirs’ reported area of habitation in the 5th century BC. Drawing on the previous research of others, it is possible to enlarge that time span to cover the 9th to the 1st centuries BC. In that period, the Saspirs occupied territory from Media to Colchis, between the Medes and the Colchians, with the former to the south and the latter to the north by the River Phasis. The Matieni

Mountains, alongside which the Sapirs dwelt, are considered to be those near the area of the modern city of Erzurum.

The few examples that have been put forward pointing to the existence of matches or similarities with peoples of Mesopotamia or North Africa cannot be taken as evidence of direct contacts with the population of those regions. In those cases, as prehistoric data indicates, we should rather speak of indirect borrowings. The intermediaries were the historical neighbours of the Chuvash, such as the ancient Armenians, Georgians (Iberians), and the ancestors of the members of the Abkhazo-Adyghean and Nakh-Daghestani language groups. As the analysis has shown, an Indo-European substrate may also come into play.

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### Information About the Author

**Anton K. Salmin**, Doctor of Sciences (History), Leading Researcher, Center of European Research, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Universitetskaya Emb., 3, 199034 Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, antsalmin@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1072-9933>

### Информация об авторе

**Антон Кириллович Салмин**, доктор исторических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник Центра европейских исследований, Музей антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН, Университетская наб., 3, 199034 г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация, antsalmin@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1072-9933>