

Alans in Khazaria and Khazars in Alania

On the Nature and Role of North Iranian Elements
in the Khazar Empire*

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Three hundred years is a long time in steppe history – it is the time that elapsed, for example, between the rise of Genghis Khan and the downfall of the Golden Horde, and also between the consolidation of the Khazar state after the first war with the Arabs and the fall of Bela Vezha to the Rus. However, while the Mongol conquests had an enormous impact on world history and in this way they attracted the attention of contemporary chroniclers of all kinds and origins, the Khazar kingdom was a regional power lying far beyond the frontiers of its sedentary neighbors – over the Black Sea and north of the Caucasus – and for this reason it often looms up in the distance and through the mist of legend because of the lack of eyewitness accounts. Even the more or less trustworthy reports which have come down to us are usually restricted to information about diplomatic relations and warfare; and this is why most often the Khazars appear in the sources as a monolithic entity, in spite of evidence for their heterogeneous composition or origin.

The subject of my paper will be the nature and role of North Iranian elements in the Khazar empire.² I must say that I bring no solutions to long-lasting problems and I think that it would be suspicious if I did, given the lack of actual evidence and, at least for now, my limited access to Russian literature. My aim is to call into question some hypotheses, old and new, and the way in which we approach the study of poorly attested periods of Eurasian history.

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² As a justification for this paper, cf. e.g. P. B. Golden, *Khazar Studies. An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*, 2 vols., Budapest 1980, 93: “one of the most important of the steppe peoples to play a role in North Caucasian and Khazar history were the Alans, a people of Iranian origin”; also his “Cumanica III: Urusoba,” in D. Sinor, ed. *Inner Asia: History, Civilization, Languages*, Indiana 1990, 44: “we should not doubt, however, that Iranian nomads remained in the Pontic steppes and formed an important substratum in the Turkic peoples that took shape in Western Eurasia”.

First of all, we should ask ourselves: what is an Alan? This ethnic name is scattered throughout the sources for a period of some fifteen centuries, but it is obvious that it cannot stand for the same reality during all of this time. From the scarce evidence we can conjecture that about the beginning of the first millennium AD a confederation of nomadic tribes was formed in the west Eurasian steppes under the sway of a Sarmatian elite, maybe invoking a common “Aryan” origin.³ The dynamics of nomadic empires, however, suggest that this confederation was probably short-lived; and, in fact, it is unknown for how long the term “Alan” was in use as a self-designation, although it remained as the current exonym for the Iranian-speaking nomads of southern Russia for centuries to come.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, who wrote towards the end of the fourth century, “the Alans inhabit the measureless wastelands of Scythia and, like the Persians, they have gradually incorporated the bordering peoples, weakened by repeated victories, under their own national name”.⁴ This is the only extant record of an Alanic supremacy over the steppe and such an account fits well with our idea of a nomadic empire, but the list of nations conquered by the Alans is disappointing, since it consists of six peoples already known to Herodotus eight centuries before and consequently it is highly suspect as being a literary elaboration instead of a first-hand report:⁵

Ammianus	<i>Neroi</i>	<i>Vidini</i>	<i>Geloni</i>	<i>Agathyrsi</i>	<i>Melan-chlaeni</i>	<i>Anthrophagi</i>
Herodotus	Νευροί	Βουδῖνοι	Γελωνοί	Αγάθυρσοι	Μελάγχλαινοι	Ἀνδροφάγοι

Moreover, we are informed about this Alanic empire shortly before its downfall at the hands of the Huns and, in spite of a plethora of sources detailing the activities of Alan groups in Europe and Africa during the *Völkerwanderung*, there are almost no records about the Alanic tribes which remained in the Pontic steppes from then on.

In his account, Ammianus states that “the Huns, after spreading through the regions of the Alans ... killed and plundered many of them and joined the survivors to themselves after forming an alliance”.⁶ Notwithstanding this brief report, there is a close similarity between this and later, better-known episodes in steppe politics: here we can suppose a combination of drastic military action and sys-

³ A hypothesis based on the fact that the kingdom of *Yancai* 奄蔡國 changed its name to *Alan(liao)* 阿蘭(聊) in the first century AD according to *Hou Hanshu* 88 and on the etymology **allān* < **aryāna*- (first given by F. C. Andreas in R. Gauthiot, *Essai sur le vocalisme du sogdien*, Paris 1913, iii).

⁴ Amm. 31.2.13: *in immensum extentas Scythiae solitudines Halani inhabitant ... paulatimque nationes conterminas crebritate victoriarum attritas ad gentilitatem sui vocabuli traxerunt ut Persae.*

⁵ The table is a comparison of Amm. 31.2.14 with Hdt. 4.104-109. In this sense, see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 2nd ed. Ann Arbor 2007, 334-335.

⁶ Amm. 31.3.1: *Huni pervasis Halanorum regionibus ... interfectisque multis et spoliatis reliquos sibi concordandi fide pacta iunxerunt.*

tematic redistribution of the vanquished throughout conquered territories and among different military units in order to break tribal loyalties.⁷

However, our sources say nothing in this (or any other) respect and, after the dissolution of the Hun empire, the involvement of the Alans in the Byzantine-Persian wars of the sixth century is the only event shedding some light on their fortunes amidst the rising tide of newcomers like Oghurs, Avars and Türküt. Once more, Menander Protector is the only author claiming that the Alans had become subject to the Türküt towards AD 575, at least according to the boast of Turxanthus (or *Türk-šad*, a title rather than a name).⁸ More than a century ago, Kulakovskij already observed that there was no mention of the Alans in Byzantine writers for the whole period from the sixth to the eighth centuries and accordingly concluded: "it is highly probable that this circumstance is in connection with the fact that the Alans were subject to the Khazars by then".⁹

In this context I would like to quote here an inspiring passage by Professor Lars Johanson with which I completely agree. In his opinion,

"the old nomadic complexes were linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous, comprising elements of different origin. The known designations refer to the representative groups of the tribal confederacies, but do not tell us which tribes were included. The ethnic or linguistic affiliation of a constituent tribe is not necessarily identical with that of the leading elite group of the complex. Titles are not limited to specific linguistic groups. Given the heterogeneous composition of the nomadic complexes, it is often impossible to determine with which tribes or under which tribes Turkic-speaking groups appeared in the Caucasus area."¹⁰

Following this argumentation, it can be assumed that, either by force or agreement, the remnants of the former Alanic *entente* found a place in the new formations which held sway over southern Russia, but by merging with the latter they escaped the attention of the chroniclers, who generally identified steppe empires with their ruling elites. However, Kulakovskij's assertion must be clarified: there is effectively only one Byzantine source for the whole of the seventh and eighth centuries, the Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, and during this pe-

⁷ My inspiration for this passage comes from P. Jackson, "The Mongol Age in Eastern Inner Asia," in N. di Cosmo, A. J. Frank and P. B. Golden, eds. *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia. The Chinggisid Age*, Cambridge 2009, 34. We are faced with different periods, but probably with similar methods.

⁸ Men. fr. 19.1 (ed. R. C. Blockley, Cambridge 1985, 176-177) ταύτη τοι καὶ ὑπακούουσιν ἡμῖν καὶ ἐν μοίρα καθεστήκασι δούλου "so they [= Alans and Unigurs] are our subjects and are numbered amongst our slaves".

⁹ Ю. Кулаковскій, *Аланы по свидѣніямъ классическихъ и византийскихъ писателей*, Киевъ 1899, 49.

¹⁰ L. Johanson, "On the Roles of Turkic in the Caucasus Area," in Y. Matras, A. McMahon and N. Vincent. *Linguistic Areas. Convergence in Historical and Typological Perspective*. Houndmills 2006, 163.

riod both the struggle with the Arab caliphate and the iconoclast controversy probably left little room for interest in faraway regions if they were not directly concerned with Byzantium. On the other hand, there is no need for an *argumentum ex silentio*, since additional evidence is provided by Eastern sources: for example, (1) a legendary report by the Syriac patriarch Michael the Great on the origin of the Khazars associates them to “the country of the Alans, which is called Barsālia” (*l-atrā d-Alān, d-meṭqrē Barsāliyā*);¹¹ (2) Muslim sources on the Second Arab-Khazar war often mention the land of the Alans (اللان *al-Lān*) and the Darial pass (باب اللان *Bāb al-Lān* “the Gate of the Alans”) as its theater of operations; and (3) a passage in a letter by the Khazar *khagan* Joseph (a list of peoples) recalls the fact that all the Alans up to the border of *Abkhazia were tributary to him.¹²

Unfortunately, none of these sources allows us to infer at what time, for how long and to what extent the Alans were subject to the Khazars and this is, of course, a crucial question. Gadlo suggested that “Alania preserved complete independence up to the middle of the seventh century”,¹³ while Novosel’cev even argued that the Alans were never a part of the Khazar khaganate, since the sources present them as “an independent political subject, now acting in alliance with the Khazars (more often), now inclining to the side of Byzantium or the Caliphate”.¹⁴ But the latter are very rare cases and the example he gives of an alliance with the Arabs is his own interpretation of a short entry in al-Ṭabarī’s *History* which states that in the year 103/721-2 “the Turks made a raid against al-Lān”, with no further comment.¹⁵

In fact, as already noted by Kulakovskij, there is an exception to the silence of Byzantine sources as well: Theophanes’ passage on the journey of the *spatharios* Leo (later Emperor Leo III) to Alania (ἐν Ἀλανίᾳ) in order to stir up the Alans (πρὸς τὸ συγκινηῖσαι τοὺς Ἀλανοὺς) against Abasgia, which was held by the Arabs

¹¹ Michael Syrus (ed. J.-B. Chabot, i-iii, Paris 1899-1910; Vol. 2: 391-392) on Kazarig, eponymous ancestor of the Khazars during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Maurice (582-602); cf. F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, “Michael der Syrer über das erste Auftreten der Bulgaren und Chazaren,” *Byzantion* 28 (1958), 105-118; D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton 1954, 5, 43.

¹² Khagan Joseph’s letter (ed. П. К. Коковцов, *Еврейско-хазарская переписка в X веке*. Ленинград 1932, 31: כולם נותני מס הם לי ... כולם נותני מס הם לי *wə-kōl ‘Alanīm ‘ad gəbūl ‘Afkan ... kōlīm nōtnē mas hēm lī* “all the Alans up to the border of *Abkhazia ... all of them are tributary to me”; 101-102 “все аланы до границы Аф-кана ... все платят мне дань”; 105, n. 13 אפכאן ‘Afkan must be a mistake instead of אפכאז ‘Afkaz); cf. S. A. Pletnjowa, *Die Chasaren. Mittelalterliches Reich an Don und Wolga*, Leipzig 1978, 156.

¹³ А. В. Гадло, *Этническая история северного Кавказа IV-X вв.* Ленинград 1979, 164.

¹⁴ А. П. Новосельцев, *Хазарское государство и его роль в истории восточной Европы и Кавказа*. Москва 1990, 106.

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī (ed. M. J. de Goeje, i-iii, Leiden 1879-1901; 2: 1437) وفيها أغارت الترك على اللان *wā-fihā ‘aḡārati ‘t-Turk ‘ala al-Lān* (not an invasion, in which case the verb فتح *fataha* would be used). Maybe a *casus belli* of the Second Arab-Khazar war (Dunlop, *Jewish Khazars*, 61-62); the terms *Turk* and *Ḥazar* are virtually interchangeable (cf. Golden, *Khazar Studies*, 51-52). I am grateful to Àlex Queraltó Bartrés for his help in this footnote.

(Σαρακηνοί), during the second reign of Justinian II Rhinotmetus (705–711).¹⁶ A certain Itaxes is mentioned during a skirmish against the Abasgians and he is labeled as “lord” (κύριος) of the Alans.¹⁷ The question arises whether Itaxes was a king or just a military chief: while the context, in my opinion, favors the second option and the word κύριος is not a usual word for “king”,¹⁸ Kulakovskij concluded that “the Alans at that time lived under the rule of national *kings* (подъ управлениемъ национальныхъ царей) and took part in international relations quite irrespective of the Khazar khagan”.¹⁹ Maybe Artamonov was closer to the real thing when he spoke here about *chiefs* (вожди) who “operated according to their private interest” and “were ready to join Byzantine service only for a good reward”.²⁰ In any case, one episode without a clear background and probably associated with an individual group and a concrete time cannot fill all our gaps for two centuries. There is again no clear evidence for an Alanic kingdom in the sources until the ninth century.

Sometimes our lack of information has been replaced by hazardous etymologies with no better results. According to al-Mas’ūdī, the *Arsīya* (الارسية), the standing army of the Khazar *khagan*, were migrants from the region around Khwārazm.²¹ Minorsky compared *Arsīya* with the Alan ethnic name *Ās* and the ancient tribe of the *Aorsi*;²² and Lewicki went further and read the form as **Orsīya* or **Ursīya*, linking it to Digor *opc*, Iron *ypc* “white” (maybe “western”).²³ But there is almost no evidence for Transcaspians Alans in the sources,²⁴ we know nothing more about the Aorsi after the first century AD and there is no additional source

¹⁶ Theoph. 600B-604B (ed. C. de Boor, *BT* i-ii, Lipsiae 1883-1885; 1: 391-393).

¹⁷ Text: τῷ Ἰταξῆ τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτῶν “under their *lord* Itaxes”; according to J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, Leipzig 1903, 168, the Persian title *bidaxš* “vice-roy”.

¹⁸ Theophanes makes use of κύριος “lord, master, sir” mostly in the formula ὁ κύριος (*sic*) Βουλγαρίας, applied to several Bulgar rulers (Kubrat, Tervel, Pagan, Telerig, Kardam). According to C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, Oxford 1997, 547, n. 5, “Theoph. appears to reproduce a contemporary source” on Leo’s Caucasian mission.

¹⁹ Кулаковскій, *Аланы*, 51.

²⁰ M. И. Артамонов, *История Хазар*, Санкт-Петербург 2002² (1962¹), 363-364.

²¹ Al-Mas’ūdī *Murūğ ad-dāḥab* II 10-12 (ed. Ch. Pellat, 5 vols., Beirut 1966-74; §§ 450-452).

²² V. Minorsky, *A History of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries*. Cambridge 1958, 147, n. 1.

²³ T. Lewicki, “Un peuple iranien peu connu: les **Arsīya* ou **Orsīya*,” *Hungaro-Turcica. Studies in Honour of Julius Németh*, Budapest 1976, 31-33 (Polish version: “**Arsīya* / **Orsīya* – mało znany lud irański”, *Studia Indo-Iranica*, Kraków 1983, 75-77).

²⁴ Evidence for Transcaspians Alans is very meager: the Alan raid of AD 72 through Hyrcania against Media (Ios. *Bell. Iud.* 7.244-251) and later Ferdūsī’s “fortress of the Alans” (الانان *Alānān dez*) and al-Bīrūnī’s “tribe of the Alans and *Ās*” (جنس اللان والاس) *gīns al-Lān wa’l-Ās*), both close to the Oxus/Amū Daryā; for brevity, see my *Sources on the Alans. A Critical Compilation*, Leiden 2000, 91-93, 252-253, 348-352.

proving any kind of relation between Alans and *Arsīya*.²⁵ Consequently, Novosel'cev was probably right when saying that "this is only a hypothesis".²⁶

In a similar way, the name of the town Astrakhan was explained by Marquart as coming from *Ās-tarḥan* "the Tarkhan of the Ās", that is to say, the commander of the Alanic troops in the Khazar army,²⁷ a conjecture followed by Vernadsky,²⁸ Artamonov²⁹ and even by Trubačëv as "most likely" in his revised translation of Vasmer's *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.³⁰ However, the origin of it all is a Khwārazmian mercenary who commanded the Khazar forces which invaded Transcaucasia in 764, named *Ās-Tarḥān* (استرخان) by al-Ṭabarī, but *Rās-Ṭarḥān* (راس طرخان) by Ya'qūbī and *Řaž T'arxan* (Ṛažd Ṛurḥuulu) by Lewond.³¹ And if the name is not all clear, besides we are told surprisingly that this general attacked the Alan country in the neighborhood of Darial.³² Maybe "Alanic troops attacking Alan territory" could be a nice subject for a *Namengeschichte*, but I think that the reconstruction of history cannot rest entirely upon etymologies, as in this case.

After some three hundred years of silence, we find the first clear mention of an Alan kingdom after the Byzantine-Persian wars in the notice on the journey of the interpreter Sallām to Khazaria after crossing the land ruled by the "king of the Alans" (ملك اللان *malik al-Lān*) under Caliph al-Wāṭiq-billāh (842-47) by the mid-ninth century.³³ The Cambridge Document, speaking from the Khazar side, tells us that "the kingdom of Alan is the strongest and the hardest of all the nations which are around us",³⁴ and in fact remembers an Alan-Khazar war under King

²⁵ *Status quaestionis* in Golden, "Cumanica III", 41-43.

²⁶ Новосельцев, *Хазарское государство*, 120.

²⁷ J. Marquart, "Ein arabischer Bericht über die arktischen (uralischen) Länder aus dem 10. Jahrhundert," *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 4 (1924), 271.

²⁸ G. Vernadsky, *The Origins of Russia*, Oxford 1959, 93: "the commander of the Alanic troops [in the Khazar army] was known as the *As-tarkhan*. A detachment of the Alanic army must have been stationed in a fort at the mouth of the Volga. This fort eventually became a city which still stands – Astrakhan".

²⁹ Артамонов, *История Хазар*, 360: "the Tarkhan of the As (*As-tarxan*) occupied a prominent position in the Khazar state and participated in the Khazar-Arab wars. The fact that Byzantium stirred up the As together with the Ghuzz and Pechenegs against the Khazars shows that the As kept autonomy in the structure of the Khazar kaganate and, not wishing to accept Khazar dominion, at the earliest opportunity they opposed it".

³⁰ М. Фасмер, *Этимологический словарь русского языка*, i-iv, Москва 1986-1987, Vol. 1: 96, s.v. *Астрахань*: "скорее всего, из тюрк. *As-tarxan* «начальник асов, алан» (в Хазарском каганате), т. е. первоначально, возможно, ставка аланского военачальника".

³¹ Sources collected and commented by Golden, *Khazar Studies*, 151-54 sub § 7 *As Tarxan*.

³² Cf. Dunlop, *Jewish Khazars*, 180, n. 43.

³³ Ibn Ḥurdaḡbih 138 (ed. M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum*, VI, Leiden 1889, 163); also recorded by Ibn Rusta, al-Muqaddasi and many others, cf. H. Göckenjan and I. Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasien im Mittelalter. Die Ġayḥānī-Tradition*, Wiesbaden 2001, 25-26.

³⁴ Cambridge Document, fol. 1v, l. 22 מלכות אלן עזה ו קשה מכל האומות אשר סביבותינו *malkūt 'Alan 'azzāh wə-qašāh mi-kōl hā-'ummōt 'ašer sebibōtēnū*; cf. N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian*

Aaron, which agrees with the fact that, according to Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, the ruler of Alania (ὁ ἐξουσιοκράτωρ Ἀλανίας) could attack the Khazars and plunder the nine regions of Khazaria (τὰ ἐννέα κλίματα τῆς Χαζαρίας) if he thinks preferable the friendship of the Byzantine emperor (μᾶλλον προτιμωτέραν τιθεμένου τὴν φιλίαν τοῦ βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων).³⁵ A similar statement can be found in al-Mas'ūdī, who says that "the lord of the Alans is mighty, very strong and influential among the kings".³⁶ All together this suggests a progressive independence from Khazar rule, and the kingdom of Alania was to achieve a certain notoriety at a regional level until the Mongol conquests, which also speaks in favor of the survival of North Iranian elements during the Khazar period.

One difficult question is the division between Alans and As. It has been broadly accepted that the Don forest-steppe variant of the Saltov culture was related to the Alans. Its origin has been generally explained as a penetration of Alans from Ciscaucasia into the Don basin, but its circumstances are controversial: a retreat under Khazar pressure in the seventh century (Ljapuškin), a migration from regions ravaged by the Arab armies in mid-eighth century (Pletněva) or a resettlement by force on the northern border of the khaganate by the Khazar government in the second half of the eighth century (Mixeev) are the main proposed solutions;³⁷ but all of them are hypotheses and interpretations not supported explicitly by any source. On the other side, Artamonov concluded that the bearers of the Saltov culture probably coincided with the As people and held the destruction of this culture to be a reprisal by the Khazars, who did not hope to keep them under their rule in view of the constant Pecheneg threat.³⁸ All in all it is highly speculative, especially taking into account that we are told nothing about the geographical location of the As, Asia, Azia or the like during the Khazar period, and that the sources that could link this ethnic name with the Saltov culture, mostly the Old Russian chronicles on the Ясы and maybe Abū'l-Fidā', belong to or deal with a later period.³⁹

Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century, Ithaca NY and London 1982, 112-113, 134-137. I am grateful to Mariona and Eulalia Vernet for their help with the Hebrew text.

³⁵ Const. Porph. *De Adm. Imp.* 10-11 (ed. Gy. Moravcsik, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, Vol. 1. Dumbarton Oaks 1967, 62-65).

³⁶ Al-Mas'ūdī *Murūġ* II 45 (ed. Pellat, § 480) وصاحب اللان ... ذو منعة وباس شديد وذو سياسة بين الملوك *wa-ṣāhib al-Lān ... dū mana'at wa-bās šādīd wa-ḏū siyāsāt bain al-mulūk*. Cf. Minorsky, *Sharvān and Darband*. 107 "in the tenth century the strongest force in the central part of Northern Caucasus was the Iranian Alāns, who most probably counted a number of Caucasian tribes among their vassals"; Новосельцев, *Хазарское государство*, 105 "Alania (was) the largest North Caucasian political formation of the Early Middle Ages [...] the Alans were the force by means of which the Khazars came out victors in the complex struggle for hegemony in the North Caucasus".

³⁷ As summarized by С. А. Плетнёва, *Очерки хазарской археологии*, Москва 1999, 24-25.

³⁸ Артамонов, *История Хазар*, 359-361.

³⁹ Both the Laurentian and the Hupatian chronicles *sub* 6624 (*Полное Собрание Русских Летописей* I, Санкт-П. 1926-28, 291; II, Санкт-П. 1908, 284), when dealing with Jaropolk's Cuman campaign of 1116, speak of Ясы on the river Don; as for Abū'l-

As a sample of the problems posed by the comparison of sources and archeological records, I would like to summarize briefly some ideas about the division between east and west Alania which I proposed at the Barcelona conference in 2007.

Kovalevskaja,⁴⁰ as early as 1958, suggested that “apparent contradictions in written sources regarding both alliances and hostile relations of the Alans with Byzantium were explained by the fact that there were two groups of Alan tribes in the Northern Caucasus, western and eastern, differing in their political sympathies and orientation”. This assertion, followed by Artamonov,⁴¹ was the starting point for further speculation, and two distinct political entities have been conjectured after the division of Alania – like Georgia and Armenia – in the Byzantine and Persian areas of influence. Kuznetsov went further and even suggested that “there is some ground to think that the inner ethnopolitical structure of Alania was historically characterized by a developed dualism, running through the whole history of Alania and reflected in the present-day division into Western-Digor and Eastern-Iron Ossetians”.⁴²

АРТАМОНОВ, КОВАЛЕВСКАЯ, КУЗНЕЦОВ	Western Alania = Digor Ossetia Pro-Byzantine	Eastern Alania = Iron Ossetia Pro-Persian
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For me, there is enough evidence in sixth-century sources, if not for two political entities, then at least for two groups of tribes that clearly sided with either Byzantium or the Sasanians. However, problems appear when we try to perpetuate this division beyond the sixth century, since we have no further information and the geopolitical map of the Middle East experienced important changes after the period of Islamic expansion. Moreover, any attempt to identify these western and eastern Alans with modern Digor and Iron Ossetians is an oversimplification with no basis in real facts. Looking for a historical parallel, the situation of the peoples of the northern Caucasus, always trapped between Great Powers, reminds me of the role played by the Iroquois and Algonquin Indian nations during the French and Indian War, the North American theater of the eighteenth-century Seven Years War. The present-day Ossetians are the last stage of a much more complex reality and, most probably, continuous strife, high casualties,

Fidā' (13th–14th century), he makes a distinction between العالان *al-'Allān*, east of Abkhazia, and, next to them, the “Turkic” الامس *al-Ās* (*Taqwīm al-buldān*, ed. J.T. Reinaud and W. MacGuckin de Slane, Paris 1840, 203). As far as I know, Marquart (*Streifzüge*, 164) was the first to propose that *al-Ās* = steppe Alans and *al-'Allān* = Caucasus Alans.

⁴⁰ В. Б. Ковалевская, *Кавказ и Аланы*, Москва 1984, 133.

⁴¹ Артамонов, *История Хазар*, 361: “the Alans consisted of a number of tribes, but basically they were divided in two groups – eastern and western, Iron and Digor”; 363 “in the sixth century the western part of the Alans was closely connected with Abkhazia and through it with Byzantium, while the eastern one generally backed the Iranian side”.

⁴² В. Кузнецов, *Очерки истории Алан*, Владикавказ 1992, 92; cf. V. Kouznetsov and I. Lebedynsky, *Les Alains. Cavaliers des steppes, seigneurs du Caucase*. Paris 2005², 143.

slaughters, migrations and/or deportations led to the dissolution of some tribes and the creation of new ones, all in all far-reaching changes of which often no record has survived.

In a similar way, Zuckerman⁴³ linked the data contained in the seventh-century Armenian Geography *Ašxarhac'oyc'*⁴⁴ with later Arabic geographical tradition, concretely Ibn Rusta's account of the existence of four - otherwise unknown - Alan tribes⁴⁵ (only the name of the leading tribe, رخساس *D. ḥsās*, has been preserved).⁴⁶ This new approach produced a fourfold division into two western groups, *Alank'* and *Aš-Tigor*, the former allies of Justinian, and two eastern, pro-Persian ones, *Dik'or* and *Awsurk'*. Furthermore, my good friend Dima Korobov was able to identify these four groups archeologically in the Upper Kuban, the Kislovodsk basin, Kabardino-Balkaria and the Upper and Middle Sunzha after the results of his research on catacomb cemeteries dated between AD 450 and 740.⁴⁷

ZUCKERMAN (<i>Ašxarhac'oyc'</i> , Ibn Rusta)	Western, Pro-Byzantine		Eastern, Pro-Persian	
	¹ <i>Alank'</i>	² <i>Aš-Tigor</i>	³ <i>Dik'or</i>	⁴ <i>Awsurk'</i>
KOROBOV (catacomb cemeteries)	Upper Kuban	Kislovodsk basin	Kabardino- Balkaria	Upper and Middle Sunzha

A detailed study of the relevant passage in *Ašxarhac'oyc'* will appear in the proceedings of the Barcelona conference.⁴⁸ For now, let it suffice to say that this is an obscure source, existing in both a long and a short version, depicting Caucasia,

⁴³ C. Zuckerman, "Les Alains et les As dans le Haut Moyen Âge," *Nartamongæ. The Journal of Alano-Osetic Studies* 2 (2003), *Nartamongæ. The Journal of Alano-Osetic Studies* 2 [2003] 151: "les ¹Alains et ²la partie occidentale des Ases digoriens, devenue «un peuple des Alains», composent l'Alanie alliée à l'empire de Justinien. ³L'autre partie des Ases digoriens et ⁴les Ases «tout court» (**Awsurk'*) s'allient à l'est avec la Perse" (superscript numbers are mine).

⁴⁴ *Ašxarhac'oyc'* Long Recension [LR], ed. A. Soukry, Venice 1881, 26 = Venice Manuscript No. 1245, 40-41, and Short Recension [SR], ed. A. Abrahamyan, Yerevan 1944, 347. English translation and erudite commentary by R. H. Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac'oyc')*. *The Long and Short Recensions*. Wiesbaden 1992, 55-55A.

⁴⁵ Ibn Rusta (ed. M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, VII, Leiden 1892, 148).

⁴⁶ Often corrected to رخساس **Ruḥs-Ās* and compared to the ancient *Rhoxolani* (as early as R. Bleichsteiner, "Das Volk der Alanen," *Berichte des Forschungsinstitut für Osten und Orient* 2 (1918), 15, "edle Asen" = Roxolanen). Just a play on names without further evidence like *Arsīya* / *Ās* / *Aorsi*.

⁴⁷ D. S. Korobov, "On the areas of the North Caucasus settled by Alanic tribes according to archaeological data and written sources," in *Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans. Iranian-Speaking Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes*, proceedings of a conference held in Barcelona on May 7-10, 2007 (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ A. Alemany and I. Arzhantseva, "Alanica Bilingua: Sources vs. Archaeology. The Case of East and West Alania," in *Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans* (forthcoming).

according to Hewsens, as it was prior to the mid-seventh century.⁴⁹ The text in question is basically a list of peoples, with several variant readings, which makes the geographical setting ambiguous:

(a) the ethnic name of the "Alans" (*Alank'*), for example, is given twice as *Atowank'* "Albanians" (although this is most probably a mistake);

(b) it is not clear if we must read *azg *Alanac' Aš-Tigor* as "the nation of the Aš-Tigor Alans" or "the nation of the Alans and the Aš-Tigor";

(c) there is no need to see two different groups in the *Aš-Tigor* and the *Dik'or* in the Ardoz country, which could be part of each other (if *Tigor* and *Dik'or* = "Digor");

(d) most important, the fourth group, the *Awsurk'*, is a correction by Eremian instead of the manuscript readings *p'owrk'* (LR) or *ap'owrk'* (SR), with the additional problem of the duplicity *Aš-* in *Aš-Tigor* & *Aws-* /*Ös-*/ in *Awsurk'*.

(e) on the other side, the text mentions the *Dowalk'*, generally regarded as the Ossetian *Twaltæ*, but they are not granted the rank of "Alanic tribe" by Zuckerman, although they were probably known to Ibn Rusta and the *Hudūd al-'Ālam* as *طولاس Tūlās* or **T(u)wal-Ās*.

In short, everything we know about the peoples mentioned in this passage from the *Ašxarhac'oyc'* is nothing but their name, and every attempt to elucidate their real nature is a matter of speculation.

In conclusion, the main problem is to what extent the Khazar empire was a Turkic empire or just an empire ruled by a Turkic elite with a significant presence of North Iranian elements from earlier periods: but this is, of course, an open question. My son, who is three years old, is learning to build his first jigsaw puzzles and sometimes it is difficult to make him understand that pieces do not always fit with each other. In our case, we have a giant jigsaw puzzle of some three hundred years, the whole of the Khazar period, but we must accept that we have been left with only a handful of pieces which often do not match, in spite of the efforts of some scholars.

⁴⁹ Hewsens, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak*, 7-15.