

Aya/Kolkheti - to the History of Synonymous Toponyms

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Abstract

The great wisdom of knowledgeable writers has played a crucial role in studying the ancient history of Georgia. They have preserved not only invaluable historical facts but also, at times, unique information about the traditions of our country. The study of epistolary heritage vividly reflects the socioeconomic relationships, lifestyle differentiation, and the political-economic history of the Colchis region, as well as the cultural ties and political-economic interaction with neighbouring countries in the history of the Colchis Kingdom. "Aia" is the most ancient name for Colchis. The name "Kolkha" (Kikha) is found in Assyrian cuneiform writings up to the 13th century BC. Colchis had relatively strong unity. Such a union was recognised by ancient wise men, who experienced such an alliance of wisdom that their sayings and words became respected authorities. The term "Kolkhida" or "Colchis" is not known in the Georgian language in any form unless it appears in Georgian sources and is derived from the language of the learned, bringing with it its peculiar concepts and expressions. In Georgian sources, it is identified as Egrisi. The well-known fact for the day is that from ancient times, in the Euro-Asian part of the Caucasus, as well as in Crete, the smaller parts of Asia, the South Caucasus, the Black Sea region, and other widespread areas, the worship of the goddess of fertility and the protector of life, the "Mother of Gods," the "Great Mother," was prevalent. It was also closely associated with the realm of animals, plants, and celestial bodies. Its manifestations are found in many cultures across Europe, the smaller parts of Asia, and the territories of the Caucasus.

Keywords: Aia, Colchis, Toponym, Argonauts

Introduction

Toponyms (place names) are "living memories" that contain information about local cultures and languages. They are passed down from generation to generation and carry centuries-old traditions. The goal of the study is to explore the historical context of two synonymous toponyms ("Aia" and "Colchis") and the complex problematic questions related to their interconnection. This issue is intricately linked to folkloric historicity and the transmission mechanism of information about the distant past through the difficult and somewhat controversial path of folk traditions and the discursive problematics of folklore.

Methods and Materials

In the process of research, starting from the objectives of the investigation, we will systematically conduct specific analyses, aligning them with existing data from the scientific literature and related studies. When working on the article, we will present insights through both descriptive and historical-comparative methods.

The name "Colkheti" was first used by the ancient Greek historian Hesiod and the poet Pindaros and later by the Greek geographer Strabo. This name is mentioned in BC. In the 8th century, Eumelos with Corinthian.

It should be noted that the first mention of Kolkheti closely coincides with the historical context of the foundation of the kingdom. Namely, the reign of King Ayet. Ancient scholars often refer to her as "Aia" in connection with Medea's kingdom. You should pay attention to the fact that the first name of Kolkheti exactly corresponds to the official name of the ruler of the state: "Kulkha || Colchi". The old name "Kolkha" comes from "Kulkha", and this toponym originates from this region.

Results

The main goal of the Argonauts' campaign is that the name of the geographical area, "Aya" (Αἶα), is found in the most ancient variants of Argonauts.

Homer does not know the name Colchis. He only speaks of a country that should be called Αἶα.

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For a while the legendary Aya and Colchis were interchangeable (Herodotus was the first to associate Aya with Colchis). It is noteworthy that the first mention of Colchis in Greek sources coincides with the mention of the state of Colchis under the name Kulkha/Kolkha (Kulcha/Kolcha) in the Urartian inscriptions of the 8th century BC. Two synonymous toponyms (Aya and Kolkheti), according to researchers, should reflect two different archaeological levels, of which Aya is chronologically older and Colchis is a later version.

Most likely, the story of the Argonauts' campaign against Aya developed in the Greek mythopoetic tradition, when the name of Colchis did not yet exist and the country was called Aya. Georgian sources do not know the names of Colchis and Kolkheti. It should be noted here that other ancient toponyms and names associated with the legend of the Argonauts show a connection with the Georgian linguistic world, which should echo the results of a specific Mycenaean expedition, which was actually carried out; contacts that the Mycenaean world was supposed to have with the Georgian world of the eastern Black Sea region; and the realities that were supposed to be related to the intended purpose of the Argonauts' expedition.

Αἶα must probably represent the second component of the name Κύταια. Some ancient sources consider Κύταια to be the city of Aya, and some call both cities Colchis.

Since the Hellenistic era, various authors have fixed the name "A" as the capital of both the legendary and real Colchis. It is interesting to draw a parallel with the name of the city on the northern coast of Crete, Κύταιον, which is repeatedly mentioned in ancient sources. The kinship between these two toponyms is clear and undisputed.

According to ancient sources, Κύταια is the homeland of Medea: "Kvitaia is a city in Colchis, due to which [the poet] calls [Medea] Kuitaiel." (Explanations of Isaac, John Tzetzes for Cassandra by Lycophron, 174).

Some ancient sources consider it the city of Aia: "The High Caucasus and the city of Aia, "Kvitaia," towered on the left" (Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica, II, 1266).

Some of them refer to both as cities of Colchis: "Aias," the city of Colchis; and "Kvitaia, Kvitaia-city of Colchis. In addition, people of Colchis as the tribe near Libistines" (Footnotes to Alexandra by Lycophron, 1024, 1312).

It is interesting to draw a parallel with the name of the city Κύταιον on the northern coast of Crete, which is repeatedly mentioned in ancient sources.

According to Stephanus of Byzantium, "Kuita is the city of Colchis, the homeland of Medea. There is another city in Scythia as well as Kuitaia in Lycophron: he/she came to Kuitaia of the Libistines (Libistines are neighbouring people of Colchis). It is also called Kuitaisi, from Kuitaiosi. According to some, Kuita is two—from here and European. There also exists the city of Kuitaioni on the island of Crete" (Stephanus of Byzantium, the Ethnica, summary).

According to numerous references in BB-linear documents, this city was already present on the island of Crete during the Mycenaean era. R. Brown considers the geographical name Κύταιον to be pre-Greek and suggests that it must be associated with Κυταία, the birthplace of the Colchis Medea [1].

In the sources, the name Κύταια occurs in several variants: Κύτα, Κύτη, Κυταίς, Κυταίς, Κύτηίς, etc.

It is true that Κύταια/Κυταία appears in Greek sources from the Hellenistic era, which may indicate a relatively late origin. However, it seems that the name of the settlement of Aeetes did not occur in the Hellenistic era. This is probably indicated by the name of the son of Phrixus, Κυτίσωρος (who is already known to Herodotus), and the names of cities in Anatolia: Κύτωρος (Paphlagonia), Μασσί-κυτος (Lycia), and, possibly, Κότα (Caria).

Κυταία must be linked with "Kutaisi," which is confirmed by regular correspondences in all three Kartvelian languages: Georgian (Kutaisi), Mingrelian (Kuteshi), and Svan (Kutashi), which gives us reason to assume that this settlement or residence already existed in the era of the circulation of the Proto-Kartvelian language.

The etymology of the toponym is remarkable. In this case, the root should reflect the pre-Greek *κwt-* and Kartvelian *kut [2].

The same root must be contained in a "pomegranate flower bud." It is noteworthy that κύτινο belongs to the pre-Greek lexical fund, and lexical forms containing a similar root are also named in the etymological dictionary of Beekes: κύταρον "spoon, ladle", κύταρος "honeycomb, pod of Egyptian beans", κύδαρος "small ship", κυττοί "nests, boxes". According to Hesychius, κύστεροι = ἀγγεῖα τῶν μελισσῶν "honeycomb". [3].

Based on the analysis of various forms, Brown concludes that the meaning of the root კურ must be a "hollow receptacle." Gordeziani also suggests that *kut is related to the root confirmed in Georgian (kut-n-a) and has the meaning of a hollow object, hollow, pod, or bud. [4].

It is noteworthy that *Kurt-/*Kut- was recently restored by H. Fenrich to the Proto-Kartvelian level: Kartvelian Kurd-/Kut-, e.g., Kut-n-a/ga-mo-kuT-na "Pumpkin Heart Removal," Kurd-i "Thief," or "someone who empties everything"; Mingrelian Kvirt-i "Thief"; Svan Kvit-, kvT- "Thief" [5].

All of the above revealed the connections of the pre-Greek root კურ with the general Kartvelian root and, accordingly, the relationship between κύταιον and Kutaisi.

It may look like M. Chukhua holds a different view on the etymology of the name Kurt or Kut [6].

who believes that the following types of phonetic-semantic transitions occurred in the root of interest to us:

Phonetic:

Proto-Kartvelian. *Kart-(a) – Georgian-Zan. Kurta/Kuta

Semantic:

Fence > fencing > fenced, confined place > City (public name) > The proper name of the city

Despite the different etymological definitions of the root at first glance, an important point is that this opinion of the scientist does not interfere with the theory of Georgian and Greek relativeness and unity named above. Moreover, we assume that it is quite possible to combine the aforementioned hypotheses and, therefore, semantic values and determine the basic content with the following semantic transitions: Fence > Fencing > Fenced > confined place of any volume (spoon, bud, pod, honeycomb, nest, box, or ship) City (public name) > Proper name of the city

There are disagreements regarding the etymology of Αἶα; it has not been restored at the general Georgian level, although it is found in some composites associated with religious holidays that have survived: in Mengr. Ayia-Zhashka—the name of Great Lenten Sunday, the fifth in order; in Svan. Ayia Mizhladeg—the Sunday before Palm Sunday.

In our opinion, the relationship of the root Aya with the component of identical composition (Jav), confirmed in the form of Yav-Nana, is also very interesting. What is extremely important is that the form of Yav-Nana, in turn, is associated with the name of the cult of the goddess of fertility and life, the mother.



Figure 1. Goddess "Great Mother" statue. A woman sitting sideways on a horse. The composition features a woman, a child, a cup, a horse and a place on a horse. The item is covered with a green patina. Tsaishi, kolkhian collective grave N1. Dadian Palaces, Historical Architectural Museum, St. 872. H 11.5, L 9.5 (tab. XIII, 2), BC VIII

In the Colchian archaeological collection, there is displayed "A woman riding a horse" of the gods, the great mother—known in the Georgian world as Nana—is widespread both in Georgia and in the Mediterranean world (Fig. 1).

"Yav-Nana" ("Lullaby") is an old Georgian folk poem-song, originally an ancient hymn of a pagan ritual. Like the songs of the "Nanina" cycle, "Yav-Nana" is also associated with the name of Nana, the goddess of the sun and fertility.

"Yav-Nana" has lost its original character; today it is a lullaby, although before that, at some point, it was sung to children during the "illness of masters" (hence "Ya" and "Vardi"—as an associative connection with pimples—and compared to flowers to win the hearts of "masters").

As already mentioned above, this song was not of such limited use before and had the form of a wider ode and general hymn. The form "rose" was probably added later, perhaps in association with the form "ya" as the name of a flower.

Conclusion

The extraordinary variety and abundance with which the archaeologically well-studied centres of ancient civilisation cannot be compared to Colchis is a visible testimony of the very high level of Colchian agriculture, which is completely consistent with the stories of the Argonauts. As a result of the research, it can be assumed that the two synonymous toponyms "Aya" and "Kolkheti" reflect two different archaeological levels, of which Kolkheti is later and Aya is older, possibly introduced by oral transmission.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contribution

The idea of creating a paper and certain scientific material around the research issue belongs to the researcher Nargiz Akhvlediani. Depending on the goals of the research, the specialists of the relevant field, in particular, the researcher Lela Chotalishvili, provided us directly from the sources important scientific material for the research and a specific synthetic analysis corresponding to the analytical research. Researcher Nino Jorbenadze reviewed new studies related to the issue in the scientific literature and prepared a paper according to specific requirements. The historical-etymological research of the place name "Kutaisi" in the research of toponyms synonymous with Kolkheti belongs to Lela Chotalishvili and Nino Jorbenadze. During the research, researcher Iamze Gagua provided relevant critical feedback and comments. All authors contributed uniquely to the creation and development of this article.

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