

TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE CULTURE OF THE
PONTIC GREEKS IN THE CAUCASUS
(BASED ON FIELD RESEARCH IN 2022-2024)*

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The language and traditional culture of the Greeks residing in Russia and the former USSR have been the subject of extensive scientific research based on field materials. Notable studies include a detailed description of the language of the Pontic Greeks by F.A. Eloyeva [1], issues of national and linguistic identity were studied by V.V. Baranova [2], a detailed description of the culture and history of the Greeks of Russia and Ukraine is the subject of the monograph by Yu.V. Ivanova [3]. A collective work edited by I. Hasiotis presents further insights in Greek [4].

The mass migration of Greeks from the territory of the Ottoman Empire coincided with the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829. According to the Treaty of Adrianople, Russia gave the Ottomans the territories it had captured during the War (Gumushane, Erzurum, Kars, Bayburt) and withdrew from these regions. Notably, the Greeks residing in these areas fought on the side of Russia during the War. Following the request from Count I.F. Paskevich, the tsarist government permitted the resettlement of Christians from the Ottoman Empire into the Russian Empire. This migration occurred in several stages throughout the 19th and 20th centuries [5, 100-101].

Currently, a research team from the Lomonosov Moscow State

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University, the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the European University (St. Petersburg) started conducting an ethnolinguistic survey in Russian territories where the Greek population lives compactly. Six expeditions were carried out in areas, where the Greek presence is most clearly expressed within the broader cultural and linguistic landscape: Sochi [6] and other regions of the Northern Black Sea region (Novorossiysk, Anapa, Gelendzhik) [7], the Caucasian Mineral Waters region [8], Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania [9], and Dagestan. All collected materials were digitized, cataloged, and organized into an electronic archive which is housed in the library of the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Philology of the Philological Faculty of Lomonosov Moscow State University.

During our field research, we have collected data on the traditional culture of the Pontic Greeks, including calendar and family rituals (birth, wedding, funeral rites) using the ethnolinguistic questionnaire by A. A. Plotnikova [10], which includes more than 400 questions on vocabulary and phraseology related to various areas of traditional folk culture: the folk calendar, family customs, agricultural rituals, and folk mythology. Additionally, the survey was conducted with a special thematic questionnaire aimed at investigating the cultural practices of the Greek diaspora in Russia. This questionnaire included 57 items: 7 addressed general information about the history of the village, the settlement of the surveyed territories by Greeks, and religious and cultural life in the 19th-21st centuries; 43 focused on the traditional funeral rites, and the remaining 7 concerned changes in the Greek funeral rite in the post-Soviet period.

The initial fieldwork was conducted in Sochi in 2022. According to the All-Russian Population Census in 1897, the Greek community was the largest (25.7%) in the Sochi region, while the Russian population was in second place (24.2%). After the period of Stalin-era repressions and mass deportations of Greeks to Kazakhstan, as well as after the departure of the remaining population to Greece in the 1980-1990s, the number of Greeks has significantly decreased, now accounting for less

than one percent (0.82% according to the 2010 Census). According to various estimates, about 3.000-5.000 Greeks currently live in Sochi. The Greek population of Stavropol is represented by two groups of immigrants from territories located in modern Turkey, namely the Greeks (*Ρωμαίοι*), who speak the Pontic dialect of Greek (*ρωμαίικα*), and the Urum Greeks, who speak the historical northeastern dialect of Turkish (*musulmanca, osmanca, etc.*). Currently, the territory of Stavropol is home to many descendants of the so-called Tsalka Greeks, who moved from the Ottoman Empire to Georgia (mainly to the village of Tsalka and its environs, which led to the emergence of the name “Tsalka Greek”), that is, on the territory of the Russian Empire as of the 19th-early 20th centuries.

Despite the complex historical turns and the Soviet era’s general policy of homogenizing ethnic differences, our research team was surprised to find out that the Greek language (the Pontic dialect) and Greek traditions have been preserved to this day. The language is primarily spoken by the older generation, who attest that Pontic Greek, the mother tongue, was their first language and they only began speaking Russian in school. Middle-aged respondents can understand the language well, but they themselves speak it little. Young people and children use only common everyday expressions. Many respondents speak the standard Modern Greek, as they often travel to Greece, some live there, study, or visit relatives. The situation we observed during fieldwork is generally similar to what we see in the virtual space [11, 117-119].

Our expeditions noted a higher preservation of the traditional culture and languages among the Greeks of Stavropol compared to the Greeks of Sochi. The Greeks of the Caucasian Mineral Waters region live compactly in concentrated communities in areas surrounding the city of Yessentuki and in nearby settlements. According to various estimates, the total Greek population of the agglomeration is from 20.000 to 40.000 people.

There are many Greek cultural centers in the Caucasian Mineral

Waters dedicated to preserving and transmitting the traditional culture of the Pontic Greeks. These centers offer lessons at dance ensembles, classes of playing traditional musical instruments. The history of the Greek villages of Georgia and Asia Minor, the history of Greek clans and families, as well as the history of the Pontic Greeks and their migration in general are described in many local history books. With the active assistance of the Greek diaspora, Orthodox Churches and Church Complexes are being built in the Caucasian Mineral Waters. The standard Modern Greek language is taught in some schools and centers of additional education. Pontic language courses are also offered in the city of Yessentuki. People mainly of the older and partly of the younger generation communicate with each other in the Pontic language, and they write poetry in it (the poetry by Viktor Stoforandov).

The concentration of the Greek population in the Caucasian Mineral Waters region is still high: according to official data (2010 Census), the Greeks constituted 15.3% of the population in the Predgorny District (16,324) and 5.4% in the Yessentuki urban district (5,452). This largely predetermines the modern ethnolinguistic situation in the region. The compactness of the Greek population in certain areas of the Caucasian Mineral Waters (Yessentuki, Kirpichny, Inozemtsevo, Suvorovskaya, Grecheskoe and Dubovaya Balka villages, Sparta and Khasaut-Grecheskoe) also contributes to the preservation of some traditional culture elements as well as the language, which leads to the fact that representatives of other ethnic groups (Karachays, Circassians, Armenians, Gypsies, etc.) can speak Pontic Greek. Thus, in the village Khasaut- Grecheskoe even the mullah of the local mosque learned Pontic to communicate with the Greek population, and in the children's ensemble of the village of Sparta the soloist performing songs in the Pontic dialect is a boy from a gypsy family.

The research trip to the Greek villages of Georgia took place on August 16-28, 2022. During the fieldwork, the following territories were surveyed: Tsalka district, Borjomi district: Tsikhinjvari, Batumi district. The number of Greeks in Georgia, according to the 2002 Census, is

15.166 (according to various unofficial estimates, this number fluctuates between 2.000 and 100.000). In 1989 the number was 100.000. The diaspora has significantly decreased as a result of the migration of Greeks to Russia (Stavropol and Krasnodar regions), during the Stalin's era repressions and mass deportations of Greeks to Kazakhstan, as well as after the departure of the remaining population in the 1980-1990s to Greece. The Pontic tradition in Georgia acquired a number of new elements as a result of cultural interference (mainly from Armenians and Georgians). Since the initial migration of Greeks to these territories in the 19th century [12], by the beginning of the 21st century the number of Greeks in percentage terms had significantly decreased. The Greek traditional culture still exists, but due to historical and political circumstances its future seems pessimistic. Nevertheless, thanks to the enthusiasm of individual representatives of the Greek diaspora in Georgia, many cultural heritage sites such as churches, chapels, monasteries, cemeteries are maintained in a good condition.

Due to the lack of materials, it is difficult for us to give a full picture of the language and culture situation of the Greeks of the Caucasus region, but we can draw some preliminary conclusions. The traditional culture of the Pontic Greeks in all the surveyed regions: Georgia, Sochi, Novorossiysk, Caucasian Mineral Waters, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, North Ossetia-Alania, and Dagestan is preserved to this day. The Pontic tradition on the territory of Russia has acquired a number of new elements not only due to the proximity to other peoples (mainly to the Russians), but also under the influence of external factors, including the peculiarities of the historical and cultural situation in the region in the 20th century. In comparison with the materials collected in Sochi and Vladikavkaz, the traditional culture and language of the Greeks of the Caucasian Mineral Waters are better preserved, however, in this region we can also observe a tendency towards the loss of the national language and the gradual replacement of elements of Greek traditional culture by the pan-Caucasian or, more broadly, by the Russian one.

There is a continuous effort to maintain ties with the "lost

homeland", encompassing both various regions of Pontus and the Greek villages in Georgia. Individual and organized groups undertake trips to the historical homelands of the Pontic Greeks, fostering connections with the local populations residing in these territories. Concurrently, ties with the "big homeland" – Greece – are preserved too. Modern Greek is taught in schools and cultural centers, a diverse assortment of Greek products is available in shops and cafes, Greek music and even radio broadcasts are played in various establishments, and entrepreneurs engage in business with Greece. Additionally, Pontic Greeks maintain relationships with numerous relatives who have migrated to Greece.

We can conclude that the traditional culture of the Pontic Greeks in all surveyed regions is preserved to this day. However, we observe transformations of ritual cultural practices due to the transition from the traditional rural lifestyle to the modern urban environment. Thus, in Vladikavkaz, where the Greeks have resided in the city since their initial migration, the occasional ritual for invoking rain (*kushkugara*, *koshkovora*, *koshkoter*) has been almost completely forgotten, and the lexeme itself is used exclusively in a metaphorical context, while in the village of Krasnaya Polyana (Sochi) and in the village of Khasaut-Grecheskoe (Karachay-Cherkessia), where the residents were engaged primarily in agricultural work, this ritual has been preserved quite well.

Cultural interference is noted, mainly from the side of Russian and pan-Caucasian culture, which is especially evident in funeral and memorial rites, in particular, including their culinary practices: at funerals, the traditional *kutia* (*kokia*) is often accompanied by standard dishes, such as borscht or chicken noodles, roast meat (sauce) etc., replacing traditional Pontic cuisine that was customarily used before the Soviet period.

This dual trend reflects a simultaneous tendency toward the erosion of the national language and the gradual replacement of elements of Greek traditional culture with pan-Caucasian or pan-Russia practices. Nevertheless, there is also a strong desire among the Pontic Greeks to preserve, and in some cases, to revive their unique traditions.

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**ԱՎԱՆԴՈՒՑԹՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ ՆՈՐԱՐԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՈՒՄ
ՊՈՆՏՈՍԻ ՀՈՒՅՆԵՐԻ ՄՇԱԿՈՒՑԹՈՒՄ
(ԸՍՏ 2022-2024 ԹԹ. ԴԱՇՏԱՅԻՆ
ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՏՎՅԱԼՆԵՐԻ)**

Քսենիա Կլիմովա

Ամփոփում

***Հանգույցային բառեր.** Պոնտոսի հույներ, Ռուսաստանի հույներ, պոլիգլոսիա, լեզվական և մշակութային ինքնություն, հունական ավանդական մշակույթ*

Հոդվածում քննարկվում են Ռուսաստանում բնակվող հույների էթնոլեզվական խմբի լեզվի և մշակույթի դաշտային ուսումնասիրությունների արդի խնդիրները, ներառյալ նրանց լեզվական և մշակութային պոլիգլոսիան և հարևան ավանդույթների, մշակույթների և լեզուների, առաջին հերթին ռուսերենի փոխադարձ ազդեցությունը: Աշխատանքը հիմնված է 2022-2024 թվականների դաշտային նյութերի վրա, որոնք հավաքվել են Ռուսաստանի (Սոչի և Հյուսիսային Սևծովյան տարածաշրջանի այլ շրջաններ, Կովկասյան Միներալնիե Վոդի, Կարաչաևո-Չերկեսիա, Հյուսիսային Օսիա-Ալանիա, Դաղստան և այլն) և Վրաստանի (Շավկայի, Բորժոմիի, Բաթումիի շրջաններ) հունական բնակավայրեր կատարած արշավների ընթացքում:

ТРАДИЦИИ И ИННОВАЦИИ В КУЛЬТУРЕ
ПОНТИЙСКИХ ГРЕКОВ НА КАВКАЗЕ
(ПО ДАННЫМ ПОЛЕВЫХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ 2022-2024 ГГ.)

Ксения Климова

Резюме

Ключевые слова: *Понтийские греки, понтийские греки, греки России, полигlossия, языковая и культурная идентичность, греческая традиционная культура*

В статье рассматриваются актуальные вопросы полевых исследований языка и культуры этноязыковой группы греков, проживающих в России, в том числе их языковой и культурной полигlossии и взаимовлияния языков и культур соседних традиций, в первую очередь русской. Работа основана на полевых материалах 2022-2024 гг., собранных в ходе экспедиций в греческие населенные пункты на территории России (Сочи и другие регионы Северного Причерноморья, Кавказские Минеральные Воды, Карачаево-Черкесия, Северная Осетия-Алания, Дагестан и др.) и Грузии (Цалкинский, Боржомский, Батумский районы).