

ROBERT CHENCINER: *Daghestan. Tradition & Survival*. xii, 308 pp. London: Curzon, Caucasus World, 1997.

The principal reason for the Caucasus being dubbed 'The Mountain of Tongues' by a 10th century Arab geographer (al-Mas'udi) was the staggering patchwork of languages concentrated in its small N.E. enclave of Daghestan ('Place of Mountains' in its Turkic etymology). If one includes the related (Vei)Nakh languages (viz. Chechen, Ingush and Bats, which last is spoken today in a single Georgian village), there are around thirty indigenous (Nakh-)Daghestanian languages, spoken by ethnic groups numbering as low as 400 (Hinukh) upto over half a million (Avar). A few members of this family are restricted to Azerbaijan and, for Udi, Georgia, whilst Lezgian-speakers span the Russo-Azerbaijani border, but the majority of the languages are concentrated in Daghestan, a country equivalent in size to Scotland and still part of the Russian Federation, where Indo-European Russian and Turkic Kumyk[h], Azeri and Nogai are widely spoken also. Difficulty in demarcating languages and dialects accounts for different totals being sometimes ascribed to (Nakh-)Daghestanian; on p. 107 and on the back of the dust-jacket we are told there are 33 'nationalities' or languages respectively, whilst p. 289 talks of Daghestan's 32 ethnic groups.

Chenciner entertains readers with a rum and rumbustious mixture of personal observations, anecdotes and local myths as they are transported from village to village for descriptions of festivals, marriage-ceremonies, funerals, dog-fights, farming, home-industries (such as the famed carpet- and rug-weaving) and regional foods. The difficulties of life in the mountains are well captured, and future visitors now have no excuse being taken unawares by local toilet-facilities. The author is not afraid to mention the anti-Caucasian racism that is widespread among Russians or the harassment suffered by Daghestanis from their fellow-Caucasian Georgians, as when in 1992 mainly Avar dwellers were forced to sell their homes in E. Georgia at five-ten times below the going rate (p.278) -- the description of surely this same event on p. 260 (despite apparent reference to 1990) paints the Georgian purchasers as mysteriously generous, paying 'two or three times the going rate' (presumably 'below' has been omitted).

Most readers are likely to be unfamiliar with the intricacies of Daghestan's cultural-linguistic diversity and might have welcomed some initial orientation -- the language-map that ends the text on p. 302 should have started it (with reinstatement of the effaced Udi(s) by substituting their correct code of 26 for the instance of 35 in Azerbaijan and its upper occurrence in Georgia) accompanied by an appropriate discussion -- the village-list and map (x-xi) would then have been better contextualised. I would also have expected some explanation of the transcription-system employed, though a certain cavalier attitude is here detectable: the combination of /h/ and /ʔ/ looks suspicious in *tsakh'a* (p. 183); *tsek[ʔ]va* (p. 197) is Georgian, not Svan, for 'dance'; 'lion' in Avar is

not *galbats* (pp. 201/203) but *yalbats*'; *t'iduk* is stated to mean 'bear' in Avar (p. 206), but the dictionaries seem to offer only *tsi*; the old capital of Daghestan is *Buinaksk* (formerly Temir-Khan-Shura), not *Buinakst* (passim), and, strangely for one first drawn to Daghestan by textiles, Chenciner writes only *cherkess* (actually a N.W. Caucasian ethnonym) for *cherkesska*, the Russian term for the traditional pan-Caucasian male tunic (see also Chenciner's article in Curzon's recent volume 'Languages of Dress in the Middle East'). Russianised forms are often used, hence *Ginukh* (vs *Hinukh*) and *Gamzatbek* (vs *Hamzatbek*).

Tighter editing might have erased some of the repetitions, such as 'clan(s)' being universally followed by 'or *tukhum(s)*', or explaining the avoidance of deaths in dog-fights by the loser running off (pp. 201 & 202). Some factual errors should also have been corrected: ancient Colchis was not located in Georgia (p. 29) -- it ran along the eastern Black Sea coast, incorporating part of W. Georgia; *lavash* is stated to be leavened bread (p. 116), and yet in Georgia it signifies unleavened bread, and the Avar-Russian dictionary of 1967 concurs; Shamil became Daghestan's third Imam and leader of the guerrilla-resistance to Russian attacks in 1834, as stated on p. 16 (not 1831/2, as on pp. 209 or 268); the Greater Bundahishn [sic] was written in Middle Persian Pahlavi, not Armenian (p. 187); some Caucasians already have sufficient difficulty in distinguishing between myth and history, needing no encouragement by such lax phrasing as: 'Jason and his Argonauts certainly reached Georgia' (p. 196); in what sense was Daghestan 'independent' specifically from 1845 to 1859? North Ossetia is not a Muslim republic (p. 219); collaborator Magomedkhan, being an Archi, surely speaks Archi (in addition to the enumerated Avar, Arabic, Lak, Kumyk[h], and Russian)? The father of North Caucasian philology, Baron Pëtr Karlovich Uslar, was Russian. When the Avars are stated to number over 600,000 on p. 268, it should be noted that this figure includes all those speakers of Andic and Didoic languages who use Avar as their local literary language. It is hardly likely that the Chechens were deported because Stalin suspected them of enjoying 'an understanding' with his Mingrelian lieutenant, Lavrent'i Beria (p.276), for Beria was personally despatched to oversee their expulsion in 1944.

Daghestan was largely closed to Western visitors during the Soviet era. It needs popularising, and this book nicely starts the process.

Corrigenda: p. viii l.22: Rieks; p. 16 l.6up: to him who; p. 33 l.19up: *khinkali*; p. 36 l.14up (cf. p. 237): Ordzhonik[']idze; p. 48 l.16: described elsewhere; p. 56 l.17up: parents'; p. 69 l.4: painting was a wedding; p. 81 l.8: extolled; p. 83 l.13: portentously; p. 87 l.4up: an; p. 88 l.8: Scythians; l.11: east Caucasian; l.12: Udi; l.13up: Sjögren; l.1up: *Völker*; p. 95 l.19up: there were no; p. 130 l.5up: seemed to serve; p. 132 l.1: Gùldenstädt; p. 140 l.6: the middle of the main; p. 142 l.12up (& p. 143 caption): *Kul'tury*; p. 152 l.1: rectilinear; p. 170 l.16: noticeable; p. 174 caption: 'shuba'(?); p.

180 1.6: occurrences; 1.18: occupied part of the Caucasus; p. 193 1.3up: humorous; p. 201 1. 10: end; p. 205 1.15: Komsomol; p. 209 1.22: Shi'a; p. 214 1.1up: *komitet*; p. 220 1.5: we were guests; p. 233 1.15: *komandirovka*; 1.22: become; p. 245 1.2up: *Sbornik*; p. 246 1.15: 1834; p. 263 1.4up: demonstrated by; p. 265 1.16: camomile; p. 271 1.11up: others'; p. 278 1.18: Adig[h]ea; p. 281 1.3: Zjuganov; p. 283 1.6up: Chechenia; p. 284 1.10: Kazakhstan; p. 287 1.3up: Zavgaev; p. 288 1.12: *inter alia*; p. 289 1.19: Kipchak; 1.28: Russian Autonomous Republic; 1.9up: Meskhetian; p. 292 1.5: Ossete; 1.6: Ossetia; p. 295 1.18: Abdurakhmanov, A.M. 'Totemistic Elements in Rituals and Legends about Animals', in G. Hewitt (ed.) *Caucasian Perspectives*, 392-405, 1992 (Lincom Europa); p. 296 1.26: Begräbnis und Totenkult bei den Chewssuren; 1.4up: *period*; p. 297 1.9: *imperatorskago*; 1.11up: *teoriya*; p. 298 1.7: *Étnokul'turnye*; 1.18up: *myshleniya*; p. 299 1.29: *Zhivopisnaya*; 1.31: *narodov*.

B.G. Hewitt