

## **Collections in the European Museums – the Cultural Heritage of the Ancient Caucasus scattered across a Continent**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Quite a few problems have been found in the historiography of the late Bronze and early Iron Ages in the Southern Caucasus; some of them had been caused by the incoherency of the cultural material accessible to international research. Investigating intensively the material in the museums, of the archive documents, and the original excavation reports in German, Russian and Azerbaijani we find different versions of historiography of the Caucasus collection in the Museum for Prehistory and early History (MVF) in Berlin for the very same period. Russian and international archaeological circles should be drawn to this problem.

Beginning in the middle of the 19th century there was a rush on the archaeological sites in the Caucasus. Archaeological excavations often were not taken out for scientific reasons but rather for material gains, or they were done by hobby archaeologists from various countries, disturbing the archaeological coherence. In establishing the various collections on the late Bronze and early Iron Ages in the Caucasus they broke the history and heritage of the Caucasus to parts.

Finds were sent to the museums of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Lyon, to Vienna and to Berlin.

This article submits the Caucasus collections in European museums to a thorough review.

The scattering of the artefacts of the Caucasus collection in the Museum for Prehistory and early History (MVF) in Berlin across museums in Russia, in the Caucasus and in Europe is still causing problems to science in Europe, especially in Germany and in Russia, as well as in Azerbaijan. With concrete facts the author shows where several collections can be found which are unknown to date to the international science community and closed to international research.

When casting new light on some aspects of the Khojaly-Gedebey Culture, also known as Central South Caucasian culture or Genje-Karabakh Culture which is still unknown to the international science community - this culture covered a vast area of the Central and Southern Caucasus in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages -, some problems of the archaeological evaluation of the finds belonging to that culture emerged.

Although this culture was one of the outstanding cultures of the Caucasus, it still requires a complete, systematic research and examination, because the scientific investigation of the finds and the conclusions to be drawn remain incomplete to date. The collections should be opened to the international scientific community attracting German, French, Russian and Caucasian scientists to fill the gap existing till today in the archaeological research of the Caucasus, starting from the Bronze Age.

The comprehensive research of this culture should include numerous artefacts, the original excavation reports starting with diggings in the thirties of the 19th century (E. Roesler, W. Belck, Graf von Schweinitz and others), the archive materials treasured in many museums and libraries in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia (including the Republic of Dagestan) and Germany; the publications edited in several languages containing general scientific investigation of this period should also be scientifically reviewed.

The new and uninvestigated collections (collected by Graf von Schweinitz, F. Korthaus, F. Bayern) which the author discovered in the Berlin Museum for Prehistory and early History (MVF) must be made accessible for scientific purposes. A great part of the collections which had been treasured in this museum had been brought to the Soviet Union after World War II and were subsequently scattered across Russian museums, mainly the State Historic Museum, the Pushkin Museum of Performing Arts (both in Moscow) and the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg. They have not been opened to scientific research till today. The attention of

The finds from the Redkin-Lager collection are a paragon of the fragmentation of Caucasian heritage; they are scattered across museums in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Germany, France, and Russia and could not be completely investigated until now.

**Keywords:** Caucasus Collections in European Museums, late Bronze to early Iron Ages in the Southern Caucasus; Khojaly-Gedebey Culture

### **Competition on finds for Caucasian collections in the European museums as an origin of their scattering**

From the 18th century at the latest we can observe growing interest of the European public for these cultures which are documented in ancient scriptures. Beginning with the 30s of the 19th century, more and more foreigners have been showing interest in the history of the Caucasus and started to visit this region.

At that point in time the Russian Emperor sent a Russian researcher named Alexander Yanovsky to the Caucasus. Yanovskiy conducted his researches on the Caucasian Albania according to the hints and traces he found in ancient sources. The purpose of these trips was to search traces of the Caucasian Albania described by Roman and Greek historians such as Pliny and Strabo. He published all the information collected in his monograph “Ancient Caucasian Albania” in 1846<sup>1</sup>. He also used the results of the work carried out by the twenty eight-year-old German philosopher and orientalist Friedrich Eduard Schulz (1799–1829) who played an important role in Caucasian archaeology.<sup>2</sup>

The increasing information on archaeological finds in the Caucasus in combination with the emerging conviction of European scholars that the origin of Indo European peoples could be found in the Caucasus lead to the desire to study the Caucasian region<sup>3</sup>. Thus, collectors, travellers and amateur archaeologists came to the Caucasus from France, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and Russia.

<sup>1</sup> Yanovskiy 1846.

<sup>2</sup> Avscharova/Pirquliyeva 2010, 28

<sup>3</sup> Göyü ov/Martinov 1990, 114.

The artefacts which they either found during official or non-official archaeological excavations or gathered by purchasing from local people were brought to the various European capitals. In that period the first private collections of various finds were established and partly also sold to European museums.

Obviously most of these collectors at site who were involved in this pursuit did not have any scientific interests. They regarded this activity as a source of profit, and subsequently they were trying to sell these artefacts with monetary gain to the European museums. The finds considered by illegally operating excavators to be of commercial value they sent to Europe, and the rest of the artefacts they destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

The main interest lying in profit-making these artefacts were excavated rather tumultuously, they still formed the basis of what is regarded as the archaeology of the Caucasus. Artefacts and ecofacts that formed the basis of the Caucasian collections were scattered across Europe.

Virchow's mandated finds came to Berlin, the finds of Ernest Chantré and Jacques de Morgan came to France (to the museums of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Lyon), those from Franz Heger and Leder entered the Natural History Museum in Vienna, and the ones found by A. S. Uvarov came to the Imperial Archaeological Commission in Russia.

The Imperial Archaeological Commission established in St. Petersburg in 1859 was founded in order to conduct excavations in all Russian regions including the Caucasus. The finds were to be sent to Moscow and St. Petersburg. The head of the archaeological exploration in Ossetia, officially commissioned by the Imperial Archaeological Commission in St. Petersburg, Vassily Dolbezhev, State Council and senior teacher in the high school in Vladikavkaz was "a very resolute and intelligent man" according to Rudolf Virchow<sup>5</sup>. Both, the head of the local Ossetian clan, Khabosh Kanukhoff who controlled the local grave robbery in Koban and Dolbezhev cultivated a manner to sell their discoveries with preference to solvent foreigners. Additionally Dolbezhev was authorized to trade duplicates and triplicates at his discretion; this was another reason why he was interested in increasing the finds permanently<sup>6</sup>.

Most of the discoveries of the Khojaly-Gedebey Culture dating to the late Bronze and early Iron Ages were sent to Russian museums, especially to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Russia's policy on archaeological finds and collections mirrored the behaviour of the other major powers. The Tsarist Empire tried to prevent the drainage of artefacts by establishing committees and companies in order to direct the conveyance of finds into the Tsarist sphere.

In St. Petersburg the "Russian Archaeological Society" was founded in 1846, followed in 1859 by the "Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society" and by the Moscow Archaeological Society in 1864. These organisations were supposed to control the shipments of Caucasian artefacts to Europe, but they had succeeded only partially.

The "Caucasian Archaeology Committee" was inaugurated in Georgia in 1871 with the purpose of overseeing the archaeological finds from the Caucasus and trying to establish a more scientific handling of these finds.

<sup>4</sup> Safarov 1989, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Virchow ,1881,411–427.

<sup>6</sup> Motzenbäcker 1996, 23.

Unfortunately, also this committee could not fulfil these tasks completely so that many cultural objects were sent to Germany, France and Austria, and into Russian museums. Nevertheless, they had been able to have some of the archaeological excavations in the Caucasus be conducted in a reasonable and scientific framework.

The interest from Russian and foreign scholars steadily increased enormously.

Starting in 1896, A. A. Ivanovski, a geographer, conducted a series of excavations in North and South Azerbaijan on behalf of the Moscow Archaeological society. The finds from about 72 stone box burials were sent to the Historical Museum in Moscow and later published as "materials on the archaeology of the Caucasus" in collective works<sup>7</sup>, of which the scientific and methodological quality was quite low<sup>8</sup>.

### **Caucasus Collections in German Museums**

A large Caucasus collection is treasured in the Museum for Prehistory and Early History in Berlin (MVF) and contains artefacts obtained to a large extend from archaeological excavations carried out in Gedebej and adjacent areas.

“The Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory” and the “Rudolf Virchow Fund” established by Virchow supported the excavations led by Waldemar Belck (1862-1932) materially as well as conceptually as he was one of the most important excavators for Virchow. Virchow who was looking for the origin of the Indo-Arians which was intensively discussed amongst philologists, anthropologists and archaeologists at that point in time considered the Armenians being the ethnic group having the closest relationship to them<sup>9</sup> and wanted to get the material proof of his theory.

In 1888, Waldemar Belck was sent as an electrical engineer to Gedebej by Siemens where he (in the words of Belck) “excavated between two<sup>10</sup> and five graves per week.<sup>11</sup> “. Virchow was quite aware of the illegality of Belck’s excavations, but, nevertheless, he constantly supported him financially<sup>12</sup> and even allowed Belck<sup>13</sup> to send finds to several museums in Germany including Danzig (today Gdansk, Poland). Altogether Belck might have looted about 350 kurgans and prehistoric graves between 1888 and 1891 with the knowledge of his employer von Siemens who was allowing Belck to carry out these works in Gedebej<sup>14</sup>.

In 1891 Belck returned to Germany, after the Imperial Archaeological Commission had prohibited him to conduct further excavations.<sup>15</sup> He was followed by Emil Roesler, who has been serving Virchow for eleven years from 1892 till 1903<sup>16</sup>. Thus the excavations were

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<sup>7</sup> Ivanovskiy 1911.

<sup>8</sup> Safarov 1989, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Virchow 1895, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Kalakent, Brief vom 19. 08. 1888

<sup>11</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Kalakent, Brief vom 19. 04. 1889.

<sup>12</sup> Nagel/Strommenger, 1985, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Nagel/Strommenger, 1985, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Nagel/Strommenger, 1985, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Kagisman, Brief vom 28. 06. 1891.

<sup>16</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Gießen, Brief vom 07. 09. 1893.

going on despite the prohibition issued by the highest authorities. Despite this prohibition, Belck excavated 45 graves within 28 days.<sup>17</sup> Belck finally had to leave Gedebej. But Belck was still able to travel to Shusha and to invite Roesler to work for him with the consent of Virchow. Belck wrote: "... I am pleased to see that Mr. Roesler continues working so hard, and I hope that a great part of this collection would come to Berlin this time...".<sup>18</sup> Belck has excavated hundreds of artefacts and sent them to the German museums such as Berlin, Danzig (now belonging to Poland), Hamburg and Munich.

In 1891, upon Belck's return to Germany, the high school teacher of German origin E. Roesler from Helenendorf (today Göygöl/Azerbaijan) was receiving medical treatment in Germany. Virchow took the opportunity to meet him and to discuss the schedule of his excavations for the next years<sup>19</sup>. Until 1895 he conducted archaeological excavations for Virchow in Nagorny Karabakh (Shusha, Khojaly, Dovshanly, and Archadzor) as well as in Genje.

In 1894 the Imperial Archaeological Commission was informed about Roesler's excavations and prohibited him to work for Virchow, as according to Russian legislation all finds had to remain in the Russian Empire.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Belck, Roesler (as a Russian citizen) complied with that legislation, and he was working until 1899 in compliance with the commission's directives which allowed him to excavate in Nagorny Karabakh (Shusha, Khojaly, Dovshanly and Archadzor).<sup>21</sup> With his finds sent to Berlin the Caucasus Collection was growing which was subsequently managed by Virchow.

A part of the collection was consisting of rare artefacts and their original photographs which Hans-Hermann Graf von Schweinitz obtained from the archaeological excavations in Dashkasan and adjacent areas. The collection is also containing excavation reports written by Graf von Schweinitz on about 28 graves monuments found near the Goygol area (Azerbaijan)<sup>22</sup>. The items gathered from more than 130 sites by F. Korthaus, a member of the staff of the Siemens factory in Gedebej, were brought to the museum in Berlin after 1902. Belck purchased these materials from F. Korthaus and Graf von Schweinitz.

Unfortunately, "scientific" results and judgments caused by the way excavations had been carried out, and obtained keeping in mind the results which those who mandated the finds wanted to obtain are still not correctly classifying the cultural heritage of the Caucasus. The bulk of the historical monuments like grave mounds, ancient settlements, churches, and graves belonging to Galakend, Jannat Galasi, Garabulag in Gedebej (Azerbaijan) and adjacent areas were erroneously presented as "ancient Armenian monuments". In general, numerous scientific, historical, geographical, ethnographic and anthropological errors are still associated to the finds treasured in the Museums in Germany.

Yet there is also the Romano-Germanic Central Museum which is situated in the city of Mainz where bronze belts and other brass products are treasured.

<sup>17</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Kalakent, 19.11.1890.

<sup>18</sup> Belck an Virchow aus Gießen, Brief vom 07. 09. 1893.

<sup>19</sup> Dschafarov 2000, 6.

<sup>20</sup> chmudov, 2008, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Rösler. 1896.

<sup>22</sup> Erwerbungsakte zur Sammlung des Grafen H.-H. von Schweinitz im Berliner Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte: SMB-SPK/MVF, IA 14, Bd. 23, E 2051/13.

Before the Second World War the Caucasus collections in the Berlin Museum for Pre- and Early History consisted of at least 6,563 inventoried objects and groups of objects. The addition "at least" is due to the fact that all original books of the collection catalogue "Southern Russia" have been lost in 1945 because of war damage and that the result of the microfilming made in 1942 is partially incomplete, which is the basis for all systematic object data. To this number there have to be added at least another 500-2,000 objects that were not documented until 1939 in the inventory books of the Berlin Museum.<sup>23</sup>

Starting in 2003 all objects listed in the historical manuscript collection catalogues of the MVF with a remark of origin as "Caucasia" were recorded in a database which was subsequently being updated and expanded. The words "at least another 500-2,000 objects" takes into account the fact that all the original volumes of the collection catalogue "Southern Russia" have no longer been accessible since 1945.

### **Russian museums**

The registers of the Caucasus collection of the Museum of Prehistory and early History" were brought to the Soviet Union in 1945-1946, and they are still in Russia to date. Because of the absence of the originals today copies of the collection records are used in Berlin which were made on the basis of the microfilming done in 1942. But at that time some pages had not been filmed, and exactly those pages are missing today in the inventory books in Berlin. It must be assumed that further objects and groups of objects coming from the Caucasus were named and described on those pages. But many objects will remain unknown until the original collection records of the Berlin Caucasus collection will have been examined.

The great part of the Caucasus collection, about 40 percent, was brought to Russia from the museum of Berlin in Germany as looted art during World War II.<sup>24</sup> After that, the collections were distributed among the Russian museums and have not been accessible to researchers to date which was one of the main reasons of the problems existing in the study on the archaeology of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the Caucasus.

The majority of the finds transported from the Caucasus, as well as from Azerbaijan are treasured in Russian museums. Thus, a great deal of artefacts obtained from the excavations of archaeologists such as A.A. Ivanovsky, I.I. Meschaninov, N.V. Fyodorov<sup>25</sup> and others constitute the Caucasian collections in Russian museums.

A part of the Caucasian collection treasured in the Russian museums consists of the discoveries of E. Roesler who worked as a teacher in the gymnasium in Azerbaijan (in the towns of Shusha and Goygol). He was inspired to carry out archeological excavations by V. Belck as mentioned before.

<sup>23</sup> Archivauskunft des Museums für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Berlin durch H. Junker vom 02. 11. 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Archivauskunft des Museums für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Berlin durch H. Junker vom (2.11.2013). Die im FLAK-Turm am Zoo eingelagerten Edelmetall-Objekte kaukasischer Provenienz sind weitgehend identisch mit den im Inhaltsverzeichnis der sog. drei Goldkisten des Berliner Museums für Vor- und Frühgeschichte aufgeführten Gegenständen dieser Herkunft. : K. Goldmann, Ch. Reich Staatliche Museen zu Berlin..., c. 42; 11-19; c. 21-23;24-25.

<sup>25</sup> Bünyadov 1960, 7-8.

With the prohibition of sending finds to Virchow in Berlin Roesler conducted his excavations in accordance with the rules of the Imperial Russian Archeological Commission and finds he made between 1892 and 1903 were sent to St. Petersburg and Moscow<sup>26</sup>.

At present, the artefacts from Roesler's excavations in Karabakh, Genjechay (Azerbaijan) and other regions are preserved in the Hermitage and in Moscow State Museum of History. His reports have been presented both in the publications of the Imperial Russian Archeological Commission<sup>27</sup> as well as in the annual editions of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory<sup>28</sup>.

### **The Caucasus Collection of the Natural History Museum in Vienna, Austria"**

The Caucasian collection in the museum of Vienna is considered to be the largest one after the collections in the Russian museums. The artefacts of the material culture dating from the Bronze and Early Iron Ages are treasured under the inventory numbers up to 5000. These artefacts consist of various pottery materials, weapons and jewellery. Basic materials were collected from Ossetia, Koban, Faskau, Kumbulta, Chimi and Kamunta regions.

A lot of valuable materials which have been identified to originate from the Northern Caucasus and several regions of Azerbaijan are currently treasured in this museum. In 1881 and 1893, these materials have been collected and submitted to the museum by F. Heger who worked as the director of the Department of Anthropology and Ethnography of the museum.

The materials from the Khojaly-Gedebey-culture are occupying a special place among the Caucasus collections in the Vienna museum. These materials were brought to the museum by the famous Austrian explorer Hans Leder in 1898. He found these materials at historical monuments in the Azerbaijani region of Goygol (old Helenendorf), a region in Azerbaijan, and he purchased them from local collectors.

### **The Caucasus collection in the National Archaeological Museum of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France"**

French museums play a special roll among other European museums in which the Caucasus collections are kept.

The collections in the Louvre and in the museum of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France are characterized by an outstanding richness and a wide spectrum. The basis of the collections is comprised of pottery materials, various types of weapons, jewellery, tools made of stones and bones and many others.

The archaeological materials were found during archaeological excavations carried out by a French collector named J. de Morgan in the South Caucasus, and he also purchased such exquisite things.

He also carried out archaeological excavations in various parts of Egypt, Iran and the Caucasus in 80s and 90s of the Nineteenth Century. The hundreds of archaeological excavations that he conducted together with German archaeologists in grave monuments

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<sup>26</sup> chmudov, 2008, 13.

<sup>27</sup> chmudov, 2008, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Rösler. 189,213-241.

between 1888 and 1891 should be submitted to closer examination. He opened more than a thousand graves and collected innumerable artefacts in Lelvar which is situated between Tbilisi and Alagoz. Morgan and Hanjar classified these materials in their research under the name of “Lelvar culture”.

A way to look at the way de Morgan conducted archaeological work might be one of his sentences: “My people who are collecting prey (sic!) for me, have conducted some excavations.<sup>29</sup>”

J. Morgan classified archaeological finds coming from Azerbaijan treasured in the French museum as “Persian and Armenian cultural heritage”. Unfortunately they are still classified this way which is spoiling their true historic and cultural classification.<sup>30</sup>

J. Morgan started excavations in the Talysh Mountains in 1890, revealed up to 230 caves, tombs and various grave monuments and collected a large number of precious artefacts belonging to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. He has discovered 16 kg of bronze materials only in one grave. The majority of these finds as well as the most exquisite examples were transmitted to the Museum of Saint-Germain.<sup>31</sup> Basically the finds belong to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, however, similar items can also be found in other periods. Although artefacts belonging to the Khojali-Gedebey culture can be found in the collection of the museum, the materials belonging to Talysh-Mugan- culture (Azerbaijan) prevail among the materials. Morgan found these materials in Joni, Tulum, Hovil, Keraveladi, Razgov and other regions of Lerik (a town in the South of Azerbaijan). Among the earthenware materials, jugs, hemisphere-shaped bowls, there are glass, vases and other dishes which attract attention due to their antiquity and beauty. Jewellery materials include decorative items to wear on the head, chest, arm, toes and feet. Gold discs, bronze earrings, pins, bracelets, rings, beads and various suspension jewellery hooks are of particular importance in the collection. Most of the metal objects were chosen for restoration and conservation in 1980 but still have not been studied comprehensively.

The mentioned excavations were conducted in order to gain artefacts, but not in order to obtain relevant knowledge<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, it is not surprising that today, the respective excavation finds cannot be correctly evaluated anymore, because they had simply been collected irrespective of the imperative standards for the interpretation of archaeological finds.<sup>33</sup> Generally there was shown hardly any interest in the coherence of the finds, these were mostly neither documented nor included in excavation reports, if these were made at all.

The finds from the Redkin-Lager collection are a paragon of the fragmentation of Caucasian heritage; they are scattered across museums in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Germany, France and Russia and could not be completely investigated until now<sup>34</sup>.

The "Redkin- Lager" collection included finds from an eponymous cemetery, located in a distance of 6.3 km to Dilican (Dilijan), which is situated within the territory of today's Armenia at the upper reaches on the right bank of A stafa River <sup>35</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Machmudov, 2008,215

<sup>30</sup> Müseyibli, 2004

<sup>31</sup> Bünyadov 1960, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Bünyadov 1960, 7–8.

<sup>33</sup> Machmudov, 2008, 10–12

<sup>34</sup> Ateshi/ Guluzade, 2014.



Today parts of the collection are treasured in the "Museum of Prehistory and early History (MFV)" in Berlin, the Moscow State Historical Museum, and in the National Museum of Georgia. Only a few exhibits of Redkin- Lager are treasured in the Museum of Prehistory and early History like hollow pendants made of bronze, latticed bronze pendants, rectangular pieces of bronze, balls of antimony and a small bronze pipe.

According to the information given by the museum regarding materials from Redkin-Lager, the remaining collection is registered as "war damage"; nevertheless, it is likely that a part of the artefacts are treasured in museums in Russia.<sup>36</sup>

Another part of the collection of Redkin- Lager is treasured in the Museum of National History of Azerbaijan. The collection was given to the museum by the Caucasian Museum in 1925. Davud bey Sharifov who was the director of this museum from 1923 till 1928 relocated the collection to Azerbaijan in the contemporary Museum of National History of Azerbaijan<sup>37</sup>.

Components of the collection "Redkin- Lager" can be found today inter alia in the Berlin Museum for Prehistory and early History, in the National Historic Museum in Moscow and the National Museum of Georgia as well as in Baku and in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Paris. The finds from "Redkin- Lager" are scattered across various international museums, they are to be searched in various collections, thus they are a particularly impressive example of the fragmentation of Caucasian heritage.

## CONCLUSION

A complete and objective investigation of the late Bronze and early Iron Ages in the Southern Caucasus can only be accomplished through a comprehensive research. It should consider the various inter- cultural relations, the different backgrounds and historical processes which influenced the Khojaly-Gedebey Culture .

Therefore the finds scattered across various museums must be examined scientifically in a comprehensive way. The original excavation reports and documents in several languages should be included in the research. Historiography and archaeology of the Caucasus have been fragmented to a large extent, which is applying to the artefacts and documents as well.

It is time to return to a holistic approach.

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