

V.I. MARKOVIN

Western Caucasian Dolmens

Mysticism, Scientific Opinions, and Perspectives on Further Study

If a scientific thought has sustained the touchstone of criticism,
it will remain a link in the golden chain of knowledge.

—Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *A Study of History*^a

Every type of monument from the western Caucasus gains certain popularity from time to time. When this happens, it receives extensive coverage in the media and newspapers, radio, and television run endless stories on it. This was the case with the tower structures in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the 1960–70s. Lively debates about the Alans' antiquities were held and are still being held in the Northern Osetia, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Kabardin-Balkaria. Recently in Krasnodar region and Adygeia, enormous interest in the dolmens has arisen. The region surrounding the town Gelendzhika was especially lucky in this regard. The interest was caused not by specialists' scientific research, but by small books by Vladimir Megre, published as part of the series "Ringing Cedars of Russia" (Megre 1997a, b; 1998). Enjoying great success, these books caused a sensation, not so much among local inhabitants as among vacationers. The dolmens' sites became a place of pilgrimage, and the monuments themselves, a place of worship. People adorn their foothills with flowers and turn to them with their questions and requests. Such touching scenes were shown once on the television show "Travelers' Club." They were so impressive that they attracted the attention of the Dutch archeologist

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Translated by Anya Bernstein.

Albert Becker, who was visiting Russia. He managed to visit a “Black Sea Mecca” and photograph “pilgrims” praying near the dolmens (Trifonov 1999).

To be able to make sense of this situation, we need to take a look at Megre’s books. The author does not consider them to be science fiction, although the character of Anastasiia, who links several novels, is fictional and reminds one of Olessia—the main character of A.I. Kuprin’s novel of the same title. “Ringing Cedars” is a backdrop for Anastasiia’s story. Amid contemporary musty pulp fiction, which has flooded our book market, small-format books by Megre win one’s heart by their somewhat naive narrative style. It was Anastasiia who made this author aware of the dolmens. Here is what Megre writes about them: the dolmens of the western Caucasus date back ten thousand years; “they precede the Egyptian pyramids.” Despite their antiquity, the dolmens have a “functional meaning for contemporary people”; people should be able to “listen to them with all their hearts” (Megre 1997a, pp. 172, 173). The dolmens were erected for “venerable” people, probably for chieftains, aspiring to understand “primordial Truth” and struggling against “the inertness of their times.” These people, who “had not lost their ability to use the wisdom of the Universe,” withdrew into tombs for “eternal meditation” (Megre 1997b, pp. 192, 193). Megre continues by describing how this took place: “The massive tombstone was removed. He entered the stone chamber, then they replaced the tombstone . . . total isolation, the impossibility of even thinking of returning. Yet even without passing into another world, the deactivation of the normal senses of sight and hearing opened the possibility of fully communicating with the Mind of the Cosmos and interpreting many of the earthly people’s phenomena and actions” (ibid., p. 194). Later people came to a dolmen, removed the tombstone, and “reflected and asked advice from the thoughts floating in the chamber. The spirit of wisdom was always there” (ibid., p. 194). Thus, every dolmen is a “monument of wisdom and great sacrifice of the spirit for the sake of future generations” (Megre 1998, p. 39). From this comes the advice to our contemporaries, overwhelmed by all kinds of worries, “to sit down near the chamber and think” and the answer will come, because the megalith and those buried within are “information receivers,” mediating the connection with the “Intellect of the Universe” (Megre 1997b, p. 192). One can find practically the same recipe for communication with the dolmens in a special collection of postcards, featuring the photographs of ancient tombs. (Postcards “Dolmens. Town of Gelendzhik.” Anastasiia Research Center, Moscow.)

In the new series “Excursion into the Mind,” likewise devoted to the Gelendzhik dolmens, a preface summarizes scientific research on the dolmens (A.A. Iessen, O.M. Dzhaparidze, V.I. Markovin, L.I. Lavrov, and others are mentioned). Yet Megre, with his statements on dolmens mentioned above (*Dol’meny* 1999, pp. 5–13) remains the main authority. The anonymous¹ author of the preface concludes his oeuvre with an original panegyric to the dolmen builders: “They were thinkers. . . . They had no equals anywhere in the Universe. Only the Great Intellect of the Universe—God—possessed higher intelligence.” “The dolmens are the repository

of ancient knowledge. Their purpose is to answer. . . . The dolmens do not accept insincerity, hypocrisy, or lies” (ibid. pp. 14, 15). Later he writes about the possibility of “working” with the photographs as with “informational prints” of dolmens. The photos can provide a needed answer to the question as a “sensation, image, shape of a thought” even through “books and speculations” (ibid. pp. 90–107).

One reason for the appearance of this faith can be supposed to lie in the dolmens’ miraculous power, mentioned by Megre, such as the presence of a special background of radiation, different from that of the surrounding landscape (Megre 1997b, p. 200). I would like to note that scientists have long noticed that places where all kinds of anomalous phenomena and unpredictable events have been observed are often located on the sites of some of the most ancient structures. For instance, such is the case of the legendary Stonehenge (Watson [Uotson] 1991, p. 332). I think that the famous mound Psynako I with a central dolmen (Anastasievka village in the Tuapse region) might also be created on a similar spot. It is possible that the soil stratum beneath many dolmen groups might have similar properties. This difference may be explained by the point that sediments of many centuries separate the dolmens from the surrounding space, while inside the dolmens and around them, the soil was preserved from the time of their creation. Scientists have only begun to understand this issue. Taking a sober view of things, this and similar phenomena are not a reason for mysticism.

Further, worship of dolmens and their use as oracles is a revival of well-known mystical practices of secret communication with “hidden beings and forces of the world” regardless of the “space, time” and physical possibilities of such practices (Solov’ev 1995, pp. 120–21). All the abovementioned elements are present in the dolmen case. Here is also an escape from the “sensory world” of everyday life, but with the “aspiration to plunge into the depths of one’s being, drawing on the otherworldly” (Radlov 1904, p. 165). Perhaps ascribing spiritual qualities to megaliths could be compared with the worship of sacred stones and plants, that is, spiritual actions for which Mircea Eliade suggested the term *hierophany* (Vanderhill [Vanderkhill] 1996, p. 335). They are comparable forms of piety, because “religion is inevitably mystical, and mysticism is inevitably religious” (*Mistika* 1996, p. 232). In both cases “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Paul’s message to the Hebrews, 11, 1).

Dolmen worship in the Western Caucasus is not new. L.I. Lavrov noted that the grounds near the dolmens were used for worship in the nineteenth century. Shapsugi [Shapshug] left special sacrificial food near the entrance to a dolmen (Lavrov 1960, p. 104). S.D. Inal-Ipa (1976, pp. 94–96) writes that Abkhazians worshiped dolmens. Cherkessians had a belief that any damage to dolmens would be punished by Allah himself (Shamotul’skii 1960s, p. 11).^b Likewise, according to E.L. Laevskaia, megalith structures were created with a secret purpose, because “in meaning, they are similar to an incantation [*zagovor*], a séance [*kamlanie*], or a magic ritual in the hope to catch and hang on to life. The great craving for immortality is a motivation that can move the “stone mountains” of megalithism (Laevskaia 1997, p. 154).

The impression of grandeur evoked by megaliths is also important (Benua 1935, p. 9). Given the above, modern spiritual worship of dolmens in the western Caucasus is not news, although it does seem strange, in view of the recent predominance of atheism in our country. We should not forget that Europeans used to worship dolmens and menhirs (Marsiro 1998, pp. 291–93). Mystical worship of dolmens and pyramids, created in “eternal stone,” has long been considered spiritually indispensable by theologians because such structures are the visible manifestations of a particular theology, the result of the silent influence of the “Spirit and Mind of the Divine Persona” on human essence and activities (*Spiral’ poznaniia* 1992, pp. 315–25; Khol [Hall] 1992, pp. 351, 352). I have no doubts that the books by Megre and his followers were written under the obvious influence of Elena Blavatskaia’s theosophy.^c However, they did not take into account that for the mystics, dolmens symbolize a “female womb” and menhirs “male creative force” (Kuper 1995, pp. 27, 203). Moreover, a dolmen’s surface could be divided into sections, each endowed with a particular “energy” (Maier and Zator 1998, pp. 159–72). I admit that here I transferred known esoterica related to contemporary [Caucasian] homes to a “house of eternity.”

I think that dolmen monuments are used for mystical purposes by virtue of a conviction that their walls and details preserve the “breath” and “energy” (*prana*) of ancient peoples (Dubrov and Pushkin 1990, pp. 27, 118). Suffering pilgrims probably address themselves while facing the *prana*. Obviously, a person awaiting an answer to questions of life and death unintentionally engages in introspection, diverted from everyday reality for that period of time. This introspective pause makes it possible to receive an expected answer, which, using the term of the writer M.P. Artsybashev, is perceived as “an internal hearing” (Artsybashev 1994, p. 507). The ancient structure is not the point: the answer, albeit not quite well formed, was initially within the person, but was overshadowed by the bustle of daily life. The very ritual of praying to the dolmen played an important role here. “Ritual is an irrational action, presenting an imitation [*imitatsiia*] consisting of three elements: magical, utilitarian, and symbolic (Marsiro 1998, p. 73). In my opinion, this constitutes the psychological base of emerging faith in the dolmens.

Megre dates the creation of the Caucasian dolmens to the tenth millennium B.C. Archeologically, they date to the eighth millennium B.C. Even for the most advanced regions, this is the Upper Mesolithic and its transition to the Neolithic. This is when people transitioned from hunting and gathering to food production, and learned how to work stone and make pottery. Obviously, both intellectually and psychologically, they were far from modern times, on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Archeologists date some dolmens to the Bronze Age. This is not modern either. Few undisturbed dolmens are known in the Gelendzhik region. A local explorer, I.I. Akhanov, has studied twenty-eight structures here, containing materials from the Scythian period, which means that they were emptied of ancient burials and used for a second time (Akhanov 1961, pp. 139–49; Markovin 1988a, pp. 24, 25). Later research confirmed this fact (Markovin 1997, pp. 253–

61, 271–83, Fig. 131, 16–20; 133, 5–7; 141, 5–11; 143, 3–6). Such dolmens as “Khan,”² “Tor,” “Lit,” “Inf,” “Got,” and “Maia” have long lost their cultural stratum (washed away, cleared, burned by fires and destroyed during the Scythians’ and Sarmatians’ time).³ It is probably difficult to expect the revelation of “Primordial Truth” with their aid, but later historic material found in the dolmens is very interesting. Archeologists P.U. Autlev and N.G. Lovpache convincingly relate it to the Scythian tribe “Isep,” known in Scythian folklore as “Isp” (Autlev 1974; Lovpache 1997, pp. 42–46).

I am not going to create obstacles for spiritual pilgrimages to the dolmens: faith is too multifaceted. However, I agree with my colleague V.A. Trifonov, who, while talking to a reporter, shared his apprehensions that followers of the “contemporary religious and mystical movement,” with their good intentions to “clear trash from the dolmens,” would instead clear “the last remains of the ancient cultural stratum” from the dolmens. The sensational “discoveries” of these enthusiasts about the dolmens’ purpose as “ultrasonic weapons of ancient people or launching platforms for UFOs” could greatly jeopardize scientific research on these ancient structures (Vil’de 1998; Grigor’ev 1998).

Comparisons between views of mystical followers and practicing archeologists could be summarized in ancient Eastern wisdom, quoted from the mystics themselves: “Truth and fiction are like oil and water: they never mix” (*Spiral’ poznaniia* 1992, p. 367).

In recent years broad generalizations have been made in dolmen research. New approaches and completely unacceptable statements have appeared. I would like to focus on some of them, but, first of all, I will mention some facts related to graphics published by archeologists. M.B. Rysin, referring to drawings for V.L. Rostunov’s article, mentions the head of a statuette (Fig. 1, 1), allegedly found by me at the Deguak-Dakhov dolmen settlement (Rostunov 1983, p. 89, fig. 17). This gives him an excuse to talk with certainty about the relation of the dolmens’ builders to the “eastern Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and the Balkans” (Rysin 1997, p. 98, and others). I must state that I never found any statuettes at Deguak. Rostunov writes about the finding made by V.A. Safronov near the village of Dzuarikau in northern Osetia, and only in the incorrect title for the drawings is this object attributed to the dolmen settlement in Adygeia (Rostunov 1993, pp. 87, 89). If Rysin had used drawings not from Rostunov’s article but from the appropriate publications (Markovin 1977, pp. 37–67, Fig. 2, 5–12; 1978, pp. 238–50, figs. 120–26), this would not have happened. Moreover, Rostunov himself, under the title “Findings from the Deguak-Dakhov settlement,” presented such poor copies of drawings that I could hardly recognize two or three examples of ceramics, looking vaguely similar to ones I had published (see Fig. 1). Of course, such works do not have any scientific value.

In 1986, an article by M.K. Teshev came out, devoted to the tomb Psybé near Tuapse. It was interpreted as a monument of late Maikop architecture (Teshev 1986, pp. 52–57).^d Its role in Black Sea archeology is exaggerated. M.B. Rysin

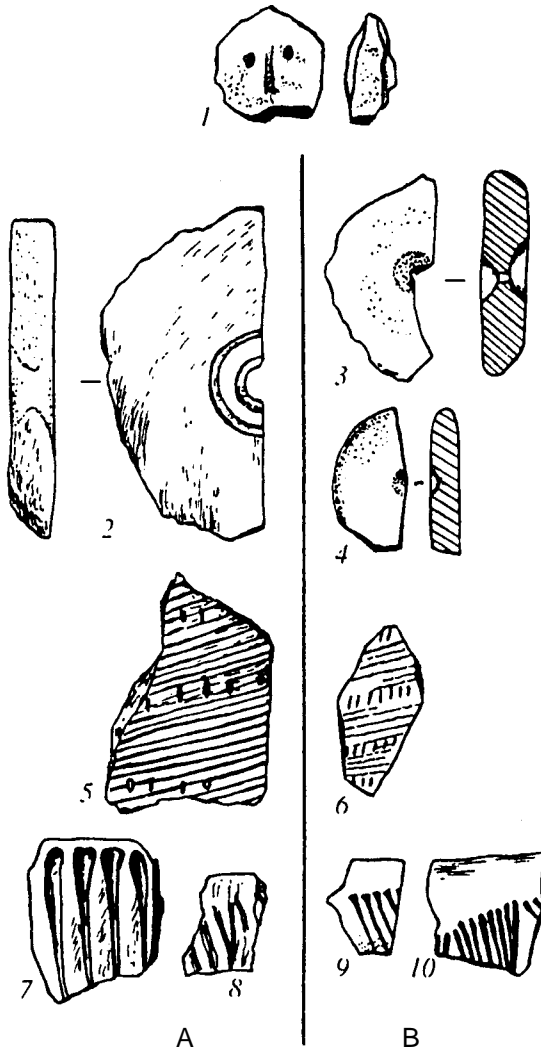


Figure 1. 1—the head of a statuette. Possibly originates from the Dzuarikau village in northern Osetia (according to V.L. Rostunov). Findings published as originating from the Deguak-Dakhov dolmen settlement in Adygeia (A, according to Rostunov). Possibly the same objects (B) published by Markovin, the settlement's researcher (2–10).

dates it back to the early stage of RBV KSD—[the beginning of] megalith construction and lumps it together with the Novosvobod tombs and box-like (*yashik-tsista*) tombs such as those of Nal'chik, Kishpek, and Kubin village in the central Caucasus (Rysin 1997, p. 88). Another scholar, N.G. Lovpache, dating it to the

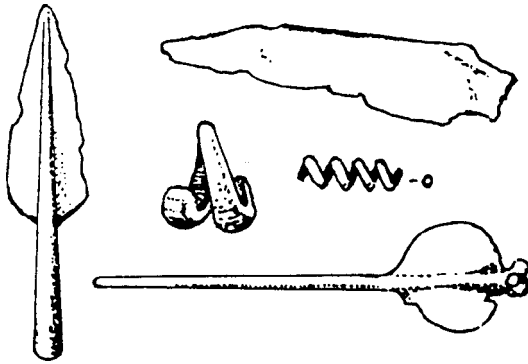


Figure 2. Iron knife and bronze objects found in tombs near the Psybé River, according to M.K. Teshev.

Bronze Age, writes that it reflects the time when “the lower reaches of Kuban’ from the Malaia Laba River to Taman’ were inhabited by the mountain-dwelling Atykh.” According to him, “the portal dolmens of Ust’-Sakhray are the continuation of the Psybé tombs,” that is, complex and elaborated monuments (Lovpache 1997, pp. 26, 35). Unfortunately, Teshev’s drawings are not professional, and one can never stop marveling at such a broad range of opinions regarding this not very representative monument that was covered with sediments from the Psybé River almost to the top. (See Teshev 1986, p. 54, fig. 1.) The other point is that before publishing the abovementioned article, Teshev published a newspaper blurb and a short article about Psybé (Psebe, Psybe) in *Sovetskaia arkheologiia*, accompanied by illustrations of the findings. They may be dated to the Early Iron Age (Fig. 2). The author has studied a total of fourteen burials in stone boxes. Middle Ages materials were discovered in the upper strata. Neither articles say a word about the late Maikop antiquities, although they mention in passing that there were some “pieces of charcoal and red ochre” in the tombs (Teshev 1981, pp. 210–12). Without denying Teshev’s achievements in local exploration (see Piatigorskii 1997, pp. 57–61), I would be very careful regarding the antiquities from the aforementioned tomb. The disparate Maikop material could have been introduced from the surrounding cultural strata, while ochre could be washed over from white thick mergel-type limestone characteristic of the whole Tuapse region, which is sometimes penetrated by jarosite containing some ochre particles. And it would not be justified to link this tombstone to the dolmens (Fig. 3).

The relation of Maikop culture to the culture of the dolmen builders is still not clear, posing a mass of questions. R.M. Munchaev in his last survey article distinguished at least two stages in the Maikop culture, attributing the Novosobod-type monuments to the later stage (Munchaev 1994, p. 181). The pottery characteristic

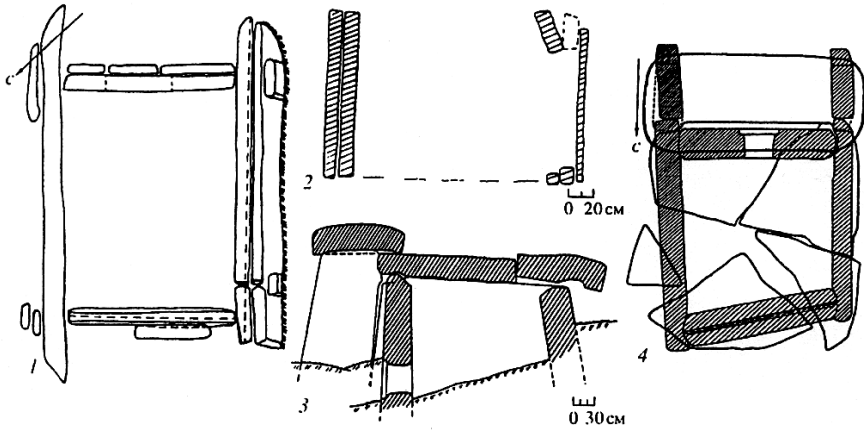


Figure 3. Archeological monuments from the Tuapse region. 1, 2—Novomikhailov village. Tomb near the Psybé River (plan without burials; longitudinal section. According to M.K. Teshev); 3, 4—Anastasievka village, Adignalovo site. Portal dolmen no. 8 (longitudinal section and plan. Measurements by V.I. Markovin).

of this time has a globular body and small well-defined neck. It is decorated by a concave herringbone pattern and convex “pearl” ornamentation (Munchaev 1994, pp. 218–21, table 20). However, despite the point that the vessels found at the dolmens near Novosvobod village definitely have a convex (and not applied) ornamentation, the “pearls” could be used to prove the Eneolithic date of the monuments, containing such ceramics (Korenevskii and Nagler 1987, p. 77; Korenevskii 1995, p. 8). Without denying the possibility of early origin of this ornamentation, I would like to emphasize its immediate relation to the antiquities of the Novosvobod type. I will return to this point later.

Lovpache writes: “The most important, curious, and crucial factor in Maikop architecture is that it combines Maikop and Dolmen archeological cultures.” In his opinion, “the separation of Maikop culture from Dolmen culture is a convention”; it would make more sense to see “the Mountain Atykh component as a form of megalithic architecture of the Maikop culture” (Lovpache 1997, p. 40). To illustrate this unity, he cites an example of such “solar-megalithic ensembles” as the Silver Mound no. 39 (possibly 31—V.M.), the site of “Khashpek” near Novosvobod village, the Khadzokh portal-corridor “*ispyun*”⁴ and the mound Psynako I near Tuapse. Unfortunately, instead of providing blueprints of these monuments, the author replaces them with reconstructions (Lovpache 1997, p. 40, fig. 7–9). Without appropriate field documentation, these sketches seem to be free variations on the dolmen theme. In any case, here we deal with incredibly complex architectural structures. Perhaps that is why we need the Psybé tomb to be able to bridge the gap between the dolmens and the primitive boxes in retrospect. It would still be a major stretch. In the Psybé tomb, as far as one can tell from the blueprint, there

were no grooves or signs of grinding, and no noticeable aspirations to erect a structure. It was assembled arbitrarily from available planks (Fig. 3, 1, 2).

As R.M. Muchaev writes, during the second phase of the Maikop culture “appearing for the first time in the Caucasus are the stone burial constructions of the dolmen type (Munchaev 1975, p. 318). Some of the first tombs of this type are structures of Novosvobod type, featuring quite complex architecture (OAK 1898, pp. 33–36; Popova 1963; Rezepkin 1991, p. 171, fig. 4).⁵ This fact gave us reason to consider that these dolmens could not be indigenous and that some arriving population left them. Moreover, these burial constructions are not characteristic of the local population, which only used them. The great quantities of weapons in these burials should confirm the conquest thinking: “From now on, this is our land!” A similar opinion has already been put forward by I.M. Chechenov regarding Nalchik’s and Kishpek’s tombs (Chechenov 1973, pp. 52–56; 1980, pp. 26–30). There are known instances of using others’ tombs. Such are the burials from different cultures and different periods in the large mounds and the burials of the Alan period in the composite dolmens of the Kiafar River basin (Karachai-Cherkessia). Inside the massive tombs, these burials were separated by layers of smaller stones so as not to touch the “spirits” of the past (Markovin 1983, pp. 90–107). Similar facts can be found in modern time (Lavrin 1993, pp. 249–54).

The question of where the first dolmen builders came from is very difficult. N.G. Lovpache does not consider it possible to accept that “the Caucasian dolmen originated in the Mediterranean, in particular, the Pyrenean peninsula.”⁶ Judging from the context of his work, he supports an Asia Minor origin of local monuments, seeing it not in the transfer of Asia Minor’s architectural forms to the Western Caucasus, but in the “motivating impulses” of this construction (Lovpache 1997, pp. 24–32). I cannot agree with this opinion, because nothing is known about the existence of dolmen-type monuments in Asia Minor (see works by G. Clark, G. Child, S. Piggot, T. Sulimirskii, G. Daniel, G. Pendlebery, and others).

Implicitly following L.N. Solov’ev, who was the first to consider fully the idea of dolmen origin in Asia Minor, and drawing broadly on folklore material,⁷ Lovpache gave a lot of attention to the “Shumerians–Sumerians,” “proto-Aryans–Aryans,” “Isps,” “Khatts–Khetts,” “Khashks–Kasks,” “Abesla,” and so on (Lovpache 1997, pp. 12–60, 75 ff.). His view in some arguments has common points with the more moderate and straightforward statement of B.V. Tekhov about the perpetual Indo-Europeanism (Indo-Iranism) of the Osetians in the Caucasus, involving Khetts, Kobans, and so forth (Tekhov 1993a, p. 24; 1993b, pp. 4, 5). It is possible to solve this question only by calling on linguists, folklorists, and specialists in Eastern studies. However, denying the influence of Eastern countries on the western Caucasus dolmen appearance, I completely agree with their great significance for Maikop cultural formation (Munchaev 1994, pp. 168–70, 209, 229; Trifonov 1987, pp. 20–24).

Returning to the monuments of the later “Maikop” stage, I again recall the period of the Maikop culture “from the end of the fourth to the third quarter of the third millennium B.C.E.” (Munchaev 1995, p. 171), and refocus attention on re-

mains of Novosvobod village or, as A.D. Rezepkin says, the “Novosvobod cultural group.” Looking for analogies to his ceramic finds from mound 31 in Klady, before going outside Ukrainian boundaries, he recalled their affinity with remains of the “Nizhnemikhailov type,” pointed to their “interaction” with the Srednestogov culture, and expressed interest in the antiquities of central and northern Europe, in particular, the funnel-shaped beaker cultures (Rezepkin 1991, pp. 189–96). As a result, he shapes his principal idea, concluding that the “Novosvobod cultural group” belongs “not to the second stage of the Maikop cultural development, but to the bloc of cultures extending from Central Europe to the northwestern Caucasus.” “But now, as it becomes more clear, the direction of this development was not from the east to the west, and it was not the Maikop culture that participated in the formation of this Eneolithic development branch, but, on the contrary, a bloc of cultures with black-polished ceramics and megalithic traditions had Central and Western Europe as its launching point, while the Novosvobod cultural group is its southeastern part, under the influence of which the representatives of Near Eastern cultures happened to find themselves” (Rezepkin 1991, pp. 192, 193). I apologize for the long quotation, but the thought is so convoluted here that I was afraid to distort it by paraphrasing.

This opinion has something in common with V.A. Safronov’s and N.A. Nikolaeva’s notion about relations between Caucasian megalithic monuments and globular amphora culture and cord-ornamented ceramics. I.K. Svechnikov, a well-known specialist in the globular amphora culture, was drawn into this polemic. He entirely rejected this hypothesis. It would seem that this amorphous theory about “proto-Germanic” cultures should now belong to the history of science. Not at all, as it turned out. As I mentioned, Rezepkin added one more culture to the northern cultures—the funnel-shaped beaker culture (*Trichtenbecherkultur*). But these very beakers brought down this theory. Nothing in this culture’s inventory, including its ceramics, has anything in common with the Caucasian material (Fig. 4) (Markovin 1994a, pp. 32, 35, 37, Fig. 3). Sometimes it seems that poorly-thought-out and hasty statements diminish Rezepkin’s work. He writes about the origin of Caucasian dolmens, jumbling together his old notion about their local origin, the influence of the funnel-shaped beaker and globular amphora cultures of northern Europe, Srednestogov tribal culture, Mediterranean populations, western Asian civilizations, people who created the “Rigveda,” and the Kuro-Arak culture (Rezepkin 1977, pp. 314–18; 1987, pp. 26–32; 1991, pp. 189–97). Such a hodgepodge of sources should be carefully scrutinized according to principal parameters, paying special attention to details, which are often treacherous. Only then one would be able to tell if this mixture had a right to exist, because it would represent a clear succession of ethnocultural components in the creation of local dolmens, considered in their development. This does not yet exist.

Very recently, an article by A.N. Gei appeared in *Rossiiskaia arkheologiiia* about a special “Nizhnemikhailov-Novosvobod” group of monuments (Gei 1999, pp. 37–39). As we can see, this is not a new idea. Usually, when speaking about

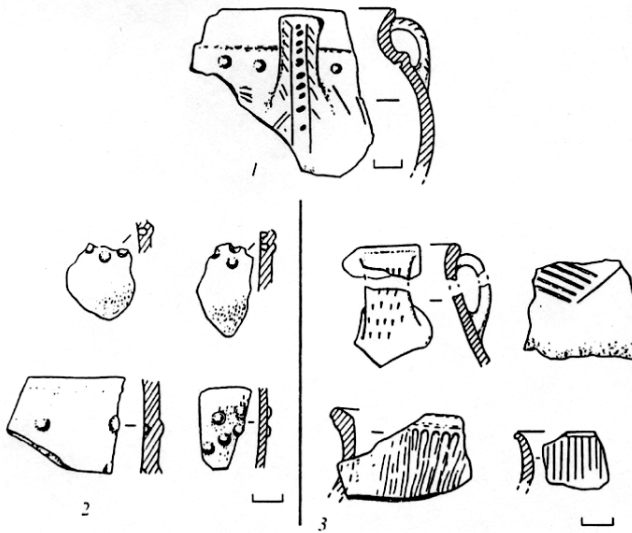


Figure 5. Psynako I mound (Tuapse region). Ceramic Material. 1— vessel fragment, combining “pearls” and dolmen ornament; 2—ceramic fragments with “pearls” and their imitation; 3—ceramic ornamentation characteristic of dolmen vessels (from V.I. Markovin).

ments of Portugal, Spain, France, and other sea-washed countries (ibid. pp. 269–71, fig. 15; Markovin 1997, pp. 335–37, fig. 179). Some dolmen structures also have analogies in the Mediterranean and its surroundings waters. What is interesting in this regard are the dolmens situated in the European part of Turkey (Lalapasha–Buunlu region), indistinguishable from Caucasian dolmens. They each have a clearly defined portal, trapezoid body, and an architecturally complete look, which some say is inimitable (fig. 6). This is one distinctive illustration of the search for dolmen origins (Markovin 1978, pp. 299–301, fig. 136, plus references). Following B.A. Kufin and L.I. Lavrov, I attempted to define the issue of the potential dolmen genesis, linking them to the Mediterranean basin and considering that sea navigation was of great relevance (Markovin 1988b, pp. 83–119).

Before studying, let alone writing, about a scientific problem, one has to research the appropriate literature thoroughly to substantiate one’s views and ensure that they be difficult to refute. N.G. Lovpache reproached me that I hardly used the opinion of F.A. Shcherbina, an historian of the Cossacks interested in the dolmens (Lovpache 1997, p. 24). Obviously, he is partially correct. But here I consider the last survey article by M.B. Rysin about dolmens. I would say it is entirely directed to dispute my views, although his opinion is so adrift in verbosity, foreign terms, and erudition that he never manages to crystallize a clear and cohesive argument. It reminds me of the final drawing accompanying his article—crude and blurred amateur work (Rysin 1997, p. 119, fig. 17). The goal of his article is of course

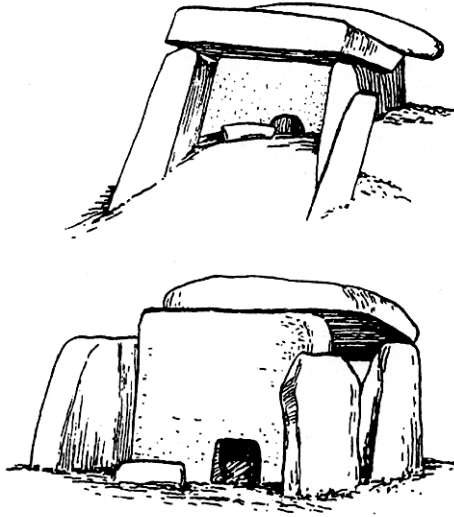


Figure 6. Portal dolmens from the Lalapasha-Buunlu region in Turkey (from Sevket Aziz Konsu).

clear: to give a general review of the Maikop culture's relationship to the culture of dolmen builders,⁸ profiling everyday life, occupations of the tribes who created dolmens, objects they used, and so forth. As far as his lively polemics with me are concerned, he could have received all the answers to his rather abrupt questions if he bothered to look at my articles published in the major journals ignored by him. Without reviewing all the questions posed by Rysin, I would like to pause at one point. In the author's abstract of his candidate's dissertation, he mentioned the existence of a "dolmen-catacomb entity" (Rysin 1992, p. 20). For some reason, this thought was not included in the abovementioned article, but had a significant response in the literature; moreover, archeologists have been exploring this idea for quite a while. In 1949, after his work at Manycha, M.I. Artamonov expressed in the press his desire to compare the materials from the dolmen, catacomb, and other cultures (Artamonov 1949, p. 333). V.Ia. Kiiashko also found similarities between dolmen and catacomb burial practices, and, more importantly, similarities in layout of catacombs and plank dolmens (probably without seeing them), even claiming they were "identical" (V.Ia. Kiiashko 1979; cf. A.V. Kiiashko 1991, p. 61). Perhaps my finding of a catacomb incense burner's fragments near dolmen no. 497 near Kizinka River, Bagovskaia village (Markovin 1978, pp. 251, 252, fig. 127, 1, 2; 1997, pp. 139, 140, fig. 58, 1) helped identify these "similarities. The version proposed by V.Ia. Kiiashko continues to appear in newspapers (Il'iukov 1997) and scientific research. But before discussing this work, let us return once more to Rysin's "dolmen-catacomb entity."

It is known that the region in question extends across the main Caucasian ridge

for almost 1,500 kilometers; and the region where the dolmens were found stretches from Abkhazia to the upper reaches of Kuban' (Kiafar River). Catacombs are mostly known in the steppe regions, with the most southern near the Dagestan village Velikent near the Caspian Sea. As one can see, this "conglomeration" covers part of the Trans-Caucasus and almost all of the northern Caucasus. I cannot judge the distance covered by the steppe catacombs; let us leave this to specialists. In any case, this mythical conglomeration encompasses a huge area. However, Velikent's catacombs should evidently be excluded from it. Its local burials are extremely rich in iron objects and ceramics; moreover, local ware is very different in shape and ornament from the primitive finds of the steppe regions.

Dagestan archeologists consider their material to be part of a special Velikent culture, preserving visible features of the Kur-Arak culture. Likewise, Manas catacombs in Dagestan are also completely different from those of the steppe regions (Gadzhiev and Korenevskii 1984, pp. 7–27; Munchaev and Smirnov 1956, p. 192; Gadzhiev et al. 1996, pp. 75–77, fig. 30). Obviously, the comparison between the dolmens of the Abkazian village Esheri and the Velikent antiquities is a scientific misunderstanding (Rysin 1990, pp. 24–25). In his methodology identifying commonalities between the dolmens and catacombs, Rysin did not consider laws of surface architectural construction, nor did he think about paleoethnography and paleolinguistics. Here I reiterate: "Claims of historical and cultural affinity must have a reliable basis. In this case, such basis could be an architectural affinity between dolmens and catacombs, but it isn't there. Stone dolmen structures have all the characteristics of high architecture, which cannot be said of the catacombs, dug in the ground. Moreover, the people who built the dolmens along a narrow strip of the Black Sea coast could hardly have a common destiny with the tribes of the catacomb culture, living in the vast steppe expanses of the regions along Azov Sea, Volga, Don, Dniepr, and so on. Neither is there an affinity in the inventory of the monuments in question" (Markovin 1994b, p. 252).

V.Ia. Kiiashko's statements and M.B. Rysin's work spawned the viewpoint of the young specialist A.V. Kiiashko. His work is devoted to the origins of the catacomb culture of the lower reaches of the Don. This is a serious research work, probably using an interesting methodology suggested by A. Häusler (Häusler 1998, pp. 137–57). However, comparison between catacomb ceramics and dolmen materials seems far-fetched, while the statement that the development of the Don and Azov Sea catacombs occurred simultaneously with "realization of the same ideas (crypts, in particular), which resulted in the appearance of the dolmens in the western Caucasus" (A.V. Kiiashko 1999, pp. 80, 177) seems extremely unsubstantiated. It was obviously inspired by Rysin's influential statement about the existence of the "conglomeration" invented by him. Perhaps that is why A.V. Kiiashko allotted in his monograph a special section for his interpretation. The author knows about the dolmens only by hearsay, he never studied any serious literature, and the problem of the dolmens, which continues to baffle many archeologists, appears quite easy for him.

Many controversial issues in the studies of the Western Caucasian dolmens boil down to their typology. Two approaches have developed: a typology specifically for studying Caucasian monuments (E.D. Felitsyn, L.I. Lavrov, V.I. Markovin, Iu.N. Voronov, and others) and typologies of local structures, coupled with some details of European constructions (V.A. Safronov, A.D. Rezepkin, M.B. Rysin, and others). The first gives an idea about all varieties and types of monuments and the second comes to a dead end if it does not correspond to canons dictated by the specific forms of Caucasian or European monuments. That is what happened with “horseshoe tombs” (also called “dome tombs”) of Europe, which are not related to Caucasian material (Rezepkin 1988, pp. 157, 158, 163, table 2). The dolmens near Guzerpil village and the Kizinka River basin (Bagov village) have nothing to do with the “horseshoe tombs,” being primitive constructions imitating vaults (Markovin 1979, pp. 144–48, figs. 77–79; 1994a, pp. 36, 38, figs. 4, 9, 10; 1997, pp. 149–53, 244–50, figs. 66, 67; pp. 124–27). It seems strange to divide Caucasian megaliths into tombs and dolmens, not as synonyms but as specialized terms. Rezepkin calls the structures found near Novosvobod village tombs as opposed to dolmens, although, with their rectangle layout and small vestibules, they are not very different from the slab structures he considers dolmens (Rezepkin 1988, pp. 159, 160–62, table 1, upper part). However, despite Rezepkin’s attempts to bring his notions closer to European standards and link Caucasian monuments to northern European cultures, he did not succeed. His typological constructions are weak. Sven Hansen, a Danish archeologist, judging from his typological classification, considers Novosvobod-type structures to be dolmens, comparing them with other Caucasian slab and composite structures (Kizinka, Pshada, Psynako I, etc.) (Hansen 1996, p. 34; 1997, p. 196, fig. 7). It is not worth separating monuments into different categories if they are united by a common cult idea, architectural conception, and territorial proximity.

Western Caucasian dolmens are only slightly studied, although a considerable literature since the eighteenth century mentions them. It is always necessary and useful to know this literature. Saying that this wastes time because it was already done only reveals a specialist’s laziness. Study of dolmens should be a common mission for all Caucasus specialists—broadly specialized archeologists of the early world. All debates and arguments are legitimate, unless they become insulting and heated. Most importantly, one should not arrive with a preconceived spectacular solution to a question not yet posed. Once I heard a hypothesis that all dolmens used to be confined inside the mounds. I have seen more than 500 dolmens near Kizinka River and almost all of them had nothing that suggested a mound, except for stone embankments for laying slabs. Making certain assumptions, omitting others, and strengthening the rest can always prove any hypothesis. It is extremely easy to do when studying dolmens, especially when copying blueprints. One must not simplify the graphic methods; it is better to exaggerate the difficulties.

The idea of preservation and study of western Caucasian dolmens has spurred creation of an international project “Caucasian Megaliths in Cultural, Social, and Economic Context.” Its realization involves solving a range of problems (Shatokhina

1997). Expressing solidarity with this project, I consider the following points to be the most important for the study of local megaliths:

1. To continue comparisons between the local dolmen structures and material objects found there with the corresponding Eurasian monuments and findings.

2. To start compiling a catalog with all the western Caucasian monuments, according to different regions, marking the sites that disappeared.^e

3. Full publication of the digging and expedition materials of A.D. Rezapkin, A.B. Dmitriev, M.B. Rysin, N.G. Lovpache, A.N. Gei, I.N. Anfimov, and V.N. Kondriakov⁹ are necessary. We hope that these will provide new graphic and artifact materials for scholars of different profiles.

4. To continue thorough study of the dolmens with their proper architectural description. It is necessary to further study the dolmens according to their types, to reconstruct building canons for each type of structure, taking their chronology and geographic distribution into account. Local particulars and architectural “schools” may be distinguished. This work is very important, allowing recreation of disappearing dolmen groups in their primordial form. The first attempts are already successful: the recreation by V.A. Trifonov of a circular composite dolmen at the Zhane River, Vilde 1998. A historical landscape of the western Caucasus should be recreated, as has been done in some European countries.

When digging, it would be good to leave some dolmens intact for future generations of archeologists. Obviously, they will have greater scientific capacities than the scholars of our time.

5. Anthropological studies of dolmens are necessary. They have not even been started yet. Until now, all ethnogenetic thinking existed at the level of general speculations (B.A. Kuftin, L.I. Lavrov, Sh.D. Inal-Ipa, L.N. Solov’ev, O.M. Dzhaparidze, Ia.A. Fedorov, V.I. Markovin, Ia.N. Voronov, N.G. Lovpache, and others). At the same time, it is necessary to continue gathering folklore material about the dolmens and information about their cult worship by different Caucasian peoples.

6. It is extremely important to begin a series of popular books devoted to different dolmens and their explorers. They should be strictly scientific and written in an elegant and pictorial style. Only such publications would be able to counterbalance the opuses of mystics.

An exchange of opinions among specialists in research methodology and dolmen interpretation is crucial. It would be good to organize a special conference with a carefully considered program and preliminary publications of abstracts in Russian and two or three other languages.

I consider that all of the above are quite feasible.

Editor’s notes

a. Readers should beware that this Arnold Toynbee quotation is a back translation, given that Markovin did not provide a page number. Since the article derives from a lecture, his language and citations are more informal than usual academic articles in archeology.

b. The significance of beliefs combining Islam and pre-Islamic traditions is exemplified

here, and is relevant throughout the North Caucasus, where mystical Sufi traditions persist, except in Ossetia, where Christian–pre-Christian syncretism is more common.

c. For more on Elena Blavatskaia's theosophy and its context, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

d. For more on debates about the Maikop antiquities and their ethnic correlations, see M. Mandelstam Balzer, ed., "Turmoil in the North Caucasus," *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*, Winter 1991–92, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 1–84.

e. Reference to "sites that have disappeared" means settlements abandoned in the distant past as well as significant archeological discoveries ruined anew by recent fighting in the West Caucasus, in present-day Abkhazia. Fighting in the northeast Caucasus, in Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya (Ichkeria), and Dagestan has been devastating as well.

Notes

1. This is most likely A. Solntsev, director of the Anastasiia Research Center (*Dol'meny* 1999, p. 4).

2. At the end of the nineteenth century, E. Zichy published this dolmen with a vandalized front tombstone (Zichy 1897, p. 332).

3. The names of the dolmens are taken from postcards published by the Anastasiia Research Center.

4. It is typical of N.G. Lovpache's book to use local words: the Khashpek region—Klady, *ispyun*—dolmen, the Shkhaguashche River—Belaia, *pytape*—fortress, and so on. I believe this is not quite justified in scientific literature.

5. Unfortunately, the blueprints of the mound 31 tomb published by A.D. Rezepkin are not very clear (Markovin 1994a, pp. 35, 36). Now that V.M. Masson has presented a more complete graphic publication of the same tomb (Masson 1997, p. 64, fig. 9), I would like to apologize to A.D. Rezepkin for drawing hasty conclusions.

6. N.G. Lovpache reminds us that L.I. Lavrov, V.I. Markovin, and others argued in their works for the Mediterranean origin of the dolmens, but then writes, "but from the very beginning of his study of the Caucasian megaliths, the Kuban' historian F.A. Shcherbina did not agree with this opinion, presenting an evolutionary explanation of our dolmens' local genesis and illustrating it with examples from the Kokhozh group" (Lovpache 1997, p. 24). This sounds extremely strange. Judging from this text, one could think that Lavrov, Markovin, and Shcherbina lived at the same time. Not at all: Lavrov's and Markovin's works were published in the 1960–90s, and those of Shcherbina in 1910. I know Lavrov's work and have used it, but I believe it is dependent on E.D. Felitsyn's research (Shcherbina 1993; Felitsyn 1904).

7. It is characteristic of Lovpache's narrative to follow folk characters uncritically, linking their actions nearly to the Stone Age. Perhaps here one should not forget the compression of time and the unreality of people's actions in folklore. V.P. Propp writes: "Counting in folklore is as relative as space and time" (Propp V.Ia. 1976, p. 96). There is the view that the heroic Caucasian epos was created during the period of strong Sarmatian influence, or even later—during the Alans' time (Meletinskii 1963, pp. 157–64).

8. For me the terms "CDB"—culture of dolmen builders—and "dolmen culture in the western Caucasus" are synonyms.

9. N.V. Kondriakov has started his work in the Black Sea region. Several of his publications are known. In one, he reviewed the study of local megaliths in four pages, providing their typology, some architectural and construction particularities, and a twenty-point list of the most distinctive monuments; and expressed the wish to turn these structures into museums. Since no scholars are mentioned in this review, the author appears to be the

pioneer and pathfinder. The blueprint that he published of a dolmen from the Sochi region unfortunately does not tell us much about its architecture (Kondriakov 1999a, pp. 4–8, fig. 1). In another article, he gives a short list of cromlech and dolmos dolmens. To interpret them, he draws, for some reason, on Dagestani ethnography, although the Dagestani did not build dolmoses during that ethnographic period; there are no dolmens in Dagestan, and the cromlechs discovered date to the same period of Paleolithic-Bronze and early Iron Age (Kondriakov 1996b, pp. 9–18).

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