



DIGOR

DIGOR, Ossetic tribal name. The Digors, who number about 80,000 people or one-sixth of the Ossetic population, live mainly in the western districts of the former North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), at the upper reaches of the Iräf (Russ. Urukḥ) river, but also in the Mozdok region of the same ASSR and in the Ozrek region of the former Kabard-Balkar ASSR (Isaev, p. 4).

In the indigenous dialect the name for both the tribe and its territory is *Digor(ä)*; the corresponding adjective with suffix *-on* is *digoron* “Digorian” (*digoron ävzag* “the Digor language”). In Iron, the Ossetic literary language, the forms are *Dīgur*, *dīguron*. This name is also used for the Digors by the neighboring peoples of the North Caucasus (Abaev, 1959-89, I, p. 380). The origin and etymology of the word Digor is obscure. A connection with *Adīye*, the indigenous name of the Circassians (see [ČARKAS](#)), has been suggested (**dīy-* plus the Circassian demonstrative pronoun *a-* “that?”), but hardly proved (Abaev, 1958-89, I, p. 380; Volkova, pp. 110ff.).

In former times the name Digor was apparently applied to a tribal community in the North Caucasus whose territory extended to the west beyond the borders of present-day Digoria. Pseudo-Moses of Khorene mentions Aštigor and Dik’or among the tribes of Sarmatia (the North Caucasus), at the upper reaches of the Kuban’ and Terek rivers (p. 26; cf. Marquart, pp. 169-72). Unfortunately the text is ambiguous, and it is not clear whether both of these tribes are reckoned among the Alans or regarded as distinct nationalities (see also Miller, 1887, pp. 104 ff.; Gagloiti, pp. 152 ff.; Volkova, pp. 110 ff.; *Istoriya I*,



pp. 45-46; Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 105). Aštigor can be analysed as Aš (cf. As, an ancient tribal name used for the Alans; see ASII) and *Digor*, that is, “the Digor branch of the As.”

In Georgian, Russian, and West European sources from the 17th century and later Digor is found as a tribal and geographic name in the same sense it is used today; thus in the Georgian geography of Prince Vaxušti Bat’onišvili (1696-1757) the Digors (*digori*, *digorelni*) are frequently mentioned among the Ossetic tribes (index, p. 1006).

Like their Kabardian and Balkar neighbors, the majority of the Digors are traditionally Muslims, unlike their Iron kinsmen, who are mostly Christian. However, tribal pre-Islamic religious ideas and practices have largely held their ground or entered symbiotic relations with the Islamic creed (for a number of Digor religious and folkloric texts, see *Iron adämi sfäldistad* I-II, passim; see also Kaloev, passim).

The Digor dialect differs to a considerable extent from Iron, upon which the standard written language is founded. Digor literary publications are rare, and most Digor writers use Iron in their works. In Digor schools Iron is taught (along with Russian); administrative and political business is carried out in Iron (and Russian). Among the few Digor writers whose works have appeared in print, the lyric poet Bayärati Sozur (Russ. Sozur Bagraev, 1888-1928) may be mentioned; his collection of poems, *Zärdi duar* (The door of the heart), from 1926, is reckoned among the classics of Ossetic literature.

The relationship of Digor and Iron, the two main dialects of modern Ossetic, can be described in terms of a marginal versus a focal dialect. In oral communication each dialect is hardly comprehensible to the speakers of the other dialect. In their grammatical structure, however, they are almost identical, although the morphological materials used differ somewhat. In all essentials Digor represents an older stage of the language, but both dialects share the same general trend of development. Grammatical innovations are largely common, and there is every reason to believe that both are derived from a fairly homogeneous proto-dialect.

In both dialects the prosodic pattern is in principle the same, word accent being subordinate to clause accent. In Digor ancient short (weak) *i* and *u* (< **i*, **u*) have been retained as two distinct phonemes, whereas in Iron they have been levelled under *i*. In Digor initial *γ*- (< **g*-) remains as a voiced velar



spirant; in Iron it has become a voiceless velar stop *q*. In Digor *q*, originally alien to Ossetic, is found in loanwords only. Both dialects have introduced voiceless glottalized stops (*p'*, *t'*, *k'*, *c'*, *č'*), no doubt through influence from the neighboring North Caucasian languages.

The Digor noun has retained two declensions, one ending in *-ä* in the nominative singular, the other in zero (<**-ā* and **-ah*, respectively); in Iron both declensions have merged. The case systems of both dialects are closely related. In addition to the four cases inherited from Old Iranian (the nominative, the genitive, the locative-inessive, the ablative-instrumental) Iron has developed a series of (historically) secondary cases, namely the superessive, the allative, the dative, the equative, and the comitative; of these only the last mentioned is lacking in Digor. Both dialects make extensive use of postpositions, nouns, or particles that are added to the genitive (occasionally to some of the other cases too) and thus constitute a system of (synchronically) secondary cases.

In both dialects transitive and intransitive verbs are kept distinct in the past tense. In the first and second person singular of the present indicative of the verb “to be” an enigmatic initial *d-* is common to both dialects (*dän*, *dä*). In Iron the present indicative plural of the same verb is apparently derived from a stem **st(ā)*: *stäm*, *stut*, *sti*; in the singular **ah-* is used. In Digor **ah-* is used in both the plural and singular. The past tense of the verb “to be” is in Digor derived from the stem **ad-* (<**hāta-*): *ad-tän*, etc. In Iron the past tense is based on **būta-*: *uīd-tän*, etc.; *ad-* is found, however, in the Iron optative of the past tense (*fä-c-ad-ain*, beside *fä-uīd-ain*). The inherited modal system (the indicative, the subjunctive, the optative, the imperative) has been retained in the present tense in both dialects; in the past tense the formation of an optative mood is a common innovation. In both dialects a future tense has been formed, originating from a periphrasis consisting of the present stem plus **čānah-* “wish” plus the verb “to be”: Iron *cār-žin-än*, Digor *cār-žän-än* “I will live” (**čāra-čāna(h)-ah-*). An innovation common to both dialects is a bidimensional system of aspectual and spatial preverbs, which at the same time express the direction of the action and the position of the observer (e.g., Dig. *ba-cäun* “to enter” from the point of an observer who is outside, *ärba-cäun* “to enter” when the observer is inside). In Digor this feature is less fully developed than in Iron.

As to vocabulary, Digor has been exposed to Kabardan influences to a larger extent than Iron. The Kabardan loanwords are, however, mostly limited to the



semantic fields of economic life (agriculture, husbandry, etc.). The basic core vocabulary, lexical items denoting the elementary human experiences, is largely the same in both dialects; this applies to inherited vocabulary as well as to borrowings.

See also [ALANS](#); [ASII](#).

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