



XUICAU

XUICAU (XUCAU), God in the Ossetian religious-mythological system.

In general, Xuıcau is characterized as an abstract figure lacking anthropomorphic features, as *deus otiosus*, far from the reach of men (Abaev, p. 255). According to traditional prayers, he created the universe, the heavenly spirits and forces, and human beings (Pamyatniki, pp. 57–58). As noted by V.S. Miller, before the conversion of some traditional Ossetians to Christianity and Islam in the 19th century, they believed in the existence of single invisible God, abiding somewhere in heaven and ruling the whole world. Miller also added that Ossetians used to mention God's name frequently in different sorts of blessings that were abundant in their everyday speech, like “*Xuıcauı xoržäx dä uäd!* (May the mercy of God be with you!)” or “*Xuıcauı xoržäx işsar!* (May the grace of God be found by you!)” (Miller, p. 423).

The ceremonial way of worshiping Him was manifested in the so called *kuıvd*, an Ossetian collective ritual prayer, conducted by an elderly person, who is most respected among the participants in the ritual and is esteemed as an experienced person from among them. When appealing for his favor and benevolence, Xuıcau is unmistakably characterized as a single being (Pamyatniki, p. 51), which can account for his linguistic form as a *singulare tantum*. From an etymological point of view, the most convincing explanation for his origins is one that cites Iranian roots (Bailey, pp. 26–27). In Sogdian, there are royal titles of the same origin in the form of *xwt'w* (i.e. *xwatāw*), that can be traced back to older form of *xwa-tāw-(ya)*, meaning “the one, who is powerful due to himself.” Émile Benveniste (q.v.) considered the name to be an



exact match to the Greek *autokrátōr* that literally means “self-master” (Benveniste, p. 256). Recently, this etymology was supported and expanded upon by Russian scholars, who suggest contamination of two derivatives of Proto-Iranian roots. The first one of these is documented in the compound **hua + dā-*, meaning “(one’s own) house, dwelling,” as a reflex of the Indo-European *sva-* ‘one’s own’ and *dhā-* ‘to put.’ They reconstruct **xvata(h)-dāta-* and **xva-dāta-*, that means “created and put by oneself” → “god, deity.” The second group of derivatives are nominal forms produced from the verbal root **tau-* ‘to be able to’ (Rastorgueva, Edelman, p. 425-26). The problem of the Ossetian intervocalic consonant -c- instead of the expected -t-, underlined by V. Abaev (q.v.), can be solved by taking into account another and more recent contamination with the Ossetian noun, similar in form and meaning – *xicau* “chief, principal” that Abaev himself suggested (Abaev, p. 256). In this case, we may observe the idea of God as a ruler, i.e. ‘Lord,’ that can be traced in a special formula where the plural form is used: *Xuicäuttı Xuicäu* ‘God of gods.’ This title appears mainly in the epic tradition, as it can hardly be separated from well-known Old Persian formula *xšāyaθiya xšāyaθiyānām*, or “King of kings” (Kent, p. 181) and can be treated as a means of rendering a superlative degree. The Ossetian word was borrowed in the Middle Ages by their Turkic North Caucasian neighbors, the Balkars, in the form of *Xəčaw*, used in a designation of the month of May. It is also used as a toponym (Abaev, p. 256).

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