The Adyghe (Circassians) interior of the XVIII - XX centuries

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Abstract. The article discusses the differences and monotony of the traditional home and the interior decoration of different population strata. In some cases, the nobility and gentry needs were the reason and basis for a slight increase in the houses’ construction and interior, which started being differentiated from the poor in terms of population. The article covers the XVIII - XX centuries, when the small changes started taking place in the interior and in construction, related to the climatic conditions and places of residence.

1. Introduction.
Considering the Circassian dwelling, the location and climatic conditions of the North Caucasus are directly studied. The North Caucasus is one of the regions on our planet where people have lived since ancient times, more precisely, from the Paleolithic period (Ancient Stone Age). Natural and climatic conditions as well as the location of the region at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, had a decisive influence on the region’s ethnic composition formation.

In the early stages of the North Caucasus history, that is, in the Paleolithic era, the dwellings of the most ancient people were mainly natural caves and rocky canopies [1]. Starting from the XVIII century, the dwellings of the Circassians were the turluch ones, covered with reeds. In the first half of the 19th century, when the struggle between feudal lords and enemy raids was over, the layout of settlements became more flexible. Due to the emergence of building materials, the houses construction became reliable, and the production of porcelain dishes, carpet weaving and furniture production increased, people started paying great attention to the interior, striving for harmony and convenience [2].

Along with caves and rocky canopies there were primitive shelters used by man, such as a hut and canopy, many of which there were in the mountain areas. Naturally, temporary camps, caves and light terrestrial huts and canopies were the characteristic of the North Caucasus until the last stage of the Paleolithic (Upper Paleolithic - 40-12 thousand years BC). In the Neolithic era, in connection with the agriculture emergence and cattle breeding, people have the first permanent settlements. Such settlements were discovered in the vicinity of Nalchik (Agubekovskoe settlement and Nalchik burial ground). But it should be noted that the population living in this region at that time was not yet familiar with agriculture. Agriculture appeared later - in the era of metal. Such an “early metal” settlement was discovered in the region of Dolinsk. There are open parking lots with rectangular ground structures built of poles and rods coated with clay from the outside (turluch technique) [3].

Considering a certain age, it is possible to dwell on the dwellings of the Circassians of the 18th century, since it was from this moment that the building materials began to improve, although the buildings in rural settlements were still very simple. The bulk of the Cherkessia population lived in rural
settlements (villages), in picturesque places at the foot of the mountains, on the banks of rivers, in the forests and fields. Kabardian settlements (kuazhe, zhelye, kheble) in Russian sources of the XVI-XVII centuries were called the taverns in the XVIII century – the villages, in the XIX - beginning of XX century – the villages and settlements. In the conditions of the further development of feudal relations, the Adyghe settlements of a monogenic type are assigned to the term “hyeble” (Adyghe - “hyeble”) [3].

2. Types of the house and the interior decoration of Circassians

2.1 XVIII century houses. Cherkessian structure was very simple and easy to put into action. The houses are built with an oblong quadrangle, at the corners of the posts connected by beams, in the middle a wattle fence is coated with clay outside and inside, the roof is thatched from the reed. The floor was earthen. The roof was covered with straw, reeds or sedge.

J. Polotsky in 1798 wrote: “The dwellings of the Circassians do not appear to be houses, in the full sense of the word; they are rather the large baskets made of carefully interwoven rods, covered with clay on top and covered with a cane roof. Such a village stayed in one place for no more than 4-5 years” [4].

2.2. The interior of this period.
Inside the walls are cleanly whitened; to one wall a fireplace, opposite a low bed (sofa), covered with a carpet or felt; a military harness, a saber, a rifle, a gun hung above the bed, as well as the other household belongings, mattresses, pillows are tidied up to one corner [5]. The furnace is small, adobe, sometimes on a wire frame, although the open hearth was also a characteristic of it. This was the home both of the first Prince, and the poorest servant [5].

2.3. XIX century houses.
The construction equipment has been improved, the houses of a new type have appeared, the plant’s production of the building materials (wood, iron, burnt bricks, tiles, paints) has increased [6]. So far, only urban settlements have received such changes in construction.

By the middle of the XIX century the most common type of Adyghe settlements was a small (one family) settlement, consisting of several (no more than 1-1.2 dozen) households, all the members were in direct consanguinity. The name of the village was received by the surname of the first settler, by the most numerous surnames in the village or by the name of the feudal. Names of a topographic nature were also frequent, emphasizing the geographical localization of the settlement [7].

Along with the estates and fences, public settlements were also part of the settlement complex. So, the centers of attraction of the hase (council), the guest house (khaklesh) of the village owner or other influential person, as well as the forge, which was a kind of a club for males, were the original centers of attraction in the villages existed from the ancient times. Since the Circassians Islamization, the mosques have become the new sacred centers, which also acted as the organizing center of the village during its development. The most important religious building was the cemetery.

The main building material for the dwelling and for all the buildings of the estate was turluk - wattle coated with clay. The four-sloped roof of the dwelling was covered with reeds, thatch or sedge; in the Black Sea Shapsugia, fern was also used. To protect against rain dampness and summer heat, a canopy was arranged around the entire perimeter (or only along the facade) of the house, resting on the wooden columns *. The house was built without foundation, the floors were earthen, coated with clay [7].

Old houses were put on the ground without foundations (Figure 1.), so that the house could be built quickly and assembled just as quickly - in times of war it was extremely necessary. At the beginning of the XIX century Claptor visited Kabarda and he noted: “The same plot of land has been used for two three years, and when it becomes unusable, the Circassians move to another place.” The author even drew attention to the fact that the Circassian villages had no names [8]. The main structure of the house walls was made of stakes and weaving, coated on both sides with clay mixed with straw, sometimes they were whitewashed with lime. The door was replaced by a strong board, fixed to the inlet. The hearth
was arranged in the central room of a residential building; later, they started installing it in the kitchen, in the yard.

The rooms in the Kabardian and Balkarian houses were divided into two halves: the “honorary” (Zhantye) and “non-honorable” (Zhikhafe) parts. Thus, the settlements and dwellings occupy an important place in the material culture of each people, including Kabardians and Balkars [3].

![Figure 1. Dwellings of XIX century](image_url)

2.4. Interior at the beginning XIX century.
The interior was simple, it was distinguished by cleanliness, neatness and a strict order of the things and objects’ arrangement. Such a strict order was ensured in connection with a large family (8-15 people). Therefore, special attention was paid to the education of girls, the ability to maintain order in the house. The girl in the house at any time, even at night, was ready to find anything. She didn’t have to look for anything. Each item had its own specific place. Among the kitchen utensils, the traditional distinguishing feature is wooden bowls, leather bags made of a whole peeled sheep skin for storing ayran, cream and sour cream, for storing flour from a peeled goat skin [2]. All household utensils were made of wood or clay; porcelain crockery was too expensive, therefore, not used.

2.5. Interior at the end XIX century
From the end of the XIX century, the dwellings of prosperous Kabardians and Balkars the new and previously unknown objects and things appear: cabinets, chests of drawers, mirrors, sewing machines, European-style tables and chairs, sofas, whatnots, carpets, samovars, down pillows and blankets, glass, clay and porcelain crockery [4]. Naturally, in a complete set, all these things were owned only by the wealthy people. As for the bulk of the population, the interior remained traditional in the flesh until the revolution.

The interior of the Adyghe house was as austere as the dwelling itself. The most valuable things, for example, ancient weapons, festive clothes, bedding, were stored in chests standing against the walls. Crockery and kitchenware were in the wall cabinets. The beds could be wooden or (for the least wealthy people) appeared to be an elevation above the ground. Universal mats, without which no Adyghe imagined his house, were the mats (ployable), made from cattail and served as rugs, carpets or wall panels, hard mattresses [7]. Factory-made household items gained the wide distribution: glass and metal utensils, samovars, kerosene lamps, furniture (high tables, chairs, wooden beds), carpets, blankets, down pillows, etc. [7].
Figure 2. Interior decoration of Circassians in the XIX century

The guest room was usually better furnished than the other rooms. It exhibited the most valuable things. The best weapons were hung on the walls - the pride of every Circassian. A wooden sofa was placed in one of the room’s corners and was a place of honor. Lots of kitchen pillows, blankets, mattresses emphasized the family’s viability. And their number corresponded to the number of family members. Chairs, beds, carpets were exclusively the property of rich Circassians.

A characteristic feature of the Circassian houses’ decoration was a lot of things embroidered with gold and silver threads (Figure 2.): watch stands, fans, comb covers, hangers for towels, wall decorations.

2.6. Houses’ types in the beginning of the XXth century:
1. The traditional dwelling of poor Adyghes is a house assembled from the rods coated with clay [6]. Such houses were called “nabzhe une” or “chybzheguu une”. The dwellings of the Circassians were built from tree branches. The houses consisted of two adjacent rooms. Such constructions date back to the beginning of the XXth century. The roofs of the houses were “bgyenishkhye une” in translation from the Kabardian word “roof of reeds”. The steps were made of stone, instead of cement they used a solution of soil and sand. The house was usually built with a canopy, which was a continuation of the roof and was supported with columns.

2. The houses of more wealthy people were made of brick or stone. There were already slate roofs. The house consisted of three or more rooms. Most of the wealthy population in Kabarda and Balkaria already had wooden floors and ceilings, glazed windows with external shutters. Since the 90s of the XIX century, an oven with a stove has been spread widely and the hearth has lost its significance [2].

2.7. Interior decoration.

The decoration of the Kabardinians’ dwellings was still rather poor and simple: a wooden bed covered with felt carpet, mattresses, blankets and pillows and the hearth was made of red brick. The wall was bleached with lime. When the visitors came to the house, they would overnight on a bed on the floor made of a “uensheku” mattress, which was handmade sewed from cloth and stuffed with hay.

After the revolution, the highlander’s dwelling gradually began to change [4]. Traditional household items have been replaced by the factory-made products - tables, chairs, bedding, dishes, metal beds, etc.
There is one description of several Adyghe dwellings: “in the center of the room there was a stone laying 30-40 cm high, having the shape of an elongated oval. Inside, it was filled with soil, in the mass of which there were charred animal bones, fragments of red clay ceramics. The gap between the layout and the northern wall of the dwelling was filled with ash and fine charcoal. The earthen floor and lower rows of masonry walls had traces of heavy soot. By all indications, these were the remains of a hearth adjacent to the described oval layout, which was probably a stove bench heated by the hearth.

The dwelling usually consisted of one room, in the center of which a hearth was located. According to tradition, the fire that gave the family warmth and food should never go out, as this promised misfortune. Subsequently, the additional rooms were added to the house for the sons, who married and decided to stay with the parents. When the visitors came to the house, a special room “kunatska” was allocated for them; and whole houses were erected for the guests in wealthy communities [6]. In XIX - beginning XX century the purchased, imported decoration items appeared in the dwellings, especially among the wealthy strata of the population [2]. If the room had two iron beds and a quadrangular table, then it was a characteristic of the fact that this family was rich. In such houses there could be two outbreaks.

A qualitative leap in the interior of the dwelling of Kabardins and Balkars took place in the 30s, as a result of the collective farm system’s victory, an increase in the material well-being and cultural level of the rural population occurred. Already in the mid-30s, the situation in rural dwellings began to approach the city. Having visited the Kabardian village of Zhemtala in 1935, journalist R. Artemyev wrote that the conditions of the most collective farmers’ houses in this village “are not much different from the urban dwellings” [4].

It should be noted that fairly rapid transformations in the housing sector were characteristic only of the very wealthy owners, although the bulk of the population still adhered to the traditional construction of housing and traditional decoration.

In the houses of the rural population in Kabardino-Balkaria the bookshelves with books, harmonics appeared in 1938 as the collective farmers of the republic acquired 27.9 thousand gramophones [4].

2.8. Types of houses in the middle of the XXth century:
1. According to the data of 1890, in Kabardian and Balkarian villages there were many stone, wooden, combined, adobe and turluch houses (Figures 3, 4) [2].
Figure 3. The adobe house built in the middle of the XX century, Kahun village. The house is still owned by the Zhamborov’s family.

Figure 4. The adobe house built in the middle of the XX century, Zayukovo village. The house is still owned by the Shugushev’s family.

2.9. House decoration
Kabardinians and Balkars’ house furnishing was quite simple: an iron bed covered with felt carpet, mattresses, blankets. Those who had wooden tables, triples and chairs in the house, were considered to be rich. The floor was wooden, the walls were whitewashed with lime. Extensive estates gained popularity a little later, the main house was placed in the center, and farm buildings were located on the sides. In wealthy families, separate dwellings in the courtyard were built for the visitors. Today this is rare, but each family tries to have a special room to accommodate travelers, relatives and guests.

3. Summary
Considering the dwellings and interiors of the Circassians of the XVIII - XIX centuries, I want to cancel that the Adyghe people in rural settlements, houses were not rich both in construction and in the interior. All the building material used was from a natural resource made by hand. By the XVIII century, the buildings had still been very simple. In some cases, the nobility needs were the reason and the best pursuit basis. It was from the end of the 19th century that the building materials started being improved. A qualitative leap in the dwelling interior of the Kabardins and Balkars took place in the 30s, as a result of the collective farm system’s victory, an increase in the material well-being and cultural level of the rural population. The situation in rural dwellings began to approach the city already in the middle of the 30s. The architecture of the XX century testifies itself to the cultural traditions’ fruitfulness in general, taking into consideration the good hospitality of the Circassians.

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