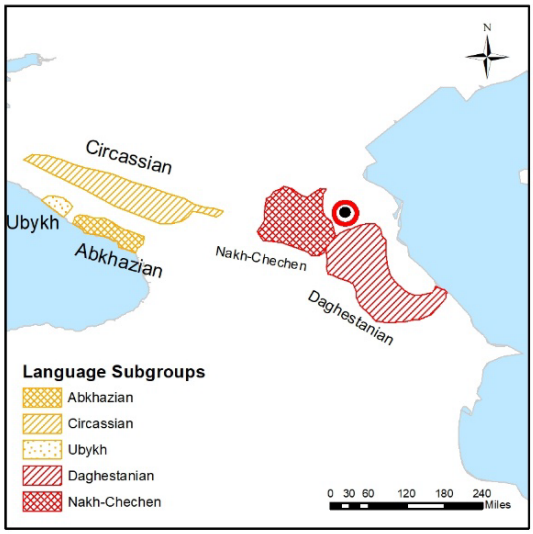
10.North Caucasian

Homeland. North Caucasian languages are limited to a small region, a fertile highland area that may be presumed to be its homeland. It is a phylum that apparently descends from the time of early occupation of temperate Eurasia, from 45,000 years ago. It is possible that the group once extended to a much larger area, as is suggested by the argument that the Basque languages of Iberia may be included in the North Caucasian phylum.

Because the North Caucasian phylum is confined to a small number of languages (under 40) in what is currently a very small area, there is little evidence to hypothesize long-distance relationships. While hypotheses have been proposed linking North Caucasian to Trans-Himalayan, Basque, and to the rise of agriculture in the Levant, the map here is limited to showing the distribution of North Caucasian languages today. In that distribution, the Nakh-Daghestanian group was established earlier than the Abkhazo-Adyghean group.



Concise Spreadsheet: top four levels

North Caucasian			
	Nakh-Daghestanian		
		Nakh	
			Bats
			Chechen
		Daghesanian	
			Avar-Andi-Dido
			Eak-Dargwa
			Abaza
	Abkhazo-Adyghean		
		Circassian	
			Adyghe
			Kabardian
		Ubykh	
		Abkhaz	
			Abkhaz
			Abaza

Full Spreadsheet: see "10.North Caucasian," listing North Caucasian languages by groups and subgroups.

Pleistocene Changes.

65,000–45,000 years ago.

45,000–21,000 years ago. Initial settlers may have had their origins in the Trans-Caucasian, Elamo-Dravidian, or conceivably Into-Pacific phyla. From this temperate homeland, forager populations extended to the west, especially in mountain zones. The *Homo sapiens* settlers in

Europe were long known as Cro-Magnon but might be properly classified as North Caucasian speakers.

21,000–12,000 years ago.

Holocene Changes.

12,000–6000 years ago. Speakers of North Caucasian languages were possibly those who, living in today's Levant, first developed agriculture relying on wheat and barley. The Basque languages of the Pyrenees may preserve traces of the migration of these early farmers. Semitic speakers, arriving from Africa, subsequently became the dominant population of the Levant and Arabia, perhaps overlaying southern portions of North Caucasian languages.

6000 years ago–1000 CE. Indo-European communities arose in the steppes north of the Black Sea and rapidly spread to the west, south, and east, overlaying and restricting North Caucasian languages to the Caucasian highlands.

Commentary and Debates. The Dene–Caucasian hypothesis argues that North Caucasian, along with Basque, Yenisei, and Na–Dene, are all descended from Trans-Himalayan languages. In this view, the subsequent expansion of Eurasiatic languages overlaid most of these languages.

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