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"Achilles and the Caucasus"

Summary

Evidence from archeology, linguistics and comparative mythology indicates the existence of a Circumpontic cultural are in the Bronze Age, and perhaps even erlier. One such Circumpontic cultural feature is the paradigmatic and syntagmatic symbolic cluster central upon a semi-divine warrior, son of a shape-changing nature goddess and a mortal hunter. In the Greek cultural sphere this symbolic cluster is attached most notably to Achilles, but not so much the hero of Homer's *Iliad* as a pre-Homeric, Thessalian Achilles, whose biography is preserved in Apollodorus' *Library* and other sources. Achilles' distant cousins in the Caucasus include the Georgian warrior Amiran, the Ossetic Nart hero Batradz, and the Abkhazian Tswitsw. The principal features of the symbolic cluster shared by these mythical figures _ semi-divine parentage, premature birth, interrupted immortalization, threat to divine sovereignty, and punishment by indirect action of the supreme deity _ are presented and discussed.