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**Problems of History, Politics and Culture
of Abkhazia, Georgia**

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The ethno-political history of the Autonomous Region of Georgia – Abkhazia is spotlighted in the book, as well as the main ancient monuments belonging to Christian culture. According to the grounded opinion and conclusion the territory of modern Abkhazia from ethnic, political and cultural aspects has always been the Georgian Region, where the demographic changes occurred only in the late medieval centuries. The authors talk about the hybrid war of the years of 1992-1993 pursued by Russia against Georgia and the overt aggression of the same Russia in 2008. The humanistic catastrophe, occupation of Abkhazia as the outcome of the above mentioned war and the Geopolitical changes equally harmful for the Euro-Atlantic space are clearly shown in the book; The necessity of solving the permanent conflict by means of peaceful methods with the support of the International Organizations is also given a strong emphasis.

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Introduction

Abkhazia – the autonomous unit of Georgia has been occupied by Russia. The small Black Sea region being in hands of Russia has already become a serious problem in regard of the global security. This book has been written with the aim of informing the civilized world and all the good will people about the truth about the 1992-1993 tragedy having place in Abkhazia and going on even today and make them realize the problem of Abkhazia.

The war in Abkhazia inspired by Russia broke 24 years ago with the participation of the armed forces of Russia and its various types of military divisions. They were the authors of the manslaughter of the Georgians, the incredible massacre of innocent people and forceful deportation of the three-fourth of the population. By the scale, non human cruelty and criminal deeds the tragedy of Abkhazia has no analogues on the Continent of Europe, but the World War II.

Officially nobody is responsible for the massacre, though it is widely known, that the chief creator of those deeds is Federation of Russia. And even the more, in August of 2008 Russia undertook another aggression – with the concocted excuse of peacemaking it attacked Georgia. After the five day war the aggressor occupied Abkhazia and the small region of Tskhinvali (the so-called South Ossetia). The outcome of occupation would be more drastic if not the position and attitude of UNDP, European Union, the USA and the entire civilized world. On the 26th of August of the same year the both devastated occupied regions were practically recognized by the Kremlin as independent States. The elementary norms of the international truth were trampled by those deeds. The so-called recognition was in fact, the regular step towards the annexation of the given territories. It was proved by the events occurring afterwards. Moscow understood that for the legitimization of the performed illegitimate deeds it was necessary to obtain the international recognition of the occupied regions. In order to achieve the above mentioned aim Russia used and is using even nowadays all the unworthy tricks and means. This is the disinformation policy on the hybrid wars made by Russia from 1991 against Georgia in the name of the separatists and about the direct aggression of 2008 and legalization of the ethnic cleansing, efforts of legalization of the genocide, bribing of the leaders of certain countries etc. Falsification of history occupies a special place in the ideological arsenal of the Kremlin. To the glory of the civilized world it must be said, that from the aspect of recognition of the occupied regions of Georgia the results achieved by Russia are extremely modest.

With the efforts of the democratic countries, it was not able to reach and we hope that it will never legitimize the performed misdeed. Simultaneously, we have to mark, that the world society, unfortunately has not realized yet the level of cruelty and nonhuman deeds performed by the Russian State and a small group of the separatists in Abkhazia. The only righteous and legitimate qualification could be the ethnic cleansing, the genocide, as it is clearly and in a well-argued manner shown in one of the books dedicated to this topic (**International society to bring a verdict on the tragedy of Abkhazia, Georgia (Jemal Gamakharia, Tamar Japaridze, Ketevan Chigogidze)**. Tbilisi, 2015. <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/117908>).

The duty of the entire civilized world is to elevate the voice against the incredible unfairness, torture and massacre of thousands of innocent peaceful citizens on grounds of the ethnicity, forced mass deportation, medieval century methods of the total violation of the elementary human rights having place till the present days on the occupied regions of Georgia.

The given book will help the reader to identify and realize the tragedy having place in Abkhazia correctly. In the book, the key problems of the history of Abkhazia from the ancient times till the present days are analyzed briefly, but well-argued, with the reference to the target scientific literature, documentary material, and European, Oriental and Russian sources. In the material is shown the unique Christian culture of the region of the early medieval centuries, which is totally Georgian; the examples of barbaric treatment of that latter is given in abundance, when with the purpose of erasing the Georgian trails, the modern occupants are destroying or altering them, trying to give them a Russian style. The overwhelming outcomes of the war made in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in 1992-1993 are obviously shown in the book.

Abkhazia is not and should not be the problem of Georgia only. The illegal agreement on the “Alliance and strategic partnership” made on November 24 of 2014 between the Federation of Russia and the marionette State of de-facto Abkhazia is the proof of it. According to the Agreement the 200 kilometer of the Georgian Black Sea sector, together with the Crimea having been recently annexed by Russia has been turned into the powerful military stronghold of Russia against the whole Euro-Atlantic space. This is openly announced by the marionette separatists and the representatives of the high authorities of Russia.

By Occupation – annexation of Abkhazia and the Crimea, Russia created the prerequisites for obtaining the Geostrategic advantage in the Black Sea basin and its vicinity. The Fathers of NATO had to understand in 2008, that Moscow would never be satisfied with the occupation of the regions of

Georgia. The ambitious plans of the Kremlin were not properly maintained in advance by them, or in spite of understanding its real plot (and is obvious from the recent Warsaw NATO Summit resolutions), they fail to undertake the timely measures. It is obvious, that Russia intends to oppress NATO not only in the Black Sea basin, but also in other regions of the world. It tries to increase its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea and Near East. It goes without saying, that it is needed not for securing its defense. The target of Russia is the Continents of Europe and Africa and Arabic countries.

The planned activities are step by step being carried out by Moscow under the mask of control and fight with the terrorism. Russia has exploited the reaction and answer of Turkey on the repeated violation of the airspace given by Ankara on November 24 of 2015 for “coping” with the inner political problems and other far reaching geostrategic aims. Today we have witnessed the increase of the military power and activity of Russia in Syria and the Mediterranean basin. The Russian military groupings stationed there, are supported by the nearest military bases in the occupied regions – the Crimea and Abkhazia.

The situation is complicated, as deceiving oneself with the illusions of “improvement” of Russia and consequently delay, repetition of the mistakes already done in 2008 will put the Euro-Atlantic alliance in face of the new and more challenging problems. The decision of European Union and the USA and other States on introduction of the economic sanctions against Russia is beneficial, though a bit late, but anyway quite efficient. It is true, that certain Western companies are losing part of their profits due to coming into force of the introduced sanctions and countersanctions, but it is relatively less evil, in comparison with the disaster inevitably awaiting the Western countries from Russia, being once more strengthened with their help. For the most part, Russia recovered and gained its strength through economic cooperation with the West and then used its power against the same West. Certain European powers call for the making of the analogous mistakes, but repetition of the same mistakes would equal the suicide.

The trustworthy partner of the civilized world can be only democratic and oriented to the well-being of its own people Russia. At this very moment, we can talk not about the lifting or erasing of the sanctions, but about hardening them and undertaking of the new and active steps. As Russia is trying to establish its hegemony on the Black Sea and is step by step approaching its aim (Abkhazia and the Crimea are consisting parts of its plan). All the efforts have to be directed towards the establishment of the fair peace in the Black Sea Basin, requiring the precise steps. At the Warsaw

Summit of NATO this topic was discussed in general. In our opinion, one of the effective measures can be introduction of the special restrictions in making use of the Straits of the Black Sea, for the States in war with the Black Sea countries. First of all, it must affect Russian Federation, which has occupied the territories of Georgia and the Ukraine, and is now making the Mediterranean Basin its target. We think, that it is high time to revise the Montreux Convention adopted on July 20 of 1936 for limitation of the aggressor's activities. The 80 year anniversary of signing of the Convention is a good reason for making of such amendments and additions, which will create a strong guarantee for maintaining fair peace in the Black Sea countries.

The proper attention is not given to one more serious danger coming from the separatist Abkhazia. It is the danger of stimulating and activating the separatism from outside. This issue is of a paramount importance for the Kremlin and de-facto authorities of Abkhazia. Representatives of the Separatists at the bidding and help of Russia are carrying out a purposeful work with the regions of the States of Europe and Asia being separatively dispositioned. The Commonwealth has to realize the fact, that the occupied Abkhazia is not only the strong military base for Russia, but it is a very effective ideological tool for performing the beneficial for Russia undermining activities against certain States and in the first place by encouraging Separatism.

Thus, the problem of Abkhazia goes far beyond such matters, as restoration of only the territory of Georgia, the current issue of returning of the population to their mother-land and homes and has turned into the global threat. Today this problem equally belongs to Georgia and the rest of the civilized world and has to be solved peacefully, but according to the fundamental principles of the international legislation and the soon the better.

1. Abkhazia/Georgia: Historical and Political Problems

1.1. Historical Abkhazia and Historical Abkhazians

Abkhazia is an Autonomous Republic within the structure of Georgia. It is situated in the North-West part of the country, on the Black Sea coast between the rivers of Enguri and Psou. It occupied the area of 8,7 thousand sq.km. Its capital is Sokhumi.

The history of Georgian Statehood counts at least 35 centuries. the legendary Colchis Kingdom existing already from the second part of the II Millenium B.C. covered the most part of the territory of modern Georgia including the Enguri-Psou sector, being afterwards called Apkhazeti. Since that period the present territory of Abkhazia being inhabited by the Georgians has always been an inseparable part of the integral Georgian Kingdom existing in different epochs or anyway an organic part of the separate Georgian political units (Egrisi, Lazika, etc.). Of temporarily split Georgia, as a result of the dominion of the Romans and Byzantians (Ist century B.C. – VIIIth century A.D.). And invasion of the Iranians (VIth century) and Arabs (The VIIth century).

The ancient Georgian chronicles – “Life of Kartli” begins with the information about the kindred and eponyms of the Caucasian peoples ...According to that chronicles, the territory from the mountains of Surami (which divides Georgia into Western and Eastern parts) to the Black Sea and the river Small Khazareti (The river Kuban flowing into the Azov Sea) was allotted to Egros – the eponym of western Georgians – Egres or Megrelians. Roman and especially Byzantine writers were familiar with the Abazins the same historical Abkhazians from the antique period, which in the Old Georgian Chronicles “Life of Kartli” are not described as foreign ethnos, but as an organic part of Western Georgians. The same opinion was shared by all Roman and Byzantine authors writing about the genealogy of the world nation; among them were Hippolytus of Rome (3rd century), Eusebius of Antioch (280-360) an author of “Liber Generationis” (334), Eusebius of Caesarea (died in 340), Epiphany of Salamis (314-403), compiler of the Easter Chronicles (630-640), Giorgi Singeloz (VIII-IX), Leon Grammarian (IX), Giorgi Kedren (IX), John Zonaras (XII) and others. The above mentioned authors were aware of the Apsils and Abazins mentioned in the I-II centuries. Some authors of the 20th-21st consider them the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians without any valid proof. In the genealogical

diagram of the world nations instead of Apsils and Abazins, Colchis// Lazians//Egrians or the same Western Georgian people are mentioned (**Georgika, V.1. Tbilisi, 1961, p. 11-20, 35, 39-41; Georgika, V. 4. 1. Tbilisi, 1941, p. 6-9, 61-63; Georgika, V. 5.Tbilisi, 1963, p. 3-4, 10; Georgika, V. 6. Tbilisi, 1966, p. 191. – In the Greek and Georgian languages).**

In Western Georgia including the modern territory of Abkhazia archeologists fix the existence of integral Georgian (Colchis) culture. Inside this integral culture, the recorded peculiarities in the different regions of Colchis and among them in the North-West part of modern Abkhazia are explained by the climate conditions, than by the ethnic diversity. The data from archeology, anthropology, linguistics and ethnology give evidence, that on the modern territory of Abkhazia lived the autochthonous Georgian population (**Essays from the history of Georgia. Abkhazia from ancient times till the present days. Tbilisi, 2011, pp. 11 - 34, 203-280**). The same is proved by the Ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Oriental sources. For instance, Greek logographers Hecataeus of Miletus (VI century B.C.), Scylax of Caryanda (IV century B.C. His data are kept in the works of the author of the VI century B.C. – Pseudo Scylax of Caryanda), Hellenic of Mytilene (V century B.C.), Herodotus (V century B.C.). On the modern territory of Abkhazia and on the territory of Dyoscuria as well (Sokhumi) definitely Georgian population is fixed, under the name of Colchis, Korax Kolles, Moskhs, 1960, Book 1, (N. **Lomouri. Information by Greek Logographers about Georgia. Materials for the Georgian and Caucasian History. Abstract 35, Tbilisi, 1963, pp. 3-35. – Grek and Georgian languages; T.Khaukhchishvili. Information by Herodotus about Georgia. Tbilisi, 1960, Book I, 104; Book IV, 37**).

According to the “Geography” of Strabo (beginning of the 1st century), Dioskuria (Sokhumi) and Bichvinta are Colchian or the same Georgian towns (Strabo, XI, 2, 19). Pliny the Elder (I century) also considers modern Sokhumi a Colchian town (Pliny the Elder, VI, 15). In the “Travel around the Black Sea” by Flavius Arrian (II century) from Trabzon being located in Eastern Black seacoast Modern Turkey) to the town Old Lazika (Was located to the North-West of the Black Sea town of the modern Russian town Tuapse) is described the true Georgian world, being divided into the small communities (Arrian, 11, 18). Their identity is specified by Claudius Ptolemy (II century) and Anonimus of the V century. Claudius Ptolemy mentions the Georgian “Suano-Colchis” in the vicinity of Gagra and Sochi; To the South-East from them latter till Cappadocia the same Georgians – Lazians, Manrals (Megrelians) and residents of Ekrektika (Egrisi) are described (Ptolemy, V, 8. 25; 9. 1-5).

The V century Anonimus repeats word-in word the information by Flavius Arrian and names several small communities from Trabzon to

Dioskuria or the same Sokhumi (Anonymi periplus, 8- 10). Unlike Flavius Arrian, the author provided the description with the comments, according to which from the town of Sokhumi (Sebastopolis) till the river Choroki (today this river is the border of Georgia with Turkey) “in the old times lived the people being called Colchis and then they were renamed into the Lazians (Anonymi periplus, 7). The information given by the V century Anonimus is quite important as it particularizes anyway well-known identity of the historical Colchians. The author definitely identifies them with the Lazians - that time population of West Georgia and not the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians, as the separatists try to prove. The Colchis was identified with the Lazians by the famous Byzantine authors such as: Procopius of Caesarea and Ioannes Lydus (**Procopii Caesariensis. De Bello Gothico, VIII, 1; Ioannes Laurentius Lydus. De magistratibus, III, 34**).

Claudius Ptolemy and V century Anonimus as we have seen above, considered the tribes named by Flavius Arrian and living in the Eastern Black Sea coast including the modern territory of Abkhazia (Absils, Abazians, Sanigs etc.) to be the Georgians. The Latin author of the IV century Rufius Festus Avienus supports this opinion. He insists, that the North-East part of the Black Sea coast to the South - East from the Circassians or the Black sea region of Georgia including the sector of Abkhazia was populated only by the “energetic Colchians” and “Severe Iberians” (**В. Латышев. Известия древних писателей о Скифии и Кавказе, т. II, выпуск 2. С. -Петербург, 1906., 358-359**).

Namely, that “energetic Colchis” and “Severe Iberians” formed the Kingdom of Abkhazia with the capital in Kutaisi (end of the VIII century – X century). At the end of the VIII century the Prince (Eristavi) of Abkhazia Leon the II legally occupied the heirless throne of the Kingdom of Egrisi (Western Georgia) and according to the Georgian Chronicles was named “the King of Abkhazians (**Life of Kartli, V. 1. Tbilisi, 1955, p. 251. – In the Georgian language**). From that time the terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazian” denotes Western Georgia and its Georgian population. Separatists exploit the topics of Abkhazian kingdom, did not consider it Georgian, but by the modern notion think it to be an Abkhazian state. Similar ideas are far from the truth. The separatists conceal the fact, that all the political and what is especially significant the rich and unique cultural heritage of the Abkhazian kingdom is genuinely Georgian. It goes beyond our understanding how non-Georgians were able to develop the unique Georgian culture - the culture being destroyed today by them? It goes without saying, that it was created by the Georgians and it is the proof that the Kingdom of Abkhazia was a purely Georgian State.

Not a single trail of activities of any non-Georgian ethnos can be traced even in the part of the Kingdom known under the name of Abkhazian

Principality and was situated to the North-West of Anakopia (modern Akhali Afoni). On the given territory, as it is shown in the second part of the present book only the Georgian culture was recorded. Within the Kingdom of Abkhazia was included the Principality of Abkhazia particularly in Bichvinta was located the purely Georgian Cathedra of Catholicos of west Georgia or Abkhazia. In the historiography is well-known all the names of the Catholicoses and all the Catholicoses of Abkhazia were Georgians. Even the more, hundreds of registered XVI-XVII - century peasant family names and Christian names belonging to the Catholicate within the territory of modern Abkhazia are Georgian in origin (**Essays from the history of Georgia. Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p. 194 -196**).

The separatists thoroughly conceal the above mentioned truth and real data and numerous other documents from their own population, with the purpose of falsifying and appropriating of History of Georgia, as these data prove the fact, that the Kingdom of Abkhazia was the Georgian State. The ancestors of the modern Abkhazians (Apsuas) have nothing in common with the given Kingdom. There is not a single document proving the opposing opinion. The data of the unique historical source “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings” being written in the Georgian language at the beginning of the XI century are the proof of the Georgian nationality of the Kings. As it is shown in the second part of the given book, the same is proved by the numerous Georgian epigraphic materials, being compiled by the Abkhazian kings or on their behalf.

The kingdom of Abkhazia was rightfully considered the main political and military power unifying once more at the end of the X century Georgia being split by the foreign invaders. At the head of the integral State were the representatives of the Bagrationi royal dynasty. Bagrat the III (978-1014) the king of Abkhazians united Georgia. This is the reason why the title of Bagrat the III and other Georgian kings began as follows:” The King of the Abkhazians... “Then came the names of other regions in succession they were brought under the jurisdiction of Georgia. The full royal titulary was gradually formed simultaneously with the unification of the State headed by Abkhazia (West Georgia) and that process is described and reflected in the Georgian chronicles. Foreign authors often mentioned the Kings of Georgia in brief as the “Kings of Abkhazians” and the State was called Abkhazia. The semantics of the terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazians” expanded and covered All Georgia and Georgian nation. Byzantine and Oriental historical sources provide the numerous examples proving that fact. In the medieval centuries the notions “Abkhazian” and “Georgian”, “Abkhazia” and “Sakartvelo” (Georgia) had the definite identification, or are the same. The above mentioned facts are used by the separatists for passing off the history of Georgia, as history of Abkhazia.

From the Byzantine sources, where the term “Abkhazia” is used with the meaning of Georgia can be named the XI century authors – Giorgi Kedren, Mikheil Ataliate, the author of the XII century Johannes Zonaras, Chronicler of the XIII-XIV century – Eqvtime and others (see the corresponding documents with the comments (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с.199, 217, 557-558, 562-563, 586-587 etc.**). The letter of the King of Georgia Rusudan dated back with the year of 1224 in the name of Pope of Rome Onore the III is kept even today in the archives of Vatican. The chancellery of the Pope gave the following name to the letter:” The letter of the King of Abkhazia” (**Илиа Табагуа. Georgia in the archives of Europe and storerooms, Book I. Tbilisi, 1984, pp. 176-177. – In the Georgian language**).

“Abkhazia”, “Abkhazian” mentioned in the Azeri and Persian sources (Khakan, Nizami etc.), meant All Georgia and Georgian or Western Georgia, but never modern Abkhazia and Abkhazian. For Example, (Khakani XII century) wrote: “I became the resident of Abkhazia and started to speak Georgian” (**А. Н. Болдырев. Два ширванских поэта Низами и Хакани. – В книге: Памятники эпохи Руставели. Ленинград, 1938, с. 137**). Nizami Ganjev (XII-XIII centuries) uses the term “Abkhazian” and “Abkhazia” several times and means Georgian and Georgia. For example, implying the fact of his temporary King Tamar’s marriage to the Russian Prince, he wrote: “Come and Help us Shah and save us from the Russians claiming (betrothing) the bride in the cradle of Abkhazia” (**Низами Гянджеви. Искандер-наме. Баку, 1983, с. 285**).

In the poem “Khosrov and Shirin” Nizami Ganjev wrote, that Apkhazi and Daruband were the hunting places of the local Atabag Ildegiz. In Azeri historians’ opinion, the inhabited locality Apkhazi, being mentioned in the Persian and Arabian sources as well, is located in the region of Khachmaz in Azerbaijan or on the place of the modern town Kuba (**Историческая география Азербайджана. Баку, 1987, с. 73**). We have to mark, that in the medieval centuries the town under the similar name was located in North - West Georgia near the town of Sochi currently the part of the Russian Federation. Many written and cartographic sources obviously show this fact. We would name the XIII century Venetian, Petrus Veskonte’s (1318) Picigani Brothers’ (1367), Soleris’s (1385) and others’ maps (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 820-830 etc.**). In that period the both towns of Apkhazi were located within Georgia. Existence of two towns of the similar names in the two regions of one State points to the common function of those towns, in our opinion. It was not an exception. For example, the extreme point of the North-East border of Georgia was its Caspian Daruband – meaning the “iron gates”. The town really performed the function of the “iron gates”. The fact, that on the North-West border of

Georgia was located the Black Sea town Gagra was mentioned by the several authors, as Daruband or the “iron gates” is worth interest (see the map of the Caucasus depicted in the “Jihan-Numa” by Katib Cheleb etc.). This necessarily points to the fact, that the both towns within one and the same State had analogous functions. The same can be said about the two towns – “Апхазии” (Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии*, с. 577-578). We strongly believe, that the medieval century Caspian and Black Sea towns under the similar name “Апхазии” (the same with Daruband) have nothing in common with the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians – Apsuas.

It is obvious for the specialists, that “Апхазии” and “Abkhazian” of the Armenian and Arabian sources denotes only Georgia and nothing else. The above mentioned sources are published with the corresponding comments (Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии*, с. 191-198, 201, 208-209, 215-217, 223, 225, 547-556, 572-574, 583-585, 589-590, 593).

Numerous facts of usage of the term of “Abkhazia” “with the meaning of Georgia (Sakartvelo) in the foreign sources is being exploited by the Separatists for their own benefit. They are trying to falsify and appropriate the history of the Kingdom of Abkhazia and integral Georgia, but in vain. The main aim of the separatists is giving rise to the anti-Georgian psychosis and ideological brainwashing of the Abkhazian population through falsified history.

Separatist historians were brought to light, as distorters of the historical sources (*Essays from the history of Georgia. Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p. 126, etc.*). We'll provide only one example. Separatists often bring as a witness the X century Armenian author Ukhtanes and write:, that the Black Sea coast tribe became prosperous, multiplied, “spread in the area and extended towards the borders of Armenians and Albanians (Azerbaijani – author). The country became densely populated and that country was called Abkhazia.” Separatists do not cite further and deceive their own population, as if in the X century the author of that text could mean the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians and their country. They misrepresent the contents and meaning of the Armenian source (М. Гунба. *Абхазия в первом тысячелетии. Сухуми, 1989, с. 12; О. Бгажба, С. Лакоба. История Абхазии. Сухуми, 2007, с.156 etc.*). In reality Ukhtanes did not speak about the ancestors modern Abkhazians and their country, but about Georgians and Georgia. In the opinion of the Armenian author, the people becoming prosperous and numerous at the Black Sea coast, those who spread towards the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan were brought from the East “slave (captive) Iberian tribes.” In the country, which “is called Abkhazia” according to Ukhtanes, lives a tribe which in its first country was called Veria (Iveria – author) and here they are called

Georgians” (Ukhtanes. History of separation from Armenians. The Armenian text with the Georgian translation and research was published by Zaza Alexidze. Tbilisi, 1957, p. 57. – In Georgian and Armenian languages). Separatists try to hide the main part of the text written by Ukhtanes. This is a typical example how the separatists falsify history and try to appropriate it and deceive their own people and the world community. Similar examples are in abundance.

The North-West border of Georgia in the XIV century reached Nikopsia. Till the V century it was called Old Lazika and was located to the North-West of the Black Sea town of the Russian Federation Tuapse. On the territory of modern Abkhazia and an integral part of Georgia only the Georgian culture had the high level of development. At the same time, in the mentioned region there is not a single trail of political or cultural activities of any other population including Apsua-Abkhazians other than Georgians (For Example written sources, architectural monuments, toponymics etc).As it has already been mentioned above, we can only suppose, that in the second part of the XII century after the onset of the Mongols, the Apsuas (Abzoa), who according to the information given by Pliny the Elder in the 1st century lived to the North of Astrakhan in Privolzhie (В. В. Латышев. Известия древних писателей, т. II, выпуск I. С.-Петербург, 1904, с. 180), started to move to the South-West direction entered into the far North-West regions, but by then had not yet reached the modern territory of Abkhazia.

During the 100 year Mongolian dominion (from the middle of the 13th century to the middle of the 14th century) began the process of desintegration of the integral Georgian State. First emerged the kingdom of Imereti - the legal successor of historical Abkhazian kingdom, from which the principalities of Samegrelo, and Guria started to separate. The Princedom of Abkhazia covering the territories from Anakopia (Akhali Afoni) to the river Bzip approximately constituting the district of Modern Gudauta was included into the Principality of Samegrelo. The famous king Giogri the V (1313-1346) liberated the country from the yoke of the Mongolians. Its North-West border reached Nikopsia and the princedom of Abkhazia was located within its borders. The off-springs of Giorgi V the Brilliant and especially Alexander the I (1412-144), kept the state from falling apart, maintained and established integrity of the State. The Princedom of Abkhazia – modern Gudauta district - was its integral part. Anakopia, town of Tskhumi and their lands situated to the South-East reaching the river Enguri constituted the integral part of the Principality of Megrelia. This valid fact is confirmed by the numerous Georgia and Foreign and among them Russian written or cartographic sources.

For example we can give here the peace of information from the book “Geography” written in the 13th-14th centuries by an Arab historian,

geographer, astronomer, physician and poet Abul- Fida. He noted, that the town of Apkhaz located near Sochi “was one of the ports of the Georgians” (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 220-221, 589-590**). According to the information given by an Arab historian al-Muhib (14th century) “Georgian had two kings – Davit and Dadimani (Dadiani – the author) –the king who rules Sokhumi and Abkhazs.” The same information is met in the books of the Arab historian and encyclopedist Al-Kalkashan (Information by the Arab historian of the 14th -15th centuries, about Georgia 14th-15th centuries, was translated from the Arabian and commented by Dito Gochaleishvili. Tbilisi, 1988, pp. 53, 56. – In the Georgian and Arabic Languages).

The materials kept in the archives of the Genoese trading factories (1354-1475) located in the town of Sokhumi confirm belonging of the town of Sokhumi to Samegrelo and the facts of dwelling of the Georgian population. We are going to review this topic once more, in order to nail down a lie tear the mask off the separatists, who deliberately falsify history and try to impress with the trade- economic ties of the ancestors of Apsua-Abkhazians with the medieval century Europe and namely, Genoa. In reality the situation was different.

As it is known, in the 13th-14th centuries the Italians were active in establishing the trading ties with the countries of the Black Sea Basin. The Venetians were the most active and from 1319 in Trabzon and afterwards from 1333 in Tana (The town of Azov) they possessed their own factories, or trading posts. According to the Italian sources, Georgian from Sokhumi also traded with the above mentioned factories (**Badoer Li. Libero dei konti di Giacn o Badoer (Constantinopoli 1436-1440), testo a cura di Derini e. T. Bertele (II nuovo Ramuse, III). Roma, 1956, p. 59**).

In the 60-ies of the 13th century superiority in trading on the Black Sea gradually passed into the hands of the Genoese. Especially the town of Sokhumi/Sebastopol was the centre of Genoese’s interest. Existence of the Italians in this town is confirmed in 1280, when one Genoese bought a trading ship “Mugetto” form another Genoese. The act of purchase was recorded by an Italian notary in Sokhumi (**Actes des notaries Genoio de Pera et de Caaf de la fin du XIII e Siecle, ed. G. Bratianu, Bucarest, 1927, p. 177**).

From the beginning of the 14th century the colony of the Genoese was so numerous, that it resulted in the necessity of appointing the Catholic bishops in Sokhumi, whose identities are established. The letter written in 1330 by the Bishop Petrus Geraldi from Sokhumi to the Archbishop of Centerbury are extant. Petrus Geraldi informs the Archbishop that he is in Sebastopolis (Sokhumi), in the inferioris Georgiane; that the Georgians lived in the town and he received donations from them every Sunday; The

ruler of the country is “at the same time the Commander-In Chief of All Georgia and he is ready together with his army to unleash war with the Saracens together with the Western Christians “etc. (V. Kiknadze. **The Latin Source of the 16th century about Georgia. Works of the Tbilisi State University. History, Art Criticism, Ethnography. Tbilisi, 1983, V. 243, pp. 101-103. – In the Georgian and Latin languages).**

Pterus Geraldini meant the Princedom of Megrelia (to which belonged Sokhumi) and its Prince Mamia the I Dadiani (1323-1345); He genuinely was the commander of the West Georgian army. Petrus Geraldini and other Catholic bishops of Sokhumi being appointed till the end of the 15th century never knew the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians, as they at that time did not live in that town.

The trade-economic ties with Genoa and Georgia became more intensified from the year of 1354, when by the permission of the Prince of Samegrelo Giorgi the II Dadiani (1345-1384), the Genoese established the independent Factories of Sokhumi (W. Heyd. **Historie du Commerce de Levant au Moyen-Age, t. I. Leipzig, 1923, p. 142-143, 192; Codice diplomatco delle colonie Tauro-Liguri durante la signoria dell’ ufficio di S. Giorgio, ed A.Vigna, parte I. ASLSP, VI, 1868, p. 266).** The Factory successfully functioned from the year of 1475 and together with the other Black Sea Factories was subordinated to the special office “Officium Gazaria” located in Genoa. From the year of 1398 “Officium Gazaria” managed the Black Sea Factories with the help of the Consul of Kafa. The Consul of Sokhumi was also appointed by that latter. From November of 1453 the right of managing the Genoese Factories was passed to the “Saint George Bank”. Numerous Italian sources give the information about the Sokhumi Factories belonging to the Genoese. They unambiguously confirm, that the Genoese trading in the Black Sea region was having relations only with the Georgians and resolve and clarify all the disputable problems with the Georgians. This was the common experience starting from the date of establishment of factories till their closure. We’d like to introduce some examples. In May of 1465, the protectors of the “Saint George Bank” called on the Consul of Kafa to be careful in Sokhumi in order not to spoil the “trade matters and business with Megrelia.” The instruction being sent in June of 1472 from the same bank to Kafa aiming to solve a conflict between Georgians and Genoese asked to “send a Consul to the son of signor Bendiano”. The protectors of the “Saint George Bank” in the instruction sent also being sent to Kafa on the 15th of December of 1472 are expressing their pleasure and satisfaction with the fact, that they “have hope to make a composition, (conclude a truce) with signor Bendian, the Prince of Megrelia” (**Codice diplomatco delle colonie Tauro-Liguri durante la signoria dell’ ufficio di S. Giorgio, ed A.Vigna, parte I.**

ASLSP, VII, 1871, pp. 338-339, 534, 873-874; T.Beradze. **Navigation and Maritime Trade in the Medieval Georgia**. Tbilisi, 1989, p. 110). From the Instruction sent by the bank to Kafa on the 4th of December of 1475 becomes clear that the parties had already adjusted the matter. The letter reads :” You have successfully adjusted the matter with Bendian, the Prince of Megrelia.” According to the Italian documents “Bendiano”...”The son of Bendiano” are in reality the Princes of Megrelia Liparit the I Dadiani (1470-1474), and his heir Samadavle Dadiani (1470-1474.) and Vamekh the II Dadiani (1474-1482).

The Venetian merchant and diplomat Josafat Barbaro, who visited Tana (The town of Azov) in the years of 1436-1451, wrote, that “The Prince of Samgerelo is called Bendian and possesses two big fortresses on the Black Sea – in Batumi and Sokhumi.” This latter is called by him with its Ancient name – Sevastopilis (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, 226-227, and 595-597**).

Thus, according to the valid Italian documents the 13th-15th century Sokhumi was a Georgian town located within the Principality of Megrelia, where the independent Trading Factory, Orthodox and Catholic churches were functioning. Consequently, the Venetians and Genoese had contacts with the Georgian from Sokhumi, Ruler of the region Dadiani and not the ancestors of modern Abkhazians, as the separatists lie.

After taking of Constantinople by the Ottomans (May of 29 of 1453) the situation in the Black Sea Basin drastically changed. Sokhumi was invaded and robbed by the Ottomans and “Avogazs” – the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians, who according to the Italian maps lived beyond the modern territory of Abkhazia(see the charts compiled in 1318 by Pietro Vesconte, in 1367 by the Piccigani Brothers, in 1563 by Giacomo de Majalo and others). The letter being sent in the second part of the year of 1454 by the Genoese Consul in Sokhumi Gerardo Pinnelli to Italy read:” I was entrusted with the power of the Consul of Sevastopolis... (Sokhumi – J.G.). Before long Sokhumi was invaded by the Avogazs and the entire population fled, in order to save themselves. I followed the lead. The Avogazs intended to take captive the majority of them. Besides, I am also informing you, that before my arrival the Turks invaded and robbed the town” (**Codicce diplomatco delle colonie Tauro-Liguri durante la signoria dell’ ufficio di S. Giorgio, ed A.Vigna, parte I. ASLSP, VII, 1871, pp. 102-103, 317-318**). In 1475 the Ottomans took the Factories of the Genoese being located in Kafa and the Crimea. Afterwards, the Sokhumi Factory soon ceased its existence. The Italian materials reflecting its activities represent the first valid and serious source of the ethno political history of Abkhazia. They definitely point out that Sokhumi belonged to Dadianis and what is the most important thing is that the Georgians lived there and they

had the trade-economic relations with the Genoese. “Relations” of the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians with the Genoese resulted in the attacks and freebootery, which together with other factors conditioned the closure of the Genoese Factory, or Trading Post.

By the end of the 15th century Georgia was split into several de-facto Kingdoms and Principalities. The Princedom of Abkhazia and also the town of Sokhumi formed so far a part of the Principality of Megrelia. From the 30-ies of the 16th century in one of the Turkish State documents the routes going to Georgia and within its regions are consistently and exactly indicated. The document mentioned first Eastern Georgia, “below which in the gorge is located the country of Kutaisi... down from it is located Guria bordering Trabzon, beyond it till Sukhumi is the Country of Dadiani. It (Sokhumi) was a port in ancient times. The slope of the mount Elborus descends to Sokhumi. Beyond it are spread out the states of Abkhazia. Behind the mountains are located the country of the Circassia” (**Turkish sources of the first quarter of the 16th century for the history of the Samtskhe-Saatabago. Turkish documents with the Georgia translation and comments, was published by Tsisana Abuladze. Tbilisi, 1983, p. 57. – In the Georgian Language.**)

Like all the other Principalities Abkhazia also struggled for obtaining more freedom. By the middle of the 16th century the possessors of Abkhazia with the help of the pagan and partly Mohammedan highlanders tightened up their grip on the situation. It was the period when the mass migration of the highlanders totally changed the ethnic picture of the population of the Abkhazian Principality. In the given conditions the Catholicos of Abkhazia (West Georgia) Evdemon the I (Chketidze) had no way out, but to leave the Principality of Abkhazia and moved his residence from Bichvinta to Gelati. Approximately 30 churches and monasteries ceased their functioning on the modern territories of the districts of Gudauta and Gagra.

The situation having place in the Principality of Abkhazia was conditioned by the unfavorable external (foreign) factors and weakening of Georgia. On the 29th of May of 1555 Iran and Turkey concluded a truce in town of Amasia, on the basis of which the parties redistributed Georgia among each other. East Georgia came under the influence of Iran; as for Turkey its influence spread to the Western part of the country. In 1578 and 1580 the Turkish army under the command of Mustafa Pasha invaded Georgia and took Sokhumi. As historian J. Boissardo wrote in his book “*Vitae et ikones Sultanorum, Prinzipum Persarum*” (Francfurti, 1581), “Mustafa Pasha appointed his Beglarbeks and Devterdars in Batumi and Sokhumi and order to curb the independence of the Georgian Iberians” (cited from the book: **Ilia Tabaghua. Georgia in the archives and library stacks of Europe. Book 1. XIII-XVI centuries. Tbilisi, 1984,**

pp. 113-114. – In the Georgian language). In 1578 Heidar Pasha of a Cirkassian origin was appointed a Beglarbeg of Sokhumi. In the same period the Ottomans started to construct a fortress in Sokhumi and used for it the ruins of the antique fortified station. In 1581 the Ottomans left Sokhumi, but the town was handed to the Abkhazian Princes – The Shervashidzes.

We have to mark, that the process of changing the historical Georgian name “Tskhumi” with a new Arabic and Turkish form “Sokhumi” was gradual and slow. Tskhumi with its new form Sokhumi for the first time is mentioned in the writings of Abul Feda at the beginning of the 14th century. From the 15th-16th centuries this new name of the city was firmly took the root. According to the specialists, the Turkish language never puts two consonants together at the beginning of the word. Besides, there is no “ts” affricate in the Turkish language. All this conditioned substitution of “Tskhumi” with its Turkianized form “Sokhumi/Sukhumi”. On the chart (map) of the Caucasus in the work Katib Cheleb “Jihan-Numa” it is marked as “Skhumi”. From the 19th century the changed name of the town established in the Georgian and Russian languages.

By the end of the 16th century the Princes of Megrelia the Dadianis managed to spread again their influence over Abkhazia. As for the Prince of Megrelia Levan the II Dadiani he was able to restore the absolute control over the Principality (1611-1657). According to the information given by the Patriarch of Jerusalem Dositheos (1641-1707) Levan baptized new population of the Principality – 40 000 men and appointed Bishop in Abkhazia. The Catholicoses of West Georgia returned to the residence of Bichvinta. According to Missionary Jovani Luca the cathedral church in Bichvinta in 1629 Georgian Priest held divine service in Georgian. The missionary marked, that Abkhazia had two Princes, there was no towns there and the population was scattered in mountainous villages and along the sea coast. The way of life was the same as in Circassia; The Abkhazians had no written rules and written language; Abkhazians were Christians, but did not perform the Christian rituals (**Ilia Tabaghua. Georgia in the archives and library stacks of Europe, V.3, 1986, pp. 155-171. – In the Georgian Language**). This was the situation in a region where from the end of the antique period Christianity was dominant and as it is shown in the second part of the given book, the high Christian culture with the Georgian written language and literature was characteristic for that region. The information provided by Jovani Luca is a proof, that as a result of demographic changes Abkhazia from the culturally and economically prosperous, advanced and superior Georgian and Christian region became the inferior in all aspects corner of the pagan highlanders.

A well-known Turk traveler of the middle of the 17th century, geographer and historian Evlia Cheleb (1611-1683) provides us with interesting

information about Georgia and Abkhazia. The above mentioned information is given in the second volume of his ten volume book "A Book of Travels". This book is translated into Georgia (**A book of Evlia Cheleb's travel, v.II. Translated and commented by G. Puturidze. Section I. Tbilisi 1971, pp. 95-109**). Evlia Chelebi travelled to the Black Sea coast in 1641. He visited the first Abkhazian (Abazian) tribe under the name of Chachi in modern Likhni – in the vicinity of the residence of the Shervashidzes (Chaches). The people of that tribe spoke with each other in Megrelian and practiced different religion. It is obvious, that in Evlia Chelebi's time the tribe of Chachi consisted of Megrelian-Avazian (Apsua) people speaking different language and practicing different religion. To the North-West from the Chachi tribe the Turk traveller visited the tribe of the Arlan. Still further to the North-West near modern Gagra he met the Chands. The tribe is considered by Evlia Cheleb to be the genuine Abazians or by the modern concept the Apsuas. The Turk traveler tells us about other Abazian tribes and marks, that the Abazians were not familiar with the Koran and had no religion. But they did not like Kapirs or Giaours (infidels) or non Moslem, as for the Moslems they can give their souls for them. In case they adopted Islam, they would make very faithful and believe in one God. Describing the port (harbor) of Anapa Evlia Chelebi remarks, that in case of renewal of the fortress and equipping it with the weapon and positioning the army it would be easier to subdued the Abazians and Circassians.

The reality being seen with the Turk travelers own eyes and the notes made by him is the valid original source and give the possibility of making important decisions. Evlia Chelebi's information is the obvious proof of the fact, that not a single Abazian tribe being named and described by him had nothing in common with the Abkhazia famous with its high level of Christian Culture (see the second part of the book) and the Throne of Catholicos in Bichvinta. This information unmasks the separatists falsifying history and naming the creators of the oldest Christian civilization not the Georgian, but the Abazians-Apsuas being described by Evlia Cheleb. Assertion of the separatists, that Christianity was destroyed by the Turks and not by the Abazian-Apsuas is groundless, as well as the fact, that the Turks forced the population to convert into Islam. Evlia Cheleb's impartial information denies this incorrect and improper ideas. According to the Turk traveler the population was not familiar with the Koran and was faithless. From Evlia Chelebi's information becomes clear, that Turkey was not able to control the Abazians and Circassians and consequently it could not forcedly spread Islam and destroy Christianity, as Separatists tell us.

It is necessary to denote, that Georgians, Georgian historical sources, unlike Evlia Cheleb call the newcomer Apsua-Abazians, Abkhazians after the place of their dwelling. Evlia Cheleb and all other Turks even today

call them their real name - Abazians. It goes without saying, that modern Abkhazians are aware of their North Caucasian origin, they know, that they are Apsua-Abazians (see the appendix: "Professor Andrei Kuraiev's opinion about the History of the Abkhazians"). The so-called law about the citizenship passed in 2005 by the de-facto government of Abkhazia is a valid proof of all the said above. In the fifth item is denoted, that the citizens of Abkhazia are first and foremost "the persons of Abkhazian (Abazian) origin."

Numerous Georgian and foreign sources provide us with the exact data about Abkhazia and Abkhazians, among them there are Russian sources as well. In the 16th-17th centuries the Georgian kingdom – principalities, tried to establish protective - friendly with the common faith Russia relations, but in vain. On the 12th of December of 1638 the King of Russia Mikheil Fiodorovich received in Moscow ambassador of Samegrelo. From November of 1639 till May of 1640 Russian Ambassadors visited Samegrelo. Their reports give the clear description of the ethno political situation having place on the modern territory of Abkhazia. They are confident that by the middle of the 17th century, the ethnic border of the Principality of Megrelia reached at least Kelasuri. It is clear from the fact, that the Russian ambassadors also visited the Dranda Cathedral church located not far from Sokhumi and that territory belonged at that moment to Samegrelo. The political power of the Dadiani family was spread on all the rest territories of Abkhazia. The information provided by Gabriel Gegenava that time Ambassador of Megrelia in Moscow is valid proof of it. Ambassador Gabriel Gegenava informed, that the throne of the Catholics of Samegrelo and all West – Georgia was in Bichvinta and he was appointed by the Prince of Megrelia Levan the II Dadiani. Nothing is said in the materials of Ambassadors about the Apsua-Abkhazians, in spite of the fact, that the Russian ambassadors travelled all over Samegrelo and consequently Gali, Ochamchire, Gulripsh districts, now included in Abkhazia. The Tsar of Russia Mikheil Fyodorovich in the letter of recognition given to Levan the II Dadiani calls the Principality of Samegrelo together with its integral part Abkhazia the country of Iveria. In the reciprocal missive letter (15th of May of 1640) Levan the II Dadiani informed the Tsar of Russia, that he was "In the Province of Megrelia of the Country of Iveria" (**Материалы посольств Гавриила Гегенава, Федота Елчина и Павла Захарьева. 1636-1640. Тбилиси, 2014, с. 190-218, 360-367, 392-394, 416-418, 441-447. – In the Russian, Georgian and English Languages**). Thus, the modern territory of Abkhazia first came to knowledge of official Russia, as the country of Iveria, or the part of Georgia.

By the beginning of the 70-ies of the 17th century to the South-East of Sokhumi had been functioning the fortification constructions being built by the Princes of Megrelia - and it was the so-called Kelasuri Wall - a new

border between Samegrelo and Abkhazia. The Kelasuri Wall is mentioned in the first part of the 17th century on the chart of Samegrelo being compiled by the scientists working in there - Archanjelo Lamberti and Christophoro Castelli. The charts had the following inscription: "The wall of 60 thousand steps in length for holding off an attack of the Abazians (**Essays from the history of Georgia. Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p.496, historical maps, №16**). The Kelasuri bordering Wall is indicated also on the charts (maps) of the Caucasus compiled by Katib Chelebi within the work "Jihan-Numa". (**Information provided by Katib Chelebi about Georgia and the Caucasus. Translated from the Turkish language, commented and provided with the index by Giuli Alasania, 1978, p. 58. – In the Georgian Language**).

In the 16th-17th centuries the Apsua-Abkhazians having settled in Abkhazia, were called Abkhazians by the Georgians after their dwelling place. At the command of the Princes Shervashidze they invaded Samegrelo trying to expand the boundaries of their principedom and get rid of the power of the Prince (Mtavari). At the same time, the possessors of Abkhazia, considered themselves a part of Georgia and implicitly obeyed the Georgian Kings. For Example, in 1661 when the King of East Georgia – Vakhtang the V (Shakhnava) temporarily subdued the West part of Georgia, the possessors of Abkhazia expressed complete obedience to him. By the order of the King the Sharvashidze family recognized the power of Mtavari of Samegrelo as well.

In the following years the situation in the country changed. It was impossible to reintegrate Georgia being distributed between Ottomans and Iran; internal wars being mainly inspired from outside intensified. The Georgian historiography admits, that for Samegrelo the embassy of Russians, aspiration towards Russia, periodical help rendered to the Kozaks struggling against the Ottomans came with price. In the efforts to isolate Samegrelo for Russia, in some historian's opinion the Ottomans supported the Caucasian highlanders in their fight with Samegrelo. In the matter of opposition with the Dadianis the Princes of Abkhazia – the Shervashidze relied on the highlanders. At the beginning of the 80-ies of the 17th century in the effort for the Principality throne won the Prince from Abkhazia Savarekh (Sorek) Shervashidze just with the help of the highlanders and took hold of the territory till the river Enguri and ruled them under the title of the Mtavari of Samegrelo. The lands strached till the river Enguri were soon announced the part of Abkhazia, as Savarekh failed to occupy the rest of Megrelia.

The newly-crowned possessors of the conquered territory first of all destroyed loyal to the Dadiani family Georgian nobility and representatives of the clergy; they cruelly dealt with the local population, made them slaves or refugees of sold to captivity. They settled Abazians, Kabardinians and

other highlanders on the occupied territories; the Georgian churches and monasteries functioning during the centuries ceased their existence or were destroyed. Among them we can name the following religious and cultural centres having the common Georgian significance; they are: The throne of the Bichvinta Catholicos, Episcopal cathedra of Dranda and Mokvi, churches of Likhni, Anukhvi, Anakopia, Tsebelda, Kiachi, Chala (Chlou), Tiliti and others being adorned with the Georgian inscriptions. The farms belonging to the eparchy of the Catholicos of Bichvinta were also destroyed. Only on the territory of the rivers Enguri and Ghalidzga, which was returned to the Dadianis, was managed to maintain functioning cathedrals of Bedia and Ilori.

The fact of settling of the Caucasian highlanders, mainly Apsua-Abazians on the modern territory of Abkhazia not being recognized by the separatist historiography is widely known. It is recorded in the works of the 18th-19th century and later period Georgian, Russian and European authors, such as: Vakhushti Bagrationi, D. Bakradze, A. Khakahnashvili and others, V.N. Tatishchev, A.N. Diachkov-Tarasov and others, P.S. Palas, I.Klaprot, Fr. Dubua de Monperet. E. Spencer and others.

In the first place, it must be said, that there are different ideas about the origin of the modern Abkhazians or the Apsua-Abazians. From this aspect the opinion of the famous Turk historian, geographer and writer Kiatib Cheleb are worth attention. He considered the Abazians the people of the Jewish origin and the population of Astrakhan their direct ancestors (**Information provided by Kiatib Cheleb about Georgia and the Caucasus. Translated from the Turkish language, provided with the introduction, comments and index by Giuli Alasania. Tbilisi, 1973, pp. 132, 133. – In the Georgian Language**). In Jews the Turkish historian implied the Judaist Khazars and not the Jews. Judaism was spread among the Astrakhanian Khazars. Kiatib Chelebi's opinion is in full coincidence with the information of the first century author Pliny the Elder about the fact of dwelling of the tribe of Abzoa in the Privolzhie (where town of Astrakhan is situated) being located to the North of the Caspian Sea. According to the 16th century written and cartographic sources, the ancestors of the Apsua-Abazians are fixed near the river Kuban. The famous German diplomat - Sigismund Gerbershtein (1486 – 1566), repeatedly visiting Russia with the special mission confirmed this fact in his book "Notes about Moscovia". According to his data along the river Kuban lived the Aphgasi people, to the South of Kuban was situated Megrelia. (**С. Герберштейн. Записки о Московии. Москва, 1988, с. 181**). Cartographer Jacopo Gastaldi in 1561 marks Abcvas regi with the main town Acua in the middle part along the river Kuban on the map chart compiled by him (**Essays from the History of Georgia. Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p. 496, Maps, №14**). The Apsua-Abkhazians, who later settled in Abkhazia

brought together with them the name of their main town (Acua) and gave it to the main town of Abkhazia – Tskhum/Sokhum.

About the fact of settling on the modern territory of Abkhazia the highlanders as it has been said above wrote a number of authors. The famous Russian historian V.N. Tatishchev (1686-1750), was the contemporary of the phenomenon of settling of the highlanders and whose works are given the significance of a source by the Russian historiography. He justly wrote, that Abkhazia (Avkhet) was “the Northern part of Samegrelo called by the Turks and Kabardinians Avkhazos, which was earlier called by the ancestors of the Russians - Obezians, but now it is populated mainly with the Kubanians” (В. Н. Татищев. *История Российская, т. I. Москва-Ленинград, 1962, с.171*). According to V.N. Tatishchev’s explanation, the Obezians are the ancient residents of North Samegrelo (Abkhazia), or the same Georgians.”Iverian is the same Obezian”. – reads the Russian chronicle (*Полное собрание русских летописей, т.VI. С.-Петербург, 1853, с. 125, 152; Г. Пайчадзе. Название Грузии в русских письменных исторических источниках. Тбилиси, 1989, с. 13-21, 51-56*). Kubanians having settled in Abkhazia in the late medieval centuries according to the Russian chronicles are the representatives of the Cirkassian-Adighean tribes. As we have seen, in the middle of the 16th century they in fact lived in Kuban (S. Gerbershtein, Jacopo Gastaldi).

One more famous Russian historian A.N. Diachkov-Tarasov wrote in 1905, that “Abkhazians did not always live there; their customs and rituals and numerous historical data confirm, that they came from the North and drove back the Georgian tribes, till they stopped at the river Enguri.” A.N. Diachkov-Tarasov wrote about the fact of coming of the Apsua-Abkhazians from the North also in 1903 (and in 1909-1910), and remarked, that this process “had place not long ago, approximately in the 16th-17th centuries” (А.Н Дьячков-Тарасов. *Гагры и его окрестности. Тифлис, 1903, с. 36-37; А. Н. Дьячков-Тарасов. Бзыбская Абхазия. – В книге: Известия Кавказского Отделения Русского Географического Общества (ИКОРГО), т.XVII. Тифлис, 1905, с. 85; А. Н. Дьячков-Тарасов. Абхазия и Сухум в XIX – ИКОРГО, т. XX. Тифлис, 1909-1910, с. 152, 210*). This just opinion is completely shared by the modern Russian scientist Andria Kuraev (see the appendix).

Pietro-Simeon Palas (1741-1811), being a member of the Academy of Sciences of Petersbourgh, travelled in the Caucasus in 1793 - 1794 and in 1811 published in Paris a book about that travel. The Abkhazians are there mentioned under the name of “Absne”. Pietro-Simeon Palas wrote about them, that :” These people probably come from the North-West part of the Caucasus” (Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии. Тбилиси, 1997, с. 285*).

German scientist and traveler Hainrih Julius Klaproth knew Abkhazia and Abkhazians quite well (1783-1835). After he travelled in the Caucasus and Georgia in the years of 1807-1808, he published several works in the German and French languages. In 1812 he wrote about the Abkhazians (Absne) basing on the opinion dominant among the scientists, that “they are the aborigines of the North-West Caucasus and later they spread in the other districts” (**Klaproth Y. Reise in den Kaukasus und nach Georgienunternommen in den Jahren 1807 und 1808. Hale und Berlin, 1812, p. 447**). The same opinion is expressed in his book published in Paris in 1823 (**Voyage ou Mont du Kaukaset en Georgie par M. Jules Klaproth, I. Paris, 1823, p. 201**). In the work being published in 1827 Hainrih Julius Klaproth emphasizes, that Apsua-Abazians “for a long time lived in the North-West part of the Caucasus” (**Tableau historique, géographique, ethnographiques entre la Russe et la Perse. Par M. Klaproth. Paris, 1827, p. 83**).

The French origin Swiss scientist Academician Frederic Dubua de Monperet came to the same conclusion. During his travel to the Caucasus he visited Abkhazia (1833). He published his works in Paris in 1839 in which he wrote the history of developing of the Dadiani possessions; “along the Sea coast, approximately till Jiketi; how it (Samegrelo) was tortured by the permanent invasions and along the beautiful seacoast operated the bloody hand of the Cirkassians and Turks. The Princes Dadiani being forced to shift their borders to Anakopia two centuries ago, now withdraw towards the river Ghalidzga and Abkhazia this troubled country, became as wild as the woods of America: everything has been turned into ruins, all the churches are destroyed, the trails of civilization are completely erased” (**Фредерик Дюбуа де Монпере. Путешествие вокруг Кавказа, т. I. Перевод с французского Н. А. Пуциной. Сухуми, 1937, с. 149**). The conclusion of Federic Dubua de Monperet confirms the fact of coming of the Apsua to North-West Georgia in the late medieval centuries. As we can see in spite of the separatists’ opinion, Apsua-Abkhazian are the destroyers of the Christian civilization being developed on the modern territory of Abkhazia, and not its creators or co creators. The fact of complete absence of the Christian terminology in their language (such as Christ, Christian, church, priest, cross, Christmas, Easter, christening etc). is a valid proof that they cannot be the creators of this Christian civilization. All the Christian terms existing in the Abkhazian language are borrowed from the Georgian language (**Essays from the History of Georgia. Abkazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p. 216-251**).

The English Edmund Spencer called Abkhazians the bitter enemies of Russia and as he denoted in 1851: „They were the off-springs of partly the Crimean (Kabardinian – the author) and partly Kuban Khans and Sultans, who together with their tribes settled on that lands” (**Information by K.Koch**

and E. Spencer about Georgia and the Caucasus. Translated from the German language and commented by L.Mamatsashvili. Tbilisi, 1981, p. 135. – In the Georgian Language).

Thus, in the late medieval centuries the well-known fact of settling of the Caucasian highlanders on the modern territory of Abkhazia being forgotten out of the political motivation from the 50-ies of the 20th century by a part of the Soviet historians is obvious and undeniable.

1.2. New Abkhazia and Abkhazians

From the 16th-17th centuries on the entire territory of modern Abkhazia had place the painful process of formation of the Abkhazian (Apsua) nation by merging of the local Christian Georgians and dominant new-comer partly moslem and partly pagan highlanders. It was largely completed in the 19th century. Merging of different ethnic groups and religions exerted a particular impact on the religious status of people (it was a mixture of Christianity, Islam and Paganism) customs and traditions, which are mostly common among the Georgians. Despite, the radical demographic changes, the Georgian nobles from the Shervashidze family continued to possess and rule Abkhazia. They never dissociated themselves from the Georgian world and never denied the Georgian language, which remained the only language of clerical correspondence and divine service. For their part, the Kings of Imereti always considered Abkhazia to be their province, though their power over the Shervashidze's was nominal. According to the Royal map of Imereti (was given to Empress Anna Ioanovna) being compiled in Kutaisi and sent to Petersburg by King Alexandre the V in 1738, Abkhazia entered into the composition of Imereti Kingdom. The king of Imereti Solomon the I (1752-1784) bore a title of the King of Abkhazians and Imeretians. In one of the letters dated by the 26th of April of 1776 he calls himself "Possessor of Abkhazians, Imeretians, Gurians and all the lower Iveria" (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 649**). As we have seen above, "Lower Iveria" meant West Georgia and naturally a town of Tskumi and All Abkhazia.

Princes of Samegrelo (Odishi), who lost the real control over Abkhazia, never refuse to return their ancestral lands and they were called the "possessors of Odishi-Lechkhumi-Svanians and Abkhazians". For example, Katsia the II Dadiani (1758-1788), Grigol Dadiani (1788-1804) and others were the bearers of the above mentioned title (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 287, 650**). From the beginning of the 18th century the territory situated between the rivers Enguri

and Ghalidzga was returned to Samegrelo and soon was named Samurzakhano after one of his possessors Murzakhan Shervashidze.

From the end of the 17th century the influence of Turkey over Abkhazia was very strong, not to say anything about its positions in all West Georgia. Those positions wavered a bit in 1696 due to loss of the Azov fortress and entrance of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea. This new condition stimulated the rise of the liberating movement in West Georgia at the beginning of the 18th century. The movement aimed liberating from the Turkish influence. Princes of Samegrelo and Abkhazia were especially active. With the consolidated forces they attacked the Ottomans being fortified in the Rukhk and Anaklia fortresses. Turkey decided to take decisive steps. Their plan and executive operations failed due to the change of the Government in Istanbul followed after the 1703 skirmish. The Abkhazian and Megrelian Mtavars continued to attack the Turk fortress guardians.

At the beginning of the 20-ies of the 18th century in Iran fell the Dynasty of Safavids (1722) and Russia seized the moment and activated its forces in the direction of the Caspian Sea. All this alarmed Turkey and it took advantage of the existing situation and occupied some of the provinces of Iran. In Turkey managed to stifle of offensive of Russia and took Tbilisi in June of the same year in 1723. A special attention was given to fortification of the Black Sea fortresses. Construction of new fortresses was started in Poti and Sokhumi. Turks were stationed in Anakopia and Bichvinta. The process of construction in Sokhumi was carried out in conditions of permanent onsets of Abkhazians.

In spring of 1730 Turkey decided to subdue the entire Black Sea region from Batumi till Azov. The planned military operation was commanded by the Pasha of Poti. The operation failed due to the rebellion of the Abkhazians. The rebelled unexpectedly attacked the Turks and killed the major part of them, the rest managed to flee, but Turkey restored its influence over Abkhazia and in the middle of the 30-ies fortified the Sokhumi fortress.

Abkhazia of that period was the place of roistering of various slave merchants and robbers. The princes were not able to control the situation. At the end of the 30-ies of the 18th century the ruler of Abkhazia Manuchar Shervashidze was removed from power and together with his two brothers - Zurab and Shirvan were sent to Turkey. His place was occupied by the Jikian noble Aslan bei Gech. Shervashidze brothers found it easy to talk with the Turkish side and adopted Islam. In 1744 Zurab Shervashidze was appointed the Beg of Sokhumi. In Sokhumi a strong Turkish garrison was stationed.

In 1768-1774 Russia and Turkey were at war with each other. In 1769 Russian Expeditionary force came to Georgia. It aimed to drive out the Turks from the Black Sea coast, but failed. The Beg of Sokhumi Zurab Shervashidze

supported Turks from the very start, but then he betrayed them and even temporarily managed to occupy the Sokhumi fortress. The Kuchuk-Kainarj truce made between Russia and Turkey on the 21st of July of 1774 gave an advantage to Russia. Besides the right of annexation of particular territories, its trading fleet obtained the right of free navigation and crossing the straits on the Black Sea. According to the item 23 of the treaty, the Georgian kingdom of Imereti was exempted from the obligation to pay taxes to Turkey. In spite of this fact, Turkey made an effort and to maintain and strengthen its position. From 1780-ies its main stronghold became a new ruler of Abkhazia – Kelesh Bei.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries the condition of the Georgian political units dramatically changed and it was a result of signing of the “Protective” Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 between Russia and Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti (East Georgia), which in fact slightly limited the sovereignty of Georgia, but the country stayed independent and maintained the status of the subject of international law. Even the more, according to the fourth secret item of the Treaty of Georgievsk Russia undertook the commitment to support Georgia in its struggle to return its historical territories and help to make Georgian integral. Consequently, the Treaty of the year of 1783 directly concerned Abkhazia, which was recognized in Russia as a part of the Megrelian Principality and accordingly of all Georgia. According to the “Historical map of Russian Empire” of the year of 1793 Georgia is considered a newly obtained territory and its North-West border reached the Azov Sea (**Essays from the History of Georgia. Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 2011, p. 496, – Historical Maps № 19**). West Georgian provinces such as Imereti and Samegrelo are also marked on the map. Abkhazia which is not pinpointed on the map was meant within the composition of Samegrelo. The fourth secret article of the Treaty of Georgievsk considered restoring of the Kingdom of Georgia within the borders being indicated on the “historical map of the Russian Empire.” But, Russia disappointed Georgia, which put itself in the hands of Russia and trusted it, but Russia killed its hopes. Russia not only failed to fulfill its promises to “Protect” and did not meet the obligations to restore the Unified Kingdom, but in 1801 annihilated the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti and established direct Russian control. Russia refused to initiate the immediate Provincial Gendarme Department and in 1802 founded the “Governance of Georgia”. This organ was ruled by the Commanders of the Russian army being stationed in the Caucasus and they were called the Vicegerents of Georgia. This form of Governance (“Preserving of Georgia”) gave Russia the legal right to liberate the Georgia regions being occupied and annexed by Turkey, restore unified Georgia, but not as an independent State as it was maintained in the Treaty of the year of 1783, but as Russia’s province.

As soon as Russia defied the Treaty of the year of 1783 and annexed East Georgia, it immediately activated its operations in Western Georgia to subdue it and Abkhazia. In December of 1803 Grigol Dadiani signed the “Petition” to be accepted under the protection of Russia with the following titular: “Possessor of Odishi, Lechkhumi, Svaneti, Abkhazia and from the time immemorial the Lands of my Ancestors”. He requested to be accepted under the protection with all his possessions as it has been mentioned above and those lands being taken away from him for various reasons (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 287**). In the lands being the possessions of his ancestors and separated from Samegrelo, besides Abkhazia were meant Jiqeti and other historical Georgian lands reaching the Azov Sea (see the above mentioned map of Russia of the year of 1793). Without any doubt the “Petition” of Grigol Dadiani to be accepted under the protection of Russia with the lands being deprived from him, was written in Petersburg or on suggestion of that latter and taking into account the fourth secret article of the Treaty of the year of 1783. This particular “Petition” and the Treaty made with the King of Imereti, was signed by the Emperor of Russia Alexander the I on the 4th of July of 1804. On the basis of that act Russia obtained the “legal” right of struggling for annexation of the Eastern Black Sea coast.

The ruler of Abkhazia watched the processes having place in West Georgia very attentively and carefully. In 1803 Kelesh-Bei started to think about changing of his political orientation. He secretly expressed the desire of becoming a Russian subject and through the Prince (Mtavari) of Megrelia tried to establish contacts with the Vicegerent of Georgia – P. Tsitsianov. On the 27th of October of 1803 that latter, sent a report to the State Chancellor count A. Vorontsov: “I consider it my duty to inform you about Kelesh-Bei and the history of his possession. In the 15th century and exactly till the year of 1414 A.D., when Iveria was integral, He - Kelesh-Bei was known under the name of Shervashidze and his possession represented one of the provinces of Iveria” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 2. Тифлис, 1868, с. 463**). Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Russia in 1806 - A. Budberg also appealed to history, when he was informing a new Vicegerent of Georgia - General I. Gudovich about the will of the Emperor to annex Abkhazia. In his letter he expressed a desired of occupying Gonio, Batumi, Poti, Anaklia, Isgauri (near Tamish), Sokhumi and Anapa fortresses. “These fortresses - Wrote A. Budberg on the 25th of September of 1806 – are the possessions of Georgia from the ancient times and it our desire to annex all those place to Russia is natural” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 3. Тифлис, 1869, с. 525-526**). As it has been said above, all this gave Russia a “legal” right of annexing Abkhazia and the lands lying to its North-West.

The modern territory of Abkhazia, like all its other provinces by piecemeal entered into the "Protection of Russia." On the 9th of July of 1805, in the village Bandza (Martvili district) the possessors of Samurzakhano signed the oath on the loyalty of the Sovereign of Russia and the Mtavari of Megrelia. In the oath Samurzakhano is recognized to be the historic territory of Samegrelo. The oath reads: "We are the vassals of the most Merciful Sovereign, as well as of the sole ruler of Samegrelo Levan Dadiani, like our country always was subdued with the sole rulers of Samegrelo the Dadiani family" (**АКТЫ, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 2, с. 527**).

In May of 1806 Kelesh-Bei appealed to the Georgian Administration of Russia on accepting Abkhazia under protection and the defence from the probable aggression of Turkey. The problem of a new orientation was debated at the Likhni Public Meeting of Abkhazians and was supported by that latter. Because of the international circumstances, maintaining the Turkish factor in the first place, Russia took his time in the matter of accepting Abkhazia under its protection." The disloyalty of the ruler of Abkhazia did not go unnoticed by Turkey. Subduing of the unruly vassal by means of weapon was considered by Turkey inexpedient and tried to solve the problem by means of political intrigues.

Struggle for Abkhazia took place under the conditions of the Russia-Turkey war of 1806-1812. The military actions swept over the Denube Basin and South Caucasus (Trans Caucasus). In August of 1807 the parties made a temporary truce, which lasted till the year of 1809. This was the period, when a lot of significant events occurred concerning Abkhazia. On the 2nd of May of 1808 Kelesh Bei was murdered by his eldest son Aslan Bei, who seized the throne and acknowledged the Sovereignty of Turkey. The baptized son of Kelesh-Bei - Safar-bei (the Christian name Giorgi) also declared himself Mtavari of Abkhazia, who was the son-in-law of the Mtavari of Samegrelo Grigol Dadiani (Dadiani's sister's spouse). Giorgi Shervashidze declared war against Aslan-Bei and asked for help the Georgian administration of Russia and reached out to the temporary ruler of Samegrelo - Nino Dadiani (Grigol's spouse). That latter made a new Mtavari of Abkhazia to make the oath of loyalty to the Emperor of Russia. In his address to Nino Dadiani and the young heir of the Principality throne of Levan the V Dadiani (1804-1840) Giorgi Shervashidze together with his loyal subjects made commitments to obey the orders of the Vicegerent of Georgia. The Prince of Abkhazia knew, that after entering under the protection of Russia his principedom would become once more the integral part of Georgia, though Georgia for that period was governed not by the Georgian Kings, but by the Russian Generals. As you have made me to make

commitments to be loyal to the Emperor and petitioned the Emperor to accept Abkhazia under the protection of Russia – read Giorgi Shervashidze's letter - It now depends on You, how you care about me, or how His Highness the Emperor will open His door for us” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 3, 205**).

The fate of Abkhazia mostly depended on Samegrelo, the rulers of which always reminded the Russian Authorities, that Abkhazia historically was the part of their possessions. On the 8th of June of the year of 1808 Nino Dadiani in her letter to the Emperor asking to take Abkhazia under the protection of Russia unambiguously pointed out: “The course of time and the disagreement resulted in loss of our Princedom – Abkhazia, which was the ancestral throne of Nikopsi, Dadiani Levan and his ancestors; Dadiani has passed (1758-1788 – the author), Father of the newly diseased Grigol Dadiani, imposed taxes and now is the member of Samegrelo” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 3, с. 201**). In Nino's opinion it was a good prerequisite and a right time for accepting Abkhazia under the protection of Russia. Thus, Abkhazia had to enter under the protection of Russia as “the Province of Iveria” and “the Member of Samegrelo”.

At this stage Russia, only formally respected the temporary terms of the Truce and was abstaining from the annexation of Abkhazia. Despite this, at the beginning of August of 1808 it made an attempt of taking Sokhumi with the help of Giorgi Shervashidze's loyal Abkhazian battalions and unified forces of Samegrelo's people's army. These forces were supported by the Russian regular army units. The united forces reached Sokhumi, but failed to take it.

After this fact, it was decided to speed up solution of an Abkhazian problem. On the 12th of August of 1808 Giorgi Shervashidze and his loyal nobility signed the “Items of Petition” compiled in the Georgian language on the accepting of Abkhazia under the protection of Russia. The Prince of Abkhazia emphasized once more that he “will be obedient to Georgia's Vicegerent together with his loyal people.” Giorgi Shervashidze's note was enclosed to the “Articles of Petition” and it said, that the letters being sent earlier and that particular petition was written by the Dean Ioane Ioseliani – the Arch-Priest of the Dadiani Princely court church, who with all his heart recommended him to become a subject of the Imperial throne” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 3, с. 209**).

Considering the international condition Russia did not hurry as always to make a final decision. In March of 1809 the temporary truce was broken and the Russian – Turkey military operations were renewed. On the 15th of June of the same year Russia managed to take first Anapa and Poti on the 15th of November. All this accelerated the process of Abkhazia. On the 17th of February

of the year of 1810 Emperor Alexander the I approved the “Items of Petition”. On the 10th of July of the same year the Russians took Sokhumi fortress.

The above mentioned material obviously show, that Abkhazia was accepted under the protection of Russia as a subject, as a historical province of Georgia, as a part of Samegrelo. The temporary ruler of Megrelia – the daughter of the last kings of Georgia Giorgi the XII - Nino Dadiani played the decisive role in it. She was driven by the desire of returning Abkhazia into the composition of Megrelia with the help of Russia. The Vicegerent of Georgia A.N. Tormasov wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Count N.P. Rumiantsev on the 11th of January of the year of 1810, that they had “to be grateful to Nino in the matter of in talking over Safar-Bei to enter under the permanent protection of Russia with all his lands and subjects” (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 4. Тифлис, 1870, с. 393**).

The analyses of the above mentioned materials put in doubt the loud claims of the Fathers’ of modern Russia, who approve their unjust decision about recognition the “independence” of Abkhazia with the false history of entering of Abkhazia under the protection of Russia independently from Georgia. In reality, under the protection of Russia Abkhazia was accepted as a historical province of Georgia.

The war between Russia and Turkey was under way. It ended with the Bucharest Truce on the 28th of May of 1812. The 6th item of the Treaty concerned the Caucasus. Russia conceded Poti and Anapa, but a great part of Western Georgia – Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo and Abkhazia remained under its “Protection.”

The region of Tsebeli (Tsebelda) did not obey the Mtavari of Abkhazia Giorgi Shervashidze. On behalf of that region the oath of loyalty of the Mtavari of Samegrelo and the Emperor of Russia being compiled in the Georgian language was signed by the possessors of Tsebeli – the Marshania family. On invitation of Levan the V Dadiani they arrived in Okumi on the 29th of November of 1815. The signed document said: “We having signed below the lords of Tsebeli community counts Marshanias are handing your Serenity Dadiani Levan, that we were loyal and obeyed Your ancestors, but due to riots were separated from each other and now You called us and gifted us again with your love and mercy and we swear on the Koran to be loyal to the Emperor of Russia Alexandre Pavlovich and the rulers of this area appointed by him. We also promise to obey your orders and fight against the enemies of Russia and Your Serenity (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 5. Тифлис, 1873, с. 507-508**). We’d like to emphasize the fact that the possessors of Tsebeli being converted to Islam swore on the Koran before the Georgian Orthodox clergy – the Metropolitan of Tsaishi – Grigol

(Chikovani), Archmandrit Giorgi (Kukhalashvili) and Dean Ioane Ioseliani. The given document being sealed by the Metropolitan Grigol proves the fact, that the community of Tsebeli by the admission of the possessors of Tsebeli (and according to other numerous sources) till the 17th century was within the composition of Samegrelo; That is the reason of making an oath of loyalty to Russia and Levan the V Dadiani by the possessors of Tsebeli.

But, even after signing of the “Articles of Petition” and an “Oath” Abkhazian people never ceased resistance to the end of the 70-ies of the 19th century. That resistance repeatedly grew into the unequal sanguinary battle against Russia. Turkey also had no desire of easily ceding Abkhazia and all Western Georgia and fulfill the Bucharest Truce conditions. In 1813 with the support of Turkey and most of the population, Aslan Bei made an effort to return to Abkhazia, but in vain.

In 1817 Outbreak of the Russian-Caucasian war increased the strategic significance of the territory of Abkhazia even more. Russia at that time controlled only Sokhumi with its 500 men garrison, but it wanted to control Abkhazia and all North-East Black Sea coasts, from where the Caucasian highlanders struggling for liberty connected the outer world and secure assistance. In this just struggle their main allies were England and Turkey. Considering all the mentioned above, Russia supported approved by it and not popular among his own people – The Prince of Abkhazia – Giorgi Shervashidze. For Example, in 1818 Russia managed to regulate the rebelled Abkhazian people and what is the main thing without the bloodshed. In 1821 and 1824 sanguinary battles took place in Abkhazia. The rebelled Abkhazians were commanded by Aslan Bei. It acquired Russia a great effort to cruelly crush a rebellion using the military force.

It must be said, that in spite of this fact, the Princes of Abkhazia – neither Giorgi Shervashidze (died in 1821), nor his heir Dimitri (died in 1822) and nor a very young Mikheil being approved by the Emperor Alexander the I on the 14th of February of 1823 were not able to control the situation in their own lands. Russia understood, that for establishing peace and stable situation in Abkhazia, besides, the executor operations it was necessary to assume other measures and it was in the first place having it out (clarifying the situation) with Turkey, as by all accounts it supported the rebels. Russia took advantage of the hard situation Turkey was in after the janissary rebellion and persuaded Istanbul to the renewal of the peaceful negotiations. The negotiations resulted in signing of the Akerman Convention on the 1st of July of 1826. In regard to Georgia it acknowledged the terms of the above mentioned Bucharest truce. Turkey considered the Ackerman Convention a temporary concession, though his signature played a particular part in giving the situation a positive

for Russia turn. On the 20th of December of 1827 Sultan Mehmed the II annihilated the Ackerman Convention. It turned up one of the causes for launching the Russian-Turkey war of the years of 1828-1829. After its end on the 2nd of September of 1829 Andrianopolis Truce was signed. Turkey recognized passage of the Georgian regions and towns – Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo, Abkhazia, Poti, Akhaltsikhe and Akhalqalaqi to the hands of Russia.

At the end of the 20-ies of the 19th century, the military and diplomatic success being reached by Russia weakened in some degree the resistance movement on Abkhazia. The majority of the leaders of the rebels temporarily refused to fight and took an oath on Russia's loyalty. Consequently, the power of the Prince of Abkhazia Mikheil Shervashidze significantly increased. It was the period, when Russia was switching to the new tactics in the struggle against the Caucasian highlanders. A new tactic gave preference to conduct of the separate executive operations. For leading such operations on along the Black Sea coast from Anapa to Poti fortified military stations were being formed. At the beginning of the 30-ies the similar stations were formed on the territory of Abkhazia and namely in Gagra, Bichvinta and Bombora.

For the purposes of using a new tactic in the struggle against the Caucasian highlanders, or conducting the punitive operations Russia actively exploited the Prince of Abkhazia and the Abkhazian Militia subduing to that latter. For Example, in May of 1837 and July of 1840 together with the Russians it took an active part in calming down the Tsebeli population (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 8. Тифлис, 1881, с. 457-463; ibid, т. 9. Тифлис, 1884, с. 492-493**). In October of 1841 Mikheil Shervashidze with his 1500 men Militia together with the Russian army took part in the process of breaking –up of the Shapsugh and Natukhaels, burning their homes and estates and banishing them from their places of dwelling. For such “heroic” deeds Mikheil Sharvashidze was earned the approval of the Russian military authorities (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 9, с. 513-519**). As we will see further the Abkhazian and Georgian Militia repeatedly took part in the struggle against the highlanders. From the military aspect Militia was not a serious power, but the even symbolic participation of the like formations in the struggle against the countrymen was given a strong political emphasis by the Russian. It was the way of Russia to organize splitting of the Caucasian peoples and set them against each other. It must be said, that the Caucasians reap the fruits of the similar treacherous policy till our present days.

The problem of Abkhazia became currently central during the period of the Eastern war (1853-1856), which is also known under the name of the Crimean war. In March and April of 1854 the military units of Russia led by

Mikheil Sharvhasidze left Abkhazia. In March of 1855 Turkey military unit entered into Sokhumi. Majority of the population of Abkhazia took a side with Turkey. As we know, Russia was defeated in the Crimea and Balkans, but succeeded in the Caucasus. Entering of the 45 000 men military landing troops of Turkey led by Omer Pasha in September of 1855 failed to radically change the situation on the front. Its aim was to give a hand to the defenders of Kars passing through Western Georgia on the way to that latter. In November of 1855 the Russian managed to take Kars, after which military campaign of Omer Pasha to Western Georgia lost its point. In February of 1856 The Turks left Abkhazia and all Western Georgia. In March of the same year, on the basis of the Paris Truce agreement Russia put a hold on the Caucasus, but Karsi and Baiazet Pachaliks were returned to Turkey. Russia was banned from positioning his fleet in the Black Sea and fortifying of the Black Sea ports.

After the Oriental War Russia had to conquer Abkhazia once more and station the military units along the Sea coast. The position of the Commander of the Abkhazian army was instated and this simultaneously meant the strengthening of the control over the Abkhazian Princedom. The same was aimed subduing of Abkhazia to the General-Governor of Kutaisi. Besides, in the upper echelons the issued of annihilation of Princedom of Abkhazia and establishing of the Russian governance was seriously being examined. Making of a decision was temporarily postponed. The task of taking the North Caucasus was pending before Russia. For solution of this arduous task Russia badly needed loyalty of the Abkhazians and Mikheil Shervashidze's help.

At the final stage of the Russia-Caucasian war the Prince of Abkhazia and loyal to him Militia fought against the Caucasians together with Russia. For example, in August of 1860 3000 men Militia of Abkhazia actively participated in the military campaign against Pskhu (**Акты, Собранные Кавказской Археографической Комиссией, т. 12. Тифлис, 1904, с. 859-860**). In May of 1864 the "heroism" of the Abkhazian Militia of Tsebelda forced the population of the Aibga Community to leave their own houses and migrate to Turkey. In the parade celebrating the end of the Russian-Caucasian war being held on the 21st of May in Kbaada together with the Russians unfortunately participated Militias of Georgia and Abkhazia (**Покорение Западного Кавказа и окончание Кавказской войны. Исторический очерк. Составил С. Есадзе. Тифлис, 1914, с. 167-174**).

Two months earlier before the end of the Caucasian war on the 27th of March of the year of 1864 the Vicegerent of the Caucasus Mikheil Romanov (Brother of the Emperor Alexander the II), raised an issue of the necessity of annihilating of the Princedom of Abkhazia before the military minister of Russia. At the suggestion of that latter the annihilation of the Princedom

of Abkhazia was to be followed by forming of the Sokhumi military district under the command of the General-Governor of Kutaisi and establishing of the Russian Kazak settlements all along the Black Sea coast till the estuary of the river Enguri (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии. Тбилиси, с. 329-333**). In April of 1864 the Emperor approved the suggestion of the Vicegerent and consequently the Manifest dated with the 17th of February of the year of 1810 on the acceptance of Abkhazia under the protection of Russia lost its legal force.

After the end of the Russian-Caucasus war (May 21 of 1864) the function of the Principality of Abkhazia was exhausted and the decision on annihilation of that latter was immediately carried into effect. In June of 1864 the Mtavari (Prince) of Abkhazia Mikheil Shervashidze was removed from the post and instituted Russian governance in the region. A military department of Sokhumi was formed and from the year of 1883 it was called the Sokhumi District and was included into the Governorate of Kutaisi. From the year of 1903 the District directly reported to the chancellery of the Vicegerent, though, administrative (Police, Mobilization) and judicial affairs were dependent on the General-Governor of Kutaisi. In 1904 Gagra was separated from the Sokhumi District and annexed to the Black Sea Governorate.

Annihilation of the Princedom (Principality) of Abkhazia and institution of the Russian governance incurred the mass displeasure of the population, being the main reasons for the rebellion of 1866. The authorities cruelly crushed the rebellion and in 1867 more than 20 000 Abkhazians were forcedly resettled to Turkey (Muhajirun). Another wave of the Muhajirun is associated with the Russia – Turkey war of the years of 1877-1878. The majority of the Abkhazians supported Turkey and almost 32 000 Abkhazians being blamed in treason were forced to leave their family hearths and migrate to Turkey. It was the greatest national tragedy.

If it were not the successful missionary activities of the Georgian clergy under the guidance of the Bishops – Alexandre (Okropiridze) and Gabriel (Kikodze) the consequences of the Muhajirun would be much worse. They now are canonized as saints by the Georgian Orthodox church. More than 25 years the Bishops - Alexandre and Gabriel headed the Eparchy of Abkhazia, belonging within the Exarchate of Georgia. They Christened tens of thousands Abkhazians. All the Georgian society supported the Georgian clergy in those activities. That action saved the Abkhazian people from total banishment to Turkey from the North-West Caucasus and their complete physical extermination like the Ubikhs and other highlanders.

With the purpose of oppression of the “unreliable” Abkhazians, Russia took other strict measures. By the prorogation of the Emperor Alexander the

II being made on the 31st of May of 1880, all Abkhazians were proclaimed “the guilty nation”. All this was followed by the discrimination of the Abkhazian people and limitation of the population in their social and political rights.

Russia toughened the Imperial and Colonial policy in Georgia after the successful end of the war in the Caucasus and extermination of the nations and banishment of the local residents from the mother-land, pacifying and weakening of the Abkhazians. In regard to Abkhazia it took form of the accelerated colonization of the region by the Russians, Armenians, Greeks and other loyal to the Empire people. It was the period when the off-springs of the Georgians being banished from the end of the 17th century from their lands were returning to the inner regions of Abkhazia. Russianization of the Schools and Church, oppression of the Georgian population, restriction of the usage of the Georgian language in all the spheres of the State and social life, was also the reflection of the toughening of the imperial and colonial policy, as well as in artificial provoking of the opposition of the Georgians and Abkhazians.

With the Abkhazians the Government chose the policy of the stick and carrot policy. After the Muhajirun Abkhazia and Abkhazians were weakened so much, that it did not have the real political power and was no longer a threat for the Empire (especially after taking by that latter of the North Caucasus). Under the given circumstances the Russian Government tried to direct the dissatisfaction of the Abkhazians towards the vanguard of the democratic and national-liberating movement in the region – the Georgians. The imperial policy of the “divide and empire” gave its fruit during the period of the democratic revolution of Russia of the years of 1905 – 1907. Unexpectedly, Abkhazians supported not the revolution, but the autocracy. We have to seek for the reason of this phenomenon in the social system of the Abkhazian society, in nonexistence of social oppression and class contradictions, in purposeful anti-Georgian policy of the Tsarism, Russianization of Abkhazia and in the natural aspiration towards the restoration of the rights of Abkhazians being deprived from them in 1880.

On the 27th of April of 1907 Nikolai the II took into consideration the “merit «of Abkhazians during the years of revolution and passed the thesis of the Government on the “leveling of the rights of the land ownership of the population of the Sokhumi District”. It shook from the Abkhazians the oppressing and insulting nickname of the “guilty nation”. Government made all the efforts to widen the chasm between the Georgians and Abkhazians during the revolution of 1905-1907, as well as after its defeat. From the beginning of the 20th century the Government repeatedly tried to split Abkhazian eparchy from the Georgian exarchate, but in vain. In the academic circles the ideology “Abkhazia is not Georgia” was elaborated and worked out and was

actively implemented in the consciousness of the Abkhazian people. All the efforts made by Tsarism to oppose Georgians and Abkhazians in spite of its tension in some degree, Abkhazians and Georgians jointly defended the integrity of the exarchate of Georgia and Eparchy of Abkhazia and bucketed the plans of the Synod of separation of the parish of Sokhumi eparchy from the Exarchate of Georgia and of Samurzakhano from the eparchy of Sokhumi.

1.3. Autonomous Unit of the Democratic Republic of Abkhazia – Georgia

After the February democratic revolution and overthrow of the Tsarism the situation in the whole Empire and naturally in the Caucasus and Abkhazia was changed. In the new conditions the supreme power in Russia was the temporary government and in the Trans Caucasus – the special committee (at the head of which was appointed Akaki Chkhenkeli from Samursakhano), in the Sokhumi District – the social security committee. That latter was formed on the 10th of March of 1917 and was headed by Alexandre Shervashidze. The Mayor (Head) of Sokhumi was B. Chkhikvishvili.

As it had to be expected, Apsua-Abkhazians and their political leaders were very sympathetic towards the unifying movement of the North Caucasian highlanders. In May of 1917 was formed the Central Committee of Highlanders (Government), which sent its representative to Abkhazia. The Congress of the Abkhazians people (7-8 November of 1917) decided to accept the Union of Highlanders, as a member, passed the Declaration and Constitution of the Public Council of Abkhazia, elected the composition of the Council (Head S.Basaria). The Council represented the national political organ of only the Abkhazian people, defended its interests and had no claims to be the Supreme political organ of the region. As a representative from Abkhazia in the Highlander's Government was sent S.Ashkhatsava, who occupied the post of the "Minister" on the issues of Abkhazia.

We have to emphasize, that establishing of the political relations with the North Caucasus, despite the arguments of the separatists did not mean including Abkhazia in its composition. The district of Sokhumi administratively was still the part of the Trans Caucasus. Even the Temporary Union of the Highlanders did not seek the territory of Abkhazia. On the 4th of December of 1917 in the Decree N1 published by him was said: "In the Districts of Zakatala and Sokhumi the power of the Temporary Government of Highlanders spread on the national and political issues, but the question of spreading of the power of the Government of Highlanders is to be decided by the Congress of People's

deputies of Abkhazia”, but that latter never made the decision of unifying with the North Caucasus in the context of the State. Even the more, the II Congress of the Peasants of the Sokhumi District decided (4-9 March of 1918), that “Abkhazia is a equal member of the Trans Caucasian people and is striving for the better future together with Democratic Georgia (Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии*, с. 397-398, 408-409).

A special committee of the Trans Caucasus having Abkhazia under its jurisdiction on the 11th of November of 1917 was replaced by the Temporary Government of the Trans Caucasus – or the same Commissariat (Head Evgeni Gegechkori). After the dissolution (5th of January of 1918) of the newly elected Inaugural Meeting by the Bolsheviks having come in the leadership of the country after the coup d'état, the Commissariat set a course towards the independence of the Trans Caucasus. The same course was needed for the negotiations with the Turkey on behalf of the Tran Caucasus. As it is widely known, Turkey was active in its efforts to exercise its rights given to it by virtue of the Brest-Litovsk Agreement, being signed on the 3rd of March of 1918 between Russia and Germany. It demanded passing of Batumi, Khars, Artaani Districts and some other regions to it. This condition catalyzed declaring of the independence of the Trans Caucasus. The deputies of Founding Meeting of the Trans Caucasus being dissolved by the Bolsheviks formed the Trans Caucasian Seim (Parliament) on the 10th of February of the 1918. On the 9th of April of 1918 the Seim announced the independence of the Region, approved the Government of the Trans Caucasus headed by Akaki Chkhenkeli. Abkhazia was again in the composition of the Trans Caucasus.

Announcement of the independence failed to improve the situation in the Trans Caucasus. On the 8-9th of April of 1918 Turkey unsheathed the sword. In two weeks it occupied a big part of Adjara and South-West Georgia. The situation was no easier in the North-West or Abkhazia. In the first place we have to mark, that simultaneously with the process of the structuring of the Trans Caucasian State, the process of national self- determination of the peoples - members of the State was under way. Within that process on the 9th of February of 1918 was held the meeting of the Georgian National Council with the representatives of the People's Council of Abkhazia. After the discussion the sides agreed: “to restore, integral, inseparable Abkhazia including Abkhazia and Samursakhano within the borders from the river Enguri to the river Mzimta” (Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии*, с. 402). The future political State structure was to be decided by the Founding Meeting, being elected according to the democratic rule.

With the efforts of the Trans Caucasian Government, the matter of returning of Gagra zone into the composition of Sokhumi District was practically

settled. The preliminary decision on that matter was made by the Special Committee of the Trans Caucasus headed by Akaki Chkhenkeli on the 30th of October of 1917. The Commissariat of the Trans Caucasus headed by Evgeni Gegechkori on the 7th of December of the year of 1917 made the final decision ;” to abolish the provisions of the Committee of Ministers being approved by the Emperor on the 25th of December of 1904, to restore the old historical borders of Sokhumi District returning of Gagra and Vzip regions in its composition” (**Статус автономных регионов Абхазии и Юго-Осетии в составе Грузии. 1917-1988. Сборник политико - правовых актов. Тбилиси, 2004, с. 213-214, 218**).

Abkhazia, as it has already been said represented an independent part of the Trans Caucasus, but the Russian Bolsheviks did not want to let it go. In winter and spring of the year of 1918 they tried twice to occupy Abkhazia. In both cases they managed to take Sokhumi and establish its Temporary Power represented by the Revolutionary Committee. Most part of Abkhazia became the polygon for the Bolshevik terror and robbery. The People’s Council of Abkhazia was dissolved and its head and a number of members were arrested. By the decision of the Seim and Government of the Trans Caucasus, the Georgian National Guard liberated Sokhumi from the Bolsheviks on the 17th of May of 1918. On the 20th of May the People’s Council of Abkhazia confirmed its own decisions and decisions made by the II Congress of Peasants of about the including Abkhazia into the common family of the Trans Caucasian peoples. Contrary to the obvious facts, Separatists’ historiography considers the day of restoring the Statehood of Abkhazia the day of announcement of the independence of the Republic of the Trans Caucasus on the 11th of May of 1918. It is unclear, how Abkhazia managed to restore the statehood, when the region was occupied by the Bolsheviks, the People’s Council was dismissed and its members were arrested and especially when the Bolsheviks having come into the power called the region not Abkhazia, but Sokhumi District. Information about restoration of the statehood sounds like a groundless rumor.

Not a single acute problem was resolved by the Truce Conference between the Trans Caucasus and Turkey being hold in Batumi on the 11th of May of 1918. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were not able to come to an agreement on the issue of the foreign political orientation. Georgia was for German orientation, Armenia for English and Azerbaijan Turkish. The above mentioned disagreement in May of 1918 led Trans Caucasus to disintegration. On the 26th of May of 1918 the National Council of Georgia declared Stately independence. On the 11th of June of 1918 between the Government of Georgia and People’s Council of Abkhazia after the negotiations was made an agreement being one of the grounds of returning of Abkhazia into the bosom of Georgian Statehood.

Peace and reconciliation in Abkhazia unacceptable for the Soviet Russia. In the middle of June of the year of 1918 the Russian Bolsheviks repeatedly performed attacked from Sochi and reached as far as Akhali Afoni. By the request of the members of the People's Council of Abkhazia, Georgian Government sent a military unit under the command of General G. Mazniashvili. On the 19th of June the General arrived in Sokhumi. The Georgian unit with the help of the 300 men Abkhazian squadron delivered an attack after which not only Abkhazia was liberated, but in a month's time on the 26th of July of 1918 they managed to take Tuapse. The so called White Guard opposing the Bolsheviks in the Civil war of Russia in August of 1918 made General G. Mazniashvili to withdraw to the direction of Sochi.

The forces of the separatists used the existing situation for their own personal benefit. In the 27th of June of the year of 1918, when the battles against the Bolsheviks having burst into the country, were under way, members of the People's Council Alexandre Sharvashidze and Tatash Marshania brought into the Kodori (Ochamchire) region from Turkey the military landing troops being largely manned with the off-spring of the Muhajirun.

On the 1st of June of 1918 the newspaper "Sakartvelo" openly wrote about the real danger of air landing of the Turkish troops in Abkhazia. Separatists tried to call the Turkish military officers the Muhajirun, but in vain. This matter was repeatedly discussed at the People's Council meetings. At one of the meetings of the Council being held on the 30th of July of the year of 1918, Vladimer Emukhvari declared, that the members of the landing troops were for sure their brothers in origin. At the same time, he emphasized the fact that "they came to us, as the part of the Turkish regular army, which they represent even today. During the war time soldiers had no right to leave Turkey without permission, as the demobilization process was not still announced. If the Government of Turkey allows this to happen, then it is a conscious step" (*Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 423*).

It was necessary to undertake reliable measures. The Georgian Army managed to localize the landing troops with the help of the Russian Kazaks being fled from the Bolshevik terror and having found a shelter in Georgia. This caused the landing troops returned to Turkey.

The Russian Chauvinists and separatists having lost all the hope of the prospect of success made a great deal out of "occupation" of Abkhazia by General G. Mazniashvili and demanded to remove the Georgian army from the region. The thesis about the "occupation" was received a boost by the modern historiography of the separatists, in order to prove the illegitimacy of being Abkhazia in the composition of Democratic Republic of Georgia in

the years of 1918-1921. The so-called matter of the occupation was repeatedly discussed by the People's Council of Abkhazia. On the 17th of July of 1918 it considered a question of G. Mazniashvili's head quarter's credibility. The People's Council practically unanimously decided, that: "to acknowledge all over again our numerous decisions and declare about the necessity of existing here the military troops of Georgia" (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 418**). On the 18-19th of July of the year of 1918 the People's Council did not support the proposition of the representative of the Georgian Government Isidore Ramishvili on withdrawing of the Georgian army from Abkhazia. The given facts challenge allegation about the «occupation.» The Georgian army was in Abkhazia in terms of the Agreement made on the 11th of June of the year 1918 having been mentioned above and insistence of the People's Council of Abkhazia.

After the failure of the Bolshevik's reckless attempt the unscrupulous separatists set a course for the anti-Bolshevik force – the White Guard or the White Russian as they were called under the command of Generals M. Alekseev and A. Denikin. On the 25-26th of September of 1918 there were held the fruitless negotiations between the representatives of Georgia (Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Gegechkori, General G. Mazniashvili) and the above mentioned White Guard Generals, concerning mainly the problem of possession of Sochi. The negotiations clearly showed, that the Russian White Guard relied on the Separatists forces of Abkhazia. Soon the suppositions were confirmed. The Separatists being encouraged by the white Guard made an effort of a violent political overthrow in Sokhumi and deposition of the Head of the People's Council V. Sharvashidze on the 9th of October of 1918. The trial failed. By the suggestion of the Head of the People's Council and its certain members, Government of Georgia dismissed the Council and arrested the conspirators and only after that called the elections of the Representative Organ. In the process of the preelection campaign Georgia had to repel an attack of the White Guard from Sochi.

The adversary took Gagra and fortified its positions at the river Bzip. In spite of this fact, the first democratic elections in Abkhazia were successfully swung on the 13th of February of the year of 1919. The newly elected People's Council headed by Arzakhan (Dimitri) Emukhvari passed on the 20th of March of the year of 1919 "The Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia". The first Item of the Act read: "Abkhazia is included in the composition of Democratic Republic of Georgia, as its Autonomous Unit" (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 435**).

In May of 1919 the People's Council decided to form a Commissariat (Government) headed by Arzakhan (Dimitri) Emukhavri. Immediately Sokhumi

District was called Abkhazia and the People's Council of Abkhazians – the People's Council of Abkhazia, the Head of which was elected Varlam Sharvashidze.

In 1919-1921 were the years of actualization of the Autonomy of Abkhazia, strengthening of the Power Structures, driving out of the White Guard from Gagra (April of the year of 1919) and working out of the project of the Constitution of Abkhazia. At the same time, the authorities of Abkhazia were confronted by the Bolsheviks and their supporters being seeded in the People's Council and tried to destabilize the situation.

In January of 1920 recognition of Georgia on the international arena and making an Agreement between Russia and Georgia on the 7th of May of the same year and recognition of the independency of Georgia by the Soviet Russia slightly improved the situation in the country. The legal guarantees of maintaining and strengthening of the territorial integrity were formed. Namely, on the 7th of May of 1920 the I item of the III article of the Russian-Georgian Agreement strictly defined the State border between the both countries: "From the Black Sea along the river Psou to the Mount Akhakhcha..." Russia made commitments to recognize unconditionally, as consisting part if Georgia the region of Gagra, being earlier included into the Black Sea Province, as well as Provinces and Districts of the Russian Empire – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi with its divisions and parish constituting the above mentioned Provinces and Districts and also Zakatala and Sokhumi Province (**Оккупация и фактическая аннексия Грузии. Документы и материалы. Тбилиси, 1990, с. 75-76**).

In 1918-1921 Abkhazia became the real Autonomous Unit of Georgia, being ruled within its competence by the People's Council and the Government being appointed by that latter. The status of Autonomy was documented in the Constitution of Georgia, being passed by the Establishing Meeting of Georgia on the 21st of February of 1921. On that very day the Establishing Meeting also passed the Constitutional Law on the "status of ruling of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia". The Autonomy was given broad rights in management of the inner affairs, which were exercised by that latter even earlier on the basis of the Agreement made with Tbilisi in October of 1919.

1.4. Annexation of Georgia by the Bolshevik Russia and that Time Situation in the Sovietized Abkhazia

Grossly violating the Agreement of the 7th of May of 1920 the Soviet Russia occupied Georgia with its further annexation in February-March of the year of 1921. With the aim of solving the problem of Abkhazia on the same year on the 28th of March the following representatives of the Occupational

Government Structures: Sergo Ordjonikidze, Shalva Eliava, Malakhia Toroshelidze and from the Abkhazian side Efrem Eshba and Nestor Lakoba hold a Session in Batumi. Efrem Eshba and Nestor Lacoba came from Turkey, where by order of the Russian Communists they were carried on a Communist agitation among the Muhajirun Abkhazians and other Caucasians and simultaneously performed the spy job for the benefit of Russia (In the opinion of the specialists the same is with the modern Abkhazians separatists having the Russian passports, that they perform the same spy job for the benefit of Russia in every country they stay and live). At the Batumi Session it was decided before electing of the Representative Organ (Congress of the Soviets) to declare Abkhazia temporarily the Soviet Socialist Republic. Before the so-called elections the “independence” of Abkhazia was manifested in the fact, that it was governed not directly by the Soviet Georgian Government, but by the persons appointed by the functioning in Tbilisi Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of Russia (Headed by Sergo Ordjonikidze).

Separatists having mastered methods of falsification of history and their patrons – the highest officials of Russia including President Vladimir Putin, willing or not deceive their own people and the world community, when they declare that after Sovietization Abkhazia was practically an independent Republic and only later in was included by the “Georgian Joseph Stalin” into the composition of Georgia with the status of the Autonomous Republic. In this respect, we have to mark, that in the first years of the Soviet Power a lot of temporarily “Independent” Soviet Republics were in the composition of Russia itself. We can name, for example the Soviet Republic of Tergi (Terek), the Soviet Republic of Don, the Soviet Republic of the Black Sea, the Soviet Republic of Kuban, the Soviet-Republic of Kuban-Black Sea, the Soviet Republic of Stavropol, the Soviet Republic of the North Caucasus, and the Republic of the Far East. The temporarily “independent” Soviet Socialist Republics also were the Crimea (the Ukraine), Kharabakh (Azerbaijan) etc. With the efforts of the same I.Stalin the “Republics” being included into Russia, the Ukraine and Azerbaijan acquired the statuses of Autonomies or Administrative Units. The same situation was in Georgia. As it has already been mentioned above, announcement of Abkhazia as a Republic was a temporary phenomenon. Unfortunately, this fact is not considered by certain scientists and they swallowed the bait of the falsifications of history, among them is also a German jurist professor Angelika Nußberger. She without taking in the situation discusses the problem of downgrading the status of Abkhazia by I.Stalin (**Angelika Nußberger. Das volkerrecht. Geschichte. Institutionen. Perspektiven. Bonn, 2010, p. 45).**

The like statements are far from the truth. In the 20-ies of the 20th century, not a single official or non-official document of Authoritative organ

of the Soviet Russia and in the speeches of their leaders and among them V.Lenin Abkhazia was not mentioned among the “Independent” Republics of the Caucasus; Abkhazia was financed not by Moscow, but by the Government of Georgia; The revolutionary Committee of Georgia, the Ministry of Inner Affairs sent their orders to Sokhumi and on the 5th of July of 1921 the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia received the decision to do the party work in order to “include Abkhazia, as an Autonomous Republic into the composition of Georgia.” In accordance with that decision, on the 23rd of July of 1921 the Session of the Executive Officials on the basis of the report made by N.Lakoba enacted a regulation on “federating of Soviet Abkhazia with Soviet Georgia due to the ethnographic, historical and conditions of life” (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, р. 118, 475).**

Unlike the formally independent Republics of the Trans Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia), Abkhazia did not have its own representatives in Moscow. The Commissary of the National Affairs (Minister) I. Stalin on the 1st of September of 1921 informed the Central Executive Committee of All Russia, that “Abkhazia is an Autonomous part of independent Georgia and thus, does not and should not have independent representatives in Russia and due to this fact it is not able to get financial credit from Russia” (**А. Ментешашвили. Исторические предпосылки современного сепаратизма в Грузии. Тбилиси, 1998, с. 67).**

In 1921 Abkhazia used to get the credits from the Soviet Government of Georgia, as in Moscow it was recognized a part of Georgia. On the 14th of November of 1921 the Head of Abkhazia E. Eshba brought about an issue of including Abkhazia directly into the Federation of the Trans Caucasus being at that time in the process of formation. In reply, the Bureau of the Communist Party of the Caucasus of Russia stated in two days – on the 16th of November :” to propose to comrade Eshba submission of his final conclusion of accepting Abkhazia into the composition of the Federation of Georgia on a contractual basis or accepting of Abkhazia on the basis of an a Autonomous District into the RSFSR” (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 482).**

Therefore, according to the Soviet standards Abkhazia could not claim the status of neither the Soviet Republic, nor the Autonomous Republic, but only of the status of the Autonomous District. In the composition of Georgia it was to acquire the status of the Soviet Socialistic Republic in order to serve as a powerful gear of pressure on the freedom-loving Georgia.

On the 16th of December of 1921 between Georgia and Abkhazia arising out of the “deep common national ties” was made an agreement “on

establishing of military, political and financial-economic ties.” The Agreement maintained also “entering of Abkhazia in all kinds of District Unions and namely Federation of the Republics of the Trans Caucasus via Georgia” and not directly. It indicates, that by the Agreement dated with the 16th of December of 1921 one Republic (Abkhazia) was included into the composition of another (Georgia) and it was not the unification of the two equal Republics. In the following years, when the “electoral” Soviet organs were established, the relations were constitutionally formed. On the 28th of February The I Congress of the Workers, Peasants and Red Army deputies of the Soviets adopted the Constitution in the I clause of the I chapter of which was said:”In the composition of the Soviet Socialistic Republic of Georgia are included with the right of self-determination: the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, the Autonomous District of South Ossetia and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia; That latter is unified with the Soviet Socialistic Republic of Georgia on the basis of the special Soviet Union Agreement” made between them (**Образование Союза Советских Социалистических Республик. Сборник документов. Москва, 1972, с. 237-238**).

In the 20-ies of the 20th century Abkhazia factually and legally was an Autonomous Republic and it was not the subject of the Trans Caucasian Federation and let alone of the Soviet Union being formed in December of the year of 1922. The Head of the Federation of the Trans Caucasus G. Ordjnikidze giving his consent on the announcement of the Soviet Socialistic Republic of Abkhazia, said in his speech at the II Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia held on the 21st of December of the year of 1921:” Abkhazians must know, that Abkhazia is an Autonomous Republic and equal in out Union” (**Съезд Советов Абхазии. Сборник документов и материалов. 1922-1923. Сухуми, 1959, с. 153**).

According to the first Constitution of the Soviet Union (1924), Abkhazia had the status of the Autonomous Republic. In the clause 15 of the 4th Chapter of the above mentioned Constitution is said: “The Autonomous republics of Adjara and Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorny Karabakh and Nakhichevan Autonomous Districts send one representative each to the Committee of Nations (**Джемал Гамахария, Бадри Гогия. Абхазия – историческая область Грузии, с. 488-489**).

Thus, in spite of the assertions of the separatist historiography and authorities of the modern Russian Federation busy with the falsification of History of Abkhazia and deceiving the international Community, facts are stubborn things: according to the first operating Constitution of the Soviet Union of 1924-1936, Abkhazia had the status of the Autonomous republic, was represented only with one deputy in one of the chambers of the two

chamber Union of the country (legislative organ), at the level of the Autonomous district (non Stately organ).

In the Constitutions of Georgia and Abkhazia that latter was mentioned as the contractual Soviet Socialistic Republic. The Separatists often appealed to the so-called Constitution of Abkhazia of the year of 1925, but in the legal context it did not exist. The thing is, that the Constitution being adopted by the III Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia on the 1st of April of 1925 without any consideration and was at variance with the Constitutions of the USSR, Trans Caucasus and Georgia and was not published; therefore it did not come into effect. Even the more, according to the information published in the “Bulletin of the III Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia” (Sokhumi, 1925), the Congress decided to finalize the working process on the project of the Constitution and bring into compliance with the Constitutions of the Trans Caucasus and Georgia.

The question is, what kind of Constitution or the project of that latter was the document of the year of 1925. In most parts in was mainly the replica of the Constitution of Georgia and at the same time declared Abkhazia a sovereign State. Relations with Georgia were recorded in the 4th Item of the III Chapter: The SSR of Abkhazia has been united with SSR of Georgia on the basis of the special contractual document between Georgia and Abkhazia and through that latter is the member of the Socialistic Federational Soviet Republic of the Trans Caucasus” and through that latter becomes the member of the Soviet Union.. In the 5th Item of the II Chapter was said, that Abkhazia as the Sovereign State had the right of leaving the Federation of the Trans Caucasus, as well as the Soviet Union. But in reality, Abkhazia was not a Sovereign State and was not an Immediate Member of the Federation of the Trans Caucasus and the Soviet Union, thus, it has no right of leaving the composition of those Republics. According to the Head of Abkhazia Nestor Lakoba it was a “Constitutional Foolery”.

Incompliance of that “foolery” with the above mentioned Constitutions was the reason, why the authoritative organs of the Trans Caucasian Federation and Georgia concluded to consider the document being received on the 1st of April of 1925 the project of the Constitution of Abkhazia and elaborate it. The fact, that according to the “Constitution” of the year of 1925 Abkhazia had the right of withdrawal the membership from the Federation of the Trans Caucasus and the USSR and was not recorded the right of Abkhazia seceding Georgia or denounce the contractual Agreement is surprising and worth interest.

Elaboration of the project of the Constitution of Abkhazia was finalized in 1926 and on the 11-16th of June of the same year the III Sessions of the

Central Executive Committee of Georgia working in Sokhumi approved the Constitution of Georgia. The second Chapter of the Constitution regulated relations with Abkhazia. On the 27th of October of 1926 the III Session of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia approved the Constitution of Abkhazia. The second chapter of the Constitution of Georgia concerning Abkhazia was included without any alterations. In the both Constitutions was recorded, that “Abkhazia was the part of the Socialistic Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special contractual Agreement and consequently of the Trans Caucasian Socialistic Republic through Georgia.” The Soviet Constitution of the year of 1926 though formally, but very clearly differentiated the power between Tbilisi and Sokhumi. The People’s Commissariats of (Ministries) of inner affairs of Abkhazia, justice, education, health care, agriculture and social security were independent from the corresponding Commissariats of Georgia and consequently acted independently, though both of them ought to inform each other about the performed activities. The Council of the National Economy of Abkhazia conformed to the Government of Abkhazia and the Council of the National Economy of Georgia. The appointees of the People’s Commissariats of Finances, Labor and of Workers and Peasants inspections were the corresponding organs of the Commissariats of Georgia, though they were obliged to submit report also to the Government to Abkhazia. As we can see, in the first Constitution of Abkhazia of 1926, there are no signs of independence. We have to consider the fact, that Abkhazia and All Georgia submit to the organs of the republic of the Trans Caucasus and the Soviet Union and had no right of making independent decisions. In compliance with the operating Constitution of the Soviet Union the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia being held on the 11th of February of the year of 1931 renamed the Soviet Socialistic Republic of Abkhazia into the Autonomous Soviet Socialistic Republic of Abkhazia (ASSR of Abkhazia).

Abkhazia had been before the year of 1931 in the composition of Georgia and it stayed there after renaming it, not to say anything about the powers and authority being determined by the Constitution of the year of 1926 that remained unchanged. Following this line of reasoning all the talk about integration of “Independent” Abkhazia into the composition of Georgia by I.Stalin in 1931 is groundless. It is the regular fiction contrived by the falsifiers of history.

In the 30-ies of the 20th century in the Soviet Empire the process of full centralization and unitarisation of the power was under way. Within that process on the 7th of January of 1935 by the decision of the 7th Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia a new edition of the Constitution of Abkhazia was approved. According to the new edition all the Commissariats of the Autonomous Republic

obeyed the corresponding Commissariats of Georgia (Article 42). The process of unitarization and management of the totalitarian system was finalized by adopting on the 5th of December of 1936 of the so-called Stalin's Constitution. It was followed by the approval of the Unified Constitution in the Union Republic and Autonomous Republics. Identical Constitution was adopted in Georgia (13th February of 1937), as well as in Abkhazia (2nd of August of 1937). According to the new Constitution, not a single sphere of the State life was not left under the direct control of the Union Republics and Autonomous Republics.

The genesis of the Soviet Socialistic system and the process of building of socialism in Abkhazia was running on in the conditions of the common regularity and common –Union general directions. At the local level excessive “Independent Actions” was not allowed. This is the context within which political repressions having place in Abkhazia in the 30-ies of the 20th century are to be assessed; the written language reform was finalized in 1938 (shifting the Abkhazian written language on the Latin graphics into the Georgian graphics), the school reform being implemented in 1945-1946 (replacing the Russian language with the Georgian language in the Abkhazian schools, teaching of the Abkhazian language with the further intensification); settling a part of the population from the earthquake – stricken neighboring districts in Abkhazia (Some of them were assimilated and belong now to the Abkhazian nation) was performed by the decision of the Government of the Soviet Union. Political oppressions as it is widely known, were the common Union “measure”. The process of shifting of the written language of the Autonomous Republics to the graphics of the Union Republic and replacing at schools the language of the Autonomous republic with the State language of the Union Republics by the directives of the central organs of the Power was being carried out in all the Soviet Union. Thus, it would be more appropriate if the Separatists express their protest against the Russian Empire continuing even today the process of assimilation of the “independent” Apsua people and not Georgians.

The post Stalinist period of “thawing” was marked in Georgia with a tragic event. In that time Soviet Union the active critic of the Stalin personality cult was under way. Inasmuch as the “leader” was Georgian in origin, the just critic against him was accompanied by the insulting anti- Georgian outburst. As a reply, it was followed with the peaceful youth protest manifestation in Tbilisi. On the 9th of March of 1956 the participants of the manifestation by the order received from the Kremlin were cruelly dispersed and many of them shot by the Russian soldiers. During the manifestation were heard the cries about restoring of the independence of Georgia. In that period the Youth underground organizations were struggling independence of Georgia (Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava and others).

After the tragic event of the 1956 Moscow enhanced the pressure on Tbilisi. The Communist organization of the Communist party of Georgia was accused of Chauvinism and efforts to assimilate Abkhazians, Ossetians and Armenians (see the Decision of the Central Committee of the Presidium of the Communist Party bore a date of the 10th of July of the year of 1956). This false and provocative accuse played the role of a certain signal for the separatists. It goes without saying, that the anti-Georgian marches in Abkhazia of the years of 1957, 1967, and 1977 were provoked by the Kremlin, though as a motive in the first two cases was used the fact of publishing of the unacceptable for the separatists historiographic works written by the Georgia authors, in the third case it was adoption of the new Constitution. With its one hand the Kremlin tried to provoke anti-Georgian protests and with the other hand it always tried to “resolve” conflicts in such a way, (to make useful for separatists changes in personnel), as to create fertile ground for even the more massive protest marches in the future arising out of necessity. This time came at the end of 80-ies of the 20th century during the period of Perestroika. The national-liberating movements having started in the Republics of the Soviet Union radically destabilized the Soviet Empire.

In the vanguard of struggle for freedom alongside with other republics Georgia also took part. The demoralized and disorganized Kremlin tried to achieve beneficial for itself results by executing the peaceful meeting in Tbilisi on the 9th of April of 1989, but failed. The outcome was opposite. The anti-Georgian meetings in Abkhazia in 1989 being elaborated in Moscow also were of no help to the imperial centre. In spite of the tricks used by the Kremlin Georgia step-by-step moved towards freedom. On the 28th of October of 1990 in the multiparty democratic elections won the national-liberating movement, followed by the liquidation of the Soviet Power in Georgia. Republic of Georgia did not take part in the All Soviet referendum held on March 17th of 1991 for preservation of the Soviet Union. In Abkhazia it was carried out with the serious violations. For achieving the desired effect the whole region of Gali, inhabited only with the 20% of Abkhazians was removed from elections, under the pretence of not readiness of the polling stations at Moscow’s bidding. Besides, in the Abkhazian polling stations the number of people voting for preservation of the Soviet Union comprised a very curious percent – 120(!). In such a manner separatists hardly manage to muster more than 50%. Nevertheless, it became clear for everybody and among them the Kremlin that the referendum for reserving the Soviet Union was not successful in the Autonomous Republic.

On the 31st of March of 1991 another referendum, for restoring the Stately independence of Georgia being held in Abkhazia was a success this

time. That time authorities of Abkhazia led by V. Ardzinba decided not to take part in the referendum, though at the same time not to block in the Autonomous Republic. In those circumstances it was a wise decision. The block of the political and social organizations “Soyuz” (supporters of preservation of the Soviet Union) did not take part in the referendum. Nevertheless, in the Referendum of 31st March of 1991 participated 61,27% from the total amount of the voters (347175) or much more than the Georgian population (45%) living in Abkhazia. 97,73% of the participants of the referendum (almost 60% of all the voters) voted for restoring of the State independence of Georgia. On the basis of the results of the Referendum, restoring of independence of Georgia was announced on the 9th of April of 1991. The election of the first President of Georgia on the territory of Abkhazia on 26th of May of 1991 was carried out in the analogous situation and the result was the same.

1.5. Attempt of Demolishing Independent Republic of Georgia and War in Abkhazia

Demonstration of especially cautious, peaceful and compromise politics in relation to Abkhazia from the side of that time Georgian authorities once more occurred in summer of 1991. Then, with the joint efforts of Georgian and Abkhazia sides, a new law for the elections for the Supreme Council of Abkhazia was elaborated; the alterations were made to the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The 65 mandates of the Supreme Council were distributed in the one mandate districts being formed according to the ethnic principle. Abkhazians were given 28 mandates, Georgians – 26 and other nations 11. Mandates were distributed in a way, as not to give the advantage of the qualified majority to any of the sides in deciding the matters of the Constitution and Status of the Autonomous Republic. Without the Agreement between Georgians and Abkhazians and the qualified majority not only the matter of determining the legitimacy of the status of Abkhazia, but carrying out Referendums and appointing the Government members were also impossible.

The mandates in the Supreme Council and the highest posts were distributed and allocated according to the ethnic sign and namely the Head of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia had to be appointed a person of an Abkhazian origin, the first deputy had to be Georgian; The Head of the Government of Abkhazia had to be appointed a person of the Georgian nationality and his first deputy had to be Abkhazian. Other important amendments to the Constitution of Abkhazia were also made. For example,

the term “Georgian SSR” was replaced with the term “Republic of Georgia”. It was a serious compromise. This change proved the fact, that if earlier Abkhazia Constitutionally was a part of Georgia, which in its turn was within the composition of the SSSR, now it became a part of Independent Georgia. For giving this an appropriate and adequate assessment, it is necessary to recall the strange instruction of the Kremlin being taken up by the separatists, that Constitutionally Abkhazia was a part of the Soviet Georgia, which in its turn was a part of the Soviet Union, but at the same time Abkhazia was not a part of independent Republic of Georgia. With this change the insinuations were ended. According to the addition made to the Constitution of Abkhazia, adopting of the law on the political-legal status required two-thirds of the votes and it was to take effect after being approved by the Supreme Councils of Georgia and Abkhazia (Article 98). It is safe to say, that the peaceful policy carried out towards Abkhazia by the Georgian Government won and the victory equally belonged to the both sides.

It was obvious, that the assertive movement of Georgia towards freedom worried the Kremlin very much. After the Referendums carried out on the 17th and 31st of March of 1991 and Presidential election of the 26th of May convinced the Kremlin, that by means of peaceful, democratic methods it is impossible to bring Georgia to knees and separate it Abkhazia from it. The Imperial centre was troubled, as Tbilisi and Sokhumi managed to heal the tensed relations without the mediatory interference of the Kremlin. For Moscow it became quite clear, that restoring of the control over Georgia would become possible only in case of overthrowing the first President of Georgia and launching the war in Abkhazia, but the central authorities of the Empire were busy and had no time for Georgia. The grim struggle for power between the Soviet Union centre (Mikhail Gorbachov) and authorities of federation of Russia (Boris Eltsin) was under way in Moscow.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union its legal successor Russian Federation made time for “disobedient” Georgia. Tbilisi refused to become the member of the newly established Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) – and it appeared to be a good excuse and for all that Georgia was cruelly punished. In Tbilisi in the cusp of 1991-1992 a violent upheaval was organized with the active participation of Moscow. After the overthrow of the Legitimate Government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the temporary illegitimate Government (State Council) of E.Shevardnadze was formed and the country was involved into the civil opposition. Russia supported illegitimate Government of Shevardnadze.

In conditions of the artificially arranged civil confrontation supported by Moscow, the separatist force of Abkhazia became extremely active.

Being encouraged by the Kremlin violating its own Constitution authorities of Abkhazia were making their own decisions and rattled the saber. On the 23rd of July of 1992 the Supreme Council of Abkhazia without the qualified majority or illegitimately decided to abolish the Constitution and restore the still born Constitution of the year of 1925 (we have discussed this matter above). This decision sped up the process of splitting of the Supreme Council and in the result it came to the war.

Today there is no doubt, that upheaval of the Government if Georgia and war in Abkhazia were the links of one and the same chain. Both of them were the consisting part of the plan or program designed by the Kremlin of weakening, splitting of Georgia and its returning in a new form in the bosom of the Russian Empire. On the 14th of August of 1992 the war started in Abkhazia and ended on the 30th of September of 1993. It was considered the bloodshed opposition of Russia and Georgia.

The outcome of the war was catastrophic for the population of Abkhazia and at large for the State as well. Besides, the tens of thousands of the dead from the both sides, the Autonomous Republic was left by the third fourth of its legitimate population. Almost 300 000 of Georgians, 40 000 Abkhazians, thousands of the Greeks, Estonians, Ukrainians, Jews, a part of the Russians etc. became refugees. Out of the 535 000 (data of the of the January of 1992) of pre-war population of Abkhazia for the year of 1997 decreased to 145 986. In the following years this figure did not change much, though the official statistics of the separatists name the unrealistic figure - 240 705. As if 122 690 were of the Abkhazian origin out of that amount, which is the blatant lie. In reality the figure from the pre-war 94 767 Abkhazian persons were decreased to 53 993 persons (data of the year of 1997) and afterwards was slightly increased mechanically, by settling there the Muhajiruns. On the whole, as a result of the war the population of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia lost 388 075 persons (72,7%), or was decreased 3,7 times. Georgian population suffered more than other ethnic groups. For the 1st of January of 1992 its number was 244 872 persons (the data are apparently set too low); after the ethnic cleansing (for the year of 1997) it comprised - 43 442 persons. Thus, the number of the ethnic Georgians was decreased to at least 201 430 persons - 82,2% or 5, 64 times.

The Georgia population living today in Abkhazia is deprived of the elementary rights. They only enjoy the limited right for dwelling. Consequently, they cannot participate in the social life, are restricted from the economic activity, and are deprived of the right of free movement, getting education in their mother-tongue. They are forced to adjust to the assimilation and deny their nationality or "voluntarily" leave the territory of Abkhazia.

Numerous Armenian and Russian communities live in Abkhazia. In total, the population being banned from Abkhazia exceeds 3,5 times the population living there. Therefore, OSCE with the participation of Russia repeatedly acknowledged and condemned the made ethnic cleansing. It happened on the 6th of December of 1994 in Budapest, on the 3rd of December in Lisbon and on the 17-18th of November in Istanbul (**Issue of Abkhazia in the official documents, Part I (1989-1999). Tbilisi, 200, pp. 408-410; Issue of Abkhazia in the official documents, Part II (1995-1999). Tbilisi, 2000, pp. 126; 333. – Both in the Georgian Language).**

The given hard statistical data and the generalized resolutions of OSCE only roughly reflect the scales of the tragedy having place in Abkhazia, mass massacre of the peaceful Georgian population and unbelievable methods of torture and incredible cruelty. Even the 20th century the witness of the Communist and Fascist Concentration Camps cannot recall such cruelty. We have to look for the analogous fact in the medieval and even more remote past.

Thousands of people dreamt to be shot without being tortured. Separatists and occupants very often used to force their victims to dig pitches and bury them alive. Numerous cases of locking in buildings or their own homes and burning alive of particular persons, families, large groups of people are widely known. Examples of wetting of alive and dead people with petrol and then burning them are in abundance. It seems, that occupants enjoyed the process of torture of the innocent people before shooting them – cutting of different parts of a body – hands, legs, noses, ears, tongues, genitals, poking out of eyes, pulling out of nails, teeth, castrating. Repeatedly, captive men are forced to watch the scenes of rape of their own mothers, spouses, daughters, sisters; then all of them were killed. Cases of not allowing the relatives to bury the people being shot by the violators, in order to give their corpses to pigs and dogs to eat were not infrequent. In September of 1992 the pieces of corpse of Giorgi Abramishvili being killed in the village Bzip (Gagra District) were salted, put into his own shoes and set to his wife. On the 10th of October of 1993 they cut off the heart resident of the Village Zemo Kelasuri (Sokhumi District) – Irodion Pipia and gave it to the dogs to eat. The fact of dissection of corpses, playing football with the heads of the dead people or putting the heads on the pole by the man-eaters of the 20th-21st centuries was quite frequent. The common method of the ethnic cleansing and genocide was hanging of people on the trees or electric posts, drowning them in the wells of their own yards. Separatists in this case killed two birds by the one stone by such deeds: they torture a particular person, physically destroy him/her and fundamentally spoil often the only source of the drinking water – the well.

Occupants and Separatists especially cruelly punish women and especially the pregnant ones. The destiny of most women captured by them was rape (often collective) with cutting of breasts and other parts of a body, poking of the eyes, slashing off the bellies and burning alive or shooting. Children were no exception. They were killed together with their parents. Russian journalist - witness of the tragedy of Abkhazia - Mikhail Aidionov in one of his articles wrote (see.: Vek (Century) N40, 1993) about the horrible facts: "In Akhaldaba (Ochamchire District) they broke to pieces hands and legs of children, they impaled them, one child was ran down with a tank. The raped women were burnt alive in the stadium. One child were skinned and on the flesh was written the following :” A Georgian dog is sold coupons” (temporary monetary unit in that time Georgia – the author). Comments are needless.

Occupants and separatists gave no quarter to the bedridden invalids and sickish and killed them lying in their own beds. Unbelievable aggression was shown towards the old. For example, 103 year old Duru Tabaghua (village Otobaia, Gali District), 96 year old Marine Gogua (village Lindava, Sokhumi District), 90 year old Lusha Tsaava (village Shroma, Sokhumi District) and many others were burnt alive in their own houses.

The victims of the ethnic cleansing and genocide having place in Abkhazia were mostly Georgians, but together with them separatists and occupants killed hundreds of representatives of other nations, who were accused of trying or save Georgians. For Example, in November of 1993 in the village Odishi (Sokhumi District) Greek Mary Anastasiadi was shot and then burnt together with 13 Georgian neighbors having found shelter in her house. For the similar “crime” besides the Greeks were shot Abkhazians, Russians, Armenians, Jews, the Ukrainians and representatives of other nationalities. For example, Branislava Igumenova from Ochamchire was shot in December of 1993 because she said to the Separatist warrior: “Even the Fascists did not do such things.”

Separatist occupants captures and shot the Head of that time Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia - Jiuli Shartava and the members of his Government - Raul Eshba, Sumbat Saakian, Tamaz Kharbedia, the Mayor of the town of Sokhumi – Guram Gabeskiria; they also killed accompanying them persons occupying high positions - Jumber Betashvili, Mamia Alasania and others. The occupants did not show mercy even towards the clergy. They captured and shot the Reverend Father of the Kaman Monastery young monk Andria (Khurashvili).

The data on the victims of the ethnic cleansing and genocide is not full. Creation of the overall database of the people massacred by separatist and occupants have not been managed till today. For example, according to the

information provided by the well-informed Russian newspaper “Rossia”, during taking of Sokhumi almost 6 000 persons were killed (Rossia, N42, 1993); In the list of the massacred peaceful citizens of Sokhumi presented in the present book are almost 1150 persons. The witnesses relate, that the streets of the town were covered with the dead bodies of the Georgian people; in the N.Kurchenko Park 400 persons were killed. The corpses were thrown into the Sea. It turned out difficult to identify those, who after the end of the occupation were killed by the separatists in the towns and villages of Abkhazia. For example – the above mentioned journalist Mikhail Aidionov informs, that “in the village Kindghi (Ochamchire District – the author) – all the local resident Georgians were hanged” (Vek (century) N40, 1993). Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia A. Kozirev had to admit at the Pres-Conference held on the 15th of October of 1993:” What is now happening in Sokhumi, is ethnic cleansing”. I.Diakov visiting Sokhumi then writes on the 19th of October of 1993 in the newspaper “Izvestia”: “Genocide reigns in Sokhumi”; “He personally with his own eyes saw tens of corpses in the Sea”, “Women with the bellies cut open”, “cut off heads thrown on the beach”. Unfortunately, their identity is not known, but the work for identifying the complete list of the killed is underway.

The data about the crime and horrible facts being committed against the Georgian population in Abkhazia are reflected in the book - “International society to bring a verdict on the tragedy of Abkhazia/Georgia», published in the English language in 2015.

We cannot conceal certain the facts and with a great regret have to admit, that more than one (almost a hundred) peaceful citizen of Georgia, and among them Abkhazians (almost 60) as well were killed by Georgian soldiers, more often by Georgian marauders fighting in Abkhazia; Unfortunately, they committed more than one crime and unlawful acts. But, if we judge from to the data of de-facto Public Prosecution Office (www.abkhaziya.org) crime committed by separatists and occupants exceed in scale and severity those committed by Georgians. Georgians at that time were mostly defending their own towns and villages and repelled attacks of the adversary. And what’s the main Abkhazians were not and could not have been the targets of ethnic cleansing and genocide, because Georgian military units did not invaded their compact dwelling places. A for the occupational forces they leveled to the ground hundreds of Georgian inhabited localities, killed or drove out local population, appropriated (till these days unlawfully hold their private possessions) or destroyed their untold wealth in towns and villages. The tragedy Georgians suffered is the direct outcome of the systematic and planned policy of capturing Abkhazia and splitting it from Georgia conducted by the Kremlin during a longtime. The

above mentioned policy was and is being carried out on behalf of the separatists and with their formal participation. Nevertheless, the main responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Russian Federation. Russia elaborated readiness for the war and provoked it in Abkhazia; It provided and is providing even today with weapons separatists and gang formations sent from Russia; In the conflict regular army of Russia and generalship of Russia were taking part in favor of Abkhazia; Moscow defended and is defending the direct performers of the crime and horrible misdeeds against the humanity from the responsibility.

Legitimization of the results of ethnic cleansing is supported by the Russian “Peaceful” mission carried out from June of 1994. Arising out of their own imperial purposes Moscow blocked a number of international initiatives being aimed to the resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia. Among them, we can name the plan (2001) of Diter Boden – the legal personal representative of the General Secretary of the United Nations – on the issues of solving the Georgian-Abkhazian matters, the plan of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany Frank – Walter Steinmeier (2008), the plan of Washington (2008) etc. In contrast to them “peacemaking” Russia executed its own design, when during the 2008 August war captured 20% of the territories of Georgia and crudely violating the elementary norms of the international legislation recognized “independence” of Abkhazia and Tskhivali Region (the so-called South Ossetia) on the 26th of August of 2008. The specified act in fact meant occupation of the mentioned territories and foredoom to death almost 500 000 persons banished from the both regions people of various nationalities.

One of the main targets of Russian military aggression was deposing the Government of Georgia, installing a marionette regime and hampering integration of the country into the Euro/NATO space. With its unlawful and aggressive actions Russia disturbed and victimized the international law and order, compromised and endangered the post Soviet Countries, all the Euro-NATO space and strategic interests of NATO and leading world States. The principle stand of that time leader of the European Union, President of France - Nikolas Sarkozy played a crucial part in defending Georgia. Exactly, by Nikolas Sarkozy’s initiative and efforts on the 12th of August of 2008 Presidents of Russia and Georgia signed the Agreement on cease fire.

The territorial integrity of Georgia, returning of the IDP’s into their native lands are supported by the leading international organizations of the civilized world and among them UN, NATO, European Union, OSCE. Due to the events of August of 2008 the official position of Tbilisi is supported in the following international acts: Resolutions passed at the Sessions of the General Assembly of UN on the condition of the IDP’s and refugees from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali being held since (9th of September of 2009, 7th of

September of 2010, 29th of June of 2011, 13th of June of 2013, 3rd of June of 2015); The Conclusion of the special Council of the Heads of the European Union (1st of September of 2008), Conclusions of the Council of Foreign Affairs of the European Union (15-16th of September of 2008), Resolution by European Parliament on the current situation in Georgia (3rd of September of 2008), On the Black Sea Politics of the European Union (20th January of 2011), Recommendations on the negotiations about the Agreement of Association of Georgia and European Union (17th of November of 2011); Resolution of the Parliament Assembly of the European Union 1633 (2008), 1647 (2009), 1683(2009) Resolutions, Reports on the Human Rights Situation in the conflict-ridden districts of Georgia (SHG/INF (2009)7, SHG/NF (2009) 9, SHG/INF (2009) 15); Declaration of the North Atlantic Union on recognition of the regions of Georgia by Russia (27th of August of 2008), Resolution of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on the conflict between Georgia and Russia (18th of November of 2008), The final Communiqué of the North Atlantic Council at the Meeting on foreign ministerial level in Brussels (4th of December of 2008), resolution #382 of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO on the situation in Georgia (16th of November of 2010), Communiqué and Declaration of NATO at Lisbon Summit (19-20th of November of 2010 etc.); Statement made at NATO summit in Warsaw (July 8-9 of 2016); Report of the High Commissioner of Democratic Institutes and Human Rights Office and National Issues of OSCE on the situation in human rights sphere in the conflict-ridden territories (27th of November of 2008), Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE on the inadmissibility of the use of force on the neighboring and bordering territories (6-10 July of 2010), Resolution of the Parliamentary Assamebly – “Conflict in Georgia” (july 1-5 of 2016) etc.

In the international acts Russian aggression is assessed as occupation of the territories of Georgia. The acts contain insistence on abolition of the recognition of the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, withdrawal of the occupational armed forces from Georgia, unconditional and dignified return of the IDP's.

Unfortunately, measures undertaken by the International Commonwealth were not enough. They failed to halt the Russian aggression, the next victim was the Ukraine. The Crimea annexation and the events developed afterwards in the South-East Ukraine in March of 2014 forces and obliges the civilized world to unite and take measures to curb the aggressor, or otherwise European Union and NATO Member Countries very soon will face pitfalls.

The establishment of non - recognition policy in relation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (the so-called South Ossetia) Regions on the international arena is

of a paramount importance for Georgia. The mentioned policy is successfully being conducted with the help of the International Commonwealth. Nobody supports Russia in this matter. It was not backed up even by the Independent States having emerged after the split of the Soviet Union and among them its closest allies. We cannot call a diplomatic success of Moscow the fact of inspiring Daniel Ortega (President of Nicaragua), Ugo Chaves (Ex President of Venezuela), two dwarf island States – Nauru and Tuvalu to recognize Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Regions at the cost of profitable economic agreement and bribes. In 2014 Tuvalu annihilated recognition of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Regions and acknowledged the territorial integrity of Georgia and established diplomatic relations with that latter. Not a single civilized State, not a single dignified political leader did not and will not undertake such a criminal step, such as recognition of the occupied by Russia territories of Georgia. Recognition of the mentioned regions is really a crime, as majority of the population left that regions because of the genocide and ethnic cleansing and as the illegitimate marionette ethnocratic regimes are functioning there and they are crudely violating elementary human rights.

Towards Georgia, Russia is continuing its extremely reactive, oriented to the violation of the international legal norms imperialistic policy, is crudely violating and not fulfilling the Agreement made on the 12th of August in 2008 on the cease fire. It not only did not restore the Status-Quo and withdrew its military units to the pre-war positions, being maintained by the Agreement made on the 12th of August, 2008, but on the contrary, tangibly increased the amount and presence of the military units on the occupied territories of Georgia and in practice chose the way of annexation. On the 30th of April of 2009 the Kremlin, on the basis of the “Agreement” made with the Separatists accomplished the “demarcation” of the administrative boundaries of Abkhazia, building and construction of the boundary infrastructure along its entire perimeter and distribution of the special troops of the federal security service. On the 15th of June, 2009 Russia exercising its right to Veto it had in the Security Council of UN halted the activities of the Observer mission of UN in Abkhazia. All this creates a real danger to peace and stability not only in Georgia, but in the whole region.

At the modern stage, the Peacekeeping process in Abkhazia has been blocked. The law of Georgia from the 23rd of October, 2008 on the “Occupied Territories” is in force. At the same time, “the Strategy of the State involvement in the matters of the occupied territories via cooperation” being passed on the 27th of January, 2010 by the Government of Georgia and “Plan of Action of the Involvement Strategy” adopted on the 3rd of July of the same year is in operation. The aim of the Georgian State maintaining of the economic,

cultural and others ties with its own population living in the occupied zone and gradual development of these contacts; availability of all the advantages and social benefits shared by the population living on the non occupied territories of the Country (especially it concerns the benefits in health care and education spheres). Present Government of Georgia is actively working in that direction and the first fruits of this work turned out to be positive.

The Georgian side undertook important peacemaking steps. On the 23rd of November, 2010 during his speech in the European Parliament the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili on behalf of Georgia took on a unilateral obligation on not using force and nor renewal of fire in the Regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, i.e. Solving the problem of territorial integrity through peaceful methods. By the Statement of the Parliament of Georgia made on the 7th of March, 2013 the above mentioned obligation was confirmed by the new Authorities as well.

For realization of the peacekeeping initiative of Georgia, with the aim of coming out off the potentially explosive situation and avoiding the humanitarian catastrophe, the immediate withdrawal of the military units of the occupational forces from Abkhazia, internationalization of the peaceful process with the help of the neutral States, returning of the IDP's and refugees to their homes is urgent and of a paramount importance. Only after fulfilling all the mentioned above the wide scale and fair resolution of the conflict, as well as determining of the political status of Abkhazia taking into consideration the realias of the international legislation, Constitution of Georgia, history and existing situation will fully materialize.

Russia is still going on to occupy Regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, but despite this fact, the purposeful foreign policy of Georgia and efforts of the International Commonwealth took quite a significant effect. On November 9, 2011 through the mediation of Switzerland, according to the Agreement reached between Moscow and Tbilisi, in exchange for the consent of Georgia on acceptance of Russia into the world trade organization, Russia in its turn directly or indirectly recognized the Legitimate State border of Georgia with Russia. The goods exchanges on the sections of the Georgian-Russian borders with Abkhazia (the river Psou) and Tskhinvali region (Roki Tunnel) shall be controlled by the International Monitors. Unfortunately, the above mentioned Agreement hasn't been put into action yet. Russia continues his "free «policy towards the all kinds of Agreements, Legislative norms. In case of pursuing the consistent and principled policy of by the International Commonwealth, it goes without saying, that the Kremlin will have to fulfill the Agreement and undertake even the more series practical steps inspired by the pragmatic motivation.

For the time being the situation is extremely tensed and complicated and is becoming even more challenging. Federation of Russia is openly struggling for restoring the full-scale control on the Post Soviet space. Russia has no desire to reconcile with the freedom and integration of Georgia and other post Soviet Republic into the Euro-Atlantic space. Russia is against the association Agreement Georgia signed with the European Union on the 27th of June, 2014. The new Government of Georgia is following extraordinarily constructive and consistent policy towards Russia and does its best to regulate the matters with Russia. Georgia even initiated particular actions, but the Kremlin is going on with its aggressive policy. The so-called Agreement on the “Alliance and Strategic Partnership” (www.nevs.kremlin.ru/ref-notes/4783) imposed by Russia on de-facto authorities of Abkhazia on the 24th of November of 2014 is a “vivid” example. With this action Russia showed once more its real face. Has unveiled and openly hold its course towards annexation of occupied Abkhazia. Even the more, according to the “Agreement” the Black Sea 200 kilometer sector of Abkhazia belonging to Georgia has to turn into the powerful military foothold used against the NATO States. The decisive geopolitical advantage of Russia will be determined not only in the South Caucasus, but in the Black Sea Basin and its vicinity.

The aims of the Russian Federation and practical deeds are at odds with the vital interests of the majority of the population of Abkhazia being forcedly banished from the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and for almost two decades have been waiting for the return to their homes, but without any effect. Russia creates a menace even for the prospect of maintaining of the uniqueness of the small Abkhazian ethnoses.

The problems of security connected with the Russian occupation of Abkhazia went beyond the borders of Georgia with its significance and even the borders of the Caucasus and grew into the Global challenge. Consequently, arising out of its long term strategic interests countries of NATO and European Union have to undertake more active and decisive steps. Cold reality demands withdrawal of the occupational military units from the occupied regions of Georgia. This requirement has to become one of the pre-conditions of lifting the sanctions being imposed against Russia. Otherwise, Europe won't be able to avoid military and economic threats looming up because of the naked aggressive policy of Russia.

In the occupied Abkhazia the main weapon of the separatists and Russian aggressors like it was before, is the usage of physical violence, ethnic cleansing, genocide and blatant lie. Falsifying of History of the region and Georgia is shamelessly and zealously performed. The Kremlin does not have in its propagandistic armory a single sound legal argument for justification

of “recognition” of Abkhazia. Accordingly, the Kremlin tries to impose false historical stereotypes on the world and go before the International Commonwealth, in a mantle of a “historical justice” fighter. Through falsifying History of Abkhazia occupants conduct policy of ideological violence, oppression of the national consciousness and cultural genocide of the local Georgian population.

The offered brief essay about the ancient Georgia territory - proves the historical priority of Georgia of holding Abkhazia. Simultaneously, it reveals the aggressive policy of the Kremlin and horrible and overwhelming outcome of this latter. Abkhazian-Apsuas are the victims of this policy. Consequently, nobody refuses them the right of the just political claim. Georgian side will always understand and support this legal claim.

The arguments and materials used in the present essay unambiguously show the aims and outcome of the aggression of Russia towards Georgia. It reveals the groundlessness of the historical and political arguments have been voicing since 2008 for excusing the unbelievable cruelty and mass ethnic cleansing by the Fathers of the Kremlin (V. Putin, D. Medvedev, S. Lavrov and others), but real and not made up history and the International justice fully and entirely stand for the territorial integrity of Georgia.

2. Monuments of Material Culture of Georgia - Abkhazia (Synopsis)

The geographic borders of the toponym Abkhazia have been changing for centuries. Foreign sources first mentioned western Georgia by this name. Later this name applied to whole Georgia. The territory of modern Abkhazia comprised Abkhazian Saeristavo, Tskhumi Saeristvo and part of Odishi Saeristavo of the United Georgian Kingdom. Thus, in reality a large part of the medieval centers of Georgian culture existing on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia by today originally belonged to Odishi Saeristavo and later on – to the Odishi Samtavro. The given cultural and educational centers have left an important trace in the intellectual development of the population of Georgia.

At the current stage of the research of Georgian cultural heritage, the numerous and diverse material culture of Abkhazian region can be generally divided into four basic groups:

- I. Landmarks;
- II. Ancient manuscripts;
- III. Religious items;
- IV. Material found as a result of archaeological excavations.

The given classification is conditional although it actually it provides a general view of artefacts of Abkhazia at the given stage (Lia Akhaladze, monuments of material culture of Abkhazia and their classification, in the collection: Cultural Heritage of Georgia on Occupied Territories, Tb., 2012. p. 131).

I. Landmarks, represent the most numerous group of Abkhazian material culture and their number is more than a hundred. Although a large part of these landmarks is damaged by today, all of them have a history of their development. Architectural buildings make up 2 most numerous groups of Abkhazian material culture: a) Architectural monuments for religious worship (church buildings) and b) temporal buildings. The first subgroup includes monastery complexes, cathedrals, small churches and chapels while the second subgroup consists of fortification buildings, bridges, observation sites, palaces of civil and large clerical feudals, etc.

It is a well-known fact that ancient architecture is a good reflexion of the potential to create national culture. Naturally, it does not exist only within its own borders and is enriched with the topics introduced from beyond. At the same time, mere copying of the experience of other cultures without taking into consideration local traditions of architecture can turn into mere superfi-

cial imitation. Architectural monuments with perfect architectural forms and diverse decorative components, occupy a distinguished place in the united gallery of Georgian landmarks. The most famous old monuments of religious architecture are the churches and monastery complexes of Bichvinta, Bedia, Mokvi, Ilori, Likhni, Drandi, Gagra, Bzipi, Tskelikari, Gudavi, Lashkendari, etc. (*L. Rcheulishvili. Essays on the History of Georgian Art. Tbilisi, 1994; Georgian Cultural Heritage, Abkhazia, Volume I. – Abkhazia, Tbilisi, 2007*). One can say that Abkhazia as well as all the regions of Georgia, abounds in Christian religious monuments used for various purposes.

Among the civilian buildings remains of fortification monuments used for defence have survived: fortresses, observation towers, bridges, etc. as well as the palaces and buildings of large feudals, a majority of which has been preserved in the form of ruins although they have not lost their historical value and today they still strongly impress viewers.

Anakopia citadel, Bagrati fortress at Sukhumi, Sukhumi Acropolis, Kelasuri fence, Bzipi, Gagra, Anukhvi, Kodori, Lidzavi, Chkhalta, Amtkeli, Khashupse, Mtshishta, Bichvinta, Azanta, Kodori, Duripshi, Likhni, Sata-mashia fortresses, etc. have played an important role of protection of the north west border of Georgia. Their number on the territory of modern Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia reaches 70.

The ruins of the Likhni, Merkheuli, Beda, Anukhvi and Tsebeldi palaces belonging to the feudal surnames of Sharvashidzes, Marshanias, Zhvanidzes and Basilidzes should be noted among the palaces of large temporal and religious feudals.

The Tamari Bridge (Tamaris Khidi) located near to Sukhumi, at the river Besleti, is outstanding among the oldest bridges of Georgia. Similar bridges are characteristic of Georgia of the X, XI, XII, XIII centuries and they have been preserved in Kartli, Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti and historical Tao Klarjeti. The bridge is unique because an old Georgian Asomtavruli inscription can be seen along its vault mentioning the first king of the united Georgia, Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-104). Nevertheless, local population calls it by the name of the Georgian queen Tamar (1184-1213).

II. Ancient manuscripts are among the most numerous groups in the cultural heritage of Abkhazia. They are divided into two groups: a) Epigraphic ancient manuscripts, i.e. inscriptions on hard material, b) Manuscripts (manuscripts on soft material). c) Numismatic material, protecting inscriptions (*L. Akhaladze. Epigraphic Monuments of Abkhazia, from Finds in the Field of the History of Abkhazia/ Georgia. Tbilisi, 1999, pp. 363-374*;

V. Silogava. Samegrelo-Abkhazia Epigraphy. Tbilisi, 2004; Lia Akhaladze. Abkhazian Epigraphics as a historical source. Lapidary and Fresco inscriptions. Tbilisi, 2005.)

a) Our epigraphic manuscripts are: lapidary (inscriptions on stones, deep lithoglyphs), carved (on icons, crosses, various religious items) and fresco (in paint) inscriptions. Epigraphic manuscripts, inscriptions can be found in Georgian, Greek, Latin Turkish (Arabic script) languages. Among them Georgian inscriptions exceed 100 (*Lia Akhaladze. Abkhazian Epigraphics as a historical source. Lapidary and Fresco inscriptions. Tbilisi, 2005*), *there are more than thirty Greek inscriptions (T. Kaukhshishgvili. Collection of Greek inscriptions in Georgia, Eighth completed edition. Tbilisi, 2004.)*, *six Turkish-Arabic (Kh. Bghazhba. From the History of Writings of Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1967)* and three Latin inscriptions. Naturally, no historical manuscripts in Abkhazian can be found on the territory of Abkhazia. The chronology of Georgian manuscripts of historical importance goes back to the VIII-XIX centuries. Greek inscriptions usually belong to the period earlier than the IX century although XI century Greek graffiti can also be found. Turkish and Arabic inscriptions belong to the XVI-XVIII centuries and Latin inscriptions date back to the II-III centuries.

There are about three inscriptions in Latin on the territory of Abkhazia. One of them was found in Sukhumi in the 90s of the XIX century and it mentions Emperor Adriane (117-138 a.d.) and his serviceman Flavius Ariane. The inscription tells the story of building fortification buildings in Sukhumi by the initiative of Ariane. It is a well-known fact that by the order of the Emperor, Flavius Ariane carried out inventory registration of Roman garrisons in southern and eastern black sea regions. Apart from the inventory, the roman serviceman also restored castles and fortresses in Trapesunt, Apsaros, Pazisi and Sebastopolis. The Latin inscription found in Sukhumi depicts this fact – repair and construction of Sebastopolis fortress, a similar inscription about construction is kept in Trabzon as well). The inscription belongs to the II century AD, in particular was made in 117-138.

The second Latin inscription was found in Bichvinta. Its fragments include only three graphemes „Leg“. A large number of researchers believes that it should have read 'legion' or 'legioneer'. This inscription can be dated as early as the II-IV centuries a.d.

The third inscription was found in 2011 during the excavations of the Sukhumi fortress and it mentions Emperor of Rome Valerianus. This Emperor lived in the II century AD, in 253-260. In 260 Valerianus was taken prisoner by Persians and he died in captivity. Thus, the inscription dates back to 253-260.

In accordance with the content of all the three inscriptions, we can say that Sebastopolis or Tskhumi // Sukhumi was important support for Roman Empire in the II-III centuries AD. Here stood Roman garrisons, for whom the serviceman Flavius was pursuing construction activity in Sepastopolis (Rskhumi/Sukhumi) fortress by the order of the Emperor Adriane. In III-IV centuries even during the creation of Lazi state, Rome retained military garrisons in Sebastopolis.

It should be noted that information about the monuments of Abkhazian material culture is protected by catholic missionaries, in particular, in the works of Teatin monks Christepore Castelli, Arcangelo Lamberti and others. Castelli album and Lamberti's novel 'Description of Samegrelo' include a lot of important information about the churches and monasteries and episcopal cathedrals a part of which has survived and a part of which has been destroyed or has turned into ruins.

b) Second group of ancient manuscripts-written manuscripts are only in Georgian and they have been written in Georgian scriptoriums Bichvinta, Mokvi and Bedia cultural and educational centers. Among them of particular interest are gospels with Bitchvinta XII c. and Mokvi XIII c. painted unique miniatures, Bichvinta XVI c. Iadgari, Bedia XVII c. Gulani, XVI c. Mokvi Omophorion, Divani of Abkhaz kings belonging to the X c. etc.

The most important centers of Georgian culture, Mokvi, Bedia, Bichvinta, Ilori, Likhni, Tsebelda, Tsarche, etc. have been creating such cultural values for centuries that not only Georgians but also Abkhazians should be proud of them. These centers of Christian culture had old book store rooms where original Georgian written works were created, religious books were translated from Greek into Georgian, new manuscripts were written. The unique manuscripts of these book store rooms preserved till today are a precious depository of Georgian manuscripts important for the development of Georgian written culture. Today they are kept in the Georgian National Center for Manuscripts in Tbilisi.

We should also mention the written manuscripts of the priod of Egrisi Kingdom of Abkhazia („Abkhazs“) (VIII-X) which were created by the order of 'Abkhaz Kings' or are included in the inscription for church warden activity. In all, up to 20 epigraphic monuments and one historical chronicle – Divan of Abkhaz Kings have survived by today. All of them (except fpr one greek inscription) are written in old Georgian (*L. Akhaladze. Inscriptions of the Kings of Egris-Abkhazeti, Informational – analytical journal "Abkhazeti" I.Tbilisi, 2004*).

It should be noted that most of the inscriptions of 'Abkhaz Kings' can be found beyond the borders of modern Abkhazia, in other historical regions on the territory of historical kingdom of Egrisi-Abkhazia ('Abkhazta'), in particular, in Samegrelo, Kartli, Imereti and Javakheti.

c) Various numismatic items have been found on the territory of Abkhazia, mostly in Sukhumi, Anakopia fortress (Iveria Mountain), Likhni, etc. Most of the coins are from Georgian and Byzantium legends. According to the inscriptions of Georgian coins, they belong to the Georgian kings Bagrat IV (1027-1072), Giorgi II (1072-1089), David IV the Builder (1089-1125). Apart from that, silver money has also been discovered. Local population called it 'Tskhumuri Tetri' and the Genoans called it 'Sebastopolis Aspra' (in ancient Georgia Sukhumi was called Tskhumi, Latin sources called it Sebastopolis, the same like Romans. Tskhumuri Tetri was minted by Odishi Eristavt Eristavi and Mandaturtukhutsesi of Georgian royal court Vamek I Dadiani (1384-1396) under the King's permission, in Tskhumi Mint (**Figure 18**). The number of Georgian coins preserved till today is more than 50 but if we take into consideration that a large part of the treasure discovered in 1927 in Sukhumi has disappeared, their number should be much bigger.

Bezants have been minted under the name of Justinian I, Constantine Monomakhos (1042-1055), Constantine Doukas (1059-1067), Romanos IV Diogene (1067-1071) and others, their amount reaches about 30 and they are located in Sukhumi, Likhni, etc. along with the coins of the kings of Georgia, Bagrat IV, Giorgi II, David the Builder. It seems that Bezants (including Trabzon coins) were used along with Georgian money in Abkhazia as well as in other parts of Georgia.

III. Among religious items, the most popular are Bedia Golden Chalice, Ilori Silver Chalice, icons of Tsebeldi, St. Catherine, John the Baptist and St Andrew The Apostle, Liturgical fan of Giorgi II King of Abkhazs, an icon of Leon III King of Abkhazians, an icon donated for the David VI Narini Ilori cathedral, Bichvinta icon of Mother of God of the Catholicos of Abkhazia Evdemon Chkhetidze and Cross-Staff tryptich donated to Mokvi Cathedral of the Mother of God at the order of the Archbishop of Mokvi, Andria Sakvarelidze, Mokvi Cross-Staff of the Catholicos of Abkhazia, Eptvime Sakvarelidze, icon of Bedia Archbishop Kirile Zhuanusdze, donated to Ilori St. George, icons of Odishi Eristavt Eristavis and nobles donated to Ilori St. George, among them most numerous are the icons donated by

Odishi noble Levan II Dadiani (1511-1557) to Ilori St George and Bitchvinta Mother of God. All the above-mentioned monuments have old Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions telling us about the wardens and creators of the monuments or represent memorial inscriptions (*G. Chubinashvili. Georgian Hammered Art: Research of the History of Georgian Medieval Art. Tbilisi, 1959; G. Chubinashvili. Georgian Hammered Art of VIII-XVIII centuriesd, in Tbilisi, 1957).*

As for the rich and diverse material found as a result of **archaeological digs** that represent a separate group in our classification, we can come across the onuments of stone, bronze and iron age, as well as those of middle ages.

I. Gagra Basilica.City Gagra, VI century (Figure 1)

One of the oldest models of early middle centuries Georgian architecture is an early christian basilica located in the center of the ruins of old fortress on the territory of Gagra.

The cathedral is constructed of roughly finished stone quadras and represents one of the oldest pieces of Georgian three - aisled basilica popular in Georgia in VI-VIII centuries. The construcion technique of Gagra basilica of is very similar to the east Georgian basilicas of three-aisled form. The interior of the cathedral has walls instead of columns, which means that it was restored in the following centuries. Today no inscriptions remain neither on the outer facade, nor in the interior. The relief cross depicted at the arched rest of the church is noteworthy from the point of view of art history. The church dates back to the VI century.

Gagra fortress. Gagra region, the outskirts of the city of Gagra, V-VI centuries

Is located on the territory of old Gagra. The well-known basilica cathedral has survived within the fortress. It is well-preserved. The Gagra fortress was restored in the middle ages.

II. Gantiadi Basilica. The municipality of Gagra, VI-VII centiries.

The remains of the cathedral are located in the town Gantiadi, on the sea coast in the north-west of Gagra. The cathedral is a three-aisle basilica. It was built of middle sized, straight limestone quadras. Flat bricks of various sizes have been used. Marble fragmernts dating back to the VI-VII centuries have been found in the cathedral. There is an idea that this is the very cathedral that the Emperor of Bysanthium, Justinian I (527-565) built for the tribe of Abazgs – the predecessors of Abkhazians at the time

of their conversion to Christianity. A fragment of white marble tombstone was found in the remains of the basilica. It has a Greek inscription which reads 'Abazgias'. It seems that the inscription belonged to the tomb of some noble Abkhaz. The inscription dates back to the VI century.

III. Drandi Mother of God Church. Village Dranda, Gulripshi municipality, VIII century (**Figure2**).

A perfect architectural monument **Drandi** Mother of God Church constructed of brick and cobblestone is located in the village Dranda which is different from Georgian church buildings by its style of architecture. However, similar cathedrals can also be found in other historical provinces of Georgia of that epoch. Similar – four pillar cross vault churches were located in Byzantium of VI-VII centuries but the architects of Drandi basilica have also borrowed some details from Georgian architecture, in particular, the semicircle spandrel built above the altar are bound by small columns (*L. Rcheulishvili. Domical Architecture of VIII-X Centuries in Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1988*).

The XVIII century Georgian historian Vakhushti Bagrationi writes: „There is a big and marvellous domed church in Dranda. An archbishop here ruled the country located between Kodori and Anakopia.”

The cathedral burnt during the invasion of Ottomans in 1737, the dome was totally ruined and the frescos were destroyed. In 1871 church service was restored here. In 1900 at the initiative of the Russian synod, the dome of Drandi church was raised and it was restored. However, at the same time valuables and marble tombstones disappeared from the cathedral.

The image of the Master has been well preserved at the dome column in the church as well as the fresco of Michael the Archangel and the fragment of the Annunciation along with the image of the kneeling Mother of God (*L. Rcheulishvili. Domical Architecture of VIII-X Centuries in Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1988*).

The Drandi church is a mixture of Georgian and Byzantine church architecture. Inscriptions have not survived.

IV. Msighkva Cathedral of Michael the Archangel. Msighkva Mountain Gudauta municipality. VIII-IX centuries.

Cathedral of Michael the Archangel is located near the village Sanapiro, in Gudauta municipality, in 3 km from the Black Sea coast, in the river Tskuara gorge on a raised hill called Msighkva Mountain. In accordance with the Abkhazian art historian A. Katsia, the cathedral is a monument of Georgian

architecture of the VIII-IX centuries. Its facade was adorned with beautiful decorative fragments. Examples of oldest Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions in the territory of West Georgia have been found in Migkhva cathedral (a total of 46 inscriptions (**Figure 20**)). The content of the inscriptions says that this cathedral was built in the name of Michael the Archangel.

V. New Athos Simon Kananaios cathedral. New Athos, Gudauta municipality. IX-X centuries (**Figure 9**).

Near to Sukhumi New Athos, on the Iveria Mountain stands a monument of Georgian architecture – Simon Kananaios cathedral. Its construction started in VII-VIII centuries and today's construction belongs to IX-X centuries.

According to ancient Georgian and foreign chroniclers, Apostles of Christ, Simon Kananaios (he was from Kanaani together with St. Andrew the First Called, were first to preach Christ in South and West Georgia, including Abkhazia).

According to the apostolic fathers, in 55 AD Apostle of Christ Simon was crucified like Christ and was buried in New Athos on the bank of the river Psirtskhi. There exists an opinion that he was buried in Nikopsia – on the north border of historical Georgia. „The tomb of Simon Kananaios is in the city Nikops in Abkhazia” – is written in Kartlis Tskhovreba“.

In IV a small church was built on the tomb of the Apostle in New Athos and it should have been made of wood but in the later centuries a cathedral of white stone was built here. It was restored several times including the XIX century. No fresco painting of the cathedral has survived. Relief images of the Christian symbols of fish, lion and cross attract attention. No Georgian or Greek inscriptions remaining on the cathedral are legible.

VI. Chkhortola hall Church. Village Chkhortoli, Ochamchire municipality. IX-X centuries.

Two churches have survived in 26 km from Gali center, on the north-west end of the Samurzakano lowland between the rivers Okhoje and Okumistskali, in the village Chkhortoli.

The cathedral preserved in the center of the village was constructed between XIX-XX by local nobles and 'the Society for Restoring Christianity'. The second hall church is in 5 km on the north-west side of the village, in the depth of the confluent of the river Okhoje, on the left side of the river, on the descent of the steep hill.

The Chkhortoli church belongs to the group of apse hall churches in rectangular which are analogous to the architectural monuments of other regions of Georgia in composition design and architectural characteristics. Hall churches of early middle centuries (V-X centuries) can be found in all parts of Georgia, In particular, Eredvi, Kheiti, Disevi, Kusireti, Lashkendati, Ilori churches.

The Chkhortoli hall church is a transitional monument and like the monuments of this time, it lacks sculptures and carvings. The travertine used in interior and the regular form of design, the quality of construction, when the whole attention is drawn to new, spacial details, clearly point to the time and epoch of construction. It is organically connected with the evolution of Georgian architecture. It is exactly within the frames of Georgian church construction and expresses united creative pursuit and directions of the Georgian architecture. Taking into consideration the architectural style and analogies of the cathedral, the church should have been built in the epoch of Konstantine 'King of Abkhazians' (893-922).

VII. Bzipi Church. Bzipi gorge, Gudauta municipality. IX-X centuries.

In the village Bzipi, on the right bank of the river Bzipi, an architectural complex of IX-X centuries has survived in the fenced territory. It includes a fenced fortress and a cathedral. The fortress consists of two parts. The cathedral was in the upper part of the fortress and in the yard of the lower part passed an old caravan road.

The church of the Bzipi fortress is cross-vault, of “embedded cross” type with three protruded apses and it belongs to the IX-X centuries. The walls incrustrated with dressed stones have remained in the whole upper part but it has no dome although it has great impact on the viewers. The doors and windows of the church are adorned with upper ornaments characteristic of Georgian architecture. The remains of another older cathedral can be seen on the east of the Bzipi cathedral.

***Bzipi fortress.* Bzipi gorge, Gudauta municipality IX-X centuries.**

Is located in Bzipi gorge, on the right bank of the river Bzipi. The fortress played an important role in the defense of united Georgia. It blocked very important roads going to the passes of the North Caucasus. The fence of the blind alley is built of well finished limestone quadras, has four angled and semicircle towers, straining arches and a gate.



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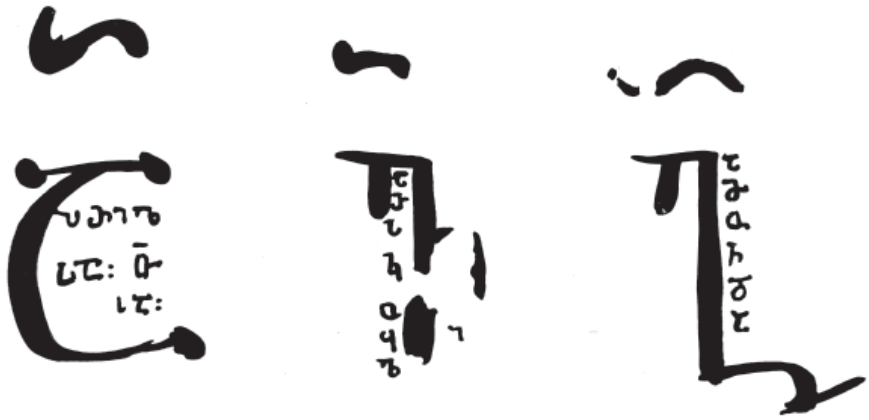
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VIII. Bichvinta Cathedral of the Mother of God. Bichvinta, Gagra Municipality. X-XI centuries (**Figure 4**).

Bichvinta Cathedral of the Mother of God is one of the most famous and popular monument of Georgian Christian architecture. It is located in the north-west part of Abkhazia, in current Bichvinta, which used to be antique city Didi Pitiunti. Pitiunt - Bichvinta whose name is connected with the name of the local relict pine, played a special role in spreading Christianity in west Georgia.

Bichvinta cathedral's first construction is connected with St. Andrew the First Called who preached Christ in I century AD here and built a church. Here Archbishop cathedral existed for centuries. It was called St Andrew Minster. The present domed cathedral is architectural monument of the X-XI centuries. At the end of the III century and the beginning of the IV century Bichvinta turned into an important religious center. It is proved by the participation of the Archbishop of Bichwinta Srtarofil in the first World Religious Meeting. The religious center of west Georgia has been located in Bichwinta for centuries. It moved to Gelati after the invasion of the Mtiulis in the middle of the XVI century. Bichwinta cathedral was abandoned and did not function in the XVII century. In XVIII century the cathedral was struck by lightning and it sustained a lot of damage. In the 30s of the XIX century by the order of the Russian emperor the cathedral was restored. The form of the dome was changed, it was plastered and the facades were whitened, after which the cathedral was altered and was disfigured. In the 60s of the XX century at the recommendation of the academician G. Chvinashvili, restoration works were carried out in the cathedral. The plaster was taken off, the dome regained its original appearance the roof was replaced, the yard was cleaned and the cathedral regained its initial appearance. By today, Bichwinta Cathedral of the Mother of God is one of the most important cult monuments.

According to one Russian note, in the beginning of the XIX century, when Russian troops were entering Bichwinta, when the road to the cathedral was cleared, a Bible written in Georgian was discovered lying open on the altar.

Among the ancient manuscripts of Bichwinta several Greek inscriptions, Georgian Bible of the XII c. Bichwinta (**Figure 23**), with painted miniatures and with ornaments, Georgian Iadgar (Georgian Lyurgic Collection) of the XVI century Bichwinta, Bichwinta Mother of God icon (XVI c.), etc. are invaluable.

Bichwinta Mother of God icon with Evdemon Chkhetidze Inscription (1568). In 1568 „Catholicos of North and Abkhazia“Evdemon Chkhetidze ordered to carve a tryptich icon of Bichwinta Mother of God, its Main Icon was made of gold and the setting was made of silver and it was placed in

Bichwinta Cathedral of the Mother of God. After Bichwinta Catholicos residency was moved to Gelati, the icon was also moved to Gelati. The icon has a Georgian inscription on its back side telling us of the history of its creation. The inscription mentions Catholicos of Abkhazia, Evdemon Chkhetidze, Odishi nobles Mamia and Levan Dadiani. Only the Main Icon has survived among the tryptich icons and the setting does not exist any more. The icon is kept in the Georgian National Museum.

IX. Bedia Monastery complex. Village Bedia, Ochamchire municipality X-XI centuries (**Figure 3**).

A beautiful monument of Georgian architecture, Bedia monastery complex is located in 25 km from Ochamchire, in the center of the village Bedia. Nowadays it includes Cathedral of the Mother of God, Archbishop chamber and a chapel. In accordance with the historical chronicles, Bedia complex was built by the first king of the united Georgia Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014) at the end of the Xth century and its construction was completed in about 999. In accordance with the Georgian chronicler, king Bagrat created Bedia as 'church for episcopacy'.

The main construction of the monastery complex is Bedia Cathedral of the Mother of God in the center of the yard. There are gates on the west, in about 40 meters with the chapel of the cathedral, and on the south of the cathedral is palace of Bedia metropolitans which is a 2 storey construction. The cathedral was significantly altered between XIII-XIV and XV centuries. The chapel is a XIII-XIV century building while the archbishop chamber was built in the XVI century by the metropolitan Anton Zhuanisdze of Bedia, which is confirmed by the Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions carved on the tympan of the chamber (**Figure 17**). Three layers of fresco paintings belonging to the X-XI, XIII-XIV and XVI centuries have been preserved in the interior of the cathedral.

Lapidary, fresco and carved inscriptions have been preserved on the facade, interior frescos and religious items of Bedia cathedral. They were written in Georgian Asomtavruli and tell us about the construction and restoration. By today 11 inscriptions can be fully read. Only fragments of other inscription have been preserved.

The inscriptions mention the architect of Bedia cathedral Svimon Galatztukhutsesi, catholicos Nikoloz Gonglibaisdze, Metropolitans of Bedia: Sopron Goglibaisdze, Antol Bedieli (Zhuanisdze), Germane Chkhetisdze, wardens of Bedia Cathedral during its construction and restoration: First King of the united Georgia Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014), Likhtimereti King Konstantine Davis patronymic Narin (1293-1327), Odishi Queen of queen Marech and her son, Eristavt Eristavi and Mandaturtukhutsesi Giorgi Dadiani,

„Diofali“ Rodabi and his son Kakhberi etc. Among the frescos of the saints Georgian Asotavruli inscriptions have been preserved: St Konstantine. St Helene St Basili, St Gregory the Theologian St Stephane, St. Zakaria, St Nikoloz etc.

Bedia episcopacy has been one of the most important religious and cultural educational centers of middle ages for centuries. David Aghmashenebeli rewarded the Archbishop Svimenon with the honorable name of Bediel Alaverdeli as a symbol of the unity of Georgia and Georgian church.

The archbishop Anton Zhuanisdze created a splendid library in Bedia monastery complex. It was a place where old manuscripts were restored, religious books were translated and new manuscripts would be added to the library. The metropolitan Germane Chkhetidze specially invited experienced calligraphers from South Georgia to the Bedia library. Famous Georgian calligraphers Gabriel Lomsanidze, Ambrose Karghareteli and Svimeon Evprateli, (Giorgisdze), carried out their activity at the monastery. Part of their manuscripts have been preserved by today.

Bedia Monastery complex represents a symbol of unity and indivisibility of Georgia. Tombs of the first king of united Georgia Bagrat III and his mother, queen Gurandukht are located here.

Present condition of the monastery: During the restoration works carried out by the Abkhaz separatist government in Bedia cathedral, the fresco of Bagrat III Bagrationi with a Georgian inscription (**Fragment 10**) was **destroyed**. It dated back to 999.

Bedia Ampulla (999) (Fragment 21). Among the religious items of Bedia cathedral one of the most important monuments is a perfect example of Georgian jewelry Bedia Ampulla, which represents a round gold bowl, its height is 12,5 cm and its diameter – 14 cm. The outer surface of the bowl is divided into 12 areas. Saints are depicted under each arch, Christ sitting on a sofa can be noticed in the middle of them on one side and on the other there is Mother and Child. Its inscriptions belonging to two different centuries tell the history of creation and restoration of Ampulla. At the images of saints and Our Savior carved out on Ampulla bear explanatory Georgian inscriptions. The upper part of Ampulla bears a Georgian Asomtavruli inscription telling us the story of donation of this valuable item by the First king of united Georgia Bagrat III and queen Gurandukht.

One more inscription is also connected with Ampulla. In the XIX century Ampulla also had a golden leg- a stand which got lost. The Georgian Asomtavruli inscription carved out on the leg tells us that the golden leg was made in the XVII century by the order of Bedia Metropolitan Germane Chkhetidze. It seems that the stand of Bedia has been robbed twice – first

in the XVII century and then in the XIX century. Part of Ampulla upper round form – the bowl is presently kept at the Art Museum of Georgia.

X. Likhni Cathedral of Dormition of the Mother of God . Likhni, Gudauta municipality. X century (Figure 6).

Village Likhni is located in 5 km from the center of Gudauta on the lowland of Black Sea Coast. The Georgian architectural monument of the X century, Cathedral of Dormition of the Mother of God is located in the center of it. It is a cross-vault construction with three raised apses in the east. Later on they built open chapels on the west, north and south of the cathedral. Inner walls of the cathedral and the chapel were fully covered with paintings. The cathedral's appearance is distinct due to its soft colours, dynamics of several longated figures and expressivity. The Likhni cathedral bears traces of paintings of X-XI centuries as well as those of later period as well as Georgian inscriptions. The antiquities of Likhni cathedral were first described by a well-known French Kartvelologist, Mari Brosset, who wrote down several Georgian inscriptions from the cathedral walls, including the well-known text dating back to 1066 about the appearance of the comet (**Figure 19**). The chronicler of Kiev principality and one of the Chinese chronicles tell us about it.

It can be said that Likhni cathedral represents a collection of epigraphic monuments because its paintings include more than 17 Georgian asomtavruli and Mkhedruli fresco inscriptions (**Figure 16**). The inscriptions mention various historic events, higher noble and religious figures, iconographic scenes and inscriptions with description of saints frescos. including kings of united Georgia: Bagrat IV (1027-172), Giorgi II (1072-1089); religious persons: Vache Protoispatar and Ipatos, Mtsignobartukhursesi and Chkomdideli, etc.

XI. Mokvi Cathedral of the Mother of God. Mokvi, Ochamchire municipality. X century (Figure 5).

A perfect architectural monument of Mokvi cathedral is located in 15 km from Ochamchire. It represents a three-aisle domed church, with fourteen facet neck of the dome. According to the Georgian chronicler of the XI century, the king of Abkhazians Leon III (957-967) „built a church in Mokvi and it became a church of episcopacy“.

A strong center of Georgian culture has existed for centuries in Mokvi. They increased the number of manuscripts, renewed old lists. Mokvi library manuscripts have been preserved till today and they inform us of the names of Mokvi public figures. Mokvi famous gospel copied at the initiative of Daniel Mokveli in 1300 is one of the most important among Mokvi antiquities. It has rich paintings and is embellished with skillfully performed ornaments. Mokvi gospel was rewritten and illustrated by monk Efrem (**Figure 22**).

Mokvi church which was one of the most important centers of Georgian culture, was rich in Georgian epigraphic monuments. But today only the chapel inscription of XII century has survived. The inscription mentions archbishop of Mokvi Grigoli (Figure 13). Among the fresco inscriptions, one of the most important is the inscription seen by the patriarch of Jerusalem Dositeos in 1659. It mentions the names of the King of Georgia David the Builder (1089-1125) and the emperor of Byzantium Alexi Komnenos (1081-1118).

Mokvi cathedral was also considerably repaired and painted in Davit Aghmashenebeli epoch. The traces of fresco paintings can be seen today as well. It can be confirmed from the sources that the place was abundant in Georgian inscriptions but they were destroyed in later centuries. In 1902 T. Zhordania would mention with regret that 'Georgian inscriptions became invisible in the damaged Mokvi cathedral, 'repaired' but in fact damaged by the current Abkhazian government.' 'If they saw any Georgian inscription, they would wipe it out or vandalize or would scribble Greek inscriptions on the wall.'

Mokvi archbishop cathedral was created in the X century but Mokvi became one of the most important Georgian cultural centers from the XIII century. Georgian sources have preserved the names of Mokvi archbishops who have made a great contribution to Georgian culture. Famous Georgian religious figures: Grigol Molkveli, Daniel Mokveli, Abraam Mokveli, Epytime Sakvarelidze, Philipe Chkhetidze and others carried out their activity in this place.

Mother of God icon with the inscription of Leon III, the king of Abkhazians (957-967). The king of Abkhaz, Leon III, ordered to paint Mother of God icon depicting Mother of God in a pleading pose. Her plea is addressed to the Saviour whose name is inscribed in the right corner of the icon. Michael and Gabriel the Arcangels are depicted in the left corner. The painting of the Mother of God was restored in the XIX century. Its frame with ornaments is embellished with glazed medallions of the saints. There is a Georgian inscription on the lower border of the icon mentioning the king of Abkhazians, Leon III (957-967).

Mokvi Mother of God icon with the inscription by Andria Sakvarelidze. The silver tryptich of Mokvi of 50-60s of the XVII century with the carved icon of Mother of God inside, Holy Mother represents a perfect example of Georgian hammered work of late middle ages. Mother of God is painted standing in the middle of the icon, on the right is John the Baptist, on the left- Stepane chief deacon. The icon is placed in a silver frame of the Triptich and bears numerous Georgian inscriptions, among them- the most

important is the warden of the icon - the pleading inscription of the Archbishop of Mokvi, Andria Sakvarelidze in which he tells us about the donation of the Mother of God icon to the st, cathedral of Mokvi.

XII. Ilori Cathedral of St. George. Village Ilori, Ochamchire municipality, Ist quarter of the XI century (**Figure 7-8**).

Village Ilori is located in 3 km from Ochamchire. There is a monument of the I quarter of the XI century in the middle of it. It is called Ilor church of St. George and represents one of the most important religious centers of west Georgia and a worship place. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, 'At the end of the sea... is Ilory St George church without a dome, small, rich and decorated.'

Ilori cathedral was built by a local feudal Giorgi Gurgenisze which is confirmed by one of the inscriptions remaining on the cathedral. According to the Abkhazian art critic A. Katsia, Ilory church is a hall type construction. In accordance with its beautiful proportions and technique of construction, this monument belongs to a number of constructions reflecting architectural and artistic inspirations of Georgia in the middle ages. It is a Ona nave construction built of apsis. It has various additions on the north, south and west. The church was built of dressed stones and it has doorson the west and south and inner space – the lighting of interior comes from six windows (*A. Katsia. Ilori. Monument of the XI cerntury. Sukhumi, 1963*).

Five lapidary inscriptions in Georgian still remain on the facades of Ilory church. The sixth inscription is wiped and several graphemes are legible. Fresco paintings have not survived here because the Ilory church repaired and painted by the noble of Odishi Levan II Dadiani in the XVII century was burned by Otommans in 1736. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, the paintings of the cathedral were then destroyed. According to the inscriptions of Ilori cathedral, the church originally was built in the name of St George. The church wards were local feudal Giorgi Gurgenisdze, archbishop Giorgi and priest Giorgi Kocholava. Giorgi Galatzi, civil figure Michael, etc are named among the builders of the church.

Present condition of the church: Restored by the de facto government of Abkhazia. As a result, the cathedral has lost its authenticity - they put the so-called Russian dome over it and whitened both interior and the facade, as a result Georgian inscriptions cannot be read any more.

Ilori ampulla Xc. Ilori silver ampulla was found at the end of the XIX century in St. George church. It is very similar to Bedia ampulla - similar to the gold ampulla of Bardzimi, its surface is also divided into eight parts by the bigger arch. Each arch has a figure of a saint. The middle arch reflects the Savior on the throne with his right hand raised for blessing and a bible

in the left hand. The left arch depicts Michael and Gabriel the archangels with ampulle and a discus in their hands bending towards Christ (*G. Chubinashvili. Georgian Hammered Art: Research of the History of Georgian Medieval Art. Tbilisi, 1959*). Ilori silver ampulle is encircled by a Georgian Asomtavruli inscription. The location of Ilori ampulle is unknown.

XII. Ilori icon of St George (1572-1582). Ilori icon of St George represents a perfect example of Georgian art of the middle ages. According to the Georgian inscription on the icon, it was made at the order of Bedia archbishop Kirile Zhuanisdze and Odishi noble Giorgi III Dadiani (1572-1582). The icon reflects the scene of first miracle of George the first.

The icon was first taken to Bedia Monastery but soon it was placed in St George church. It is from here that the miraculous history of the icon began. It was connected with healing of an invalid person, a blind man's vision was restored, a deaf man started to hear, etc.

In 1925 Ilori icon of St. George was stolen from the cathedral but it was returned. In 1936 the icon was finally lost but its photo exists.

Ilori icon of St George (XVII. 60-70 years) a silver, folding, three sided icon decorated with a chain, depicting St Teodore and Dimitri with explanatory inscriptions. The icon can be opened and within can be seen St George in war clothes, in a standing position. On his right Bedia Metropolitan Kirile Zhuanisdze's figure is carved in a pleading position. All the images have explanatory inscriptions except for this one. There is a 15 line Georgian asomtavruli inscription in the sacristy telling us about the history of donating the St George Icon to the Ilori cathedral by Bedia metropolitan Kirile Zhuanisdze.

Noblemen are mentioned together with Kirile Zhuanisdze. These are: the head of the region – Odishi nobleman Giorgi Dadiani and his spouse queen Tamari. It is kept in Zugdidi museum.

XIII. Anukhvi Michael and Gabriel Archangels Church. Village Anukhva, Gudauta municipality, XI century. (Figure12)

In village Anukhva as early as XIX Russian countess archaeologist Praskovia Uvarova discovered large sized church ruins. Its size, harmony of ornaments and their proportionality causes wonder even today. The cathedral represents one of the perfect examples of XI century Georgian architecture. It is similar to the architecture of ancient south Georgia according to the architecture and highly artistic ornaments.

The Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions of the XI-XIV centuries found in Anukhvi church tell us about the history of the cathedral, its wardens and its restoration in later period. According to one of the inscriptions,

Anukhvi cathedral was originally built in the name of Michael and Gabriel Archangels. The beautiful Georgian pointed inscription of XI century carved out on Anukhvi column, mentions the names of large nobles and feudals of Abkhazia of that epoch, Anukhvi cathedral wardens: Giorgi Basilidze, his father Basili, brothers Theodore Demetre and Merkile who raised a cross and built Anukhvi cathedral to remember the souls of the members of their family (*Lia Akhaladze. Abkhazian Epigraphics as a historical source. Lapidary and Fresco inscriptions. Tbilisi, 2005*).

A perfect architectural style, decorations and ornaments of Anukhvi cathedral and forms of the inscriptions can also be found in the architecture of the other regions of Georgia. We should mention Giorgi Basilidze's beautiful inscription of Anukhvi cathedral, which is made artfully and is pointed inscription. We have similar inscriptions in Svetitskhoveli, Samtavisi, Alaverdi, Nikortsminda and Shiomghvime.

XIV Besleti church. Village Besleti, Sukhumi municipality, X-XI centuries.

Besleti church is located in the village Besleti, in 200 meters from the famous Besleti arched bridge. We can see from the ruins that once here was a monastery complex and its main building – the cathedral is nearly ruined by today and its contours are barely seen on the land. A large construction stands on the north-east of the cathedral. It had four rooms connected by thin halls with each other. Additionally one can notice several other ruins which tells us that once here was a large monastery complex. The monastery should have been one of the most important religious centers of Georgia in the middle

Besleti bridge. Between X-XI centuries (Figure 11). This single span bridge is located on the river Besleti river bed near to Sukhumi. Locals call it Tamari bridge. The total length of the bridge is 35 m. Width-8 m. It is constructed of limestone bars, is incrustated with dressed stone blocks and flat brick layers. According to N. Chubinashvili, the bridge represents a construction of middle ages and its architect had studied the features of this river well. This old bridge even satisfies construction criteria and it can bear up to 8 tons of cars. Such a strong and technically well built bridge should have been located on the road of large political and trade importance. We have similar bridges to Besleti bridge in other regions of Georgia. In particular, an iron arched bridge in Kartli, Dondalo bridge in Adjara, a cascade of arched bridges in the historical south Georgia (Tao Klarjeti). The west end of the arched bridge bears a one line asomtavruli inscription telling us: „ქ(რისტე) (მეფე(ე)ო) ყ(ოველთ)ა (აღ)იდე ორთავე ს(უ)ფ(ე)ვათა უ(ძლეველი) King of kings Bagrat). Although the inscription mentions

king Bagrat, people have called this bridge Tamari bridge as a sign of love and affection to Queen Tamar. Both the inscription and the bridge belong to the end of the X century and the beginning of the XI century

Present condition of the monument: The bridge was cleared of the plant layer. A part of the Georgian inscription has survived.

XV. Tskelikari church of St. George. Village Rechkho-Tskhiri. Gali municipality, XI century.

The church is located in 20 km from Gali and was built in the name of St George but the locals call it Tskeli kari (Tskevlis kari- the door of cuese). According to Abkhazian art critic L. Shervashidze, the church represents a perfect example of XI century Georgian architecture. Three lapidary and seven fresco inscriptions are mentioned in the scientific literature. According to their content, in XI century Tskelikari church was built at the initiative of the religious person Merkile and local noble feudal wardens. In the following centuries the cathedral was altered three times when restored. In the XVII century the cathedral warden and tenovator was Chichua earldom and the fresco of one of them is depicted on the wall of the cathedral together with fragments of the relevant Georgian inscription.

XVI. Tsebeli churches. Gulripshi municipality.

Tsebeli church of St Tevdore, XI century. In the XIX century on the outskirts of Tsebeli the russian archeologist, countess Praskovia Uvarova found a cathedral that was later visited by D. Bakradze. Both researchers have described the inscription found in the cathedral which says that the cathedral was originally built in St Tevdore's name. It is built of carved stones, which are a perfect example of art. These miraculous stones attracted attention of researchers in 60-70s of the XX centuries and they were studied by art critics R. Shmerling and L. Khrushkova having found parallels in architectural forms and analogies confirmed that these examples were similar to the other christian monuments of east and south Georgia (**Figure 15**). Present state of the church is unknown.

Tsebelda Church of St Andrew The Apostle, XII century Russian archeologist Praskovia Uvarova found icon of St Andrew the Apostle in the ruins of one of the churches of Tsebelda. It has a Georgian inscription which tells us the history of construction of the church in the name of St Andrew the Apostle by the famous Georgian public figure of the XII century, Mechurchletukhutsesi of the Court and eristavt eristavi, Abusalan Iobisdze. According to the historical reseach of the inscription, the cathedral was built in the last quarter of the XII century.

Tsebeldia church of St George, XII-XIII centuries. A Russian archeologist I. Voronov revealed ruins of a Christian church in 4 km from Tsebeldi in 1988. It had one construction detail that had a relevant Georgian inscription (**Figure 14**). The inscription tells us about the construction of St. George church. According to the analysis of the inscription, it should have been constructed in the XII-XIII centuries. Its present state is unknown.

Tsebelda icon of St Catherine, XI century. In the 80-s of XIX century a damaged icon was found in Tsebelda. Its central part depicts St Catherine in full height. Because the icon is damaged, the photo shows one hand. On both sides of the halo of St Catherine an explanatory inscription can be read ‘St Catherine’ („წ(ბიღვა)ჲ ეკ(ა)ტი(ე)რობე“). On the edge of the lower frame of the icona two lined Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions are carved in beautiful pointed (kidurtsaisruli) writing telling us about the unknown warden of the church – Noble lady – Mariam. From artistic and paleographic point of view, the icon of St Catherine represents a perfect example of the XI century (**Figure 24, 25**).

Tsebelda icon of St. John the Baptist of XI century. In the 80-s of the XIX century an icon was found in the ruins of old church and its frame was silver gilt. In the central part of the icon was depicted John the Baptist, whose face cannot be seen on a photo nowadays. The saint is turned right raising his hand in a plea. There is a Georgian inscription “Saint John” in the right and left corner of the halo, and the inscription on the lower frame of the icon tells us about Saba the son of Meleli who is the warden of the church. According to the art criticism and paleographic signs, the icon of St. John the Baptist was also a masterpiece of Georgian chasing art of the XIX century.

Tsebelda icon of St. John the Baptist of the XII century.

Tsebelda icon of St John the Baptist represents a perfect piece of Georgian art. It is fully made of silver. Several fragments of the icon have survived by today and they have a Georgian Asomtavruli inscription telling us about a famous public figure of Queen Tamar epoch, Eristavt eristavi and Mechurchletukhutsesi Abulasan Son of Iob. Predecessors of Abulasan son of Iob were from Dal-Resbelda valley. Because of this reason Abulasan built a cathedral in the name of St. Andrew the Apostle and donated to it the icon of St. Andrews.

XVII. Ghumurushi churches, Gali municipality

Ghumurishi I church. Ghumurishi foothills, XI century.

Abkhazian art critic L. Shrvashidze discovered church ruins in the mountain chain of Ghumurishi in the 60s of XIX century. An old Georgian asomtavruli during the excavations of this church. The inscription tells

us the story of construction of the cross and the cathedral by the 'Queen of queens' Sagdukht. According to the historical sources, the 'Queen of queens' Sagdukht was an outstanding lady and a wife of Odishi eristavi eristavi who was the warden and constructor of Ghumurishi cathedral. The cathedral and inscription are dated by XIX century.

Present condition of the cathedral: church ruins have survived.

Ghumurishi II church. XIX century.

There is a basilica in the center of Ghumurishi. It was built in XIX century by the initiative of local population. There was no public worship in he church in the soviet period and there was a collective farm warehouse in it. In the beginning of the XXI century the population cleaned the church and as a result, numerous tomb stones with Georgian inscriptions were discovered. The epitaphy in Georgian Mkhedruli mentions the surnames of the representatives of local feudals: Emkhvari and Anchabadze.

XVIII. Dikhazurgi church, village Dikhazurga, Gali municipality, XI century.

Village Dikhazurga is located in the south-east part of Abkhazian foothill on the right bank of the river Enguri. This village was called Didi Tsipuri until 1952. The name of this village is mentioned in the historical novel of Italian catholic missionary Archangelo Lamberti and on the map of 1654 pointing out the existence of the church. "Tsipuria Monastery-writer Lambert, - was built on a plain on the bank of Enguri. Now the monastery is in the hand of our people. Here are located two churches joint together, one was built in the name of Mother of God and another one- in the name of St George.' It seems that two joint churches existed in Tsipuria in the late middle centuries. They belonged to the catholic missionaries by the middle of the XVII century.

At present the ruins of the church in Dikhazurga are called St Barbara church. In the beginning of the XX century farmers found two stone plates among the ruins of the church. On one of them a cross is depicted. On the left, between the horizontal and vertical flangs a full-length figure of a standing man is depicted. The man has his hands in a pleading form bent towards the cross. Above the vertical flangs of the cross, and in the right spandrel is an inscription in Mkhedruli mentioning the architect of Dikhazurgi cathedral Grigol Galakrozukhutsesi. The inscription represents one of the earliest samples of Mkhedruli writing in west Georgia.

Present condition of the church: The interior and exterior of the church are in a bad condition.

XIX. Gudava church, Gali municipality, VI-VIII centuries, XV-XVII centuries.

According to the ancient Greek and Byzantium sources, Gudava represented an important religious center from old time. Here was located Ziganisi fortress - one of the most important fortifications of west Georgian Lazika kingdom. In the VII-X centuries one of the 4 archbishop cathedras was located in Gudava. It is known that the first king of united Georgia Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014) closed Gudava episcopacy as it was a Greek religious center and created Bedia Georgian archbishop cathedra.

Gudava church should have originally been constructed in the VII-X centuries but it was restored and altered several times in the developed and later middle ages. The restoration of Gudava church in the XV century was connected with the name of the local feudal Rabaia and his wife Nigamtsira who are mentioned on the ornamented plate of the construction stone found in the Gudava church yard. There is a three line Georgian inscription in the ornament and it mentions the wardens of the church Rabai and Nigamtsira. There is also a second inscription carved mentioning the deacon of the cathedral. Both the inscription and the restoration of the church go back to the XV century. The present condition of the church is unknown.,

XX. Anakopia fortress. Iveria mountain, near to New Athos.

Historical Anakopia is located in 20 km from Sukhumi, on one section of Iveria mountain. It was called New Athos in the XIX century. On this mountain stands citadel of Anakopia fortress at the height of 350 meters over the sea level. According to the Georgian chronicler, Vakhushti Bagrationi: 'The city of Anakopia stands at the edge of the sea... it was a beautiful city at the sea. It was built and honored by the Bagrationis.'

Anakopia fortress is a defence building surrounded by a stone fence. Marvelous fortress walls with control towers, siege pool and lime stoves have survived till today. Anakopia cathedral dating back to the VII-VIII centuries is an important construction of the fortress. Traces of perfect ornaments of later period can be distinguished even today in the ruins.

Anakopia was a public center of Abkhazians till the 80s of the VIII centuries. In 735-38 the united forces of Georgian aristavis Miri and Archil and the Abkhaz aristavi Leon I destroyed the army of the Arab commander Murvan Kru (the Deaf)(Mervan Ibn Muhammed) at Anakopia. After that the last caliph of Arabs (744-750), had to leave Georgia. At the end of the VIII century, Abkhaz aristavi Leon II declared himself a noble first and then - king of Abkhazians. He united the whole West Georgia and moved the capital of Abkhazia from Anakopia to Kutaisi.

After the unification of Georgia, Anakopia fortress became one of the most important fortification construction of the country and was restored by the government several times. Here stood Georgian royal army. It was protecting the north-west border of Georgia. During the excavations of Anakopia fortress there was found a coin of the King of Georgia Giorgi II (1072-1089) with an inscription: 'Christ! Bless Giorgi the king of Abkhazians and Georgians and the Ceasar.' Anakopia fortress was significantly restored during Giorgi II. Several Greek inscriptions of Anakopia fortress are well-known. Among them are several graphites which mainly had a cult usage.

When Georgia was divided into small kingdoms and municipalities at the end of the XV century, Anakopia became a residency of Abkhaz eristavis (at first) and then of Abkhaz noblemen. In the XVII century, Anakopia was invaded by Turks and the residency of Abkhazia nobles moved to Likhni. After that Anakopia was ruined and Abkhazians called it Psirtska.

During the Russian rule in 1876-1900 St. Panthelemon monastery complex was built on the territory of historical Anakopia. It was Russian affiliate of the Russian Monastery from Aton Mountain. It was at this time that Anakopia was called New Athos.

As you can see, majority of the cultural monuments created in the period of existence of *Egris-Abkhazeti Kingdom (VIII century, 90s – X century, 70s.) and United Georgia (X-XV)* Part of them today is within the borders of modern Abkhazia. However, they are created in the historical epoch when this territory represented a part of the significant Georgian region Odishi saeristavo. From the XVI-XVII centuries after the start of the migration of the population of caucasus mountains to the territory of abkhazia, local unprotected Georgian population was ousted from native lands to the inner regions of Odishi principality. The borders of Odishi principality were also changed. In the new circumstances, Georgian monuments of previous centuries of unique value were not created but gradually damaged.

The proof of this is devastation of Bichvinta, Bedia, Drandi and other churches from the XVI-XVII centuries. Unfortunately, the same situation takes place from the beginning of the 90s of the XX century, when majority of local population was driven out of the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. With the help of the separatist government, Ilori, Bedia, Drandi, Simon Kananaios cathedrals have lost their authenticity as a result of the restoration works carried out. Likhni, Gagra and Chuburkhinji cathedrals are in poor state. The given cathedrals were visited by the representatives of the ICOM Russian Committee whose report mentions the poor state of the monuments of Abkhazian material culture. As we can see from the short description of the monuments we have observed, – says the

report, – The main purpose of their protection is carrying out complex restoration works in connection with conservation of the monuments. These works should include: cleaning and strengthening (wall) construction, its protection by special personnel, provision of protected roofing, provision of drainage from the walls, fight against salted eroded stones, strengthening of foundation, etc. Ilori (Dome, whitening), Dranda (baptismal font), Bedia (Damage of frescos during injections). All of this is done because of lack of resources in the agencies for protection of monuments of the separatist Republic in the process of control.

If we take into consideration the vital importance of the historical monuments of Abkhazia, it should be underlined all of the work should be done by highly professional licensed restorers. The restoration should also be carried out in accordance with the special documentation (project, design offers, engineering and technological-methodological recommendations, etc.) and in accordance with the existing rules. According to this report, it is clear that all the international norms of protecting cultural heritage have been violated. In accordance with the Venice Charter, The historical and cultural monument located on the occupied territories should be inviolable and 'It is our duty to hand the heritage on in the full richness of its authenticity for future generations' Ilori and Bedia cathedrals have lost their historic and aesthetic value because of the so-called 'restoration' the unity of the past and present has been lost. In accordance with the above-mentioned Charter, 'A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness' and should be preserved in its traditional environment. For the purpose of protecting cultural values in conflict situations, 'Nara document on authenticity' was developed at the international conference Which took place in Nara, the city of Japan in 1995 saying: 'Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space, and demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems. In cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties.' The given document is based on the Venice Charter as well as the convention of 16th November 1972 on Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage. Nevertheless, the Russian side with the assistance of self-declared Besarion Aplyia in occupied Abkhazia, is trying to misappropriate and alter the cultural heritage of others, to wipe out the trace of Georgian culture. Unfortunately, this is not just wiping out the Georgian trace but also an attempt to deprive Abkhazians of their historical roots, destroy their identity, a way to adapt more easily to the actual reality.

3. Appendices

3.1. Professor Andrei Kuraev on the History of Abkhazia

On the 26 of June of 2013 the first Orthodox Missionary Conference of Russia was held with

the support of the Orthodox-Missionary centre “Tavros,” in Cheremnetsk (Leningrad district) in the Monastery of John the Evangelist with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Saint-Petersburg and Ladoga – Vladimir and the Bishop of Gatchina and Luzsk – Mitrophan.

One of the reporters was a well-known theologist, professor, Archdeacon Andrei Kuraev, who had been studying the faith and religion of the Abkhazians and conducting the missionary activities. He was asked to speak about his Abkhazian experience. He announced the historical Abkhazia to be the territory of Georgia and the historical Abkhazians – the original Georgians and the modern Abkhazians (Apsua) people being settled in Abkhazia in the 16-17th centuries with the help of the Turks. His answers were precise and profoundly scientific. In A. Kuraev’s opinion the modern Abkhazians do not represent historical Abkhazian kingdom, historical catholicate of Abkhazia, and are not the heirs of the cathedrals and other monuments of culture located on the territory of Abkhazia.

Tell us about your Abkhazian experience – (question posed to A. Kuraev):

I cannot call that experience successful. Sometimes I am jealous of the first Cristian Missionaries, as they were really disengaged. As for me, though I was free in my actions, in fact, I was blocked in every aspect – for instance: The local clergy is not interested in having a representative of Moscow in Abkhazia, for our ministry of foreign affairs all this is the third wheel, as well as for our Embassy. The patriarchy declares that it cannot finance this mission. I beg your pardon, but I am not a priest and thus not able to collect money from the surplices. I have either to think about drawing financial funds for this mission or fulfill missionary activities. I haven’t got any financial resources. Officially I am nobody there, everyone avoids me, as the church considers it the territory of Georgia and I have no right of being and functioning there.

fter approximately one and a half year of hardships you come to school for conducting a lesson and the school director poses a question: What will you give us as a present?

Abkhazian faith and religiousness – is very peculiar – You know it is an extremely interesting problem worth serious discussion and dispute. Is the missionary lie acceptable even being told in the name of highest good? The thing is that the Abkhazians like the idea that their pre Christian religion was not paganism and after converting into the Christianity they worship the same god. If we agree with this thesis it will be very easy to propagate it, but the elementary acquaintance with the scientific ethnographic literature shows that it is not so! It is the very natural polytheism and the one who is called by them the One God is different. It is more like Zeus – One initial god of the Greek world. When a Greek person says the same, we immediately agree with him. The phrase of Heraclites “one is single – but it wants and does not want at the same time to be called by the name of Zeus” - is my beloved one.. It is an amazing theological formula. I'd agree with Heraclites at once. The problem is that when you start to honor the ethnography of Hesiod or Homer you understand that Zeus is not an original God he is the son of Chronis. Chronis himself is not the first but is the son of Uranus and their relations are not simple and harmonious like our ideal Trinity – reciprocal love and obedience. There is the reciprocal permanent castration there etc. Wars, intrigues ... casual communal broil in heavens. When you dig a bit deeper you understand, that something like is common for the Abkhazian mythology. If you inform about this the Abkhazian he may not like it, if you pet him on the back and tell them they had only one God and were clever and wise even in ancient times and when we the Russians climb the trees together with the monkeys in the fifth century you had the cathedral in Pitsunda it would be splendid! It is better not to pose a question what they have in common with that cathedral. Even more serious problem is the connections of modern Abkhazians or those whom we call Abkhazians with Abkhazia. The fact, that gorgeous and fascinating Christian Orthodox Cathedrals are located on the territory of Abkhazia and there was the ancient Orthodox Abkhazian kingdom and existed the Abkhazian Orthodox church is true. The problem is whether those living today have anything to do with that or not? The paradox is that those people call themselves Apsua and the country Apsni and not Abkhazia. The word Abkhazeti is Georgian in origin and those calling themselves Abkhazians were the part of the Georgian ethnos like Megrelia etc. Georgian historians suppose that those authentic Abkhazians were Orthodox inseparable with the Georgians and church etc. They were massacred and driven out of the country by the Turks in the 16-17th centuries and they partly fled from that coast to the East to the mountainous Georgia. On the deserted seaside lands the Turkish authorities

settled the Circassians. It appears that the modern population of Abkhazia appeared there not long ago. But they are flattered to consider themselves the builders and constructors of those ancient cathedrals and be their scions, like the Walakhs are fascinated by being the heirs of the Romans and call themselves the Rumanians, Romei, Romani, the heirs of the ancient Romans, but even if the Dacians have some connections with the Rome, those connections are very remote. The Romanians are at least honest and admit that they have the cult of Emperor Trajan. You know why? Because Trajan defeated Dacia. It is incredible, that they honor their conqueror, as he made them the barbarians the part of the European civilization.

In Abkhazia the situation is opposite. They did not defeat those ancient Abkhazians, without them the fact of deportation would be unexplainable. But they inherited their lands, partially their family names, but this is not for them but for the tourists. They do not call themselves Abkhazians – they do it only in Russian and in conversations with the foreigners and tell them the other story. But I cannot say this to them, as it will offend them and then they will call me the Georgian agent. But if I say that – yes Abkhazians are the most ancient orthodox population in the world and please return to the faith of your ancestors, I am afraid this will be craftiness or will sound as some kind of deception, but from the missionary point of view it will be very effective. We Russians have the same problems with the modern history.



N2. A fragment of the map, being compiled by the Portugese Royal cartograph Diego Homem in 1559. Near present Gelenjik (Russian Federation), which is not far from the Azov sea hoists the flag with the image of the red color cross; under the flag there is an inscription Mengralia, i.e. Megrelia. On the map made by Diego Homem Abkhazia is not shown as an independent unit and it meant within Megrelia. It is published in the books: J. Gama-kharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia – the historical region of Georgia, p. 831-832; B. Gogia Abkhazia... p.33.

N3. A fragment of the map, being made Italian missionary Archangelo Lamberti, being in Megrelia in 1633-1649. This map was for the first time published by the author in 1654. According to the map the North-West border of Megrelia is the river Kodori and Kelasuri wall, which is marked on the map with the inscription: “The wall in the length of 60 000 steps (being built), for preventing the invasion of Abkhazians”. On the map are designated 50 Georgian (and not single Apsua) toponymes. The map was repeatedly published.





N4. Fragments of the Turkish Map of the Caucasus (60-70-ies of the XVII century)

The map was included in the book written by the Turkish scientist-historian and writer Qatib Chelebi - "Jihan - Numa," being published after the death of the author in 1732 in Istanbul. The populated places and that time administration border between Samegrelo and Abkhazia are exactly pinpointed. Due to the process of settling of the Apsua- Abazians, the Turks gave the name of Abaza to Abkhazia. In the North-West "Drbnd" (Derbend) is marked the Turkish name of medieval Gagara (Gagra). To the South-West of Derbend "Bujundu" (Bichvinta),"Sghuksu" (Souksu - the port of Bombora), "Nkhl" (Likhni), "Aghcha" (according to the "Kartlis Tskhovreba" (life of Kartli) - the river Aghats, being called by the Abazians - Aapsta), "Arsanlar" (Anakopia) and Skhum (Tskhumi/Sokhumi) are recorded. At the town of Sukhumi along the river Kelasuri passes the administrative border with Samegrelo ("Megril"). Ibidem without the inscription is marked a well-known building of fortification - Kelasuri Wall, being built by the Prince of Samegrelo - Levan the II Dadiani (1611-1657), as a protection from the invasions and raids of the Abazians. (Tamaz Beradze, Koka Topuria, Manana Sanadze, Bejan Khorava. The Historical Atlas of Georgia, pages 56, 99).



N5. A fragment of the “New Map of the Russian Empire” of the period of Peter I , is compiled between 1721-1725 in the Netherlands and West Frizia by Ioan Kovens and Kornelius Mortier with the support of Everardo Isbrandt Ides. According to the map, Russia directly borders with Georgia, the North-West border of which reaches the Azov sea. It includes the regions: Abkhazia, (Abascia) Megrelia (Mingrelia), Guria (Guriel), Imereti, Samtskhe-Javakheti (Samaea) and Kakheti (Caguetia). It is published in the books: J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia. Abkhazia-Historical region of Georgia, p. 847; B. Gogia. Abkhazia... p. 64-65.

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