

# TRUSO

HISTORICAL AND  
ETHNOCULTURAL ISSUES



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# **TRUSO – HISTORICAL AND ETHNOCULTURAL ISSUES**

**Edited by Roland Topchishvili and Natia Jalabadze**

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The book is the result of interdisciplinary research involving scholars from various academic fields (history, ethnology, art history, architecture, archeology). The monograph deals with the history of Truso, its relationship to the state, the ethnic composition of the population, monuments of material culture, etc. The authors discuss the impact of the current socio-cultural, demographic and economic transformations and political challenges on the current state and infrastructure of the region. The study of written sources, ethnographic data, monuments of material culture, epigraphy, toponyms, confirms that since ancient times the region was an area of settlement of Georgians and was part of the Georgian state. In a sense, this book gives an answer to the falsifiers of the history of Georgia, who present Truso as one of the centers of the formation of the Ossetian ethnos and their historical homeland.

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## INTRODUCTION

The given book **Truso – Historical and Ethnocultural Issues** was written with the financial assistance of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia; it was developed within the framework of the project, the winner of the grant competition “Support for Research Projects and International Scientific Events for the Study of the Border Regions of Georgia” (2020). Based on the existing political situation, the study of the border regions of Georgia has not only scientific and theoretical, but practical significance too, as it is related to issues of state security. Today one of the most problematic border regions of Georgia is Truso, a historical part of Georgia, administratively part of the municipality of Kazbegi. The Truso Gorge covers the upper reaches of the Terek River<sup>1</sup>. It is bordered by the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (the subject of the Russian Federation) to the north and northwest and by the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia to the southwest in some sections.

The area from the source of the Tergi River to the Caucasian Gates (Dariali Pass) has always been an integral part of Georgia. During the early medieval period, this part of Georgia was inhabited by the local Georgian ethnic group – Tsanars and consequently the region was called Tsanareti. Due to the complicated political, social and economic situation, the majority of Tsanars resettled to the lowlands, to the historical province of Kakheti and by the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the number of the population living at the source of the Tergi River significantly decreased. The remaining Georgian population accumulated on the territory which was later called Khevi and its population – Mokheves; they have always been the loyal guards of the Caspian Gates – the northern pass leading to Georgia. The extreme upper reaches of the Tergi, which in Georgian historical annals is referred to as Truso, were inhabited by the migrants from the adjacent Georgian historical-ethnographic region Dvaleti. On the area at the confluence of the

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1 In Georgian *Tergi*; in the following text *the Tergi River* will be used

Tergi and the river Mna, the “country of Mna” with ethnic Georgian population emerged.

In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ossetians from the mountains of the North Caucasus, basically from the Kurtati and Alagiri gorges, moved to Truso, which led to a change in its ethnic composition. Later, from the end of the 18th century, Ossetians also settled in Mna. Thus, eventually, due to the resettlement of the part of Georgians and, to some extent, due to the assimilation of the local population with the Ossetians, the historical territory of Georgia became a settlement of Ossetians.

Today the Ossetian villages of the Kazbegi region are practically abandoned and the majority of their population lives in North Ossetia. Back in Soviet times, there was constant resettlement of Ossetians to the North Caucasus, although initially, it was seasonal. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991-1992 Georgian-Ossetian conflict accelerated this process. Gradually the Ossetian population completely left Truso.

After the 2008 August war the Truso Gorge (as well as Kobi and Ghuda, a village at the head of the Aragvi valley) appeared in the sphere of Russia’s geopolitical interests and has become the subject of constant discourse in the Ossetian / Russian media.

Ossetian and Russian scientific and political circles designate Truso and adjacent territories as historical East Ossetia (sometimes they are even called Central Ossetia); Ossetian scholars declare it as the area where Ossetian ethnos originated and which, according to their claims, was an “integral territory of South Ossetia” before 1922; based on these “scientific findings” Ossetians make a claim on the given territory and strive to annex these historic Georgian lands to Ossetia; they intend to return them to the “ State of Ossetians” (Kozlov, 2017; Medoev 2019) and thus “restore the historical justice” (Ostaev 2019). The accomplishment of this plan is in the Kremlin’s interests, as it will allow Russia to exercise control over this important geostrategic area. In this respect, the security of the Georgian state faces a certain threat.

Georgian scholars have never studied this border region from this viewpoint since it was undisputed that it had always been an integral part of Georgia and that its inhabitants were ethnic Georgians

(before the resettlement of Ossetians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century). There are numerous oral or written sources and monuments of material culture to prove the truth. As for the falsifiers of the history of Georgia, they intensively propagate the idea of ascribing these territories to the so-called East Ossetia and assert that they are their indigenous lands and historical territories. The works written by Georgian scholars in response to the false history published in Ossetia and Russia are available mainly to Georgian-speaking readers. Foreign readers, especially in academic and political circles, unfortunately, are not acquainted with the real state of facts. Therefore, it became necessary to conduct an interdisciplinary study of Truso and publish its results not only in Georgian but also in English.

The authors of the collective monograph are the key personnel of the above project, ethnologists: Roland Topchishvili (principal investigator), Lavrenti Janiashvili, Natia Jalabadze, Giorgi Avtandilashvili, art historian Giorgi Gagoshidze, archaeologist Giorgi Gogochuri, and architect Giorgi Bagrationi. The project was implemented in 2020. The research was conducted based on historical, ethnological, art history, architectural and archaeological disciplines. The complex expedition was carried out in the Truso Gorge; Key personnel collected field ethnographic materials, fixed, photographed, and sketched archaeological, epigraphic, and architectural data; the obtained materials were analyzed in a historical context; practically unknown ancient Georgian samples of material culture were discovered, they were studied and dated; archaeological exploration was carried out, monuments were described, photographed, important objects were measured and sketched.

The monograph covers the history of Truso, its relationship with the state, the ethnic composition of the population, the identities of autochthonous and migrated ethnic groups and their interdependence, the monuments of material culture. The book considers the current socio-cultural, demographic and economic transformations, the influence of political challenges on the existing situation and infrastructure of the region.

The work has not only theoretical and educational, but also practical value. It will provide theorists and practitioners in relevant

fields with the necessary scientific information, as well as provide the society with objective scientific information. The monograph can be seen as a response to the falsifiers of the history of Georgia, whose works are used as guidelines by certain scientific circles and Kremlin apologists; the authors are confident that this work will demonstrate to the relevant structures and the concerned society that territorial claims regarding the upper reaches of Tergi (Truso Gorge) are absolutely groundless. It will greatly assist international organizations participating in the Georgian-Ossetian Peace Talks.

The authors express their deep gratitude to the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation for financial assistance in the implementation of the project and publication of the book.



## **GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW OF THE UPPER REACHES OF THE TERGI GORGE**

The upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge is administratively part of the Kazbegi municipality of Georgia. The area of the municipality is 1082 sq. m. It is located mainly on the northern slope of the main watershed of the Caucasus. Administratively, the municipality of Kazbegi also includes a certain territory to the south of the main watershed of the Caucasus - the upper reaches of the river Tetri Aragvi (Guda and the adjacent area). The administrative unit of Kazbegi, apart from the upper reaches of Tergi, includes the basins of the river Sno (its right tributary) and the river Mna (its left tributary).

The Tergi River originates in the northern and eastern glaciers of the Zilgahokh Mountain, at an altitude of 2,800 meters above sea level. From the source it flows 25 km. (i.e. on the territory of Truso) between the main and lateral ridges of the Caucasus. In Truso, the rivers – the Shuatisistskali (from the left) and the Desistskali (from the right), as well as some small rivers, join the Tergi.

The Georgian Military Road runs from the state border of Georgia to the village of Kobi along a section of the Tergi Gorge. The upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge are bordered on the east by Khevsureti, a historical-ethnographic province of the Georgian highlands, on the west by the headwaters of the Didi Liakhvi (resp.: Grater Liakhvi) and Ksani valleys and on the south by Mtiuleti and Gudamakari. The state border runs north of the region, namely, it borders on Ossetia and Ingushetia, which are part of the Russian Federation. As for Truso, it is bordered on the west by Dvaleti, the indigenous historical-ethnographic province of Georgia, which since 1858 became part of Russia. There is a pass from Truso to Dvaleti through the Zakha Gorge, that is officially called the Truso Pass (3150 m. above sea level), though the local population calls it “Kheladura Pass”. In the north, Truso borders on the Kurtat Valley of Ossetia. Historically the upper reaches of the river Tergi was first under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Kingdom, then, for some period,

it was under the rule of the Eristavs of Ksani (Dukes of Ksani), and later it became the domain of the Eristavs of Aragvi. After the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire, it was part of the Dusheti Uyezd of the Tbilisi province. The population of the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge was more developed than the other Georgian highlanders; this was primarily due to the road that connected the country to the North through the Dariali Pass. But it should be emphasized that the social promotion mainly refers to the Khevi section of the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge. Truso was somehow isolated, cut off from this road due to the geographical factor; there was a very narrow Kasara (Kasri) pass, which in fact hindered the integration of its population with the inhabitants of the Mna Gorge and especially of Khevi.

At the headwaters of the Tergi River in the transition zone between the Central and Eastern Caucasus, there are several peaks: Suasiti/Shuatisi (4.480 m.), Maili (4.620 m.), Gimara/Jimara (4.4770 m.) and Mkinvartsveri (5.033 m.). There are about 60 mineral springs both in Truso and Khevi. There are travertines (limestone deposited by mineral springs), which add a special beauty to the district. Due to the diversity and beauty of nature, the Truso Gorge is called the "Geological museum".

In Truso, at the beginning of the gorge, there was the highest village in Georgia – Resi (2400 m. above sea level).

There was once a mountain forest in the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge, but due to deforestation, minor subalpine meadows have replaced it. In the old forest area, there are only bushes (including birch and rowan-trees (*sorbus aucuparia*) now. The mountainous landscape of Truso determined the nature of the local farming activities, the main field of which was cattle breeding.

Truso is depopulated today. The Ossetian population living here started to migrate to North Ossetia at the beginning of the Soviet period. They were attracted by the city life of nearby Vladikavkaz (the local Georgian population also aspired to this); then in 1944, a certain part (one-third) of the Truso residents were resettled by the Soviet authorities in the Ingush villages (Prigorodny District). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the remained in Truso Ossetians moved en masse to North Ossetia.

## TRUSO IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

**Introduction.** The Georgian reality has show that Russia is again betting on the Ossetian factor, pursuing an expansionist policy in the South Caucasus. When, after 2004, Georgia's aspiration for NATO became irrevocable, the Russian authorities began to actively work for the seizure of some lands and border regions of Georgia (Areshidze, 2010). The August 2008 war and gaining influence over the de facto Republic of South Ossetia, was part of this Russian scenario. As stated in S. Neil MacFarlane article, the desire of Georgia to join NATO became a significant factor for Russia's aggression. Then-President Medvedev, when talking about the August war in one of his interviews with journalists, openly declared: *„We have simply calmed some of our neighbors down by showing them that they should behave correctly in respect of Russia and in respect of neighboring small states. And for some of our partners, including the North Atlantic Alliance, it was a signal that before taking a decision about expansion of the Alliance, one should at first think about the geopolitical stability. I deem these [issues] to be the major lessons of those developments in 2008“* (Whitmore 2011).

After the occupation of Tskhinvali and Akhagori regions in 2008, The “return” of Georgia's northern border region, namely the Truso Gorge (as well as the Kobi Basin) to Ossetia and gaining control over this strategically important territory, has become topical on the Kremlin's agenda; today the Kremlin, in alliance with Tskhinvali, manipulates the fact that Ossetians used to live in this territory and, resorting to falsified history, tries to present it as the historical homeland of the Ossetians; intending to annex it to South Ossetia, they have concocted a new name and refer to it as “East Ossetia.”

In 2014, the external session of Eurasian Forum of Russian Institute of Strategic Studies was held in Vladikavkaz. It was dedicated to the existing political situation in the north and south Caucasus. Michail Chernov, then-deputy director of the Center of Strategic

Studies of the Russian Federation, when talking with media, declared: *“Historically, Russia has always relied on different peoples. In a certain historical period, it is no secret to anyone, the Russian Empire relied on the Georgian people, actually created Georgia, created this Georgian people from many different Kartvelian peoples. Due to certain historical reasons, at a certain historical stage, Soviet Georgia ceased to exist. And it ceased to exist primarily due to the demands of its own authorities and the population of Georgia. There was a fact of genocide of Ossetians, there was oppression of other peoples – Armenians and Azerbaijanis – everyone is well aware of this. And now a new objective period has begun. This time Russia in the form of the Eurasian Union is returning to Transcaucasia, returning for a long time and for a very long time. For certain reasons, it is no longer possible to stake on the Georgian people, and the stake will be made on other peoples, and one of these peoples, undoubtedly, are the Ossetians. This process has already begun, the Republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia have appeared... But this process has not yet been completed and, naturally, it will end in one form or another.”*(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXsMy8tVwoQ>).

To say briefly, Kremlin is counting on the Ossetian people. And the fact that the completion of the above process is urgent for Russia is clearly demonstrated by the so-called creeping annexation of Georgia’s lands after the 2008 war and the growing claims to the Georgian territories, where the Ossetian population used to live (the Truso Gorge, Kobi Basin, Ghuda..).

In the context of Georgian-Ossetian conflict, hybrid warfare, as a modern form of war that is focused on the accomplishment of strategic goals without physical confrontation (Hoffman 2007:7), is associated with Russia. To achieve its geopolitical goals, the Kremlin, apart from military force, effectively uses the existing economic, financial, political and information levers of influence and is particularly efficient in the use of information warfare and propaganda (Avalishvili ... 2016: 5). It reveals the most vulnerable spots of the target country, carries out active informational brainwashing of the population, conducts propaganda and carries out informational-psychological operations. In 2013, Valeri Gerasimov, the head of the General Headquarters of

Military Forces of Russia, published an article which later was called “Gerasimov Doctrine”; it says about the means of the achievement of geopolitical goals of the Kremlin; Gerasimov believes that informational and psychological war has a crucial role in the modern war and in the 21st century, political aims will be achieved not by the military, but informational means (Meister 2016:3). This initiative has become the most important part of the Russian “hybrid” war. And, I. Panarin, one of the ideologists of Eurasian Alliance talks about the necessity of considering in “the second informational war” of such elements as a creation of general stereotypes, maneuvering with people, manipulation with information and spreading the disinformation (Julukhidze 2018:5). Today, the experts consider the Truso Gorge as one of the target points in Russia’s hybrid war for the South Caucasus(Jalabadze 2017:59).

**Information War and Truso.** The area of Ossetian settlements in the Kazbegi region near the Georgian Military Road – the Truso Gorge (also the Kobi Basin), which is about fifteen kilometers from the Roki tunnel, is of great strategic importance for both Georgia and Russia. The area has been of particular interest to Russian / Ossetian politicians since the August 2008 war; if we ignore some preconditions, it can be said that their claims to these historical territories of Georgia emerged from this period and gradually increased, which was accompanied by the Kremlin’s intention to unite North Ossetia and de facto South Ossetia. According to experts, the seizure of the Truso Gorge will allow Russia to control a section of the Georgian Military Road – the shortest highway connecting Russia with Armenia and Iran. At the same time, theoretically, due to the location of the Truso Gorge, the Georgian side could attack the road that goes out of the southern portal of the Roki tunnel and the slopes of the pass. As a result of their collapse, the road in the direction of Java and Tskhinvali will be temporarily closed (Lukjanovich 2015: 89)

In 2014, the chairman of the *People’s Frunt* N. Natadze, discussed the strategic importance of the Truso Gorge for Russia in connection with the construction of a tunnel in the Dariali Gorge (the tunnel was constructed by a company associated with Russia). According to his opinion, the tunnel, the declared purpose of which was to supply the

Dariali Hydroelectric Power Station with water, could have been used as a transition pass through which the army and armoured vehicles could move directly to Kazbegi that actually means losing the Dariali Gorge as a defence zone. The deployment of Russian troops in Truso, a few kilometers from Kazbegi, is tantamount to the capture of the Cross Pass, and the claim to Truso, a strategically important area, is the same as announcing “check” to Georgia and generally the West by the Russians. According to Natadze, Russia’s stated goal is to prevent the existence of a NATO member state in its neighborhood, but in fact it wants to close the Transcaucasian corridor to the West and restrict their movement to Central Asia (Abesadze, 2014).

In his article *The Question of Kazbegi*, Ossetian politician A. Fadzaev openly stated: “Russia should not lose these Ossetian territories (he means Truso, Kobi and Ghuda, N.J.), that were illegitimately included in the composition of Georgia and are very important from a geopolitical and military-strategic point of view”. (<https://www.apsny.ge>)

In his speech at the Congress of the Ossetian people in Vladikavkaz in 2014, E. Kokoity emphasized the importance of their relations with Russia, noting that “*the Ossetian people love Russia so much that this love does not need to be verified*”; and the plan to expel Russia from the Caucasus and replace it with NATO and US forces is dangerous for the small Ossetian nation (Abesadze, 2014).

The fact that the seizure of this part of Georgia is a desirable and urgent matter for the Kremlin is evidenced by their activities, which they intensively undertake together with the Ossetian reactionary forces and with the help of propaganda levers of hybrid war, reinforce the idea that this so-called “East Ossetia” historically belonged to Ossetians and is the original Ossetian territory, which the Bolsheviks, against the will of the Ossetian people, illegally torn away from their homeland and annexed to the Soviet Republic of Georgia.

The propaganda methods of hybrid warfare are diverse: propaganda is created in different formats (text, audio, video, photo material). It is disseminated through various channels – the Internet, social networks, radio, television, print media, through direct meetings and communication with members of the public. Propaganda is based on

fabricated stories and distortion of real facts; it is created quickly and continuously. In many cases, old misinformation is redistributed and replicated; The main task is not only to present the lie as the truth, but also to confuse the target object, distorting the facts so that he no longer sees the real picture (hybrid war ... 2017)

Russia's model of the seizure of the above region is based on the following concept:

Truso is the historical territory of Ossetia ("East Ossetia"), it belonged to South Ossetia, i.e. was a part of it, and therefore must be annexed to it; the Ossetian population, which was allegedly expelled from Truso by the Georgians and are not allowed there today, must return there. Then the Republic of South Ossetia and North Ossetia Alania should be united; finally, the united Ossetia (including historical Georgian territories) should be under the jurisdiction of Russia!

It should be noted that Ossetians do not have a written language and therefore Ossetian sources do not exist at all; there are no other sources to provide information that this area is considered the historical homeland of the Ossetians. Instead, some representatives of the Ossetian humanities are working diligently in this direction, and their goal is to rewrite the history of Ossetia (in relation to South Ossetia) (R. Bzarov, M. Bliev, F. Gutnov ...). We shall touch upon this issue in the next chapters and I shall not dwell on it now.

However, in addition to the fact that Ossetian / Russian scholars, relying on falsified stories and unfounded evidence in their works, present South Ossetia and the so-called East Ossetia as the historical homeland of the Ossetians, fictional stories and false information are widely disseminated through social networks. For example, in this regard interesting is to note the Internet portal "Drevlit.ru", which presents ancient Russian and translated into Russian foreign sources or their interpreted versions. If we indicate "South Ossetia" in the "search" column, in the list of found documents we shall see both the original and translated in Russian foreign manuscripts of the 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries (and later period too). South Ossetia is nowhere to be found in the original manuscripts, only southern Ossetians, or Ossetians of Georgia are mentioned there; however, they are substituted by South Ossetia in translated or interpreted documents. It is significant

that in the manuscripts of that period there is no such differentiation as South and North Ossetia; when mentioning Ossetia they refer to North Ossetia (<http://drevlit.ru>). Truso is nowhere mentioned as historical Ossetia, and even more so, as a part of South Ossetia, and there is no mention of East Ossetia at all.

The adherents of the theory of Truso being the historical homeland of Ossetians, cite as one of the arguments the Ossetian legend *Three Tears of God*. This legend is associated with the hero of the Nart Saga Batradz and tells us about the foundation of the shrines – Taranjeloz, Mikalgabirta and Rekom (Dumezil 2001:71-73). After the death of Nart Batradz, God ordered local deities and angels to bury the young man in Sophia Crypt. But they couldn't do it until God shed three tears from the heaven. The angels then carried the body into the crypt and buried it; And where three tears of God fell, three shrines were erected: Taranjelos in Truso, Mikalgabirta in Tual and Rekom in Valagir (The Narts 1988: 272, Mamisimedishvili 2015: 94-95).

Populist-propaganda media uses the narrative of the formation of the Tarangelos Shrine in Truso on the place where a tear of God fell, as a proof that this area is the historical homeland of the Ossetians and their sacred place. This idea is fomented in newspaper articles and documentaries by A.Tuaeva, which are dedicated to the Truso and Kobi topic. In the film "Tirshigom, the Holy Homeland of the Ossetians" (2014), Truso is referred to as the sacral territory of the Ossetians, a sacred place where the ancestors of the present-day Ossetians lived for centuries and which, allegedly, the Georgians tore it away from historical Ossetia.

The names of the shrines – Mikalgabirta and Taranjelos are of Georgian origin – Mtavarangelozi (Archangel) and Mikelgabrieli. As Georgian and some foreign scholars state, the cult of Archangels in Ossetia was introduced from Georgia and this is proved by relevant historical sources. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, at the order of King Tamar, the bishop of Tsalka converted the population of the Truso and Zakha gorges to Christianity and built the Churches of the Archangels here (Antelava 2017: 329).

Despite the great desire of opponents, to present the churches in Truso as Ossetian relics, they are actually samples of Georgian



architecture; undoubtedly, Georgian local cults and religious monuments were adopted by the Ossetians, who moved to Truso (as well as Kobi and Guda) from the north (see the corresponding chapter in the book).

Modification of the culture of a migrant ethnic group as a result of contact with a different culture is common. This process involves changes of attitudes or behaviors between the representatives of different cultures that can lead to the mixing or blending of cultural elements. In modern studies, the term acculturation is used to denote the process and result of the interaction of different cultures, during which recipients - representatives of one culture or their part, adopt the norms, values, and traditions of another, donor culture (Sadokhin: 2005: 130-136). This is the result of long life in a foreign cultural environment, characterized by a relatively stable change in individual or group consciousness according to environmental requirements. (Berry 2002: 291-296). Alfred Kroeber, an American anthropologist defines acculturation as changes made by one culture to another, which leads to an increase of similarities between them. This type of change can be bilateral, however, very often, this process is asymmetric and one culture is usually partially absorbed by another (Kroeber 1948:425-428). John Berry, who studied intercultural psychology, distinguishes four strategies of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration (Berry 1996: 296). In the case of the Ossetians of Truso, we are dealing with the case of integration: When Ossetians migrated from the North to Truso, there already lived Dvals (local group of Georgians). For a certain period, these two ethnic groups peacefully coexisted; part of the Dvals left the gorge and part remained; gradually the Ossetian migrants integrated with the local population: Ossetians adopted cultural elements of the host group (types of residential or agricultural buildings, construction technology, types of farming, religious cults and traditions, etc.). In the course of time, the Ossetians prevailed over the Dvals; they became dominant and completely assimilated the remaining Dval population. As for the above-mentioned Taranjeloz, it is a sample of Georgian architecture – the Archangel Church, which was adopted by the migrant Ossetians. This fact should be a reflection of the acculturation process when the

Mtavarangelozi (Archangel) was still the object of worship of a group of Georgians (Dvals) in this area.

Back in 2007 A.Tueva published the article „Трусовское ущелье. Почему оно за границей? (resp.: *Truso Gorge, why is it abroad?*); she noted that due to the historical injustice, the recklessness of Russian politicians and the insidious vagaries of fortune, the homeland of 65 Ossetian families (the Truso and Ghuda gorges and the Kobi basin) has become an inaccessible foreign country to the residents of 33 Ossetian villages. The author refers to these territories as Central Ossetia and concludes that these lands unjustly, without any logic are currently part of Georgia. Referring to the historical, narrative, or other sources, she tries to prove that the territory belongs to the Ossetians; she assures us that this territory has never been Georgian because Georgians have not lived here at all and there is no evidence that they ever lived on these lands. She considers the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. as the period of establishment of Ossetians in the Caucasus – when their ancestors Scythians came to the Caucasus via Dariali Gorge. The author speaks of the sevenfold depopulation of Truso and argues that the ancestors of modern Ossetians finally settled in the valley in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A.Tuaeva uses information by Vakhushti (a famous Georgian geographer, historian and cartographer) that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were eight Ossetian settlements in Truso, and states that most of the buildings preserved here belong to that period. The author claims that after the “Perestroika”, the Ossetian villages once with the richest collective farms immediately impoverished. There is not even a sign of civilization here – there is no first-aid post, no shop, no post office, etc., and the Government of Georgia does not care about the fate of Ossetians. The main purpose of the article is to convince the reader that no one has ever lived in the 33 Ossetian villages of the indicated gorges except the Ossetians, and this territory belongs solely to them. Tuaeva underlines that the Ossetian population of Kazbegi has Russian citizenship and their whole life is still connected only with Vladikavkaz, and not with Tbilisi; she hopes that historians and politicians will conduct a more detailed analysis of these gorges (<http://iratta.com/2007>).

Since 2009, the problem of Truso has permanently been raised by

mass media, Ossetian/Russian politicians, scholars and representatives of the general public, emphasizing that the Truso Gorge (Kobi, Guda) is Ossetian territory, that it was seized by Georgians and should be returned to Ossetian people. The distribution of various falsifications and false information continues. Accordingly, the Georgian side also addresses these issues and tries to prove the falsity of the facts and events in the Ossetian media. At the initial stage of the information war in this direction, representatives of the Georgian media did not often use scientifically grounded counterarguments but mostly limited themselves to the statement of facts. Information of Georgian media is generally incomprehensible to the Russian-speaking audience. It was seldom translated into Russian or English, neither scientific articles were properly presented in Russian. The disputed issues were mostly discussed by the Georgian side in the Georgian language, while the Ossetian side disseminated information mainly in Russian; and since the latter has a much larger audience in the form of Russian-speaking users, they had the prospect of winning the information war from the very beginning (Jalabadze, 2017). However, today the situation in the Georgian media space is better in this regard.

The issue of *East Ossetia* still remains an active topic of discourse in the Ossetian media, and the authorities of self-proclaimed South Ossetia continue to make claims on the Truso Gorge and Kobi Basin, considering them “integral part “of the de facto republic and argue about the need to restore “historical justice”... (Papaskiri 2018).

In 2017 another propaganda documentary of A. Tuaeva *Unattainable Homeland – the Truso Gorge and Kobi* “was released. The main goal of the film is to present the so-called East Ossetia as the historical homeland of Ossetians and reinforce this stereotype. The director once again emphasizes the legend of the founding of the Tarangelos temple in Truso and considers this to be proof that the ancestors of the Ossetians lived here since ancient times. The author of the film asserts that the analysis of the Truso architectural monuments and religious constructions reveal that this territory was inhabited solely by Ossetians from ancient times and that it never belonged to Georgia’s Kazbegi region. But here Tuaeva accidentally makes such an irrelevant statement, which turns the already fragile theory of

Truso as the historical homeland of Ossetians, upside down. As she claims the representatives of 52 families of 13 villages of Truso are “the migrants from the different places of North Ossetia”; in other words, she directly declares that the dwellers of Truso resettled here from North Ossetia. The film also talks about how the Ossetian territories appeared within the administrative borders of Georgia, that this historical injustice was committed while the construction of Georgian Military Road – for the convenience of Tsar’s officials all the settlements from Kazbegi to Vladikavkaz were ascribed to the latter and the Kazbegi -Tbilisi segment to Dusheti Uyezd of Tiflis gubernia (governorate). It is underlined that Ossetia voluntarily joined Russia and that the residents of Truso, Ghuda and Kobi took an oath of Loyalty to Russia; and Georgia, having decided to secede from Russia, seized territories that have never belonged to it.

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYsHrq\\_bYnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYsHrq_bYnY)).

In recent years, the international news agency South Ossetia Today has been actively working on the Truso problem. In 2019, a letter from S. Kozaev was published, based on a falsified history and fabricated stories and trying to present the disputed territories as the possessions of Ossetia. It is interesting that the rhetoric, objects and actors have not changed since 2009. It is still emphasized that “East Ossetia” is one of the oldest territories, where the Ossetian ethnos originated and dwelt, that the Truso, Dariali and Kuda (Guda) gorges and the Kobi basin have been the eastern outposts of the Ossetians. They continue to tendentiously cite the works of ancient authors, Russian and foreign travelers and researchers, falsify statistics, etc.

Absurd is the assertion of the author: “all East Ossetian toponyms are of Ossetian origin: the names of rivers, mountains, valleys, villages are Ossetian. There are no ancient Georgian archaeological sites here, there is no evidence of the presence of Georgians on this territory in the past. The mass resettlement of Georgians in East Ossetia took place after the establishment of Soviet rule in Georgia in order to oust the Ossetian population from there “ (Kozaev 2019).

The author speaks about the discrimination of Ossetians by Georgians and among other narratives, refers to the history of the deportation of the Ingush people in 1944, when part of the Truso

population moved to Ingushetia. After rehabilitation, the Ingush people asked the Ossetians to return to their lands in East Ossetia, but the government of the Georgian SSR did not accept them and settled them in North Ossetia (Kozhaev2019). It is a well-known fact that after the repatriation of the Ingush, the Ossetians refused to return to their homeland and seized the Ingush lands; the current discord between the Ossetians and the Ingush stems from this situation (Jalabadze 2006:86-87). However, the biased information provided in the article serves to form anti-Georgian sentiments.

The materials presented clearly show how the spread of false information through the media and the use of propaganda methods for hybrid warfare is carried out. And these methods imply: 1. **The denial of objective reality** (propaganda is based on fabricated news, distortion of real facts, taking out the news or an event from the context and covering them from favorable for the Kremlin angle); 2. **Frequency, continuity and repeatability** (propaganda has prompt and continuous character. In many cases takes place the dissemination and reproduction of the old disinformation to ensure the urgency of the topic); 3. **Disorientation of the object of propaganda** (the main stake is placed not on presenting a lie as a truth, but the disorientation of readers/viewers, so that the latter be unable to distinguish the real state of things out of given controversial information) (Avalishvili...2016 6:5)

**Anti-Georgian Public organizations and the Truso Issue.** Promotion of the topic of Truso and Kobi is connected with the activities of anti-Georgian public organizations based in Vladikavkaz (Lukianovich 2015:123). On December 21, 2008, the organization *Darial* was established in Vladikavkaz under the leadership of G. Salbiev, a former high-ranking official of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the very first meeting of the organization, the leader of *Darial* referred to Kazbegi, Truso and Dariali gorges as “East Ossetia” and declared that the whole Kazbegi region belonged to the Ossetians and these territories were occupied by Georgia; in 2010, the Georgian media spread information about the activities of the organization, notifying that it was planned to detach Truso and Gudauri from Georgia and

that the organization had maps and projects outlining how to connect the Tskhinvali region to Kobi and Gudauri via Truso. It was also stated that “at the meeting of the organization, the representatives of Armenia promised the Ossetians to compile such documents as if they had found in the Armenian historical sources the data that the Kazbegi region was the ancestral land of the Alans, from where the Ossetians were expelled by the Georgian kings” (<http://expertclub.ge>). After that, Salbiev repeatedly raised the issue of the “return” of Ossetians to the Kazbegi region and discussed possible ways for the region to become part of South Ossetia; he demanded the abolition of borders and pasportization of the Kazbegi region; until 2010 (that is, before the opening of the Lars checkpoint), he required the abolition of the visa regime and the restoration of free movement through the checkpoint. (<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/163460/>). After the creation of the de- facto Republic of South Ossetia, the demand for the unhindered return of the Kazbegi Ossetians to their historical lands was added to the requirements of *Darial*. And after this issue is resolved, active work will begin to unite South and North Ossetia (<http://www.frontnews.ge/ge>).

The organization *Darial* and its leader permanently organize pickets at the Upper Lars (Verkhny Lars) border crossing, mainly during religious holidays, where they demand to give the right to Ossetians, former residents of Kobi and Truso, now the citizens of Russia, to cross the border to attend their religious holidays and visit the cemeteries of their ancestors. The fact is that since 2010, when the Lars checkpoint was opened, Russian citizens have been able to enter Georgia without a visa, move freely, and no one has prevented Ossetians with Russian citizenship from returning to their villages. Only because of the complicated relations with Russia and the impending dangers that accompany the interests of seizing the territories of Kazbegi, the Georgian side does not allow those who are suspected of provoking tensions to cross the border. Official Tbilisi, declared a number of politically engaged individuals (including the leaders of the three above- mentioned organizations) *persona non grata*, and they were banned to enter Georgia (it is noteworthy that the Ossetian side was warned about this decision in advance); these

were the people who want to provoke a destabilization in Kazbegi municipality. The opposing side considers this fact a violation of the right to freedom of movement and demands a response from the Georgian authorities. Salbiev protests against the non-admission of these people to Kazbegi and systematically voices the facts of “violation of human rights “.

“The return” of so-called “Central Ossetia,” i.e. Kazbegi municipality, is part of the program of the organization – *For United Ossetia*. The organization has become especially active in recent years. According to its leader A. Khugaev, who considers himself a “defender of the rights of the Ossetian nation”: *“The Ossetians have never removed the issue of returning the lands of their ancestors. Georgians appeared in this region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ossetians lived in Truso, the Kobi Basin and the Guda Gorge. All toponyms here are of Ossetian origin: rivers, mountains, valleys. There are no Georgian archeological monuments that are more than 120 years old. Official Georgia spares no effort to wipe out Ossetian toponyms and substitute them with Georgian ones”* (Tarkhanova 2015).

Another organization, *Kazbegi* led by S. Tuati, is involved in this propaganda war. By the assessment of the experts, today *Kazbegi* is the most dangerous and influential separatist structure, which operates with definite goal, namely to destabilize the northern border of Georgia (Lukyanovich, 2015:127); though according to its rhetoric and activity, it is less aggressive. Recently, this organization has been most actively seeking a decision from the Georgian government on the admission of Ossetians to the Kazbegi region. Apart from Russia, Tuat also has Belgian citizenship; According to experts, it is possible that he will continue his activities in Europe and will fight through official or unofficial support for the return of ethnic Ossetians to the Kazbegi region (Lukyanovich 2015: 124-1281). The propaganda basis of such organizations is falsified history, anti-Georgian rhetoric and the desire for a new demarcation of borders.

**“The list of Kobi inhabitants”.** Tokhsirov’s letter was published in Kavkaz. Reali in June of 2019, where the author tells about the hardships of about 200 residents in North Ossetia, who have been trying in vain for several years to get the right to visit the houses

and cemeteries of their ancestors in the border region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti. They were blacklisted a few years ago because they wanted to register property in the village of Kob.

Before that, Ossetian and Russian media focused on the fact of not allowing these individuals to visit their shrines and ancestral cemeteries; this issue has been under consideration since 2013, and since then some of their groups have picketed several times at the Lars checkpoint. Presumably, they were organized by the leaders of pro-Russian organizations (Darial, Kazbegi, etc.); Russian border guards let them in, but the Georgian side does not allow them to enter. However, in the existing situation, the only way to avoid the provocations and confrontation between Georgians and Ossetians is to prevent anti-Georgian-minded individuals, who pose a threat to the country's security, from entering Georgia. The Border Service has their lists and it is not surprising that the leaders of the above-mentioned organizations are blacklisted (though, they had crossed the border several times before). A similar situation continues to this day.

In the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia, the actions of the Georgian government were assessed as ethnic cleansing, and parallels were drawn with current events and those taking place in Georgia in the 1990s in connection with the Ossetians (Parastayev, 2017). (Parastayev, 2017). The Ossetian side states that these bans are directed against the Ossetians and their relatives living right on the border in the Kazbegi region. They are banned from entering Georgia, which is outright discrimination. 80-year-old Shamil Dzantiev, the father of the mayor of Vladikavkaz, was denied entry into Georgia at the Darial checkpoint, which was followed by a response from the Russian diplomatic corps; The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave a very strict assessment of Georgia's actions (Kozayev 2019). This issue has become an excuse for Ossetia's / Russia's growing claims to Georgia. According to South Ossetian media, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic "protests against the inhumane actions of the Georgian authorities and condemns the ethnocide policy pursued by the Georgian government against the residents of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania since the middle of the last century"; they also



threatened that if this practice continues, they will reserve the right to revise the regime of crossing the state border of the Republic of South Ossetia with Georgia along the entire perimeter (Kakhishvili, 2017). According to the information of *Kavkaz.Realii*, in 2018, 157 persons were included in the so-called blacklist; as they state, there were few “politicals” among them. The majority was included in the list after they demanded from the local municipality the copies of the records from the land property books and attempted to legalize their lands and houses.

How real this number is and how sincere are the sentiments of people from this list to the shrines and tombs of their ancestors, we do not know. As for the legalization of lands and houses, they did not show this interest until Kobi was declared a recreational zone and a tourist city was planned to be built there (Jalabadze 2006: 101). A. Tuaeva claims that the position of the Georgian government (meaning the non-admission of Ossetians) is connected with the desire to create a large recreation area in the Kobi basin and that there is already a cable car from here to the famous Gudauri ski resort and, moreover, before that, there was already an idea of creating a large logistics center in Kobi (Тохсыров 2019).

**Geneva International Discussions.** International discussions in Geneva is the only active platform for leading a political dialogue between Georgia and Russia since 2008. Apart from Georgia and Russia, representatives of the United States, co-chairpersons of OSCE, the European Union and UNO, participate in the debates. Representatives of Tskhinvali and Sokhumi, the head of the government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the head of the administration of the former Autonomous District of South Ossetia are also involved in the debates.

According to official data, since 2016, the Ossetian side at the Geneva discussions has already begun to manipulate the Truso issue; During 2016 discussions, representatives of Tskhinvali repeatedly raised the issue of protecting the monuments of Ossetian culture in East Ossetia (Utiazhvili, 2016). For example, during the 35th round of the Geneva discussions (22-23 March), they raised the issue of preserving Georgian historical and cultural monuments in Georgian-

controlled “East Ossetia”; it was said that the Ossetian population expelled from this region is not allowed there. Ossetian representatives requested permission from experts to study and evaluate Ossetian monuments of the historical and architectural heritage of Tirsigom // Truso (<http://www.mtsa-rso.su/node/1659>). It should be noted that **the expulsion of ethnic Ossetians from Kazbegi municipality is not true. In fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ossetians living in Truso, the Mna Gorge and the Kobi basin, simultaneously moved out, abandoned their houses and migrated to North Ossetia. At the same time, they took with them Georgian state property cattle and sheep belonging to Soviet farms.** After that, during the Geneva discussions, Ossetians constantly raised issues related to Truso, such as free travel of Kazbegi Ossetians to their native villages and shrines, patronage of Ossetian cultural heritage sites and the return of Ossetians to Truso for permanent residence (Kobi, Ghuda).

In 2017, the state news agency RES published information about the 42nd round of the Geneva International Meetings, at which representatives of Tskhinvali again raised the issue of “East Ossetia”. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia said: *“Once populous villages today turned into ruins; the Ossetian population was completely expelled from these places. This is a vivid example of what the Georgian government is dreaming of with regard to South Ossetia, which they wanted to “turn into a wasteland.”* (<http://tsominf.org/node/1166514062>).“(<http://cominf.org/node/1166514062>).

In 2018, D. Medoev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the self – proclaimed Republic at the question of a correspondent of the newspaper „Netgazeti“ – „Whether the claims of South Ossetia on Truso and Kobi gorges were discussed at the final round of Geneva discussions“ – gave the following answer: *„Ossetia is indivisible, as well as its national entity. No matter who owns today its parts – all these are transient... in Geneva, the delegation of Ossetia accentuated on the violation of human rights by the government of Georgia, on the humiliation of the sentiments of those believers, who have been deprived of the possibility to visit the graves of their ancestors“* (Kakhishvili 2018).

In the same interview, he made provocative statements, alleging that there was a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Ossetians from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both the Menshevik and the Bolshevik authorities in Georgia permanently forcibly evicted them, massacred them and expelled them from the old territories. However, the Georgian communists have already achieved this with the help of “soft power” – a policy of assimilation and cultural genocide. He calls the current events of the modern period neo-fascism and states that this issue has always been and will always be on the agenda of Geneva Discussions” (Kakhishvili, 2018).

D. Medoev discussed these topics in his interview to German newspaper Ne-u-es De-ut-schland and noted that sooner or later these lands would be returned to Ossetia and Ossetians would live there; he also mentioned that Ossetian diplomats repeatedly raised the problems of Ossetians, the former residents of Kazbegi, at Geneva Discussions. (<https://mtisambebi.ge>)

At every session of Geneva Discussions, the delegation of Ossetia permanently appeals to Georgian Authorities, accusing them in the violation of human rights, such as the violation of the right to freedom of movement and the right to life (Kozaev 2019). Recently, the South Ossetian side has been focusing more on the protection of Ossetian historical and cultural monuments in “East Ossetia” during the Geneva talks, which is likely to be an easier way to penetrate the region.

Thus, at Geneva Discussions, the representatives of Georgia apart from settling the problem of the state’s occupied territories have to deal with the problem of so-called East Ossetia and absurd allegations, connected with it. The most concerning fact is that, the concocted notion – East Ossetia is being established in the international arena as well as the stereotype of Georgians who oppressed Ossetians and annexed the historical territories of Ossetia.

**Conclusion.** After the occupation of the Tskhinvali and Akhalgori regions in 2008, Truso (along with Kobi and Ghuda) took a special place in the South Caucasus scenario of the Russian hybrid warfare. This part of Kazbegi municipality, previously inhabited by Ossetians, turned out to be in the geostrategic interests of Russia,

and Tskhinvali's / Kremlin's claims to these historical Georgian lands gradually increased. Resorting to the falsified history and creating myths about "East Ossetia", the Kremlin seeks to portray this territory as the ancient homeland of the Ossetians, annex it to Ossetia and thus gain control over a very important area.

The Ossetian population of the Kazbegi region and its territories is a hot topic of information warfare and propaganda. The Kremlin already considers the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia to be its subject and is constantly circulating the idea of its annexation to North Ossetia (including the aforementioned "Ossetian" territories); resorting to propaganda leverages, it asserts the idea that this so-called East Ossetia historically belonged to the Ossetians and is the original Ossetian territory, which the Bolsheviks, against the will of the Ossetian people, illegally torn away from Ossetia and annexed to the Soviet Republic of Georgia.

The activation of this problem is directly related to the activities of several anti-Georgian public organizations in Vladikavkaz (*Darial, For United Ossetia, Kazbegi*); their propaganda basis is a falsified history, fabricated facts, anti-Georgian rhetoric and a desire for a new demarcation of borders.

The Ossetian (practically Russian imperial) campaign to annex the lands of the Kazbegi region to Ossetia is based on propaganda methods of hybrid warfare, which ultimately serves to direct political discourse in favor of the Kremlin's interests.

## TRUSO – HISTORICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC REGION OF GEORGIA

*The inhabitants of Truso before and after the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century*

### **OSSETIAN AUTHORS ABOUT TRUSO**

The historical areal of the settlement of the Georgian people was rather extensive. Due to the external factor (the aggression of the Muslim world), it gradually reduced, particularly in the South and East. In the north, the territory of Georgia was limited by natural boundaries. That is the reason that throughout the centuries these frontiers had practically been kept intact. Only the Russian Empire managed to violate them when in 1858 it took away from Georgia one of its historic-ethnographic regions Dvaleti. Administratively, Dvaleti belonged to the Gori district of Tbilisi Gubernia (Province), as a region of Nar. In 1801 Russia annexed it as one of the territories of Kartli and Kakheti.

Russia still attempts to decrease the length of the state border of Georgia and they do it through other people's hands, in this particular case, Ossetians. Ossetian scholars not only declare the so-called South Ossetia, which was created during the Soviet period, to be an ancient Ossetian territory, but they state that the whole left bank of the river Mtkvari and the right bank of the river Aragvi also belonged to it. They dream of the seizing of these territories and in case this dream is realized, two big highways of Georgia, Georgian Military Road and the freeway would turn out in the composition of the future enlarged state of Ossetia (factually within the modernized Russian Empire).

Recently, Ossetian authors made the issue of Trusoverlyactive. They refer Truso as East Ossetia. By the way, during the Soviet period (in 1960s) they named Truso (along with Kobi basin) and Dvaleti, referred as the *Central Ossetia* (Kaloiev 1971: 52, 58). Claims of Ossetian authors on the territories of Georgia are nourished by

Politicians. And such *works* have nothing to do with science; they ignore the historical annals and documents and whenever resorting to them, they give their own interpretation; according to their version, the monuments of material culture in the gorge are constructed by the ancestors of Ossetians. The same is said about the Georgian archeological monuments. The falsifiers try to disorient the readers, preaching that no other ethnos apart from Ossetians have ever lived in the Tergi Gorge. (A.Tuaeva. <https://region15.ru/article/trusovskoe-uschel-e-pochemu-ono-za-granicey/>). It seems that the imagination of Ossetian authors is limitless. As they claim, their ancient ancestors ,*Tirsi* ,lived in the Caucasus in the 16<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> cc. B.C., which corresponds to the Ossetian name of the Truso Gorge – *Tirsigom* (A.Tueva. <https://region15.ru/article/trusovskoe-uschel-e-pochemu-ono-za-granicey/>). A researcher should not comment on such nonsense; there is no source, especially relating to the 16<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries B. C., confirming this statement. It might have been only in Hittite sources, but not even a phonetically close ethnos was found.

Neither do other authors lag behind in falsification and distortions of historical facts and sources. As they claim, according to Georgian sources, Ossetians settled at the source of the Tergi Gorge (Truso) at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Tsallagov 2019). It should be stressed that there is no information indicating the presence of Ossetian settlements either in Truso or in adjacent to it regions at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century in any Georgian sources. When talking about the sources, researchers usually name the source they referred to or at the best, they would offer an extract from the source to the reader. In such cases, Ossetian authors ignore this simple scientific ethics. The same author considers the names of places (toponyms) and monuments of material culture as the facts verifying the settlement of Ossetians in Truso at the beginning of the middle centuries. The author does not indicate any source of Ossetian toponyms, as there is no such source. As for the material culture (towers, sanctuaries, crypts...), they belong to a much later period (apart from small size Christian sanctuaries/churches and so-called zurgianikoshkebi-backed towers with a horseshoe-shaped rear side). The same can be said about crypts. There is not found any above ground or partially

underground crypts, there. There are underground crypts, built much later – they belong to the period of the settlement of Ossetians here (mid 17<sup>th</sup> century).

There are some narratives indicating that Ossetians came to the mountains of the Caucasus, among them in Dvaleti and Truso, much later. This fact is affirmed by Ossetian authors too, but they presume that Ossetians used to live in Truso (and Dvaleti) much earlier. They simply ignore the facts that written annals say nothing about the settlement of Ossetians in the region. In this regard, stands out F. Gutnov, with his book on the history of Ossetian villages and family names, where one chapter is dedicated to Truso. The author studied the history of all family names living in Truso and found out that almost all of them came to Truso from Dvaleti and different gorges (basically from Kurtat) of North Ossetia. He considers that the time of the settlement of Ossetians here took place in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, though he “asserts” that much earlier, Ossetians had lived there and that the first wave of resettlement took place in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. As they claim, the migration of Ossetians to the South Caucasus continued later too. According to them the biggest wave of migration to Truso took place during the invasion of the Golden Horde. Even more, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Truso was under the influence of Alan aristocratic families, namely, in the sphere of influence of the King’s children: Parejan and Bagatar. They claim, that Georgian feudal lords, namely the Eristavs (resp.: Dukes) of Ksani paid attention to Truso, much later; it is also stated that they fought for Truso for a long time and finally managed to conquer it at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Gutnov 2001: 181-182). Thus, Ossetian author tries to present the desired as a reality and states as if there was a third wave of migration of Ossetians in Truso, and among them were Alans (Sarmatians, Scythians); they say that the first wave of migration took place in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and according to them, this is verified by the fact that Ossetians from Truso are said to settle in the village Edisi, in the source of the river Didi Liakhvi in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He ignores all sources; he does not need any written chronicles because even a supposition of any Ossetian researcher is sufficient for him. By the way, Truso was granted to the Eristavs of Ksani by the

king of Georgia. And the information about the latter is presented by F. Gutniov *`Dzegli Eristavta* (resp.: – Chronicles of the Eristavs of Ksani) (Legal Monuments of Georgia, 1965:106). The Ossetian author misleads the readers when writing that the inhabitants of Truso had been successfully repulsing the attacks of the Eristavis of Ksani for a long time. The written annals stated the opposite – it is said there that Truso dwellers swore allegiance towards the Eristavs (Legal Monuments of Georgia, Chronicles 1965: 113)

### **GEORGIAN SOURCES ABOUT TRUSO**

Does Truso really belong to Ossetians? Didn't Georgians live there? First of all, it should be outlined that Ossetians do not belong to ancient Caucasian peoples. The Ancestors of the Ossetians of Indo-European descent have come a long way from Central Asia before arriving in the Caucasus Mountains (Topchishvili 2008). They came to the North Caucasian mountains only by the time of the Mongol invasion; their coming to the Caucasus did not happen overnight, it was finished during the invasion of Tamerlane. Little by little, they managed to penetrate into the territories of Georgian settlements; first, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century they occupied Dvaleti and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they were seen in the mountainous region of Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli; G. Topchishvili) and Truso is part of the mountainous region of Shida Kartli. Almost at the same time, Ossetians, along with Truso (the source of the Tergi Gorge), settle in Maghran-Dvaleti (the source of the Didi Liakhvi River). There were only nine "mountain villages" in Maghran-Dvaleti (that in old Georgian means, Forested Dvaleti).

From the north, the settlement area of Georgians was surrounded by natural boundaries. Often it was mistakenly written that natural boundary runs along the watershed of the Caucasus. Yes, it runs, but not everywhere. In some places, the watershed of the Caucasus in the northern part of east Georgia is lower than the north range which is situated in parallel to it, and crossing the watershed is more convenient, while the north range is high and impassable. The territory, where the watershed is lower, has been inhabited by Georgians from ancient times. These territories are: Dvaleti, Tusheti,



northern Khevsureti and Khevi. Khevi is in the composition of the present Kazbegi Municipality, where the Georgian highlanders – Mokheves lived and still live. In other words, this is the headwaters of the Tergi River. Here is Truso, which covers its upper reaches. Vakhushti Bagrationi tells us about Truso: “Truso is in the upper part of this valley with its three gorges...among the people living there are Ossetians, Dvals” (Vakhushti Bagrationi 1973: 357). The scholar of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century particularly stressed that the ethnic composition of the Truso population in his times was already mixed; here, the local Dvals (Georgian highlanders) lived together with migrated Ossetians. Vakhushti also indicates that from the west, Truso was bordered by the Zakha Gorge of Dvaleti: **Likewise, the inhabitants of mountainous parts of Inner Kartli, Vakhushti calls the inhabitants of Truso – Dvals: the people living there are also “Dvals that had resettled from Dvaleti”**. It should also be mentioned that V. Bagrationi always distinctly separated Dvals from Ossetians. He writes the following about Kasris Kari, the pass leading from Dvaleti to the north: **“and this high arched door, made of a cliff and mortared stones, that overlooks the river, was built by sovereigns to safeguard it so that no other, among them Ossetians, can pass through it, without their consent”** (Vakhushti Bagrationi 1973: 645).

There still is and has always been a fortified border pass – *Dariali*, which had been constructed by Georgian kings much earlier before Christ. K. Gann wrote that the Georgians call the *Dariali* – *The Door to Khevi*, where the Georgian kings always had guards to protect against the attacks of the mountaineers and nomads, living on the plains of the Caucasus (Gann 1909: 49). Its old name was *The Door to Aragvi*. The old civilized world was also interested in fortifying this border pass, to avoid the invasions of barbarians and nomads. The name of this door that led to the north came from Iran; Iranians called it *Dari-Alan*, or door to Alans, the pass leading to the place, inhabited by Alans. Existence of a strong and powerful Georgia was in the interests of the Middle East political entities and ancient countries too, as it would have been able to control Dariali (and of course other passages too) properly. When Romans invaded Georgia, they found that Dariali was under the control of the Kingdom of Iberia (Kartli). According to

the notes of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman author: “*the door to the Caucasus is a huge creation of the nature, the result of the sudden split of the mountains. The pass itself is fortified with iron bars. On the opposite bank of the river there is a fortress to halt the wave of numerous tribes*”.

Earlier, Georgia was divided into different *Saeristavos* (resp.: Duchies) and regions. According to this division, Dariali belonged to *the Saeristavo of Aragvi* (resp.: The Duchy of Aragvi), which occupied the territory from this point up to the river Tergi, till the last village Siveradti in Truso (Акты (Acts) 1876:347-348).

According to Georgian sources, in the upper reaches of the river Tergi, in Truso, with time, the composition of the population gradually changed; Truso in the early middle ages, was part of Tsanareti (later, along with Khevi). By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, after the resettlement of the local group of Tsanars to Kakheti, their place was first occupied by the other Kartvelian group, Dvals, but eventually, from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Truso became the settlement area of Ossetians which came here from the north. The descendants of the Tsanars remained only in Khevi. The migration of Dvals to Truso failed to turn this region into Dvaleti. Geographical factor made difficult to merge Truso and Dvaleti. Truso had much more common with Khevi, though geographical factor was the obstacle that hindered their integration and their uniting into one ethno-geographical region; and this geographical factor was a very narrow Kasri pass. The main water artery of Truso-Khevi, from the source of the river Tergi till Dariali (Georgian – Russian border) is 50 km. In *Ossetian Ethnographic Encyclopedia* printed in Vladikavkaz in 2013, we read about Truso, that it is now in the composition of Georgia. As if some kind of political formation of the Ossetians had ever existed and Truso was part of it. It should be underlined that Truso (the source of the Tergi Gorge has always been within the boundaries of Georgia) from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (as well as Khevi) was part of the county of the Eristavs of Aragvi (resp.: Dukes of Aragvi). Before that, Truso, together with Khevi, for many centuries was directly subordinate to the Royal authority. **In the documents dated 1732, inhabitants of Truso and Ghuda are registered as “mountain men of the Eristavi of**

**Aragvi**” (documents 1940: 233). In the document issued by Bardzim the Eristavi of Aragvi in 1733, the only obligation of bonded peasants of Gergeti Church was the defense of Khevi and Truso from Tatars (Jordania 1967: 141). Georgian authorities would always give certain concessions towards the Mountaineers and among them Ossetians. For example, it is a well-known fact that King Erekle II issued the regulation, according to which Georgians, Armenians and Tatars were obliged to serve one month in the army, annually. But the Georgian highlanders, as well as Ossetians (living in Dvaleti, in mountainous regions of Shida Kartli and Truso) were freed of these duties, as they had already been defending the borders of Georgia from the raids of the Lezghians (History of Ossetia 1962: 308-309, doc. #232).

According to the census of 1770 of Kartli and Kakheti, Truso, or *East Ossetia* as now Ossetian “researchers” call it, along with Khevi and Mna were in the composition of the Saeristavo of Aragvi. The upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge (Khevi and Truso) were part of the Satavado (resp.: County) of the Eristavs of Aragvi of Kartli and Kakheti Kingdom; this is verified by the notes of a Russian official about the counties of Aragvi and Ksani: «В Грузии два Эристовых владения, одно называется Арагвского Эристово, а другое—Ксан-Эристово...» (Tzagareli 1891: 37; History of Ossetia...1962: 273-274, doc. № 194.) (*there are two Saeristavos (resp.: The Duchy) in Georgia; the name of the first one is the Saeristavo of Aragvi, and the name of the other – the Saeristavo of Ksani...*). Even more, the Zakha Gorge in Dvaleti that was bordering Truso, also belonged to the same Saeristavo (Legal Monuments of Georgia (1965: 420). One of the documents belonging to 1791, mentions that the Mouravi (resp.: a regional governor) of Truso was *Vakhtang, the son of the King* (Legal Monuments of Georgia 1985: 122.). From the official papers of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is vividly seen that *Ossetians of Aragvi* looted Kartli. For example, in 1774, the King Erekle wrote: “*Listen to our decree, those of You, who are the **Ossetians of Aragvi**, beware of your malevolence that has gained such a huge scale, as the country takes charges against you*”(The Central State Historical Archive of Georgia, fund 1448, book 1, case #1379). From existing documents of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is seen that Ossetian population of Truso were

levied by a certain tax (resp., *sakomlo* – *hearth money*) from the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (National Center of Manuscripts, fund hd, document #3906); the fact that the state had its officials there (mouravi and vicegerent) indicate that from the ancient times the source of the Tergi Gorge has been an inseparable part of Georgia.

### **ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA**

According to the records of *Ioane Bagrationi*, there were 8 villages in Truso, at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Bagrationi 1986: 5). Just the same number is indicated by Vakhushti Bagrationi, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is natural that the representatives of the Royal family had the accurate information about the demographic and ethnographic situation in the mountainous regions. Thus, **it is clear that there were only eight Ossetian villages in Truso. The author of the above mentioned encyclopedia indicates thirteen villages. The eight villages turned into thirteen during the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.** In the same period Ossetians settled beyond the borders of Truso, namely in the Mna Gorge and Kobi Basin. The resettlement of Ossetians would happen both from Truso villages and Dvaleti. These facts of migration are registered in ethnographic materials. As an example, we can name the Agaevs (Ossetian surname) living in the village Shevardeni, who came from the Nar Gorge, that was in Dvaleti. Initially only the Arjinovs and the Mamievs used to live in Shevardeni. The Mamievs had migrated from the Nar Gorge in Dvaleti; the family name of the Mamievs, before their Ossetization, was Mamiauri. The representatives of the third family name were – the Sapievs, who migrated there from the Kurtat Gorge, much later.

Ossetins, as Alans, are declared to be the ancient inhabitants of the gorge, that as they claim, are verified by historical-architectural monuments, deserted settlements and epigraphic monuments (though, it should be outlined that, both monuments and epigraphy verify the presence of Georgians here from ancient times, for example so called backed towers that were characteristic to the local Kartvelian groups – to the mountainous region of Shida Kartli; preserved

epigraphic monuments, for example, the inscription of the 10<sup>th</sup> century church in Mna, is Georgian. From the ethnological viewpoint one detail, characteristic to shrines in Truso, is very interesting. It is a well-known fact that Georgian highlanders built shrines/churches on hills near their villages; even the vague observation shows that all churches in Truso that are small in size, characteristic to mountainous regions, are built on the hills, while from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ossetian settlers constructed their shrines in the villages. Analogous fact is verified in the village of upper Mna in the Mna Gorge. Here we see a sanctuary with a niche for candles in the center, with a cross over it that was covered with Russian inscriptions. The inscription tells us that this Ossetian sanctuary *Vasterji* was built in 1907. Coming out of these facts, we arrive to another important conclusion that Ossetians migrated in the region much later.

In this respect, one more fact, connected with religious holidays is very interesting:” there is a cult building – **Uashtarji** – St. George in the village Gimara, in Truso. The next holy place – Uatsila-Vatsilai is located in the field, near the village, which is called Fashmushta. They would **celebrate Atengenoba, dedicated to St. George**, here; the whole village celebrated this holiday. They would buy cattle for slaughter on the money sacrificed to the icon while the worshipping and the whole village would celebrate this day together. Atengenoba comes on July 22. The inhabitants of other villages would come to warship the icon and would bring the cattle for sacrifice if they had pledged to the icon; in case they did not vow to offer cattle to the icon, they would bring cakes and beverage” (Itonishvili 1958: 12-13). Ethnographic material gives the bases to make an important conclusion. Holiday of Atengenoba was characteristic solely for the mountainous regions of East Georgia. It was unfamiliar for all four Ossetian communities (Digori, Alagiri, Kurtat and Tagauri) of the north Caucasus. Holiday of Atengenoba was celebrated among the Georgian mountaineers of Dvaleti (Dvals), where the holiday was adopted by the Ossetians, who migrated there; similar situation was observed in Truso . The migrated to Truso Ossetians (and not only the inhabitants of the village Gimara), made the local holy places into their worshipping places which was quite natural. The migrants

asked the saints of locals for protection. It should be ruled out that Atengenoba was introduced to Truso from Dvaleti, as Ossetians who lived in the village Gimara were migrants from Kurtat community.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC AND STATISTICAL DATA**

Previously, Ossetian authors would write that Ossetian population of Truso were the descendants of Ossetians that had migrated here in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. But they distorted the data. For example, they say that in the 1770s, there were 400 Ossetian households in Truso. In reality in 1776, the number of Ossetian households in Truso equaled to 71, in 1780 to 73 (History of Ossetia 196: doc.# 72). According to 1802 data, in 12 villages of Truso, which was the domain of the Prince Vakhtang (Almaskhan), were registered 158 households and 991 persons. In this period, eight Ossetian villages that existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, turn into twelve villages. And this was conditioned by the continuous migration processes and of course, by the natural growth. There is a book of censuses of 1831-1832, which contains detailed records of the Ossetian population living there. By that time, there were already 13 villages in Truso (one more village was established after 1802). The number of households in 1831 was 190 (955 people). (The Central State Historical Archive of Georgia), fund 254, inventory 1, case #1245 pp. 143-183). There is little difference between this data and the one presented by the French *Marie-Frederic Dubois de Montereux* who was in Truso in 1840s; he registered 207 Ossetian households and 856 persons, there. This number included, not only the inhabitants of Truso but also 3 villages located along the river Mna with registered 16 families and 55 persons, as well as 6 villages with 56 households and 190 persons located on Ado Meadow and in Kobi (the data registered by Marie-Frederic Dubois de Montperreux are taken from the book: Volkova 1974: 133.). If we deduct this data from the data referring to the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge, then we see that all in all there were 135 families and 611 ethnic Ossetians living only in Truso. The reduction of the number of Truso population for the last ten years was conditioned by the fact that part of them resettled to the villages of the Mna Gorge and adjusting it villages.

But according earlier data, belonging to 1802, the population of Truso equaled to 148 households and 896 persons (Acts1868: 81.). Thus, from 1780 to 1803 the number of Ossetian population of Truso increased by 75 households, i.e. their number practically doubled. By 1831 the growth of the Ossetian population is more evident – now their number equaled to 190 households. Consequently, increase of the number of Ossetian families during 30 years equaled to 48 households (in comparison to 1780 data, the growth of the number of households equaled to 117). **In 1860 there were 216 households in Truso; overall number of the population was 1.304. In 1873 the same data were consequently – 226 households and 1.393 men. In 1886 the number of Ossetians here reached to 240 households and 1.627 men. By 1910 the number of Ossetians in Truso increased up to 1.923 men.** From 1831 to 1910 the number of ethnic Ossetians doubled, it increased by 968 persons. In regard to 1926 census, there were 12 villages, 232 households and 1485 Ossetians in Truso (The SSR of Georgia 1930: 62). Thus, from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century till 1910 the growth of the number of ethnic Ossetians in Truso was rather big. From 1910 to 1926, the indicator of the growth was still high; for the last 50 years the increase equaled to 50 households; in comparison to the indicator of growth for 1803, when the registered number for 80 years was 94 households. It should be considered that during the same period, from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of Truso often would resettle to adjusting to it the Mna Gorge and Kobi Basin (the villages Mna, Shevardeni, Upper Okroqana, Lower Okroqana, Kobi, Ukhati, Akhalsopeli/Nogkau, Almasiani...). If the villages of the Mna Gorge (Mna, Shevardeni, **Okroqana**) were considered to be traditional ones, which before the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, were inhabited solely by Georgians; in the register of property of Prince Vakhtang, which was compiled by Russia in 1802, the villages Mna and Okroqana are among the Georgian villages («Деревни грузинския»), the number of households and people that were registered there, equaled to 5 households (20 persons) and 15 households (89 persons), respectively (acts1868: 81). For this period, Kobi basin was factually uninhabited. The first Ossetians settled here only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in

the deserted village of Bazaliani (later Almasiani). The other villages of Kobi basin were founded only at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and basically due to the growth of the population in Truso. **In 1831, 569 ethnic Ossetians lived in the Mna Gorge and Kobi Basin. This data increased up to 870 by 1886, and it reached 1.172 for 1910.** In 1926, the number of Ossetian households here equaled to 155 while the number of people 1.029 (The SSR of Georgia 1930:62). Migration of the population from Truso to the Mna Gorge and Kobi Basin, were conditioned by two basic factors: natural growth of the population that caused the deficiency of farmlands and the closeness of the Military Road.

Considering the presented statistic data, the figures that are provided by Ossetian authors about the number of ethnic Ossetians in Kazbegi Municipality (Truso, the Mna Gorge, Kobi Basin), is rather surprising. According to the presented site (<https://south-ossetia.info/otrezannaya-ot-doma-vostochnaya-oseiya-vernut-nelzya-abyt/>) the number of Ossetians in the Kazbegi region in 1886 equaled to 17.000. As they claim, this figure declined to 14.523, only during eleven (11) years and that the number of the Ossetian population declined even more and by 1926, during the Soviet Period, the number of Ossetians in the historic-ethnographic region of Khevi dwindled to 8.326. Before the very collapse of the Soviet Union, according to 1989 census, the number of Ossetians in so called *East Ossetia* and the Kazbegi region was 4.969. It is sufficient to see the registers of the census hold by the Russian Empire and compare that data with the above given ones to verify the inaccuracy of the data, presented by this site. According to the lists of households compiled in 1886, there were two rural communities inhabited by the ethnic Ossetians – in Abano (in Truso) and in Kobi. Due to the data, registered in 1886, there were 239 households and 1617 ethnic Ossetian inhabitants in the first community, while in the other one, there were registered 133 households and 947 persons (Code 1893). The historical-ethnographic region of Khevi, namely the Kazbegi region, factually would have been unable to maintain more population, as their number in the mountains has always been limited.

If we sum up, we will see that the number of ethnic Ossetians in



Khevi, by 1886 equaled to 2.564 (and not to 17.000). The statistical data of the first Soviet All Union census of 1926, are published. Presented figures show that there were 232 households and 1486 persons in Truso rural community (almost the same as in 1886). In rural community of Kobi 236 households and 1625 ethnic Ossetians were registered (this number included the Ossetian population living Ghuda community in Mtiuleti district in the upper reaches of the river Tergi). Totally, the number of Ossetians in the whole Kazbegi region, equaled to 3.111 men (the number of Georgians equaled to 4.135, i.e. their number exceeded the number of Ossetians by 1.024). When commenting on statements of the authors of falsified information we will restrict ourselves with just this remark: due to the geographical factor, it is impossible for such a number of people to live in mountainous regions, which lack the farmlands (both croplands and the grasslands). Migration of Ossetians from Kazbegi region to North Ossetia had a permanent character; basically, they would resettle to the capital city of North Ossetia, Orjonikidze that was rather typical for that epoch; developing city attracted the inhabitants of mountains and among them were not only Ossetians, but Georgians too.

The migration of Ossetians from Kurtat to Truso continued for a long time. Russian scientific literature indicates that Ossetians from the village Khidikusi and other villages of Kurtat, settled in Truso in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Kuzminov2004: 684). Generally, migration of Ossetians from Kurtat to Truso (as well as to Khevi and the Mna Gorge) lasted throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (The Central State Historical Archive of Georgia, fund 254, inventory 3, case # 256). In parallel, takes place the migration of Ossetians from Truso to the villages, situated on the lowlands. Ossetian population of Truso, as the residents of Georgia, were actively involved in the inner migration processes and similar to Georgian mountaineers used to resettle in the lowlands of East Georgia. The process of migration from Truso, Khevi and Mna in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is verified by the registered ethnographic materials.

According to the 1886 household lists, Ossetian villages of Truso were the following: **Ketrisi** (24 households), **Abano** (18 households), **Zakagori** (8 households), **Shuatisi** (28 households), **Karatkavi** (former

Georgian name **Khutsuri**, 20 households), **Burmaseki/Burmasigi** (7 households), **Tsotsolta** (13 households), **Gimara**(24 households), **Tepe/Tepi** (16 households), **Resi** (13 households), **Sivrata**(5 households), **Zemo**(resp.: Upper) **Desi** (15 households) and **Kvemo** (resp.: Lower) **Desi** (7 households). The census also revealed that among Ossetians from Truso were Ossetinized Georgians too, for example the Eloev (6 families) in the village Shuatisi, who were the descendants of the *Eloshvili* from Khevi, Bagiev (1 household), who basically are the descendants of the *Bagauri*, Georgian mountaineers from neighboring region of Dvaleti. Thus, in 1886, there are already thirteen (13) villages in Truso, instead of eight villages at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to ethnographic data, initial eight (8) villages in Truso were: **Abano, Ketrisi, Resi, Desi, Gimara, Zakagori, Shuatisi, Qaqiduri, also QutsuriorKaratqavi/Kartsopeli**. In 1870, one more Ossetian village is registered in the household book. The village Tepe was added to the above mentioned eight (8) villages. The similar situation is registered in the books of the cameral recording in 1831-1832 and in 1873.

In the *Kavkazkii Kalendar* (resp.: *The Caucasian Calendar*) (part 1) issued in 1910, is published the list of the settlements of the Caucasus, where each village is supplemented with interesting statistical and ethnic data. Naturally, the villages of the Truso Gorge are also represented in this list. It should be mentioned beforehand that, very often Kartvelian (resp.: Georgian) ethnos is represented as local groups: Imeretians, Megrelians, Pshavs, Khvesurs, Tushs, Gurians and Mtiuls. It is noteworthy that the population of some villages of Truso are ascribed not to Ossetians but Mtiulis. For example, the following villages are presented as inhabited by Mtiulis: **Abano** (184 persons), **Burmaseki** (77 persons), **Gimara** (201 persons), **Zemo** (resp.: Upper) **Desi** (107 persons), **Zhagori** (resp.: **Zakagori** (31 persons), **Karatkavi** (resp.: **Kartsopeli** (31 persons), **Ketrisi** (263 persons). Thus, by Russian official data of 1910, out of 13 villages of Truso 7 were inhabited by Georgian mountaineers (Mtiulis). How can this fact be explained? We think that it should look for the explanation in the multi-ethnic composition of the villages. By that period the assimilation of migrated Ossetians with Dvals was not finished yet.

It is known from the scientific literature that the artisans working with gravestones were the *Gudiev* who lived in the village of Okroqana in the Mna Gorge. The ***Gudievs*** were not Ossetians by origin. They were the descendants of local Georgians, the *Gudia-ur-i*, part of whom Ossetinized in Ossetian linguistic-ethnic environment. We have the description of the Mna Gorge, dated by 1774 (where along with the village Mna, are included, Okroqana and Shevardeni too). In this document along with Georgian surnames (*Babeuri, Arjinauli, Badadze, Nokarauli, Shushghiauri, Aghsuaidze, Nasqidauri, Badilauri, Varzouri, Tadiauri*) is included the surname – *Gudiauritoo*.

Thus, the Mna Gorge has been inhabited by Georgians from ancient times and the change of the ethnic composition of the population started only at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. And these changes were conditioned by the intrusion of Ossetians from Maghran-Dvaleti (9 villages in the upper source of the river Didi Liakhvi and Truso). The joint attack of Ossetians from Maghran-Dvaleti (9 villages) and the population of 8 villages of the Truso Gorge on the Mna Gorge, completely changed the ethnic situation there. The Georgians, who due to these attacks resettled into different villages, naturally preserved their identity, but those who stayed there, having turned into the ethnic minority, eventually Ossetinized. Mechanical growth of the population and the number of villages (five (5) villages) in Truso, falls on that period. From this very period, at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ossetian villages were added to the tree villages in the Mna Gorge; new villages were founded near the existing ones and below the confluence of the river Mna into the Tergi: *Akhalsopeli*, the Georgian name of the latter (it is registered under this name in 1831-1832 books of cameral recordings) later was translated by Ossetians and called *Nogkau*, Almasiani (id. Bazaliani), Kobi and Ukhati.

It is known that the Ossetians in North Ossetia buried their dead in graves that were erected on the surface (there were also semi-buried or underground tombs). According to Ossetian researchers, in Dvaleti the Ossetians did not bury the dead in aboveground tombs, which is a direct confirmation that the Dvalians were not Ossetians. The situation was the same in Truso. In the 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; Ossetians did not bury their dead in overground or half buried tombs. The study

of Truso's burial sites confirms very interesting ethno-cultural facts: in a number of villages, migrated Ossetians buried the dead in the underground family crypts, but later, imitating the Georgians, they began to bury the dead in the ground. From the second half of the 19th century, tombstones were erected similar to those used by the Georgians; The inscriptions on the gravestones, as a rule, were made in Russian, although many of them were in Georgian. Thus, in Truso (as well as in Dvaleti), only Georgian / Christian burial traditions were practiced, not Ossetian (with the exception of the post-migration period). The adoption of the Georgian tradition of funeral service was naturally conditioned by the spread of Christianity and contacts with Georgians. It is noteworthy that according to church records from the mid-15th century, Dvaleti (like Truso) belonged to the Samtavneli diocese, and the taxes levied by the church on local residents were rather symbolic (Javakhishvili 1974: 10).

The migration of Ossetians to Truso is also studied by non-Georgian writers. For example, V. Pfaf and N. Volkova name the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, as the period of their migration. According to their ethnographic materials, Ossetians migrated to Truso from Kurtat community. F.S. Gutnov thinks that the process of migration of Ossetians to Truso took place much later (the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Gutnov2001: 181-182). The same can be said about the whole Shida Kartli (resp.: Inner Kartli). Ossetian researchers were unable to reject the facts; after the 1930s they asserted that each Ossetian household in Inner Kartli mountainous regions lived for 10-12 generations there, though Ossetians had lived in those territories even earlier. In this respect, stands out Z. Vaneev, who even introduced such a notion as *PrezhnieAsetinis*(resp.: *Earlier Ossetians*) (Topchishvili 1997).

The first massive migration of Georgian population from Truso took place during the raids of Tamerlane (the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> cc.). Meanwhile, the survived population of Georgia found the safe harbor in Khevi. We can name the numerous facts indicating the belonging of large number of Georgian surnames that lived in Truso. These surnames are: The Zakaidze-Zagashvili, the Babashvilis, the Pajishvilis, the Arjinashvilis, the Badashvilis, the Kobiashvilis, the Tuchashvilis, etc. The Qasoevs and the Sukhievs consider themselves to be Georgians;

they claim that their genuine surnames were – Qasoshvili and Sukhishvili (Jalabadze 1961: 22). These narrating are registered by the ethnologist, G. Jalabadze in the 1950s. A number of people with Ossetian surnames told him that the migration of their ancestors from the Ardoni Gorge took place 3-4 generations earlier. In the same time, similar ethnographic material is also registered here, namely, when Ossetians, came to the village Gimara, they drove out the local Georgian population with sticks and occupied the castle, built by the locals. Each of those sticks was about two meters long and their width equaled to the size of a wrist of a strong-built man; they were kept in sanctuary of Vatsila, as the memorial of their ancestors (Itonishvili 1958: 13). Dvals used to live in Truso before Ossetians.

The name of the sanctuary in the village Shevardeni–*Maskharoba/Matskharoba*, the name-day of which was celebrated on July 22, is rather interesting. It is obvious that the sanctuary with such name could not have been founded by Ossetians; it must have been erected by Georgians and Ossetians that settled in Shevardeni, converted it into their worshipping place. ***Maskharoba/Matskharoba, is the phonetic version of Georgian Matskhovari (resp.: the Savior).*** There were numerous shrines/churches of “Matskhovari” in other regions of Georgian mountains too.

One more fact verifies that Truso has been the area of inhabitation of Georgians since ancient times: *“according to ethnographic sources, in Khevi and Truso for quite a long period, there were Sakhatokanebi (resp.: the lands of the shrine). Each shrine had arable lands of about 1-2 hectares”.* (Jalabadze 1961: 212). We would add that the lands being under the possession of the shrines were characteristic for the mountainous region of eastern Georgia, while such practice was unknown to Ossetians. The fact is that the Ossetians that came to Truso, continued the old tradition of Georgians and eventually appropriated these shrines too.

According to the ethnographical materials gathered in the Khada Gorge in Mtiuleti and Khevi, the Zakaidzes from Mtiuleti and the Zagashvilis from Khevi, had had a common origin. Both the Zakaidzes and the Zagashvilis stated that they come from Truso and that the Zagakov (now Ossetians) that lived in the village Okroqana were just

another branch of their family surname. The Zagakovs themselves also admit that earlier, their surname was Zagashvili and they would consider themselves as Georgians. Initially they lived in the village Zakagori, in Truso and later resettled to the village Mna. One part of them are said to migrate from Mna to Khevi (initially to Gveleti and later to Tsd). Ethnographical materials about this family name were written down by G. Jalabadze in 1958: “according to narratives, Kvemo (resp.: lower) Okroqana was founded earlier. They said that native inhabitants of this village were the Zagakovs who, previously considered themselves to be Georgians and were registered as the Zagashvilis. Ancestors of the Zagashvilis were said to come from the Zaki Gorge (Zakhi in Dvaleti – R. Topchishvili). They were said to be three brothers. Two of whom remained in Khevi while the third brother initially settled in the village Abano and then in the village Mna. One part of the Zagashvilis were claimed to move from the village Mna to the village Tsd in Khevi, as for the third part of this family who stayed in Mna, was said to build the sanctuary of *Marianoba*. Separated parts of the Zagashvili family would have frequent meetings in the shrine; these branches were said to have changed their surname after the name of their father Koba and his ancestry – Kobaita and received the surname Kobiashvili” (Jalabadze 1961: 226). It is noteworthy that the ancestors of Zagashvili as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century had already lived in the Tergi Gorge. “According to Zagaev, they used to be Georgians. Their ancestors were referred as chiefs in the Truso Gorge. Their ancestors are said to occupy the most honorable place at the celebration table that was set at sanctuary. **Dwellers of Mtiuleti and Gudamakari had to receive a consent from their ancestors on the usage of summer pastures in Truso.** ... According to annals, a deputy village headman Indo Zakadze was a strong person who donated to the Holy Trinity a field granted by the king (Jalabadze 1961: 227).

Thus, today the Kobiashvilis, who are the separated branch of the Zagashvilis, and who lived in the village of Qanobi in Khevi, would visit the place of the inhabitation of their ancestors in the village Mna with Zagashvili, for offering their prayers in the sanctuary; Ossetians would meet them as the first settlers of the village and the vassals of the local sanctuary with great honor. All these surnames: Zakaidze, Zagashvili

and Zagaev have common roots – it is an ancient Georgian name of a man *Zaka* (*Zaki*). By the way, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Zagashvilis in Truso had not been entirely Ossetinized. Initially, in 1886, they had been registered in the village family book as Ossetians, but later the clerk, conducting the census, crossed the nationality *Ossetian* and wrote *Georgian* above it. It is noteworthy that the Zagashvilis (Zagaev), as the majority of Truso population, were bilingual. The field for the language along their surnames, indicate that they speak two languages *Georgian* and *Ossetian*. As for the Zagashvilis from Almasiani (Bazaliani), it is registered that they speak only one language – Georgian. The similar records are made concerning Gudiauri and Arjinauli from Mna. In 1886 family lists, firstly, they are registered as Ossetians, but later the clerk had crossed the nationality and with the same handwriting wrote – Georgian, over it. It is noteworthy that in the *KavkazkiiKalendar* (resp.: *The Caucasian Calendar*) of 1910, the inhabitants of the village Zakagori were registered as Georgians. The Kesaevs, living in the village Shuatisi in Truso, came from the Zakha Gorge in Dvaleti and their surname used to be Kesauri (in Dvaleti, Kesauri preserved their second family name Gentsauri too). The Kesauris had some relative ties with the Georgian nobelmen, the Kherkheulidzes, who according to Ossetian narratives had common origin. As for the Kherkheulidzes, they, as the representatives of the upper society, for the first time, were registered in 1466-1477 documents. Referring to 1886 family lists provided by family registers, 31 households of the village Karatkavi and 21 households of the village Ketrisi in Truso are registered to be bilingual – as they spoke in Georgian and Ossetian (The Central State Historical Archive of Georgia, fund 254, inventory 3, case #1805). Moreover, the spoken language of the inhabitants of the village Mna, was only Georgian. (The Central State Historical Archive of Georgia, fund 254, inventory 3, case #). In general, the majority of the population of Truso villages, were bilingual.

The ethnographical material gives the foundation to the explanation of the bilingualism (Georgian-Ossetian) of village *Ketrisi*; here it concerns the *Kesaevs* that resettled from Dvaleti and whose Georgian surname earlier was *Kesauri*: according to the materials

found by Ossetian ethnographers, they used to be Georgians and had the common roots with the prince Kherkheulidze and correspondingly were the descendants of two brothers Kesa and Kherkha (Kaloiev 1999: 264). Their Ossetinization in Truso, happened much later, when the migration of ethnic Ossetians was accomplished (from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century).

The facts of migration of Ossetians from Dvaleti and various gorges of north Caucasus to Truso are verified by Ossetian authors themselves. For example, the Tuaeiv from the village *Burmasigi* (according to 1886 family lists – the Tvaivi, 7 households) came here from the Mamisoni Gorge in Dvaleti. The Borozovs and the Botsoevs who lived in the village Gimara came from the Dargavs Gorge (in 1873, accordingly 14 and 7 households). All families living in the village Desi (1873: The Khamitsov, the Totrov, the Kargaev, the Mirikov and the Kaziev) were also migrated from the village Tsmi in Kurtat. The Kusaevs from the village Resi were from the village Dagomir, in Alagir. The reason for their resettlement would have been the lack of lands. The Kalmanovs, who also lived here, came from the Kurtat Gorge, the Kudzievs from the Dargavs Gorge. The Tajievs in Tsotsolata resettled from the Dargavs Gorge. Kalagi, who are considered to be founders of the surname Kalagarov, inhabitants of the village Tape, are said to be migrated from the north Caucasus. The Ketoevs, from the village Ketrisi came from the Kurtat Gorge.

Thus, based on the above presented reviews of the surnames, it is obvious that Truso that was inhabited by Ossetians (from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), initially was the habitat of Georgians. Before the settlement of Ossetians in Truso, it was basically inhabited by the Dvals. This is verified by the words of *V. Bagrationi* (among inhabitants are *Ossetians, Dvals*). Often Georgians referred migrant Ossetians by dual ethnonyms – *Ossetians Dvals*. It is obvious that gradual resettlement of Georgians from Truso to Khevi was followed by the occupation of the deserted Georgian villages by Ossetians from the north Caucasus (Volkova 1974). The migration of Ossetians, initially to Dvaleti and later to Maghran-Dvaleti and to the Tergi Gorge (to Truso) was preconditioned by the economic hardships that were caused by the lack of land and its barrenness and by the fact that



Kabardians blocked the passes leading from the North Caucasian mountains to the lowlands.

In the Late Middle Ages, in Truso, the ethnic processes that took place there, resembled the ones that happened in Dvaleti, namely, when the extradition of locals or their resettlement on the other territories, was followed by the occupation of these lands by the ethnic Ossetians. But Ossetians, whose language belongs to Iranian language group settled on the territories that were not completely deserted by Georgians. Ossetians managed to assimilate with Georgian mountaineers who were in minority. I would resort to Russian authors: **«Формирование населения Туалта происходило, в основном, за счет переселявшихся алагирцев»** (resp.: *“Theformation of the population of Tualta took place, basically at the expense of resettlement of inhabitants of Alagi”*) (Kuzminov 2004: 688). We would only add that under Dvaleti he means Truso too.

The old inhabitants of Mna, were the Badashvilis (formerly Badadze), who live in Khurtisi today. This family name is mentioned in written records of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (“Chronicles of Gergeti”). The Babeuri-Babashvili family was also from Mna; It was said that later the Tuchashvili family separated from Babeuri-Babashvili. Chochoshvili’s migration route from Dvaleti (originally Chochouri, where they lived in the village of Khurtisi) to Khevi, ran through Truso. Padzhishvili (Topchishvili 19:42) were the old residents of Truso, registered in the 1774 census as Pajiauris. Itonishvili and Zilinashvili from Kanobi were also from Truso. The root of these two family names is *Mamiauri* from Dvaleti. The Kobiashvilis, residents of the village of Qhanobi in Khevi, relocated from the village of Mna; the latter is confirmed by the ethnographic fact that they still came here for pilgrimage. The religious tradition of taking boys into the sanctuary during the celebration, was also to be performed there. Other ethnographic materials are also interesting - the population of Khevi, Mokheves, used Truso as a summer pasture for their herd. Thus, Mna, Okrokana and Shevardeni were inhabited by Georgians in 1774, but by 1831 the ethnic composition of these villages had already changed, although the population of these villages was bilingual, that is, Georgian-Ossetian.

## **LOCALIZATION AND TOPONYMS OF TRUSO**

According to Ossetian researchers Truso occupies the territory from the village Kobi up to the river Tergi (Zakaraia 1972: 39; Itonishvili 19: 111). Guldami Chikovani cleared up the issue on the localization of Truso. **Relatively small territory of Truso, occupied the territory from the upper source of the river Tergi till the narrowest passage of the Gorge – Kasara (the length of Kasara exceeded 3 kilometers. In fact Kasara was a natural barrier between Truso, Khevi and the Mna Gorge (Chikovani 1985: 105-118). There was no pathway among the regions of the Tergi Gorge and the only possible way of communication was accomplished on the horseback. This factor complicated the integration of Ossetians living in Truso with Georgians that lived in Khevi – Mna.**

*Kasara* is the same as *Kasri*. And in old Georgian *kasri* meant a narrow passage, with a fortified tower (*Abuladze* 1973: 193). Ossetians from Truso and Khevi told G. Chikovani, that “the lower border of Truso is the place, where the gorge of the river Tergi extremely narrows (its width reaches just a couple of meters) and caught between cliffs roaring river rushes down cutting its way”. The same configuration of Truso is given by German traveler J. Klaproth, who gathered the information from locals in 1808. As he was following the Tergi, from its source downwards, he wrote: “in one verst (resp.: 1.07 km) from the village Abano we passed the village Kshetris Koiate-Kau” (he speaks about the village Kertisi – G. Topchishvili). This is the last village inhabited by the dwellers of Truso (*Gelashvili* 2012: 300). According to the 14<sup>th</sup> century *Chronicles of Eristavi* **the territory of Mna situates between Khevi and Truso; inhabitants of Truso and Mna were in confrontation with each other** (*Legal Monuments of Georgia* 1963:113).

Thus, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, three regions (micro-regions) were identified in the Tergi Gorge – **Truso, Mna and Khevi**. According to *Gergeti Chronicles* (1439) is obvious that apart from Khevi, Mna and Truso too, were loyal to the common deity of Khevi (resp.: Gergeti Trinity) (*Legal Monuments of Georgia* 2013: 215). Based on this very document, G. Jalabadze drew a fair conclusion: in the 15<sup>th</sup> century

the Truso Gorge enjoyed a special treatment; it was one of the relatively free forms of the feudal protection and subordination, which is described in the 15<sup>th</sup> century annals of Gergeti Trinity. This form of relationship was called *mokideba*. In Khevi existed the institute of *Saqdrishvili* (a feudal lord owing service to the church) and *mokidebuli*; these relatively light forms of Feudal relationship, must have been conditioned by the role of the population in the Gorge, as they were considered to be the force that protected the gorge from enemies (Jalabadze 1961: 224). It should be said that Ossetians from Truso were levied by the tax, so called, *Samaspindzlo*, which was paid in kind – giving away certain number of sheep or cattle. This fact is verified in the list of hospitality tax that is from Truso and is dated by 1776 (National Centre of Manuscripts, fund HD, doc. 3507). According to 1780 document the number of sheep as a tax *Samaspindzlo* to Ossetians from Truso amounted to 1080 (National Centre of Manuscripts, fund HD, doc. 12211), which was the tax for three years. According to the decision of the rulers of Georgia, inhabitants of Truso were freed from the rent on the land. Once in two years, each household was obliged to pay five (5) sheep, as a tax; in case the tax was not paid, on the third year, the number of sheep for covering the tax amounted to 12 (Acts 1876: 349). Georgian authority registered only 81 households in Truso. Such was the true reality in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as this particular mountainous region, did not have sufficient lands for the allocation of more households.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the whole Tergi Gorge (Truso, Mna and Khevi) was just one region and their main place of veneration was Gergeti Sameba (resp.: Gergeti Trinity). What is more important, both inhabitants of Truso and Mna were Georgians that are directly reflected in toponyms and anthroponyms. That was the continuation of the old tradition. Dvals, resettled in Truso from Dvaleti, usually would have become the worshippers and vassals of the main shrine of the gorge – Gergeti Sameba (resp.: Gergeti Trinity).

What was the factual reason for the creation of three historical-geographic entities in the upper reaches of the river Tergi instead of the previously existing one entity? Especially, when in early Middle Ages, there was just one region – Tsanareti? The answer to this

question is simple: an ethnographic group of Dvals that migrated to Truso from Dvaleti preserved their peculiarity due to geographical factors. Thus, they were not integrated with Mokheves. The narrow Kasri passage factually did not allow integration.

Even Ossetian researchers admit that the migration of Ossetians to the so-called Kobi Basin took place much later and that they had come there from Truso; though, habitually, they would ascribe the period of their migration to much earlier period, i.e. the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. But in reality, their migration to this region started at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and ended during the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If we look deep into the history, both Georgian and foreign sources state that the inhabitants of the Tergi Gorge (on the whole territory of Kazbegi Municipality) were the ancestors of Georgian mountaineers – ethnographic group of Tsanars, that are mentioned by the second century Greek geographer *Klaudius Ptolemy*. In *MoktsevaiKartlisai* (resp.: *Convention of Kartli*) when covering the events of the 6<sup>th</sup> century – **Tsanaretis Khevi** is mentioned. Massive resettlement of Tsanars to Kakheti and lowlands took place in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The result of their massive resettlement was that Tsanars, as historic-ethnographic group, disappeared from history. That was not the all-out displacement and migration of their ancestors; some part of them still stayed there. After certain period **Tsnareti** was removed from the name of the *Tsanareti Khevi* and we received **Khevi**. **As for the people living in Khevi, they were called Mokheve**. Mokheves, for the first time, are mentioned in historic annals in the period of King Tamar. According to the chronicler, when the Pkhovels revolted “the king called for Atabag (title of rulers of Samtskhe) and all dwellers of the mountainous regions: **The Dval, the Tskhrazmel, the Mokheve, the Khadel, the Tskhavatel, the Chartal and the Ertsotianel** and put them under the subordination of Ivane Atabagi, thus making him in charge of them” (Chronicles of Kartli 1959: 111). The dwellers of Truso are not named among the Georgian mountain peoples in the quotation. The reason is that, they had not been formed as a separate ethnographic group in the 12<sup>th</sup> century yet; Truso, by that time, was inhabited by Dvals. The source is even more important, as Dvals are

named among East Georgian mountain peoples. It is noteworthy that in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a chronicler, when describing the events that took place at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, sharply differentiated Dvals from Ossetians (*Chronicles of Kartli*. 1959: 330). Mokheves are numerous mentioned in *Dzegli Eristavta* (resp.: *Chronicles of Eristavi*). While the contemporary Ossetian “scholars” preach that Mokheves never existed and they are Ossetians, who forcefully were made to change their nationality by Georgians not long ago. In the manuals of the so called South Ossetia, we read that initially, not only Truso but Khevi too were inhabited by Ossetians, and they claim that it was confirmed in the works of V. Bagrationi (<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki>). Factually, nothing similar is written in Vakhushti Bagrationi works. We can name many Georgian sources where Khevi and Mokheves are mentioned. If Mokheves did not exist, why did Ossetians mark the place of their settlement «Хиуыком» (the gorge of Mokheves)? By the way, as mentioned in the Russian scientific literature, Ossetians had never lived in the Dariali Gorge, that the northern part of the Tergi Gorge was the habitat of the Ingush; they say that here, at the left bank of the Tergi, the first Ossetian settlements were registered in the 1720s-1730s. According to Klapproth, Ossetians living in Lars, Chmish and Balta payed tax to the Ingush (*Kuzminov* 2004: 676-677). Thus, according to the Russian researchers too, Ossetians did not live in the Tergi Gorge; they settled there much later.

**The united Tsanareti (the Tsanareti Gorge) after the 10<sup>th</sup> century was divided into three small regions: Truso, Mna and Khevi.** Mna was situated between Truso and Khevi. This is verified in relevant parts of *Dzegli Eristavta* (resp.: *Chronicles of Eristavi*) (the second period of the 14<sup>th</sup> century) (*Legal Monuments of Georgia*. 1965: 113). Mna was the region, with a number of villages. Later, it became a part of Khevi. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mna was covered by Truso, which was preconditioned by the growth of Ossetian population in that period of time and the gradual substitution of Georgian population by Ossetians in Mna. Earlier, in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were no Ossetians in Truso either. It was the place where would live Dvals, who according to the name of the place of their habitat, were

called **Trusoeli** (from Truso); later they also Ossetinized due to the assimilation with Ossetians that infiltrated from the Kurtat and the Alagir gorges. One of the sanctuaries of the village Okroqana «Нары Уастырджи» (Tsagaeva 1972: 183), which means St. George of Nara. It is a common knowledge that Georgians (particularly mountain peoples) when moving from one place to other would take their sanctuaries with them. That way should have been moved from the Nar Gorge in Dvaleti, the initial place of residence of Tsanars, the sanctuary of St. George to the village Okroqana.

Mistakenly, Truso was considered as part of Dvaleti. Truso was a separate historic-geographical entity and resettlement of Dvals to Truso, do not give us the foundation to consider it as a part of Dvaleti. **In the written documents of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Georgian highlanders, living in Truso are called *Trusuelebi* (the *Chronicles of Eristavi*), inhabitants of Truso are called *Trusuelni* (Meskhia 1954: 348; Legal Monuments of Georgia 1965: 113). *Trusovelni* are mentioned in *Gergeti Matiane* (resp.: *Gergeti Chorinckles*) belonging to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Sharashidze 1954:246, 272. Truso is attested in the ecclesiastical document of the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century) According to this ecclesiastical document, *Truso* was in the composition of Samtavisi Eparchy. In the middle age Georgia, *Trusuelni* (population of Truso) were an ethnographic group similar to Dvals, Khevsurs, Pshavs, Mokheves, Mtiuls and Gudamakars (Chikovani 1985: 107).**

By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Truso was within the boundaries of the Saeristavo of Aragvi. We often encounter the expression „Aragvis Osni“ (resp.: Ossetians of Aragvi) in documents, which basically referred to the Ossetians living in Truso and the Zakha Gorge in Dvaleti, as well as the ones, that lived at the source of the TetriAragvi (resp.: the river White Aragvi) in the village Kumlitsikhe, that situated near Ghuda and Gudauri. The authors of that period would simply write *AragvisOsni* instead of *Ossetians living in the Saeristavo of Aragvi*. Ossetians did not live anywhere else in the Aragvi Gorge. After the abolition of *the Saeristavo of Aragvi* (1746), Ossetians from Truso refused to obey the Royal Court. Naturally, King Erekle campaigned against Truso (Orbeliani 1981: 113). Truso and the Eristavi of Aragvi (resp.: The Duke of Aragvi) Jimsheri, are even mentioned in the folk poetry written down in

Mtiuleti. What was the reason for the rebellion of Ossetians from Truso? Was it the desire to change the patron? The decisive role in that decision played the new wave of massive migration of Ossetians from north Caucasus who was unfamiliar with the feudal relationships and obligations envisaged under serfdom, the ones that they had, before a feudal lord and the state.

Unfortunately, the local group of residents of Truso, whose ancestors were Dvals, vanished after the migration of Ossetians. Later, Ossetians that came to Truso were called the Trusoeli (resp.: the ones from Truso); some Georgian surnames happened to be among them. One might ask – what factors determined the substitution of one Georgian ethnographic group by the other group and finally what was the reason for the change of their ethnic identity? The reason was pointed out above. One of the reasons was a number of epidemic outbreaks, namely of plague. This factor also facilitated the penetration of Ossetians initially to historic-ethnographic region of Dvaleti, later to the source of Didi Liakhvi in Maghran-Dvaleti and in the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge.

Studying the number of ethnographic facts, enabled the ethnologist *Giorgi Jalabadze* to come to a significant conclusion, namely, he observed two layers in the population of Truso: “there are number of customs that clearly differentiates one layer of Truso dwellers from the other one. We presume that one layer is the old layer of Dvals and the other layer is a the new one – Ossetian. ... gradual growth of a new layer in the upper reaches of the Truso Gorge caused the assimilation of Ossetians with the locals or their gradual resettlement down the river Tergi or towards Kartli “ (*Jalabadze* 1961: 226)

Issued by the Erekle II document in 1746, concerning Saint Nino Church in Bodbe (in Kakheti lowland, where is buried Saint Nino, who spread the Christianity in Georgia) is rather interesting. ***Khevshi-Dvalni*** (Dvals in Khevi) are mentioned in that document (documents 1940: 415-416). It shows the relationship of mountainous regions with the lowland (Royal Court). In this case it concerns the dwellers of the Tergi Gorge, namely Dvals that lived in Khevi (***Khevshi-Davlani***). **Historically, mountaineers from Truso were stablemen of the Bodbe Eparchy. Naturally, they meant the mountainous peoples that lived in**

Truso and who had moved here from Dvaleti. Over the course of time, the Dvals that lived in Truso moved to lower parts of Khevi. And later, their place was taken by Ossetians who migrated from Dvaleti. Due to these two factors, the inhabitants of Truso who lived in Khevi were called Dvals. The usage of the term *Khevshi Dvalni* in this document is a reflection of the old tradition and indicates that from the middle of the 17th century, the population of Truso basically was composed of Dvals. The document also indicates that Georgian authorities considered Truso as the constituent part of Khevi.

By the way, the toponym *Truso*, can be explained solely in Georgian. It is an old Georgian word. We read in the dictionary of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani: **“Druso is a barrier of stone with a tower over it; it is big and well-built”; “Druso is a high, well-built stone barrier with towers over it”**. The lexicographer Davit Chubinashvili gives the same explanation of the word. By the way, Truso, along with other mountainous regions, was the one, where this type of barriers with towers were constructed. As for the fact that the name of the region is *Truso* and the name of the construction is *Druso* can be explained as the substitution of the consonants *D* and *T*. If we resort to G. Chubinashvilibeing *plebeian*, they pronounce *t* instead of *d*. **In some Georgian dialects, for example in Kiziquri, *Truso* was the name of a grindstone for sharpening the scythe. Such a stone, with characteristic bluish tone, was used without moistening. And the Tergi Gorge was rich with such grindstones.**

In science, toponyms are considered the language of the earth. *Truso* belongs to this category. The name of the village ***Gimara*** (in the Ossetian language *Jimara*. comp.: personal name Jio<Gio) is explained by the Kartvelian languages. **Gim** in Svanetian means earth, ground, as for **sgim**, it means acid water and *-ar* is a suffix, characteristic for Kartvelian languages. Here are many other toponyms that are explained by the Georgian language: ***saburta*** (*the place, where the ball was played*), ***Kheladuri*** (*a mountain and a passage to Dvaleti*), ***sa-kokhe, sa-pepl-e, sa-batkn-e...*** (Tsagaeva 1972: 122); Tsagaeva also wrote about the Georgian origin of these toponyms (Tsagaeva 1972: 64). **Kokhi** is a certain type of stone and means a stone for a threshing board, which was used for covering the bottom of the



threshing board. *Sa-pepl-e*, a place where butterflies would nestle; as for the *sa-batkn-e* – a fenced place, where the lambs were kept. The given three micro toponyms could be created only by the representatives of Kartvelian language groups. This fact also indicates to the fact that migrated to Truso Ossetians encountered with local Georgian population there. Otherwise, it is impossible to explain how could the toponyms of Georgian origin be formed in the Ossetian linguistic-ethnographic environment.

There are many toponyms on the territory of North Ossetia that can be explained in the Georgian Language (Tsagaeva 1972: 125), especially in historically Georgian region of Dvaleti that borders Truso (G. Topchishvili 2015: 163-205). Both in Dvaleti and Truso we have the toponym *Abano*. In the first case, it is just a name of a part of the village Nara, while in the second case – it is the name of a village. Even Tsagaeva is unable to ignore this fact and writes that in Georgia, the place with mineral and hot waters is called *Abano*. We can cite K.Gann in regard with this toponym too: *Abano, abanosi, abana – from Georgian. Abano = баня, местобань* (a place, where you can take a bath) (Gann 1909: 1). All in all, there were 20 villages with the names *Abano* and *Abanoebi* in Georgia, both in its East and West parts as well as in the South.

At the village Ketrisi, there is a solidified lava flow from Khorisari, on the right bank of the Tergi; the local population call it *Ghorghana* (Kharadze 2015: 24). This name is a transparent Georgian toponym too – both in old and modern Georgian *Ghorgh* means piled crushed stones.

*Tsotsoltai* Georgian oeconym too. In Georgian language a *tsotsola* means not only a high, slender person, but also high and peaked mountains too. Natural-geographic surrounding of the village *Tsotsolta*, is indeed distinguished with such mountains; behind the village are very high and bare cliffs. Not only the root of the mentioned toponyms are Georgian, but their suffix too. Countless toponyms with the suffix – *ta*, are registered on the whole territory of Georgia. The toponyms, registered in Truso, with –*si* (id. *shi*) are of Georgian origin: *Re-si, Ketri-si, De-si*. The suffix – *si* is characteristic for the majority of Georgian oeconyms. There is a cult place in Truso and Dvaleti that is called **DziriDzuar** (jvari–resp.: cross) (Tsagaeva 1972: 18). This

obviously Georgian toponym directly indicates that both geographic regions were areas of the settlement of Georgians. The name of the sanctuary in the village Okroqana – **NarUastirji** (St. George of Nara), verifies the fact of the migration of the population from Dvaleti to the upper reaches of the river Tergi.

The village *Zakatgori* in Truso is a Georgian toponym. It consists of two parts: *Zakat-gori* and means the hill of the Zakadze/Zagashvili. Similar toponyms, the second part of which is *gori* are rather common, in Georgia.

A. Tsagaeva registered the toponym **Saburta**, which is ascribed to the undefined toponyms (Tsagaeva 1972: 122). *Saburta* is absolutely, transparent Georgian toponym, in which we distinguish the prefix – *sa*, and means a place for playing the ball. Such toponyms are numerous in Georgian villages. Here is also registered such a toponym as **lekuimta**– that is the result of joining of two Georgian words *lekui/lekvi+mta* (resp.: Puppy/cub + mountain). We can also name: *Miliona*, **Naruani** (*ipse Naruuli*) – a small river “Narovani” is in Khevi too, which joins the river Tergi at Kobi; **Sakokhe, Saneuli**; the same author verifies the existence of the toponym **Okro** near the village Kertisi, in Truso (Tsagaeva 1972: 198).

The fact, that the Tergi Gorge has been the place of the settlement of Georgians, is verified by the name of hydronym too. **The name of the river “Tergi” is of Georgian origin.** There were villages in SidaKartli (resp.: Inner Kartli) – *Tergvani* and *Tergvisi*. We have surname *Tergiashvili* based on the masculine name *Tergi*. **In Imeruli and Mtiuluri dialects Tergi is the name of an instrument for crashing or drilling the iron** (Glonti 1984: 247).

We should name one more transparent Georgian toponym. In the scientific literature the passage leading to the Zakha Gorge from Truso is called *Truso Passage*. It is charted on the maps that way. But the locals call this mountain passage *Khelad-ur-imta/gadasasvleli* (resp.: Kheladuri mountain/passage) (the toponym *Kheladuri* is registered by Tsagaeva as well (Tsagaeva 1972: 122). Both the root and the suffix of this toponym (*Khelad-ur-i*) are Georgian. In 1780 documents, among the villages in Truso is named the village Qaqid-ur-i (in the Russian translation Kakid-ur-i) (National Center of manuscripts,

fund Hd, case # 3906, ИсторияОсетии 1962: 143). The root of the oeconym is a masculine name *Qaqida/Qaqita*, that was spread in the mountainous regions of East Georgia (we also have Georgian surname – Qaqidashvili). In the list of Truso dwellers that payed the tax – *Samaspindzlo* (on a toll basis) we encounter Georgian toponym with the suffix – *ur*, such as, the name of the village – Khuts-ur-i. It turned out that the name *Khutsuri* was the previous name of the village Karatkavi. The surnames registered in the village Khutsuri in the documents of 1776, later are met among the surnames of the dwellers of Karatkavi. J. Klapproth also indicates to the identity of these two villages: “*I stayed in Sivrauti and Resi till the evening...after one verst we passed the village Kalagat-kau and after another verst Burmasig-kau, or the village of the yellow tower. In 1,5 versts from here, at the left bank of the river is the village Khutsuri or Karat-kau; it is a big village with towers*” (Gelashvili 2012: 300).

In the documents of King Erekle, dated 1776 and 1780, the surnames of Ossetians from Truso are presented with a suffix – *shvili* (Kashiashvili, Gabulishvili, Janigishvili, Gusalishvili, Berozishvili, Barsagishvili, Tavashvili, Jantishvili, Urtashvili, Kumalagishvili, Chalagishvili, Khamichishvili, Salbishvili, Sapishvili, Gioshvili, Akoshvili, Tegashvili, Adeshvili, Bibishvili, Kokashvili, etc.); the latter additionally highlights that they were the citizens of Georgia, that Truso was indivisible part of Georgia and they were integrated with Georgians.

The practice of falsification is limitless for Ossetian researchers. The map attached to the book *Осетины* (resp.: Ossetians) that was published in Moscow, in 2012, can be named as one of the typical examples of falsification. The map is titled *Ossetian societies at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries*. According to this map, in the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries the whole territory of the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge – Truso and Khevi up to the northern borders of Georgia, were Truso and was inhabited by Ossetians. But where is ancient historical-ethnographic region of Georgia – **Khevi** and the place of Georgian ethnographic group – **the Mokheves**? According to their *logic* the Mokheves would have been Ossetians who had changed their ethnic identity and became Georgians, not long ago.

The topic of migration of Ossetians to Georgia to the south of

the Caucasus range and the reasons of the latter, namely, the lack of lands, is given by N. Dubrovin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian author; he also mentioned that Ossetians would voluntarily become the sworn vassals of Georgian feudal lords (Dubrovin 2015: 295).

There are such Georgian architectural monuments in the Tergi Gorge as Churches of Garbani, Sioni and Akhaltsikhe that are built in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries and Gergeti domed cathedral (the 14-th c.). The latter was the treasury for the treasures of the Catholicate of Mtskheta and Saint Nino. Naturally a question arises, did Georgians keep the treasures of the most important Church of the country and the Cross of St. Nino, the Enlightener of Georgia, on the territory of the settlements of the other ethnoses? Did they entrust the safeguarding of the Dariali Door, that was considered to be the entrance to the country? Could Georgians let others guard the door that had been built for the repulse of nomads? Has the lapidary inscription on Gergeti Sameba (resp.: Trinity Cathedral), in Asomtavruli (resp.: Georgian Capital script) *Tirsingomeli* been engraved by Ossetians?

The fact that Truso has always been an inseparable part of Georgia is confirmed by the fact that local Ossetian population connects the construction of existing in the region Medieval Christian churches, with King Tamar and the period of her reign. **The foundation of Mtavarangelozhi (*Taranjelos* – Archangel), that is on a hill, near the village Ketrisi, the sanctuary of all inhabitants of Truso, was also ascribed to King Tamar (Tsalagov #4 2019);** it is clear that Ossetians should have received it from the local Dvals, who lived in Truso. This sanctuary was visited for worshiping not only by local Truso population but by Georgians from the Aragvi Gorge too. This ethnographic material indicates that Georgians that came on a pilgrimage to Truso were the ones that had migrated to the lowland.

#### ***ABOUT THE RELATIONS AND LINKS OF INHABITANTS OF TRUSO***

There were strong agricultural and economic ties among historical-ethnographic regions of Georgia. Mountainous regions were factually unable to exist independently, as the agricultural products harvested in the mountains would usually last only for three-four months. On

the other hand, they had livestock products in abundance. As well as the inhabitants of other mountainous regions of Georgia, the population of the Tergi Gorge had tight contacts with the foothills and lowlands of Georgia. The Mokheve and old (Dvals) and new (Ossetians) population of Truso would exchange or sell cheese and melted butter in the lowland. They would sell livestock products either at the Military Road of Georgia, or would go to Dusheti or Tbilisi for their realization (Description of Historical Monuments of Georgia 2004: 462). According to ethnographic data, “the basic receiving point for the sheep farm products from Truso in Pasanauri”. Historically, neighboring the Mtiuli and inhabitants of Gudamakari would use Truso summer pastures (G. Jalabadze). Some agricultural tools were brought from the lowlands of the Aragvi Gorge, namely, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so called *Dolaskedurinamgali* (sickle from Dolaskedi) was very popular in Khevi and Truso (Jalabadze 1961: 220). [Dolaskedi is at the foothill of the Aragvi Gorge]. The buried below ground kvevris (resp.: earthenware vessels for wine) near the Church of Archangel (the 10<sup>th</sup> century), at the inflow of Tergi with its tributary river Shuatisi, are the confirmation of agricultural-economic ties of Truso with the lowlands of Georgia. There used to be Georgian inscription above the Church doors (Description of Historical Monuments of Georgia 2004: 462).

Under this background, the assertions of some authors that Ossetians from Truso get related solely with Ossetians and that there were no cases of mixed marriages between Georgians and Ossetians evokes a surprise (Tsalagov # 4 2019: 88). Georgians predominantly integrated with Ossetians and the mixed marriages between them were rather frequent. Referring to ethnographic materials, at the time, when the dwellers of 9 villages of Maghran-Dvaleti and 8 villages of Truso simultaneously attacked the Georgian population of the Mna Gorge and due to the numerical superiority induced the Georgian population to leave their villages namely, Mna, Okroqana and Shevardeni, one of the inhabitants of the village Abano had a Georgian wife. Her attempt to save the Georgian population of the Mna Gorge turned out to be futile. All these happened at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to ethnographic materials, “the Mokheve would often marry Ossetian

women, as they had beautiful women. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, four Ossetian brides were brought to the Village Qanobi just during one night". As for the Georgian women, the marriages between them and Truso dwellers were rare; the reason for the latter was not an ethnic, but a geographical factor. Truso was isolated region and there was no pathway (which was built till the village Abano only in the 1850s). as for Khevi, from the ancient time there was the road called the Military Road of Georgia that connected Georgia to the north Caucasus (in the construction of the given road along with Georgians participated Ossetians from Truso too).

By the way, neither women that resettled from Truso to the Mna Gorge and Kobi Basin, were greatly interested in marrying the Truso dwellers. The geographic factor somehow preconditioned that Ossetians living in the Kobi Basin, would call their compatriots living in Truso, "deaf, uneducated and narrow-minded" (Ossetians that lived in the Zakha Gorge in Dvaleti called Ossetians from Truso "headless and brainless").

## **DVALETI AND DVALS**

Ossetian authors, without any feasible arguments regard the ancient historical-geographic region Dvaleti and the local Georgian mountain people Dvals, as historical territory of Ossetia and its population as Ossetians. They have no scientific basis for the confirmation of the latter; it is not observed either in Georgian written monuments or in numerous Georgian toponyms (Topchishvili 2015: 162-205; Topchishvili 2011: 56-79); they are not found neither in inscriptions that are still preserved on the ruins of churches. What is more important, the concept of the Ossetian origin of Georgian local group, Dvals is being much popularized within the wide specter of the local Ossetian population. They strive to achieve the recognition of the fact that they lived in the Central Caucasus from ancient times by the declaration of Dvaleti to be an indivisible part of Ossetia and by the introduction and establishment of the term *Ossetian-Dvals*. They also state that the upper reaches of the river Tergi, is an inseparable part of Dvaleti; that way they declare that Truso too, was the original

settlement area of Ossetians. A number of books were published about Dvaleti and Dvals, some of them in Russian, the language they are familiar with.

Migration of Ossetians and their settlement in Dvaleti, basically took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was covered by the 19<sup>th</sup> century German author G. Merzbacher, who traveled in Dvaleti in 1891; he also noted that Ossetians who survived the raids of Genghis Chan and Tamerlane hordes found shelter in the high mountainous Caucasus; in addition, he stated that part of them might have already lived there. As for the southern slopes of the Caucasus, Ossetians came here much later, and managed to drive the local Georgian Dvals away (Merzbacher 2011: 268).

After the collapse of the unified Georgia (second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century), Dvaleti was in the composition of Kingdom of Kartli. Dvaleti, as a rule, was governed by the Mouravi (regional governor), who was appointed by the crown court. For example, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Giorgi Saakadze was the Mouravi of Dvaleti, who simultaneously was the Mouravi of Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Pavlenishvili (princes) hold the position of the Governor in Dvaleti. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some parts of Dvaleti were transferred under the governance of Imereti Kingdom (under the rule of the Eristavi of Racha (resp.: The Duke of Racha). At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, only Zakha, Zrogo, Zaramagi and Nar were under the governance of the king of Kartli-Kakheti; Maghran-Dvaleti, Zghgele, Lesre, Tebe, Leta, Kasrikhevi and other small villages were under the control of the Eristavi of Racha.

There were many monuments of material culture in Dvaleti, but only small part of them survived till today. There was *Kasris Kari* (resp.: Door to Kasri) in the North of Dvaleti; Georgian chronicler writes that it was “the door, made of a cliff and mortared stones, to safeguard it so that no one including Ossetians could pass it; there in Zramagi was a big, extremely fortified castle, that was said to be built by King Tamar and a number of small village with towers” (Vakhushti Bagrationi).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Dvals are still mentioned (more out of the habit), though their ethnic identity had already been changed as they had already been Ossetinized by that time. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

the population in Dvaleti was already comprised of Ossetians, who factually were the mixture of local Georgians (Dvals) and Ossetians that came there. When Vakhushti Bagrationi talks about the Nikozi Eparchy, he notes, that “here resides the shepherd of all Caucasians and **Dvals that are called Ossetians now**”. Ethnic change is already obvious. Referring them by (Vakhushti Bagrationi) dual ethnonym – *Dvali Ossetian*- is conditioned by it. Ossetinization of Dvals did not happen overnight. Their ethnic assimilation has continued throughout many generations and basically was finished in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though in the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, part of Dvals still preserved their ethnic identity. Even more, till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of the Zakha Gorge were bilingual – they would speak in Ossetian and Georgian languages. The facts confirming the Georgian origin of Dvals are registered by a German scholar JacobReineggs too. He, when talking about the river Ardon, notes that Ossetians that lived there talked not only in Ossetian, but in old Georgian too (Reineggs 1796 <http://drevlit.ru/docs/kavkaz/XVIII/1760-1780/Reineggs/text2.php>). E. Zichi, talks about the surprising resemblance between the dwellers of Mamisoni and Georgians ([http://drevlit.ru/docs/kavkaz/XIX/1880-1900/Zici\\_E/text1.php](http://drevlit.ru/docs/kavkaz/XIX/1880-1900/Zici_E/text1.php)). Some Ossetian authors call Dvals as *Dvali-Alans*. We can use a citation of the Polish author Matvei Mekhovski (1457-1524), who states that Alans were not mountain people, that they solely lived nearby the river Don, in the steppes of Eurasia and that their place of dwelling was the lowland (Kavkaz 2010:31).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge is a historical territory of Georgia and the ancient place of the settlement of Georgians. It was and remains the unity of two geographical formations – Khevi and Truso. Initially, it was inhabited by the *Tsanars*, a local group of highlanders of Georgia, most of whom, due to political, demographic or other factors, moved to Kakheti, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> century new processes unfolded in the region. The remaining Georgians in the upper reaches of the Tergi gorge mainly gathered in Khevi. Although it should be noted that the



Georgian highlanders lived even higher in the country of Mna; from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Dvals from neighboring Dvaleti came to the uninhabited free lands of Truso, which is higher than the Kasara / Kasri gates, and settled there. Although the resettlement of the Dvals to Truso did not cause any ethnic changes, since the Dvals were ethnically Georgian. Tamerlane's invasion inflicted great damage both to Truso and other mountainous regions of East Georgia.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an ethnic change was observed in neighbouring to Truso, Dvaleti; Georgian mountaineer Dvals were substituted by resettled from north Caucasus (from Kurtat and Alagir), Ossetians. The majority of Dvals were scattered in different parts of Georgia, as for those who stayed there, they gradually assimilated with the resettled Ossetians. Though, the assimilation of Dvals continued almost up to the recent time. From the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ossetian ethnic entity would gradually spread on the territories of Georgia that previously were inhabited by Dvals, i.e. in Truso and Maghran-Dvaleti (the source of the river Didi Liakhvi. The Georgian population was gradually replaced by Ossetians.

Assimilation of Dvals with Ossetians, apart from Dvaleti itself, took place in Truso too. Settling of Ossetians in Truso happened in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though this process did not have an instant character and it lasted till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, till the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of Truso were Georgian mountain peoples. Later Georgian mountaineers were substituted by Ossetians, that also were called *Trusoelis* – inhabitants of Truso.

The region of Mna between Khevi and Truso remained Georgian for a long time; the appearance of Ossetians in Mna and their assimilation with the remaining Georgian population started only at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries conditioned by the resettlement of ethnic Ossetians from Truso to Mna and their assimilation with the local Georgian population. In some respect, the resettlement of Georgian population into different villages of Khevi facilitated the migration of Ossetians to Mna region.

Throughout the whole history of Georgia, the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge, both Khevi and Truso have always been its integral parts.

## THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RUSSIAN CENSUSES OF THE POPULATION OF TRUSO, THE MNA GORGE AND THE KOBİ BASIN

### **VILLAGES OF TRUSO**

#### **The Village of Abano**

In 1802 there were 20 households in Abano with 166 persons. In 1831-1832 – 18 households, 128 persons; in 1860 – 24 households, 90 males; in 1873 – 27 households, 191 persons; in 1886 – 27 households, 197 persons. In the 1860 census, the surnames of ethnic Ossetians living in Abano were recorded with Georgian suffix (-shvili). According to the 1776 archival document, they also had the following Georgian surnames: Urtashvili, Chabolishvili, Sirdishvili, Sapishvili and Batishvili. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century family names, only the Sapishvilis / Sapievs are recorded in the village of Abano in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rest of the families were relatively new. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar* (resp.: *The Caucasian Calendar*), 184 persons lived in Abano. By the 1926 census, there were 121 inhabitants (23 yards) recorded in Abano.

#### **The Village of Ketrisi**

In 1802 there were 10 households in Ketrisi and the number of persons was 96; in 1831-1832 – 24 households, 110 persons; in 1860 – 20 households, 134 persons; in 1873 – 25 households, 153 persons; in 1886 – 23 households, 200 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 263 persons lived in the village of Ketrisi, in 1926 – 216 persons (34 households). The biggest families were the Kokoevs/Kokashvilis and the Tsalagovs/Chalagashvilis. In 1886, the dwellers of the village were bilinguals (they spoke both languages –Georgian and Ossetian). The toponym *Ketrisi* (*Keterisi* in the 1780 document) is derived from the Georgian name *Kvatetrisi*. According to ethnographic data, “the Kokaevs were migrated from Lamardon, the Kasaevs – from the Zakhā Gorge of Dvaleti, the Tsalagovs– from

Unal, the Chetoevs ( the same Ketoevs) – from Ardon. The Tsalagovs were the first to settle in the village of Ketrisi”.

### **The Village of Shuatsi//Suatsi**

In 1802 there were 10 households in Shuatsi, and they comprised 96 persons; in 1831-1832 – 28 households, 111 persons; in 1860 – 29 households, 92 males; in 1873 – 29 households, 160 persons; in 1886 – 34 households, 177 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 263 persons lived in the village of Shuatsi, in 1926 – 170 persons (25 households). In 1886, the dwellers of Shuatsi were bilinguals (Georgian, Ossetian). The families living in Shuatsi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were relatively new settlers: the Bagievs, the Sambegievs, the Turbegovs, the Koskaevs. It was only in 1886 that the Salbievs (7 households) first appeared in the family lists. The Batsievs migrated from Dvaleti. They settled in Truso in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Village of Zemo(Upper) Desi**

In 1802 there were 12 households in Kvemo Desi, and they comprised 86 persons; in 1831-1832 – 11 households, 37 persons; in 1860 – 13 households, 96 persons; in 1873 – 13 households, 121 persons; 1886 – 15 households, 151 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 140 persons lived in the village of Zemo Desi. The most numerous were the Khamitsashvilis / Khamitsovs, who moved to Zemo Desi from Magran-Dvaleti and the Karigievs and the Kazievs migrated from the Kurtati Gorge. In the village there was a shrine of Uasterji (St. George), where the *Atengenoba* festival was celebrated.

### **The Village of Kvemo (Lower) Desi**

In 1802, there were 13 households in Kvemo Desi, and they comprised 68 persons; in 1831-1832 – 9 households, 43 persons; in 1860 – 10 households, 50 persons; in 1873 – 7 households, 48 persons; in 1886 – 7 households, 41 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 263 persons lived in the village of Kvemo Desi. In the 1926 Census, Kvemo and Zemo Desi were registered as one village. At that time the total number of inhabitants was 157 (26 households). According to the documents of 1778 and 1780,

4 households lived in the village of Kvemo Desi. The Salbievs were registered as Salbishvilis, the Tatirovs – Totrashvilis and Tatrishvilis, the Khamitsovs – Khamichashvilis. There is no sign of the Mirikovs who migrated at the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Village of Karatkavi (Former Khutsuri)**

In 1802 there were 19 households in Karatkavi, and they comprised 134 persons (men – 90, women – 44); in 1831-1832 – 20 households, 97 persons; in 1860 – 27 households, 171 persons; in 1886 – 31 households, 192 persons. In the census, for each family, the language they spoke at home, Georgian or Ossetian, was recorded. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 216 people lived in the village of Karatkavi. In 1926 – 91 persons (26 households) were registered. According to the 1780 document, there lived the Adeshvilis, the Kumalagashvilis (Kumalagovs), Jukoshvilis, Qaulishvilis (Kaluevs in the XIX century Russian censuses, in 1860 – K(Q)aloshvilis), the Bezhashvilis (later this surname is not observed), the Chalagashvilis (in the 1800s this surname is not met in Karatkavi), the Urtashvilis (further Urtaevs), the Bulachashvilis (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Bulatsovs/Bulachievs). In 1776 in Truso there was a village of **Khutsuri**. Comparing this document with the one of the 1780, it turns out that the surnames registered in the village of Khutsuri are mentioned in the village of Karatkavi. The same can be proved by the family names recorded in the village of Karatkavi in XIX century censuses. The similarity of these villages is indicated by J. Klaproth, too. Thus, the earlier Georgian name of the village of Karatkavi was Khutsuri, which was formed by the Georgian suffix (-ur). According to the ethnographic data, the Urtaevs, Kaluevs and Kumalagovs mmigrated from the North Ossetian village of Dargavs and the Bulatsevs – from Tsimit (Kurtati community). In the village, on the mountain, there is a shrine `Tarangelozı`, which was a shrine not only of the village, but also of the entire Truso.

### **The Village of Burmaseki//Burmasiği**

In 1802, there were 6 households in Burmasigi and they comprised 45 persons; in 1831-1832 – 7 households, 41 persons; in 1860 – 8 households, 30 persons; in 1873 – 8 households, 57 persons; in 1886 – 7 households, 61 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*,

77 people lived in the village of Burmasigi. In the 1926 Census, 69 persons (13 households) were registered in the village. The number of people at that time was 157 (26 households). In the 1780 documents, the village Burmasigi is not registered which confirms that this village did not exist at that time.

### **The Village of Tsotsolta/Tsotsolda**

In 1802 there lived 10 households in Tsotsolta (Chocholi), and they comprised 62 persons; in 1831-1832 – 13 households, 84 persons; in 1860 – 14 households, 104 persons; in 1873 – 29 households, 160 persons; in 1886 – 17 households, 117 persons. According to the census, the inhabitants of the village were bilingual – “Family language – Georgian and Ossetian”. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 151 persons lived in the village of Tsotsolta, in 1926 – 83 persons (16 households). In the 1776 document, it is introduced under the name of *Chocholi*

(*Chocholi* can also be found in the document of 1802). The name of the village Tsotsolta/Tsotsolda is derived from the conical (Tsotsola in Georgian) mountain behind settlement. Observing the family names of the villages of Burmasigi and Tsotsolta it becomes evident that these two villages were originated from the village of *Qhaqhiduri* (Georgian oeconym with *-ur* suffix) in Truso in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Magkaevs migrated to Tsotsolta from the Zakh Gorge at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Village of Gimara//Jimara**

In 1802, there were 22 households in Gimara, and they were comprised of 130 persons. In 1831-1832 – 24 households, 101 persons; in 1860 – 24 households; in 1873 – 25 households, 80+67=147 persons; in 1886 – 29 households, 162 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 201 persons lived in the village of Gimara. In the 1926 census, 186 ethnic Ossetians (19 households) were registered in the village. The village is mentioned in the 1776 and 1880 documents. According to the 1776 document, In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only the Berozashvilis lived in the village. Later the surname

was changed into Berozov in the Russian way. The founders of the village Berozovs moved from North Ossetia..

### **The Village of Tepe//Tepi**

In 1802, 12 households lived in Tepe, and they comprised 66 persons; in 1831-1832 – 16 households, 83 persons; in 1860 – 17 households, 125 persons; in 1873 – 20 households, 131 persons; in 1886 – 19 households, 128 persons. In 1886, the village dwellers were bilingual – “family language – Georgian and Ossetian”. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 159 people lived in the village of Tepe. In 1926, 164 persons and 23 households of ethnic Ossetians were registered. The main family name in the village of Tepe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Kalagov / Kalagishvili. It was not included in the 1780 document ; perhaps the population changed.

### **The Village of Resi//Reshi**

In 1802, 20 households lived in Resi, and they comprised 66persons. In 1831-1832 – 13 households, 55 persons; in 1860 – 17 households, 110 persons; in 1873 – 18 households, 120 persons; in 1886 – 18 households, 125 persons. In 1886 the village dwellers were bilingual– “family language – Georgian and Ossetian ”. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 170 persons lived in the village of Resi, in 1926 – 166 persons (27 households). The Kusaevs immigrated from Tsimiti, the Kudzievs – from Unali, the Kalamanovs – from Kurtati.

### **The Village of Sivrata**

In the document of 1802, the village Sivrata is not mentioned. In 1831-1832 there lived 5 households, 18 persons; in 1860 – 4 households, 19 persons; in 1886 – 4 households, 30 persons. This census shows that the village dwellers were bilingual (Georgian – Ossetian). According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 24 persons lived in the village of Sivrata. In 1926, 18 persons (5 households) were registered in the village. The village did not exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Kalagishvilis / Kalagovs were not mentioned in Truso at this time either. They were first mentioned as inhabitants of Sivrata only in the 1860 census.

### **The Village of Zakagori**

In 1802, 5 households lived in Zakagori, and they comprised 29 persons. In 1831-1832 – 6 households, 29 persons; in 1860 – 9 households, 38 persons; in 1873 – 9 households, 36 persons; in 1886 – 8 households, 30 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, only 2 households lived in the village of Zakagori – “Ketoshvili Bibo” and “Bibishvili Shikha”. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bibishvilis no longer lived in this village. The surname Ketoshvili became Ketoev. The Ketoshvilis settled in the village of Zakagori in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the abandoned settlement of the Zagashvilis.

In 1831-1832 there were 13 villages in the entire Truso Gorge with 194 households, and they comprised  $590+365=955$  persons.

### **VILLAGES OF MNA AREA AND THE KOBİ BASIN**

#### **The Village of Almasiani//Bazaliani**

In 1802, Almasiani is recorded with the name of “Almasi”. At that time, totally 4 households and 25 persons lived in the village, in 1831-1832 – 10 households, 56 persons. Religion – Christians; agricultural activities – arable farming and sheep-breeding; in 1860 – 14 households, 91 males; in 1873 – 11 households, 79 persons; in 1886 – 14 households, 90 persons. In 1886, the Zagashvilis (5 households) are registered as Ossetian and their mother language – Georgian. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, in Almasiani/Bazaliani lived 122 persons. In 1926, this indicator comprised 201 persons (35 households). According to the records of the 1831-1832 census, the family names living in the village were represented by only one each household pointing to the fact that they were newly moved from Truso.

#### **The Village of Mna**

In the list of villages included in the domain of Vakhtang Batonishvili, compiled by the Russians in 1802, the village of Mna is included in the list of Georgian villages (“Деревни грузинския”) of Khevi province in which 5 households (20 people) lived.; in 1831-

1832 – 13 households, 65 persons. Religion – Christians; agricultural activities -arable farming and sheep-breeding. In 1860, 12 households, 75 persons lived in Mna; in 1873 – 12 households, 81 persons; in 1886 – 13 households, 90 persons. “Spoken family language – Georgian”. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 120 people lived in Mna. In 1926, 122 persons (16 households) were registered. In 1774, the village was completely inhabited by Georgians. Ossetians were settled in Mna at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which is evidenced by the number of households in each family.

### **The Village of Ukhati/ Zemo ( Upper) Ukhati**

In the 1802 document only 13 households and 92 persons are registered in Ukhati; in 1831-1832 – 15 households, 86 persons; in 1860 – 15 households, 90 persons; in 1873 – 16 households, 109 persons; in 1886 – 21 households, 138 persons. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 197 persons lived in Zemo Ukhati.

### **Village Kvemo ( Lower) Ukhati**

The village did not exist either in 1802 or 1830. In 1860, 6 households, 38 persons lived in the village; in 1873 – 6 households, 36 persons; in 1886 – 4 households, 39 persons. Family language – Georgian and Ossetian. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 31 people lived in Kvemo Ukhati. In the 1926 census, both the Zemo and Kvemo Ukhati are represented as a one village. At that time, 171 persons (24 households) dwelt in the village. Ethnic Ossetians immigrated from Truso to Zemo Ukhati in the 1800s and to Kvemo in 1840s-1850s.

### **The Village of Kobi**

In 1802, in Kobi lived 10 households, 70 persons; in 1831-1832 - 15 households, 82 persons. Religion – Christians; agricultural activities – arable farming and sheep-breeding. In 1860, 31 households 199 persons lived in the village; in 1886 – 31 households, 227 persons. Ossetians of this village indicated Georgian as their spoken family language. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 254 persons lived in Kobi, in 1926 – 205 persons (11 households). Ossetians first



settled in Kobi at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then the migration of ethnic Ossetians to Kobi took place during the entire XIX century which is confirmed by the notes of the 1860 census. According to Volkova, the Bizikovs and Zlievs moved from the Kurtati Gorge, and the Abayevs and Gadzievs from Jbi. The reason for their relocation was land shortage. The settlement of Ossetians in the village of Kobi was largely due to its location on the military road and that it was the center of the rural community. I. Klaprot wrote: “The Ossetians living in Kobi are mostly fugitives from the mountains; They killed people there and moved here to avoid blood revenge.”.

### **The Village of Akhalsopeli//Navakavi**

In the 1802 document, this village is not mentioned. In 1831-1832 – 10 households, 74 persons lived in the village; in 1860 – 10 households, 37 persons; in 1873 – 9 households, 58 persons; in 1886 – 10 households, 52 persons. The spoken family language was Georgian. According to the 1910 *Kavkazski Kalendar*, 110 persons (35 households) lived there. In the census book of 1831-1832, the village is recorded with the Georgian name Akhalsopeli. In the description of the following years, they translated oikonim and wrote it as Nawaka / Nogkau. Its inhabitants were mainly resettled from Truso in 1810-1820.

### **The Village of Okroqhana**

In the list of the villages under the rule of Vakhtang Batonishvili, compiled by the Russians in 1802, the village of Okrokana is included in the list of Georgian villages (*Derevni Gruzinskya – resp: Georgian Villages*) of Khevi and there lived 15 households (89 persons); in 1831-1832 – 18 households, 117 persons. Religion – Christians; agricultural activities -arable farming and sheep-breeding. In 1860, 23 households, 126 persons lived in the village; in 1873 – 25 households, 71 persons; in 1886 – 23 households, 136 persons In this village, everyone is registered as “Georgians” by nationality. In this village, everyone is registered as “Georgians” by nationality It seems that at first there was written “Ossetian”(«осет.») but then it was crossed out and written Georgian” («грузины»), instead in the same handwriting.

Family language – Georgian and Ossetian. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, there lived 204 persons in Okroqana, in 1926 – 175 persons (23 households). The main inhabitants of the village were the Gudiauris who are registered as Gudiaevs in the records of the Russian census. Transformation of ethnic identity of the Gudiauris (Gudiashvili) and their registration as Gudiaevs occurred due to their appearance in the Ossetian linguistic and ethnic environment, as well as their family relations – mainly their marriage to Ossetian women.

### **The Village of Shevardeni//Shavardeni**

In 1831 – 7 households, 44 persons. Religion – Christians; agricultural activities – arable farming and sheep-breeding; in 1860 – 9 households, 69 persons; in 1873 – 9 households, 89 persons; in 1886 – 10 households, 92 persons. Family language – Georgian and Ossetian. According to the 1910 *Kavkaszki Kalendar*, 134 people lived in Shevardeni//Shavardeni, in 1926 – 52 persons (9 households). Initial dwellers of the village were the Babeshvilis and the Arjinashvilis who are registered as Babeuri and Arjinauli in the 1774 census. In the Ossetian ethnic and linguistic environment representatives of both families changed their ethnic identities and became Ossetians. The marriage to Ossetian women played the great role in this process.

### **The Village of Tolgoti**

In 1802, 4 households and 15 persons lived in Tolgoti ;in 1831-1832 – 2 households, 7 persons; In 1860 – 4 households, 18 persons; in 1873 – 3 households, 18 persons; in 1886 – 3 households, 16 persons. Family language – Georgian.

## HISTORY OF ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF KHEVI AND PROSPECTING IN TRUSO

The territory of Kazbegi municipality has not been completely studied. Field research mainly covered the area on both banks of the River Tergi, from below the village of Kobi to Larsi. Truso Gorge still remains a blank spot on the archaeological map of Khevi until today.

In 1877, on the site of the discovery, the Russian scientist G. Pilimonov conducted field campaigns where a large number of archaeological artifacts were discovered (armament, horse harness, crockery, belt device, jewelry and cultic objects – mainly sculptures and handbells. The artifacts are made of bronze, iron, silver and gold). The archaeological collection is known as ‘Kazbegi Treasure’ in scholarly literature. G. Filimonov dated these finds to the first appearance of iron production (Filimonov: 1878:26-33). To this day, Kazbegi treasure is considered to be one of the most significant and interesting archaeological discoveries on the territory of Khevi. B. Kuftin dated Kazbegi collection back to the Achaemenid period (5<sup>th</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), and the burial inventory – to the Hellenistic epoch (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) (Kuftin 1941: 32-45).

Until recently, the material from Kazbegi was regarded as the oldest findings of the region. In 1991, pottery of the Kura-Araxes culture of the Early Bronze Age was accidentally found in the village Tkarsheti (Mindorashvili 2005 :17-19). A settlement-site of the Kura-Araxes culture has also been evidenced in the gorge of Village Juta.

The village-sites in Khevi have not been studied yet. Only one settlement-site of middle ages near Sioni was studied by I. Gdzlishvili in 1960 (Tsitlanadze 1976: 10). Cemeteries of this period can be found in Gveleti, near the area of ‘Gigias Satibi’, in Larsi and Dariali Castle.

The deceased were buried according to Christian practice in the stone graves of Gveleti cemetery. The graves yielded weapons (spearheads, knives), fibulae, buckles, clasps, rings, brooches,

bells, mirrors, metal utensils, bracelets, beads, coins and pottery of different shapes. The grave inventory creates a certain picture about the relations between Khevi of the Early Middle Ages and certain parts of east Georgia, as well as the outside world. The cemetery dates back to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Mindorashvili 2005: 19-101).

There is a cemetery of 'Gigias Satibi' on the right bank of the River Tergi in Dariali. The tombs yielded the following: ceramic vessels, fragments of a bronze fibula; beads made of glass, crystal and different materials; black glass twisted bracelets; silver bezel rings. One of the rings had a gemstone with an Arabic inscription. Also noteworthy are two Arabic silver coins of the 9<sup>th</sup> century; a glass drinking vessel. The inventory discovered in the tombs of the cemetery, mainly the pottery, finds resemblance with the famous clayware from the sites of Shida Kartli and other regions. The ornaments found in the tombs (glass bracelets, glass beads, silver bezel rings) perfectly depict the relationships of the people of Khevi with Shida Kartli and some of the regions of Caucasia. According to the inventory, the cemetery is dated back to the IX-X centuries (Tsitlanadze et al. 1998: 70-78; Ramishvili et al. 1973: 75-76). Early medieval graves have also been investigated in Larsi (Kruglov 1937: 247-248).

Archaeological study of Dariali Castle and its cemetery suggests that the first stage of construction of could be related to the building activities of the king of Kartli Mirvan (II century BC). Throughout the Middle Ages, Dariali Castle was the chief fortification which protected the northern borders of Georgia. Graves of the Early and High Middle Ages have been studied on the cemetery (Kruglov 1937: 247-248; Tsitlanadze, Gobejishvili 1964: 23-25; Mindorashvili 2005: 105-150; Ramishvili... 1997: 105).

In Khevi scholars have researched some underground crypts. They have been excavated in Gergeti, Garbani, on the territory of Arshi Castle, on the territory of the church in Akhaltsikhe, within the fence of Sioni Basilica and in Tkarsheti. The crypts are of the same type: rectangular in plan running east-west direction. The walls are built with dry masonry of more or less processed large stones. In rare cases, mortar is used. They are covered with shales. In the western

part there are stepped passages arranged with stones extended from the wall. Apparently, this type of crypts is typical of Khevi. Supposedly, the underground crypts emerged in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ramishvili...1973:75-76; Ramishvili et al. 1974: 71-73). Cemeteries of the high medieval period are found in Juta and Artkhmo (Bayern 1885: 41-45).

There is a rock-cut Betlemi monastic complex on the slope of Mkinvartsveri. Although the material obtained through excavations are of a later period, the monastery seems to have been founded some time earlier. It has been suggested that its construction could be connected to the period of spread of desert monasticism in Georgia – 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Japaridze 1948:228-239; Mchedlishvili 1981: 37-40; Mchedlishvili, Nikolaishvili 1986: 40, 42-50).

In August 2020, a complex scientific-research expedition took place in the surroundings of Truso and Mna which intended to identify and record historical-architectural and archaeological monuments of these two micro-districts of the Tergi Gorge. During the prospecting campaigns, archaeological monuments were attested in the Mna Gorge as well as in Truso.

A small size burial mound was found in the village-site of Akhalsopeli (Nogkau). It was undoubtedly built in the prehistoric times. There is a settlement mound in the village-site of Mna, on the left bank of the river. A cemetery was arranged on it. The shapeless pieces of pottery collected from the surface are so fragmentary that it is difficult to define their age. In our opinion, it must be a multi-layer settlement-mound.

There is a cemetery (X-XI centuries) situated north of Mna Church. The cemetery must have emerged here during the very first stage of functioning of the church. Remains of structures have survived in front of the church, on the edge of the natural hill. Among them the most distinguished is a fragment of a megalithic backed tower built with large rocks. The remains of the buildings in front of the church are also megalithic. The ruins yielded a stone tool supposedly used for processing leather (?).

In 1924, a treasure of coins containing 926 billons and copper coins was found near the church. The treasure comprises coins of

the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries issued by Georgian kings Vakhtang IV (1443-1446), George VIII (1446-1446), Konstantine II (1479-1505), and Davit X (1505-1525) (G. Dundua T. Dundua. 2015: 158).

The village-sites of Mna and Gaguat have remains of megalithic backed towers. There are also megalithic ruins around them. A village-site was tracked at the end of Kvemo (Lower) Okroqana, near the cemetery. The walls of the structure are visible in the cultural layer. According to the ceramics, the settlement-site could belong to the Late Classical or Early Middle Ages.

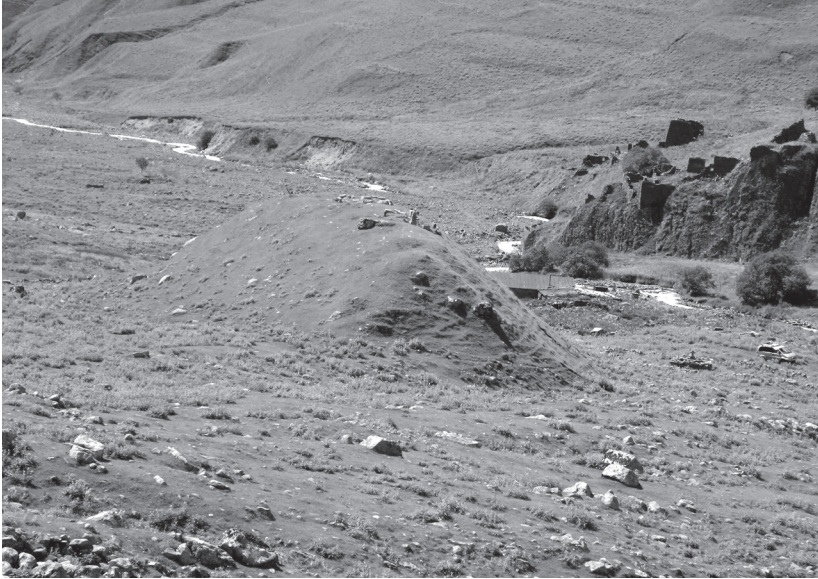
In the village-site of Resi in Truso there are graves with built up walls covered with big stone slabs. They have south-north direction (Pl. V). Outwardly, they look like early medieval stone graves.

The ditch cut on the slope north-east of the Zakagori cemetery exposes an ash-coal layer. Fragments of animal bones and artless small broken pieces of pottery are visible at the depth of 0,5 meters from the earth surface. It could be an early medieval village-site.

Cists are visible south of the eastern section of Karatsopeli. Modern graves are arranged over the cists. Apparently, a modern-day cemetery covered the area of the previous one.

In Kvemo Desi, there is a megalithic complex with remnants of the backed tower found at its head. Like Mna towers, it is built with dry masonry of large rocks. The tower had been annexed with structures built of big stones. Only remnants of single walls have survived. It is obvious that a backed tower and its contemporary complexes had existed in Kvemo Desi before the village emerged.

The identified settlement-sites, cemeteries, complexes with backed towers and remains of churches (Suatisi, Tepi) have been studied archaeologically. Without it our knowledge about the historical past of Truso cannot be perfect. We consider it absolutely necessary to identify and study the archaeological monuments of Truso. When there is a shortage of written documents, archaeological data are often the only reliable source while studying history. We believe that research of the archaeological antiquities of Truso will be the priority in the near future.



**The Village of Mna. The settlement mound**



**The village-site of Mna. Cemetery near the church**



**A stone tool used  
for processing leather.  
The village of Mna**



**The village of Okroqana.  
Cultural layer of the settlement-site**



**The village of Kvemo Desi. The remains of backed towers**





**The village of Suatysi. The ruins of a church**



**The village of Gimara. The ruins of a church**

## GEORGIAN INSCRIPTIONS IN TRUSO AND THE MNA GORGE

An ancient Georgian lapidary inscription is preserved on the church of the Virgin (St. Mary)(10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) situated on the upper stretch of the River Mnistsqali (Bagrationi 2004:466). A single-line *asomtavruli* inscription is engraved on the lower stone of the southern corner on the east facade of the church, at 52 cm above the ground. The andesite block is rough-hewn. Therefore, the contours of the carved-out characters ‘disappear’ in the light and shade of the uneven surface. The area of the inscription is 107X14cm., the biggest character – 8 cm., the smallest – 3cm. The words are not separated, no punctuation is used, titlois denoted by a short horizontal line.

### Copy of the Asomtavruli inscription of the Mna Church

The inscription reads as follows: ქე შე შვილნი მაქარისმ (?)  
Christ, have mercy on the children of Makarism (?)

The last character of the inscription resp.: „m” – M indicates that the inscription is either incomplete or damaged; we can suggest that the craftsman made a mistake and instead of “n” wrote “m”. Mistakes like this were very frequent in medieval Georgian epigraphy (In Bieti inscription `bakZ” – “ბაკძ” (resp.: Bakdz) instead of “Bak(u)r” (Bakradze 1953: 34,35,Tab.VII, Picture 3). If we assume that the final grapheme is ‘N’, then it reads as follows: “ქრისტე შეინყალე შვილნი მაქარისნ[ი]” – „Christ, have mercy on the children of Makarish[i]”. Graphemes of the inscription are carved by an inexperienced hand; the levelness of the lines is not maintained; ductus of graphemes is low; some letters are squared. The ‘nose’ of the letter ‘L’ in the Mna inscription „l” – is as oblique stretched out as on graphemes ‘L’

and 'E' in the construction inscription of St. George Church (year of 914) in Javakheti (Shoshiashvili 1980: 171), on grapheme 'E' in the inscription of the Kachio Church (10<sup>th</sup> century) (Silogava 2012: 69, N87, Picture 56), etc. According to common features, the inscription fits in the X century and is made by a non-professional craftsman. It should be mentioned here that andesite is a solid stone and it is difficult to carve an inscription on it. In old times, ktetorial construction inscriptions were mostly carved above the doorway or window of the church. Based on these data, Mna inscriptions cannot be regarded as ktetorial. We think that Makare donated the stone with an inscription in the process of the construction of the church and in order to mark it he asked the Lord to have mercy on his children, too. In the Middle Ages it was very difficult to quarry, cut and transport the construction stone to the construction site. The process of construction of the church is depicted on the reliefs of the cornice of the western façade of Korogho Church (end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) not far from Mna in the Khada Gorge (Tumanishvili 2012: 100-107). The village churches of small size like that of Mna were frequently built by donations from different persons, by paid or unpaid services. A smith Gabel also took part in the process of construction of St. Tevdore Church (995) in Pia (a village-site in Aspindza Municipality) whose main ktetors were Chkari and his brothers. Gabel either funded or built the western window lintel of the church which we learn from the commemorative inscription on the same stone (Shoshiashvili 1980: 270-271). The inscriptions of St. George Church (10<sup>th</sup> century) of the same ruined village commemorates a 'stone-setter' Grdzelisidze, others mention Kravi, Akhoan, Oman (Shoshiashvili 1980: 271-273). In the construction of the Dirbi (Kareli municipality) church of the Dormition of the Virgin (957-967) participated a certain Guram (Gagoshidze 2006: 23, 24). Two inscriptions on the church of Bajiti (Sachkhere municipality) (11<sup>th</sup> century) say that Giorgi and Mikael had purchased one stone each (Silogava 1980: 71, 72). In short, there are numerous such inscriptions on the walls of preserved on the walls of the churches in different parts of Georgia. Presumably, the inscription in Mna illustrates a similar circumstance.

The name *Makare* attested in the inscription is the version of

*Makari*. The surname Makarashvili is doubtlessly connected with this first name. There is a village of Makarta in Gudamaqari district. A priest Mikel, former Makare, is mentioned in the Gergeti synaxarion (15<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries). It is in this manuscript that the surname of Makrashvili is recorded (Sharashidze 1954; 282<sub>5</sub>, 283<sub>14-15</sub>).

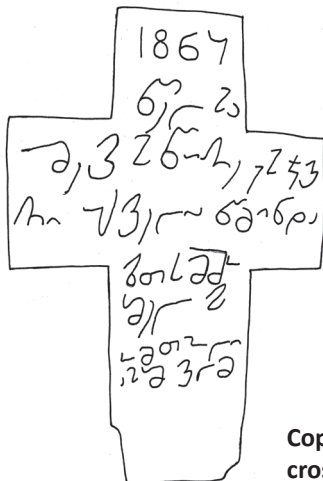
The inscription of Makare from Mna is the earliest epigraphic monument (10<sup>th</sup> century) known to us from the upper stretch of the Tergi Gorge. A copper cup with a *mkhedruli* inscription carved on it is also preserved in the church of Mna: ‘K. by Giorgi Maqashvili’. It is obvious that a certain Giorgi Maqashvili donated this cup to the church of the Virgin in Mna. According to paleographic data, the inscription belongs to the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Most epigraphs in Truso are the inscriptions of tomb stones or stone crosses of niches dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are accurately dated with Arabic numbers. In this respect remarkable is a stone cross with rectangular arms installed in the two-stepped stone base placed at the southern wall of the church of the Virgin in Mna. The cross niches of this type are preserved in many places of Truso, Mtiuleti or Khevi. The front part of the cross is decorated with simple ornaments, an alter cross with trefoil ends is grooved in the middle. There is a two-line inscription carved in cursive *Mkhedruli* on the lower arm of the

cross, near the base. The cut is shallow, covered with lichens and it is difficult to read; presumably, the name of the craftsman is written there. There is an eight-line *mkhedruli* inscription performed by the same hand on the back of the cross:

‘In 1864, I, Omtoliashvili, donated this crossto the Holy Virgin’

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially from its second half, Russian



**Copy of the Mkhedruli inscription of the cross of the Mna church**

inscriptions appear on most grave stones. The graves often have monuments mounted with a cross vertically erected over them. Facets of the monuments are decorated with Russian style low reliefs of onion-domed churches. There are Georgian-type grave stones in a shape of parallelepiped next to the former. Some of them have Georgian *-mkhedruli* inscription. As mentioned above, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the grave stones with Russian inscriptions exceed those with Georgian inscriptions. Ethnic Ossetians whose infiltration in Truso started from the middle of the XVII century (Topchishvili 2019:57), were quite densely populated here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After Georgia became a constituent part of the Russian Empire, Ossetians started leaving the Georgian cultural milieu gradually and orientated themselves towards the Russian one. However, apparently, some Ossetians stuck to the Georgian-speaking community. The Mna Gorge, which is situated between Truso and Khevi, was still ethnically Georgian until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but Ossetian elements started dominating at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries; from the same period the tendency of turning ethnic Georgians into Ossetian is observed (Topchishvili 2019:55). An archaeological mound-settlement situated at 200 meters south-west of the church of the Virgin in Mna is covered with the 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery. Among many graves with Russian inscriptions, there are those with Georgian ones too. There is a ten-line *mkhedruli* inscription on the rectangular gravestone in the southern end of the cemetery which says that here lies Isbali Kokiov, who died at the age of 30 in December 1865. At the end of the inscription visitors are asked for mercy. It is remarkable that the age of this person is provided not in Arabic numbers, but grapheme 'l' (30) in *Mkhedruli*.

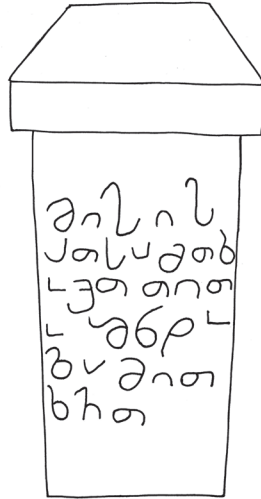
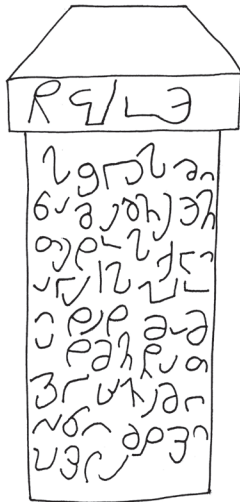
Below the confluence of the rivers Tergi and Mnistsqali, on the left bank of the Tergi there is a big cemetery around the ruined church of a village-site of Shevardeni//Shavardeni; there are graves of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A rectangular stone monument erected west of the church stands out among them. It was crowned with a cross in its time. Today this stone is removed from the grave – it obviously rolled down the mountain slope. Two facets of this grave monument have an extensive sixteen-line epitaph



**Shevardeni. The epitaph on the gravestone of "Tedos Kali", main facet**



**Shevardeni. The epitaph on the gravestone of "Tedos Kali", side facet**



**Shevardeni. A copy of the epitaph on the gravestone of "Tedos Kali"**

carved out in *mkhedruli* script. The graphemes are not linked; they are extremely stylized and is reminiscent of *Dedabruli Handwriting* (old Womanly hand) by their disorderly, zigzagged forms (Khazhomia 1949:87-97). It should be mentioned that this kind of writing is encountered in the upper stretch of the Tergi as well. There are ten lines of epitaph on the main facet of the tombstone in Shevardeni// Shavardeni and six – on the side facet. The inscription reads:

“1876 | beneath this | grave | I lie here | the daughter of Tedo, | wife of Alex. | I left | my mother and father | with tears | in their eyes, | I died on May | tenth. I beg each of you | forgiveness”.

The date is written in old Georgian graphemes.

At the same cemetery, east of the church there is a grave monument depicting the equestrian Saint George spearing the dragon. The stone has an epitaph carve in *mkhedruli* script:

‘Beneath this | grave | I Janbola | Abaev | lie here | I died in the year of | 1906 on | May 7’.

There is a two-line epitaph executed in *mkhedruli* script in the lower part of the eastern facet of the monument, below the relief of Saint George: ‘This was carved by | Tukha Tak(a)ev.

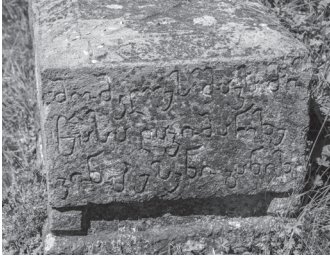
This epitaph attests the name of the sculptor of the grave monuments Tukha Tak(a)ev, who came from ordinary people. It is evident that this person who lived at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> centuries



**Shevardeni. The epitaph of Janbola Abayev, inscription of a stone carver**

was fluent in Georgian and presumably, learned his specialty in one of the Georgian craft guilds of gravestone sculptors.

On the left bank of the River Tergi where it is joined by Mnistsqali, there is a village of Okroqana consisting of two districts – Zemo (Upper) and Kvemo (Lower) Okroqana. The cemetery of Zemo (Upper) Okroqana mainly contains graves of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them have Russian inscriptions, but we tracked one with a Georgian



**Okroqana. Inscription of a tombstone**



**Zemo Desi. mkhedruli inscription of a tombstone**

inscription as well. A three-line *mkhedruli* inscription has been deliberately damaged so that it is impossible to read a considerable part of it. We can learn from the fragment that here lies a certain Gudaev(?), who died in 1874. On the narrow facet the inscription ends as follows:

“...I was killed, buried in the | black grave | whoever reads it...”

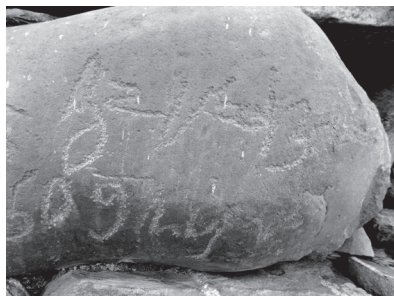
The age of the deceased was also written in old *mkhedruli* graphemes.

Advent of the Ossetian ethnos in Truso seems to have occurred from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Georgian population was gradually replaced by Ossetian one (Topchishvili 2019:54,55). Apparently, there was little chance to find Georgian inscriptions here; however, they were discovered by our expedition. Here, too, the gravestones have epitaphs of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries whose majority is Russian.

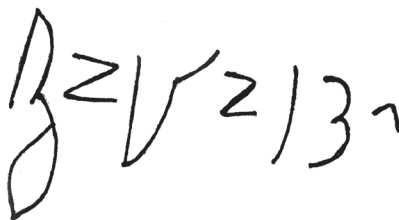
At the cemetery of Zemo Desi, among the gravestones with Russian inscriptions there is one with a three – line Georgian one an epitaph in *mkhedruli*. A certain Salume, Igor Tsubulov’s wife, who died on May 1, 1898, is mentioned in the inscription. The name *Salume (Salome)* is the direct proof of identification with Georgian culture.

There is a late medieval square tower on the outskirts of Village Gimara, on the right side of the River Tergi. The tower is built with big shales. It is severely damaged and only two floors are preserved (Bagrationi 2004:453). The north façade has a *mkhedruli* inscription carved on the cobblestone. In terms of style it looks like the inscription





Gimara, inscription on the tower



Gimara, inscription on the tower,  
copy

“Tedos Kali” (“Tedo’s daughter”) on the gravestone in the village-site of Shevardeni//Shavardeni. At first sight they are *mkhedruli* graphemes, although among them one can find something like the Latin character “z”. The inscription reads: “1886 1850 (?) *bztszev*”.

The inscription is severely damaged. The meaning of two dates is unclear: are they years of birth or death? In this case, the word on the right of the dates is interesting. It can be read according to the alphabet created by loane Ialghuzidze (Ioane Gabarashvili) (1775-1830) (The Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia 1980:45), an Ossetian public figure, poet and pedagogue. Ioane Ialghuzidze laid the foundation for Ossetian writing system. He created the Ossetian alphabet on the basis of the Georgian alphabetical graphics. In order to express the Ossetian phonetics perfectly, Ialghuzidze had to introduce additional characters, including the sound between “a” and “e” which he indicated by character “Z” (Shanidze 1964;173). In my opinion, the inscription on the Gimara tower is definitely written with the Ossetian alphabet of Ialghuzidze in which Georgian – *mkhedruli* graphemes and Latin “z” can clearly be seen.

In Sameba (resp: Trinity) church (the turn of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries), located in the village of Suatsi (Bagrationi 2004:475), a severely damaged iconostas (end of 19<sup>th</sup> c. or beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> c.) decorated with icons painted in oil has survived. Archangel Michael defeating the devil with his feet is depicted south of the Holy Gates. On the upper part of the icon, there is an *asomtavruli* inscription made in white paint against the dark background: „mixail m.....angelosi”

„მიხაილ მ[თავარა]ნგელოსი“ (resp.: Michael the Archangel). It is evident that the iconostas of the Suatsi Church was painted by a Georgian artist.

We could have finished this review here, but it is impossible not to mention the so called Truso stela – a grave monument which was found on an old cemetery at the confluence of the rivers Tergi and Suatsi. The stela was immediately transferred from Truso to Orjonikidze – the capital city of the Republic of North Ossetia in 1957. Today this monument is exhibited in the Museum of Vladikavkaz. The

grave stela is a rectangular basalt column (height – 133 cm, width – 29-35 cm, thickness – 20 cm). The surface has a cross with equal arms ‘rested’ on the shaft; a fourteen-line inscription is cut out on both sides of the cross. The inscription was studied by the Soviet linguist Giorgi Turchaninov (1902-1989) (Giorgi Turchaninov is the author of the hypothesis about the Proto-Caucasian script. Most of the scientists do not share his opinion).

He regarded it as an Ossetian text written with the Syriac-Nestorian alphabet (Turchaninov 2013: 168-191). In his opinion, the inscription is read from right to left. The author thinks that the date is indicated under the shaft – on the thirteenth and fourteenth lines of the inscription. The year 1637 according to Seleucid calendar [it starts from 311 B.C.], is 1326 A.D. Turchaninov states that the date is written with graphemes as follows: 1000+400+200+20+10+7. In this case, 30 is written with graphemes corresponding to 20 and 10. The researcher explains this oddity in the following way – according to him, this circumstance is the reflection of the vigesimal system common in the Caucasus, which was used in speech by Georgians as well as



**Suatsi, Lower Trinity Church,  
The iconostasis of the Archangel  
Michael**



Truso Stella, copy,  
according to Turchaninov

Ossetians and, in this case, the Georgian influence was evident – *ocda at chvid-meti* (resp.:thirty-seven) = 20+10+7: in the Ossetian language thirty-seven is pronounced as 7+10+20 (авддæс æмæ ссæдз) (Turchaninov 2013: 172, 173). Obviously, the researcher’s line of reasoning fell short here. It is true that Georgians use the vigesimal system in their speech, but in writing they apply the decimal system. In the Georgian alphabet the letter “ლ” (resp.: “L”) indicates ‘thirty’. It is also unclear why the craftsman from Truso writes six hundred with the characters expressing four hundred and two hundred. Thus, the date on the stela of Truso has nothing in common with the Georgian numerical system. Arguments about the date on the stela are not persuasive, which causes additional questions to rise. For example, in Turchaninov’s opinion, a certain deceased Ivane is mentioned in the inscription from the family name of Alkhasi (Turchaninov 2013: 183), here the author emphasizes

that in these Syriac-Nestorian graphemes there are also Georgian letters “ს”, (resp.: “a”), “ო”, (resp.: “i”), “მ”, (resp.: “m”), “კ” (resp.: “k”), which proves that the craftsman was fluent in Georgian as well (Turchaninov 2013: 184). The researcher adds that in this part of the Caucasus nothing was known about the existence of Nestorians, that this inscription was the only evidence of the existence of Nestorians, and that Nestorianism failed in the struggle with the strengthened Georgian church. In the end, the author admits that the paper is preliminary and reserves the right to research the issue again (Turchaninov 2013: 187).

The paper is really preliminary, ambiguous and confuses the reader. Even a completely uninformed opponent will put logical questions: Didn't this inscription need someone to read it? Was this the only stela erected in the Truso Gorge with such a script (the Ossetian text with Syriac-Nestorian graphics)? At the same time, the author does not conceal the fact that there are also Georgian *mkhedruli* graphemes in the inscription. This uncertain dating of the stela shows that Ossetians had settled in Truso yet as early as in the XIV century. We will not go into details of this issue as the history of the Ossetian settlement is defined in the Georgian scholarly literature (Gvasalia 1991; Topchishvili 1997; Topchisvili 2019). It is difficult to speak about the monument that you have not seen, and it is impossible to draw accurate conclusions from the low-quality photos and copies made by G. Turchaninov. However, at first sight, the graphemes inscribed on the stela show resemblance with the Georgian *mkhedruli* letters. Consequently, we cannot claim that the stela of Truso has Georgian-*mkhedruli* graphemes, but the likeness of the graphemes inscribed on the stela with the Georgian letters is appreciable; all Georgian vowels and the following consonants are visible on the stele: “ჰ” (resp.: “b”), “გ” (resp.: “g”), “ღ” (resp.: “d”), “ვ” (resp.: “v”), “თ” (resp.: “t”), “კ” (resp.: “k”), “ლ” (resp.: “m”), “მ” (resp.: “m”), “ს” (resp.: “s”), “ყ” (resp.: “q”) out of which the graphemes “გ” (resp.: “g”) “ღ” (resp.: “d”), “თ” (resp.: “t”), “ლ” (resp.: “l”), “ს” (resp.: “s”) literally remind us of the letters of the epitaph of “Tedos Kali” (“Tedos daughter”) in the village of Shevardeni//Shavardeni. We think that there is a need for the comprehensive study of the stela from Truso. Generally, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in mountainous villages of Shida Kartli it was quite common to write Ossetian texts with Georgian letters on gravestones. Such facts were attested by I. Megreliдзе in the middle of the XX century: “a more specific fact about the Ossetian-Georgian relationship is that, as mentioned above, Ossetian words are written with Georgian letters on a number of gravestones. In South Ossetia, it was common to correspond with one another with the same Georgian letters” (Megreliдзе 1984: 271).

Unlike Khevi where the architectural monuments and many samples of old Georgian epigraphy are preserved, Truso – being

isolated from the central road – is less remarkable in this respect. The oldest lapidary inscription in the upper stretch of the Tergi Gorge is cut out on the church of Mna (10<sup>th</sup> c.) which clearly indicates that it was Georgians who indigenously inhabited this area. This land is a part of historical Tsanareti, and a certain Makare and his children mentioned in the inscription were representatives of this land. Most lapidary inscriptions date to the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries and they are represented in the form of grave epitaphs; at that time the majority of the population was Ossetian. Most of the epitaphs in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Russian, which must be the result of the Russian imperial policy. The scantily preserved gravestones with Georgian inscriptions provide information that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, part of the Ossetian people in the Truso Gorge still maintained the sense of integrity with Georgian lifestyle and culture. It should also be noted that the Ossetian inscription created by Ioane Ialghuzidze using Georgian alphabet as its graphic basis was attested on this land. We think that future research will provide more information for the study of the history of the earlier period of the Truso Gorge.

## ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS OF TRUSO

According to the relief and accommodation, Truso can be divided into four parts. The first part covers the stretching far and wide ravine starting from Kasara. A couple of kilometres away from Ketrisi where the mountain slope is leveled, on the left bank of Tergi, there is a village of Abano. After this village, the ravine represents wide rocks and ends at the confluence of Desistsqali and Suatisistsqali rivers where there is a deserted village Zakagori at the small protrusion of the mountain slope.

The second part of Truso is the Desistsqali valley famous for its sulphur springs. At the beginning of the valley, there is a village of Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Desi, and a kilometer away the village of Zemo (resp.: Upper) Desi is located. One way of this ravine was used to get across the source of the Didi Liakhvi river, historical Maghran-Dvaleti, and another – the valleys of Aragvi and Ksani.

The third part of Truso is the Suatisistsqali valley. In the middle of the valley, there is the Suatisi village. A small hall church of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and a defensive tower of the late feudal period are preserved here. In the surroundings of the village, there are two more churches along the mountain slope. The locals call all three of them *Shaniba*. Deep in the valley, 2 km. away, there is one more hall church which is quite large for high mountains.

The fourth part of Truso reaches the source of the Tergi River. The gorge is comparatively narrower here and Tergi adds small rivers to itself from each side. At the junction of these tributaries, there are fortress villages: Kartsopeli (Karatkau), Burmasigi, Tsotsolta, Gimara, Tepi, Resi and Sivradi – the previously abandoned village.

The first village that you can see on the upper reaches of Truso is Kartsopeli where six towers and a small sanctuary are preserved. One of the most well-preserved Bulasovs' towers is surrounded by a three-floor flat-roof house. A couple of kilometers away, there is Burmasigi complex where the old back-to-back dwellings are perched on the mountain between the defensive tower and castle-house.

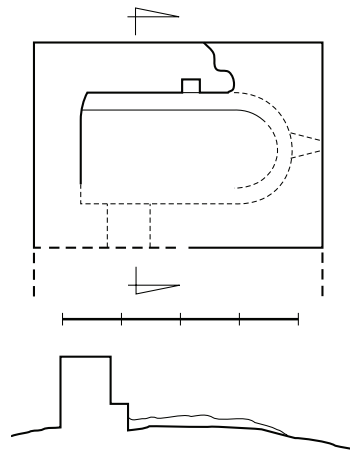
Then in the village Gimara, there is a holly tower of *Alardi* and old ruined dwellings. In the village Tepi, there is a small hall church of St. George, a so-called *decorated* castle-house and the old construction itself beautifully located on the mountain. In Resi – the last village of Truso – a St. Basili small hall church and several castle-houses have been retained.

The geographical and spatial centers of Truso are situated at the junction of these four main parts. Therefore, it is not accidental that the main shrine of Truso *Mtavarangelози* (resp.: *Archangel*) perceived from every point, as well as Zakagori were built in this place. With in this complex surrounded by walls, it is still possible to restore back-to-back built two-floor flat-roofed houses, a central square with a tower-house nearby, and defensive towers in the north and south. Zakagori is composed of an integral architectural ensemble with its interesting planning on the complex relief. In fact, there are no other preserved fortified dwellings like this in east Georgia apart from Shatili and Mutso, which makes Zakagori unique.

Here we will consider some important monuments of architectural heritage of Truso and Mna.

**Village Zemo** (resp.: Upper) **Tepi. The Upper Church.** From the newly discovered hall church in the north-west outskirts of the upper part of the village, only the fragments of the wall above the ground have remained.

From the small-sized church (5 X 3.5 m) the north-western part and the order of the lower stones of the eastern wall can be noticed easily. The church used to have a southern attachment. Seemingly, this church had been abandoned earlier, and a new St. George church was built instead, which might be of the late medieval centuries. Accordingly, the upper church must have been built before that.



**Plan and cut to the east**

**Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Tepi. St. George Church** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 476). 60 m. from the village in the south, on the bank of Tepistsqali there is a small (4.7 X 4 m.) hall church of St. George with a rectangular altar. The entrance is on the southern side and has an architrave. Initially, the gable roof was covered with slabs of schist. The church was built in the late medieval centuries.

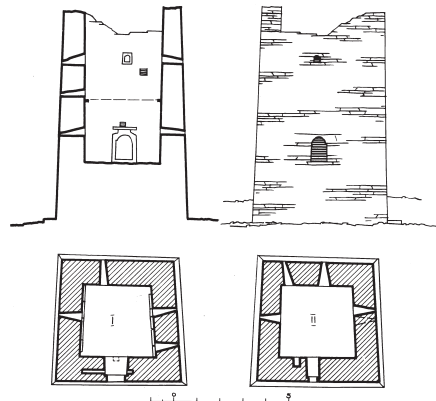
**The Tower.** An architectural monument is erected in the north, in the outskirts of the village. It was rectangular (6.5 X 6.5 m) in plan and was built from large and rubble stones in turns. The door is made of cut stones. The stones on fa-



**Ornamented tower door**

acades, corner, and door aperture are comparatively processed. The arch of the door is composed of two stones surrounded by two schematic twisted ornaments. On the right of the arch a deer is snipped, and on the left - two different size human figures. Transversely of the door the hunting scenes are cut. They are dated back to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. or the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup>c.

**Gusalta. The tower** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 454) is located in the north-eastern outskirts of the ruined village. The shape of the tower is slightly trapezoidal (5.2 X 5 m) in plan. It is built from large dry stack and rubble stones in turns. The stones on facades, corner apertures, and lower levels are comparatively

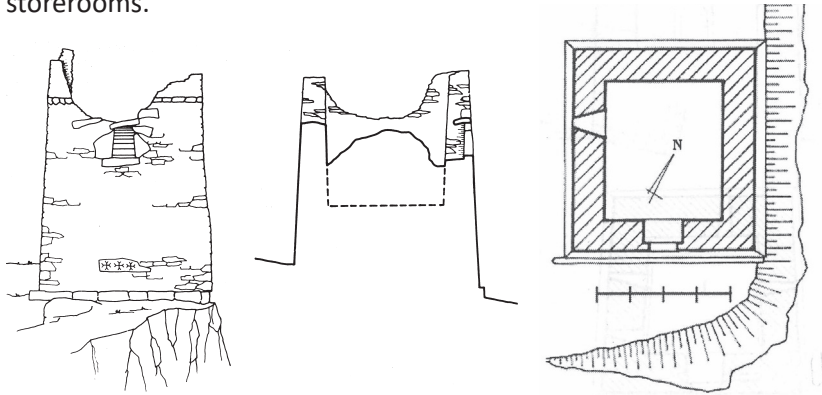


**Cut, façade and plans**



massive and processed. Only two floors are preserved (9.4 m high) which are considerably narrow in height. The only arched doorway is in the south-western part at 2.75 m. above the ground. The tower is dated back to the late Middle Ages.

**Village Gimara.** From a historical look, the village retained only two ruined towers and a mixture of abandoned houses and farming storerooms.

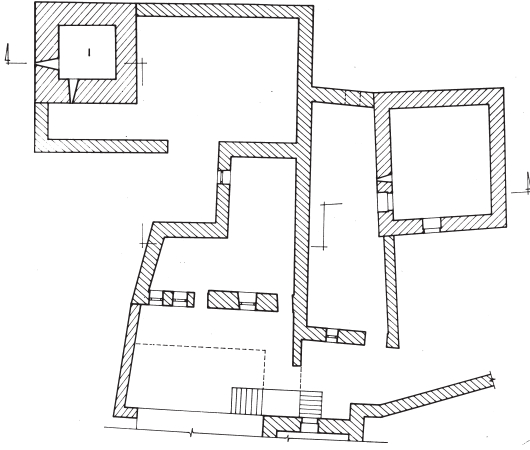


**Façade, cut and plan**

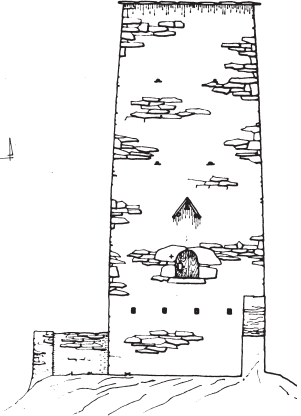
**The tower** is located in the western outskirts of the village. It is square in plan (5 X 5 m) and slightly narrow in height. It is built from large dry stack stones in turns. The stones on facades, corner apertures, and lower levels are comparatively massive and processed. Parts of the south-western walls of the first and the second floors are preserved. The arch of the doorway is composed of two thoroughly cut stones. At the bottom of the door, a large stone is stretched out to be used as a wooden staircase console. It is dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Village Burmasigi.** The monument represents a complex of tightly packed buildings of different functioning out of which a tower and castle-house are high-altitude dominants. The castle-house in the east is partly destroyed, but the north-eastern tower is one of the well-preserved towers in this region. The castle-house is almost square in plan (5.5 X 5.6 m) and contains four main floors.

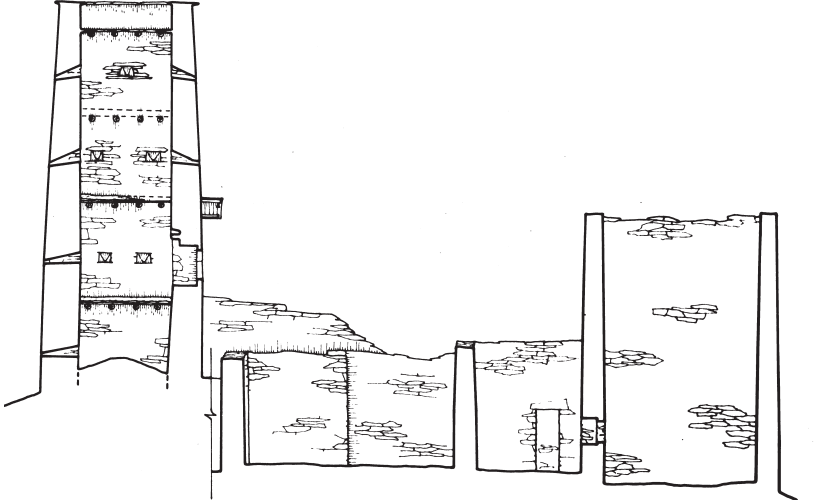
Externally, the monument is a solidly built castle-house. Its entasis is gradually getting narrower. The height is 12.7 m. The most notable



Plan



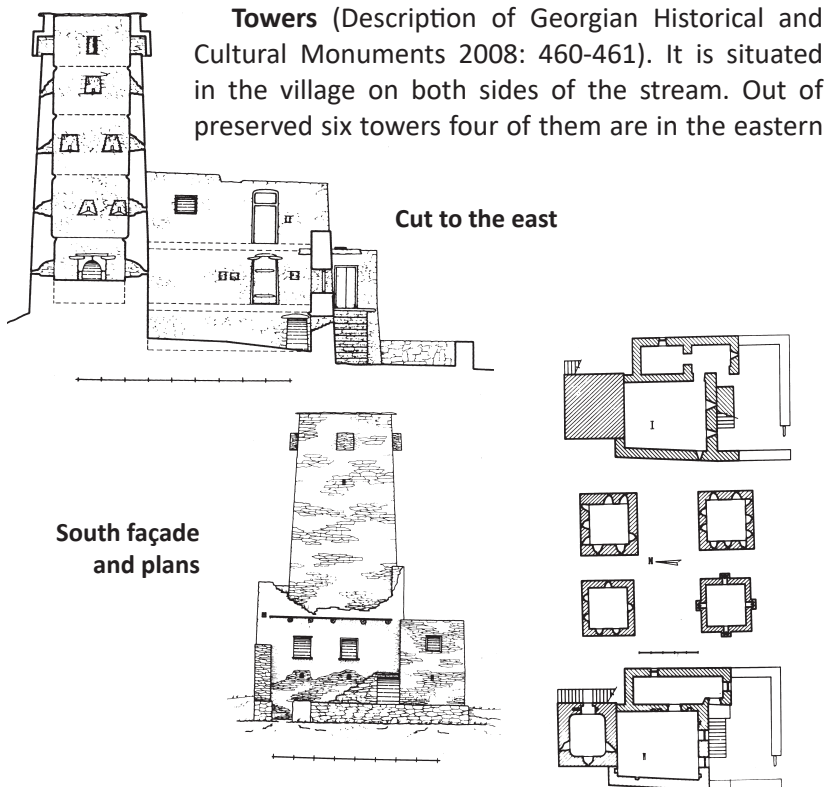
East façade



Cut to the north

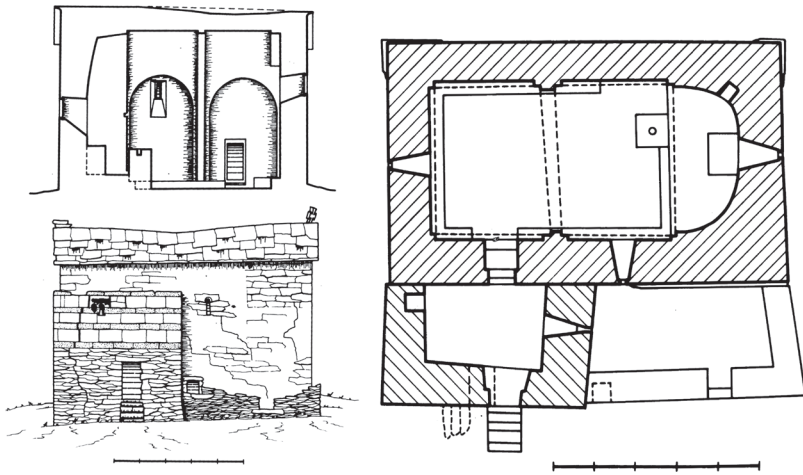
of all is the eastern facade with the entry door. Two large architrave rocks create its Curve arched outline. A small cross is carved in the southern rock. As the height increases, the thickness of the wall decreases that retains the steadiness of the tower. According to analogous samples, the tower dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Village **Kartsopeli (Karatkau). The Church** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 460) is situated at the beginning of the village, in the southern part. It is a hall church (4.1 X 5.5 m), elongated in the direction of north-south. It is built from rubble stones. The church has no apse and both eastern corners are rounded, especially in the upper part. It has a gable roof covered with large slabs of schist. The roof ridge is placed on the north-south axis of the church, which is quite a rare case. The church dates back to the late medieval period.



part of the village, and two – in the west. As the local people report, ten towers used to stand there at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All towers are patrimonial and belong to the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Towers are square in plan, narrowed in the upper part. They are built from rubble stones.

**The Church of Archangels** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 462). The architectural monument is 1.8 km west of Kartsopeli (from where the path leads to the church), in the middle reaches of the Truso Gorge, at the confluence of the rivers Tergi and Suatisistsqali, on the summit. It is even nearer Zakagori (600 m.) but harder to get to the place from here. The church is the main shrine of the gorge. It dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. As the local people report, on the top of the doorway, there was

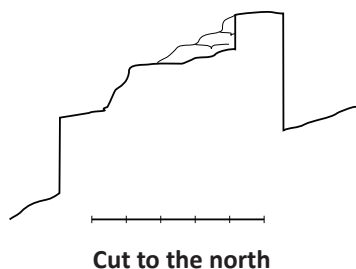
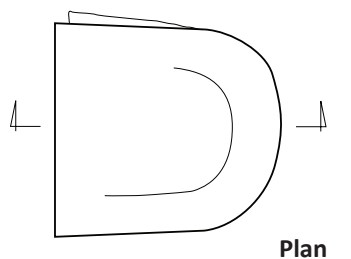


**Cut to the south, South façade and plan**

a Georgian inscription according to which 330 poods of salt were spent on the construction of the building. It is a hall church (9.5 X 5.7 m) built from large slabs of schist. The entrance of the church is in the south. Near the arch of the door, a hand is imprinted on the plastered surface. In the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, a human hand was imprinted on the walls of those churches that were under the direct subordination of the Georgian Catholicos. In the apse, there is a small flat-roofed window. Under the window, there is an altar stone leaned against the wall. Two big Kvevris (resp.: earthenware vessels) are into the ground nearby. One can find two similar Kvevris (resp.: earthenware vessels) installed in the western wall. The platform of the altar is two steps above the floor. In front of the altar, there is a rectangular stone with a cylindrical hollow in the middle (supposedly to fix the cross in it). All of the three windows on the facade have semi-circular relief archivolts. A gable roof is covered with large slabs of schist. Two extensions of the later period are attached to the church to the south.

**Village Kvemo** (resp.: **Lower**) **Desi**. A dwelling complex (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 452-454). *“The architectural monument is located in the outskirts of the village, in the north-east. It dates back to the late medieval period. It consists of a dwelling house, a battle tower, and a construction connecting these two buildings. It is built from rubble stones and clay. The monument is damaged: the roofs of the tower and the house are destroyed as well as between-floor coverings, which according to the preserved wall pockets were arranged on the wooden beams. In the north-eastern corner, the house adjoins the tower.”*

*The tower is square in plan (6.15 X 6.25 m), four-storied (10.6 m high).*

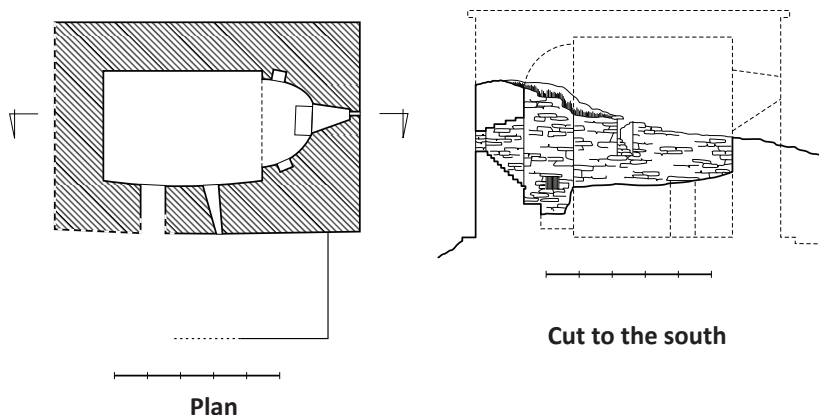


*The first floor was a hiding-place, the second and the third floors – a shelter for family members in case of danger, the fourth floor – for defensive and observation purposes. The entrance to the tower is from the south, on the second floor – 2.8 m above the ground. The house and the tower had a flat roof covered with earth “.*

**The backed tower** is built on the highest place, to the western edge of the village. Nowadays, mainly, only the lower massive part of it is preserved although, on the backside, the remains of the wall of the first floor are also identified enabling us to imagine, at least, approximately the internal planning of the room. The width of the front wall of the tower on the south-western side is 6 meters and 6.5 meters from the front wall to the back, which is sufficiently big for backed towers. The backed tower is built from dry-stacked large slabs and rubble stones in turn, which means that it was constructed in the early medieval period.

**Village Suatisi (Shuatisi). The church of Suatisi Gorge.** The monument stands 2 km from the village in the north, in the depth of the Suatisi Gorge (at the height of 2420 m above sea level), in a slightly leveled part of the bare slope. The church is severely damaged.

It is a hall church (6.3 X 9.2 m). There is a narrow window with a deep, multi-step (11 steps) windowsill in the semicircular apse, in the east. The doorway is widened considerably in the direction of the interior. Under the window, there is an altar stone leaned





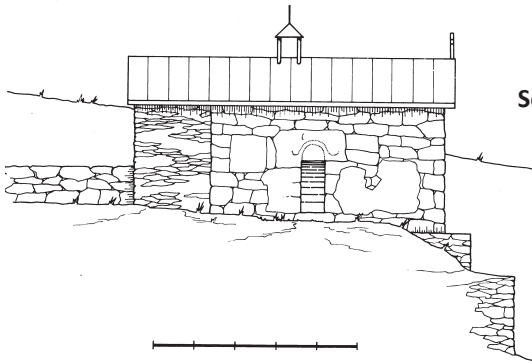
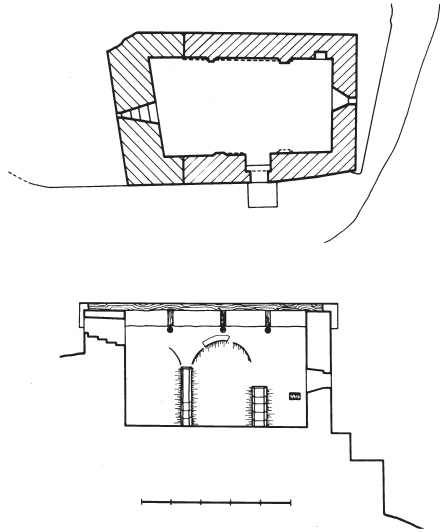
against the wall. In the center of the southern wall, there is also a narrow window with a multi-step (6 steps) windowsill. To its west, there is a rectangular door presumably passing through the southern extension. Only the remnants of the eastern and southern walls have been preserved out of them.

It should be noted that the church walls are too thick (1.6 m on average), which was supposedly caused by considering the severe climate.

At the bottom of the eastern facade, one can notice the remnant of the 40 cm foundation. The cross with equal arms is carved on the same facade, under the window on the left. The approximate height of the church reached 7 meters, which is clearly outlined in the section of the restoration drawing.

According to the style marks, the monument must have been built in the High Middle Ages.

**The (Kvemo) Sameba church** (resp.: **Lower Trinity**) (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 474-475). It stands on the mountain slope in the north-western outskirts of the village. It is a rectangular hall church with an altar (7.6 X 5 m) built in the irregular arrangement of roughly-hewn sandstones of different sizes and shapes. The entrance is from the south. It is covered with a rectangular stone. There is a narrow window in the middle of the eastern wall of a rectangular altar. The church used to have a vaulted



South façade, plan and cut to the north

roof. The interior walls are partly plastered. Facades are plain. On the southern facade, at the end of the doorway, there is a carved semicircular arch with an upturned bow-shaped curve above it. It dates back to the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

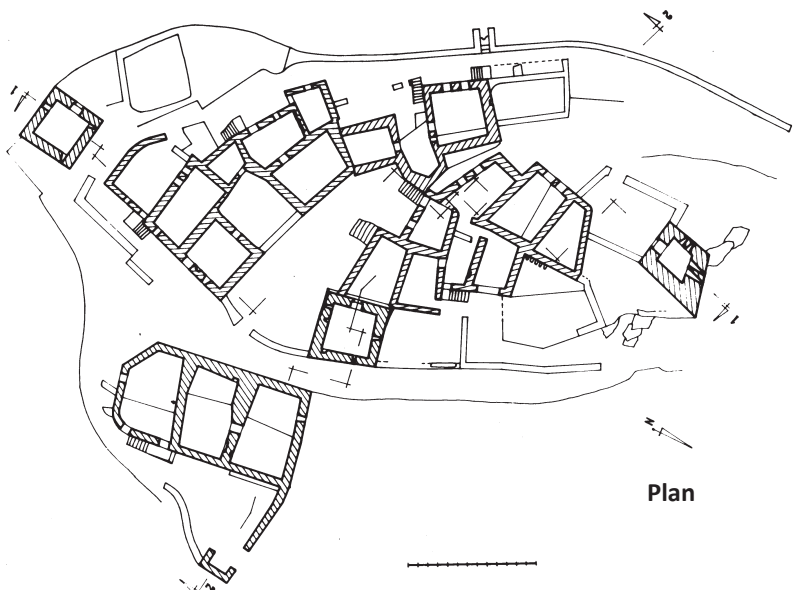
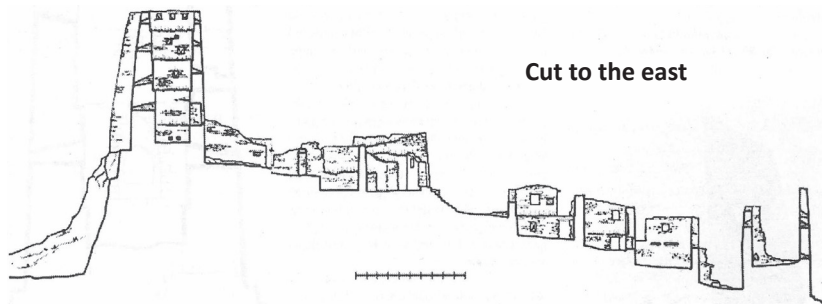
**Village Zakagori** (*Dzeglis Megobari* – resp.: *Friend of the Monument* #1 1991). The ruined dwelling Zakagori is situated in the central part of the gorge. The ensemble is a unified system with the organized functional planning, interesting principle of zoning, and sufficiently complex vertical planning. According to zoning, the



complex can be divided into five dwelling sections. Along the edges, there are defensive towers in the northern and southern parts. One tower house is even in the central square of the complex. The walls surrounding the ruined dwelling are preserved here and there and they are low. Despite this fact, it is still possible to restore the previous layout of the fence.

Out of five sections, the 1<sup>st</sup> eastern section is separated from the core of the ensemble.

Other sections of the ensemble are divided according to the direction of the exit from the interior: The 2<sup>nd</sup> section leads to the



south-eastern part, The 3<sup>rd</sup> section to the south-western part, the 4<sup>th</sup> section – to the north-eastern part, and the 5<sup>th</sup> section – to the central square. The dwelling-houses were two-storied in which the first floor was used for farming purposes, second floor – for living. This is attested by the fact that the first floors are comparatively low and less lightened, the door is narrow and short; the window is small and equally narrowed in the direction of the exterior. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and nearly in each room there are two or three square-shaped windows. The door is comparatively big and wide. Most buildings have dry-stacked 60-80 cm thick walls; mortar is also used here and there. The trace of plastering is also noticeable on the walls of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

A square among the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> sections with the dominant building of a tower house is the center of the complex. This part must have been a public gathering place according to its arrangement and dimensions. A square with an entrance from the east is elongated on the west-eastern axis in such a way that a person standing on the threshold can see the main shrine of *Mtavarangelozi* (resp.: *Archangel*) church on the opposite mountain.

The vertical planning of the ensemble should particularly be noted. Tightly packed terraced houses were fit to the relief so that the difference between the heights of the flat roofs did not make barriers to move, and the dwellers could use the system of the flat roof beside the road around the complex to communicate with one another.

The vertical dominant of the Zakagori ensemble includes two defensive towers and a tower house. In contrast to the dwelling house, they are built from relatively larger stones. Especially large, hewed stones are used around the outer corners and the doorway.

The tower house built in the north-eastern part of the square now represents a 9 m high building with a square shape in plan. The only curve arched door is in the west direction, 3 meters above the ground.

The tower is raised in the south on the natural stone citadel; similarly, as above, the only curve arched door is in the west direction, and both ways from the west and east sides gather at the southern tower. The path to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> sections goes through the central square using the staircase and crosses the complex.

The partly enclosed southern part of the square resting upon the

tower house turns into a terrace in the east. According to the existing long stone benches here, we can assume that it was a gathering place for men.

The complex might have been founded at the end of the High Middle Ages. Given continuous destructive invasions to Truso from every side, it must have been imperative to establish the main link of the defensive system. Zakagori buildings can belong to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The architectural decision of the defensive towers is the best evidence of it. The existence of gun ports on the towers indicates that they must have been built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

We can safely say that the type of monument like Zakagori is unique in Georgia according to its look, architectural decision, and importance. It can be defined by maintaining the approximate original look and by more or less planned construction.

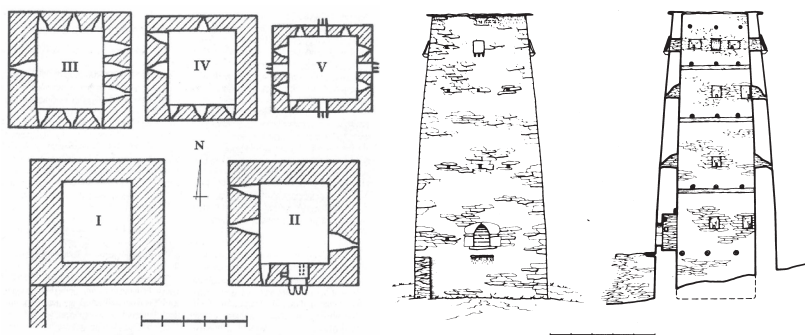
**Village Abano. A complex of towers** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 436). In the northern part of the village, three towers can be identified on the territory of today's nunnery. The tower, situated in the south, is nearly authentic, but the towers in the north-western and north-eastern parts have changed their original appearance.

The southern tower (5.8 X 5.6 m.) has five floors and is built from large rubble stones stacked dry. The castle is fairly high (20 m.) but it becomes significantly narrow. There is an arched entrance from the north. The gun ports are arranged in four directions on each floor. On the upper floors, there are even three-gun ports on each side. The movement between the storeys was possible through apertures on the floor using the ladder.

The north-southern tower (7.6 X 8.7 m.) has four floors. The gun ports are cut on every side of each floor. On the last floor there are machicoulis-like (resp.: loopholes of fortress walls and towers) projecting bases with three holes at the bottom from where it was possible to make vertical shootings. An arched entrance of the tower is from the south.

All three towers must have been built in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or in the 18<sup>th</sup> century after the spread of firearms in the mountains.

**Village Ketrisi.** The ruins of the old part of the village Ketrisi are on the left bank of the river Tergi but a comparatively new part built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is opposite them, on the right bank of the river. In the “new” village, the whole complex of watermills has been preserved, while in the “old” one, there is the only defensive tower maintaining more or less original appearance. It is built in the northeast of the village and is a square in plan (5.6 X 5.7 m), six-floor (13 m. high) strong building.



**Plans, South façade, cut to the west**

The tower is built from large slabs of schist using tufa blocks here and there. By their architectural forms and analogs, the monument should belong to the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Village Mna.** The ruined village Mna is situated on the right bank of the river Mnistskali. A particular type of structure, the so-called *castle-house* has been preserved here (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 466). It is a large, square tower (10.3 X 8.2 m) built of dry rubble stone masonry; comparatively large and well-processed stones are used around the corners and apertures. Its internal, four-floor spaces were important from the perspective of living accommodations and for defense purposes. Apart from the windows on each floor, we can see gun ports. There is an arched door on the southern facade. One can notice two horizontal rows of white stones in dark colour masonry on the southern facade; the upper row continues on the eastern facade, too. The *castle-house* was built in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Above the ruined village (at a distance of about 500 m) along the river on its left bank, there is a **church of St. Mariam** (resp.: St. Mary) (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 466). The church stands on a small elevation of the mountain slope. There used to stand a big backed tower nearby (in the west); the latter lies in ruins at present and preserved only at the height of four meters.

The church is a hall type (8.5 X 6 m.). The lower part of the altar (about 1.3 m high) is right-angled in plan but in the upper part, the altar forms a horse-shoe shape by gradual completion of the corners.

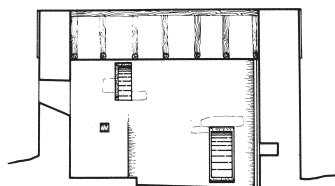
On the southern facade of the church at the lower corner, an Asomtavruli (Resp.: Capital script) inscription is preserved on a big light-red stone.

Near the southern wall of the church, on two large stones, there is an ornamented cross carved from the whole stone.

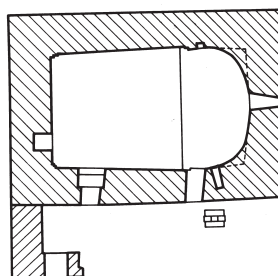
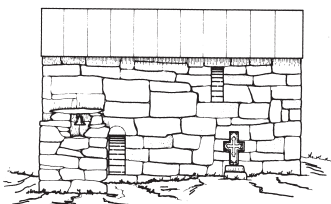
The church might have been built at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**The backed tower near the church of St. Mariam (resp.: St. Mary).**

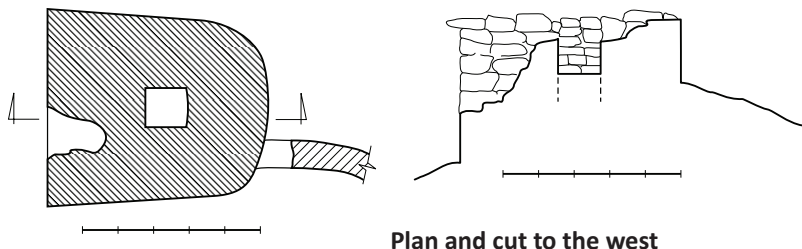
The backed tower is built in the south-west about 6 meters from the church of St. Mariam (resp.: St. Mary). Nowadays, only the remnants of the ground floor and the base of the tower are preserved. The height of the ruin to the south from the front wall is about 4 meters, but from the back in the north, it maintains only 2 meters. In the center, there is a preserved lower part of the square storeroom (1.2 X 1.2 m), which like in many other towers of this type is the storage



**Cut to the east**



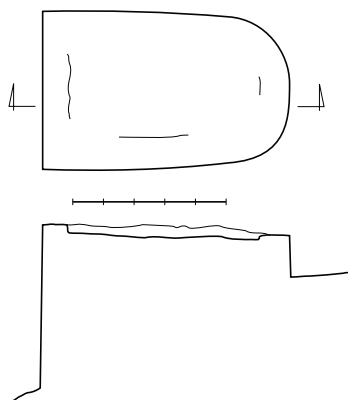
**South façade and plan**



Plan and cut to the west

for products placed under the floor. The tower is made of sufficiently large rocks in dry masonry, which indicates that it was built in the early medieval period.

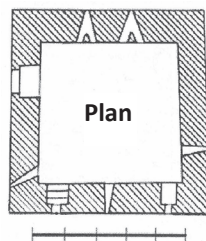
**Village Gaguate (Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Mna). The backed tower** is built in the outskirts of the northern part of the ruined dwelling Gaguate. At present, only the massive lower part of it is preserved. In the west side of the front wall from the tower, a 5.5-meter-high wall is preserved; in the west, on the back side, due to the relief, only 1.3-meter-high wall is retained. In plan, the tower is elongated to the east-western axis (8 X 5 m). The remnants of the wall are also outlined on its surface. The thickness of the wall might have been 1.1 meters.

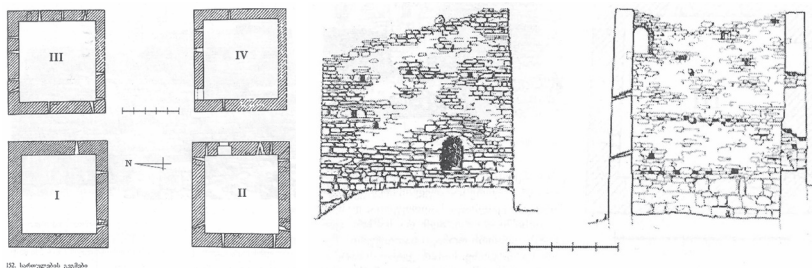


Plan and cut to the north

The backed tower is built of large rocks in dry masonry which relates the date of its construction towards the early medieval period.

**Village Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Okroqana. The tower** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 483). In the outskirts of the west part of the village, a four-floor tower is raised that is square in plan (6.8 X 6.6 m). The tower is built of sufficiently large rocks in dry masonry, slightly reduced towards the upper





132. Կարթագինի զանգեղ

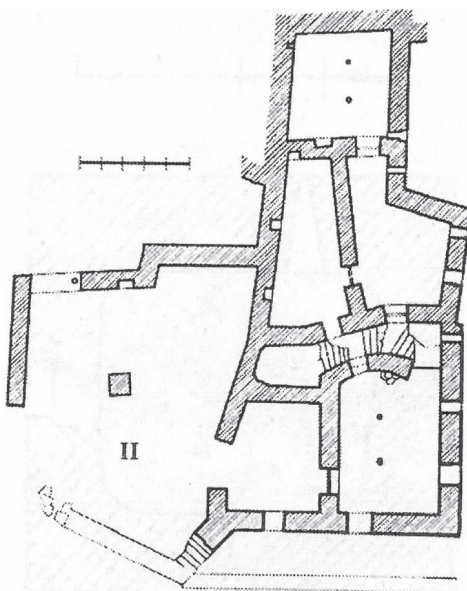
**Plans, north façade and cut to the north**

floors. Coverings between the floors rested on the construction of wooden rafters but are demolished at present.

The tower might have been built either at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

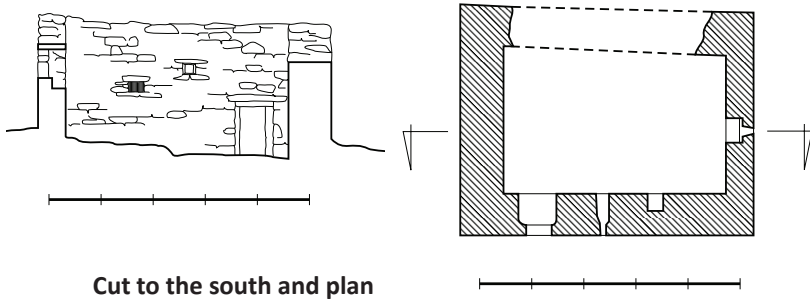
Village **Zemo** (resp.: **Upper**) **Okroqana**. **The complex of towers.** The towers are situated on the left bank of the river Tergi. Three towers out of four are almost destroyed. The one raised comparatively in the south from them is partly preserved. It is dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The dwelling complex is on the western edge of the village, at the roadside leading to Truso. It was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, building extensions and overbuilding continued until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The complex (20 X 26 m) consists of a dwelling house, farming storerooms, and a yard.



**Plan**

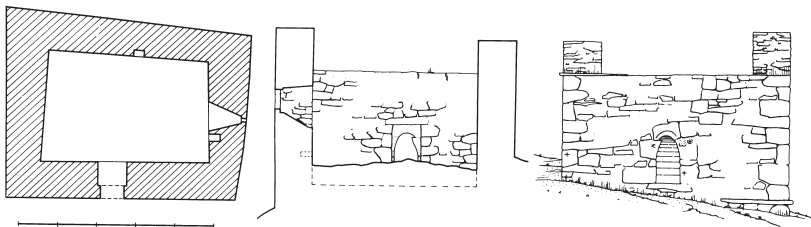
Village **Shevardeni**. **The church of the Savior** is situated at the beginning of the village where the mountain slope is slightly leveled. It is a hall church (4,3 X 3,9 m) built from large slabs of schist. The entrance is from the south. There are two niches in the western wall with a small window in one of them. One niche is in the northern wall. Inside, the church is covered with thin slate stones. The top is flat. From the exterior, the building is covered with a tin gable roof.



**Cut to the south and plan**

Three meters to the west of the church, on an artificially created platform, there is a cube-shaped bell tower built with large basalt stones. It dates back to the Late Middle Ages.

**Village Akhalsopeli (Nogkau)**. **The church** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 487). The architectural monument is located in the middle of the village, on the roadside. It was built in the 1820s. On the southern façade, simple symbols are carved on all the three stones above the door. On the middle stone, in parallel to the arch, a semi-arc is carved; on the stone to the west – a hand, to the east – two symbols: one of them resembles the wheel



**Plan and cut to the south, south façade**



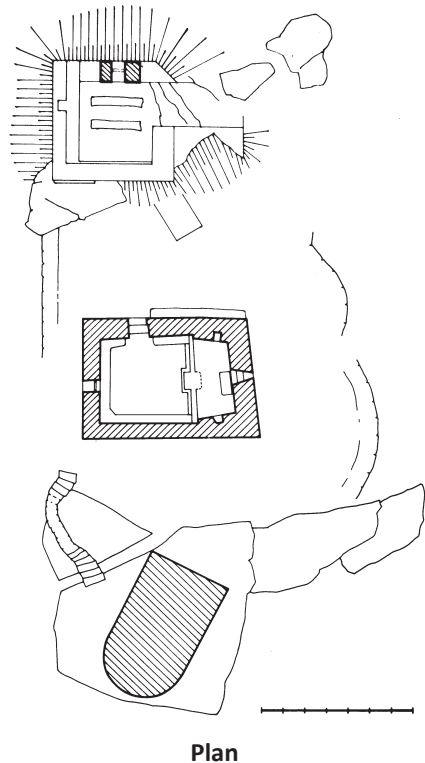
of a cart, the second – a sliced apple. On the facades, crosses are depicted here and there.

Village **Kobi. The complex of Giorgisminda** (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008: 467). It is situated on the rocky hillock near the village. The backed tower relates to the High Middle Ages; the square tower and church date back to the late medieval period. It consists of two towers, a church, and a fence. The complex represented a significant link in the continuing/unified chain of signal towers in the gorge. The signal towers of Truso made visual contact with the towers of Khurtisi and Goristsikhe situated on the lower reaches of the river Tergi via the complex.

The tower to the south is rounded at the backside (6.5 X 4 m).

The second tower is square (5.6 X 5 m), almost destroyed. On the preserved part of the north wall, there is a bell tower.

In the center of the complex, there is a hall church built of rubble stone (5.6 X 5 m). On the eastern facade, on the top of the bell tower, there is a massive rectangular stone with a stone cross erected on it.



## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARCHITECTURE OF TRUSO AND MNA**

**Backed towers.** The issue of localization of backed towers in Truso and Mna appears to be significant as far as the defensive buildings of this type is characteristic only for the settlement area of indigenous Georgians (Zakaraia1962: 49-82). Backed towers are mainly concentrated in the central part of the eastern Georgian mountainous regions. **In this respect, historical Khada is remarkable (Gvasalia... 1983), which is even called “a country of 60 towers”. We can read about it in *The Geography of Georgiaby Vakhushti* (Vakhushti Bagrationi 1941: 65). We can see many towers of this type in the adjacent historical regions of Khada as well, starting from the sources of Aragvi, in the upper reaches of the Ksani and Liakhvi gorges, and the area of our interest, including the whole Kazbegi region. It is so interesting that we can observe the separate cases of these towers almost in whole Georgia. For example, *Gurjigori tower* nearby the village Khevischala of the Akhmeta region (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 2008); The backed tower of the village Koshkebi – on the right side of Mtkvari (Description of Georgian Historical and Cultural Monuments 1990); *Uznariani tower – in Tori, nearby the village Tsaghveri of Borjomi region* (<https://georgiantravelguide.com/ka/uznarianis-tsikhe>); *Chobiskhevi tower* – in Samtskhe (the photo collection of Devi Berdzenishvili, <http://www.dspace.nplg.gov.ge/handle/1234/260165>); *Skuri tower* – in Tsalenjikha region, Samegrelo; *Likhauri tower* – in Ozurgeti region of Guria; also *Hashkoi tower* – on the territory of Turkey in the Georgian historical province Artaani at the border of Shavsheti.**

In Truso we can see backed towers in Kvemo Desi, in Mna – next to the Mna Church of St. Mary, in the ruined village of Gaguate and in the Giorgitsminda complex of Kobi.

In other villages of the Kazbegi region the towers of this type or their remnants have been preserved in Khurtisi, Gergeti, St. George's church of Darqi in Sno and two more in the village Gaiboteni.

Besides Georgia, rectangular-shaped towers can be noticed in the

north Caucasus as well. However, backed towers are typical only for the settlement area of indigenous Georgians.

The periods of the backed tower construction can be divided into three stages:

1. Early Middle Ages (the 4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cc.) built of large slabs of stone in dry masonry. The majority of them have been preserved in the form of ruins.
2. High Middle Ages (the 5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> cc.), lime mortar was used frequently, even though the cases of dry masonry built of only smaller rubble stone can also be found.
3. Late Middle Ages (the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> cc.), the walls were built of rubble stone, lime mortar, and with the emergence of firearms, gun ports appeared accordingly.

Backed towers in Truso and Mna, except for the backed tower in Giorgitsminda complex of Kobi, were built in the Early Middle Ages. From the towers of Kvemo Desi, Mna and Gaguate only lower levels have been preserved; but only the tower of Mna has the walls of internal planning, particularly, a square-shaped farming agricultural storeroom under the ground floor. Storerooms like that are encountered only in the 2/3 cases of this kind of towers. However, the narrow shape of this type is very rare.

The southern tower of Giorgitsminda complex in Kobi must have been built in the High Middle Ages. In addition to the defensive function, it was also used to pass on a signal due to its direct visual contact with Kurtisi backed tower which, in its turn, faced the pyramid-shaped tower of Sioni. From the latter, through the towers of Arsha and Pkhelshe the signal was spread to the Sno castle and Stepantsminda. Particularly, the tower of Giorgitsminda controlled Truso and the entrance to Mna. It is obvious that the existence of the backed towers in Truso and Mna is a clear evidence that this region was the part of the *Georgian world*.

**Rectangular towers.** Truso is also represented with a multiplicity of rectangular towers. Mostly they are preserved in Kartsopeli with 6 such towers. We can find two towers in Tepi, Gimara, Zakagori, and

Ketrisi in each of them, one tower – in each of the villages of Gusalta, Tsotsolta, Burmasigi, Kvemo (Lower) Desi, and Suatisi. There are three towers in village Abano too.

In the village Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Okroqana of the Mna Gorge there is one rectangular tower, four – in Zemo (Upper) **Okroqana**, and one – in Giorgitsminda complex of Kobi.

Rectangular towers in both regions have many things in common. The entry doors to the first floor are 3-4 meters above the ground level. On each floor, gun ports are arranged, which indicates that they were constructed in the late medieval period. In frequent cases, the arch of the door is composed of two stones. Coverings between floors are represented by the constructions rested on wooden beams. The entasis is narrowed everywhere, especially in the case of Abano's southern tower, which makes it resemble the so-called pyramid-shaped tower of Sioni in Khevi. In many places where the tower is fully preserved, in the center of the walls, on all four sides there are machicoulis-like rectangular projections for vertical shootings from above.

Similar towers are common in other regions of Georgia as well. In Khevi, for example, towers of this type can be found in Gveleti, Stepantsminda, Pansheti, Sno, Sioni of Khevi etc.

**Dwelling buildings.** In Truso and Mna an interesting symbiosis of fortified and dwelling buildings is presented by the so-called *castle-houses* (sometimes also called *tower houses*), occupying the special place in Georgian architecture. Even the fact itself that the Ossetians called this type of houses *galuan* (parallel to the Georgian *galavani* – resp.: *fence*) demonstrates its Georgian origin.

Castle-houses can be seen almost in every village of Truso and Mna. Frequently, cattle sheds or storerooms are arranged on the first floor. On the second and upper floors (if any), there are rooms for living. This type of dwellings has narrow windows and gun-ports in frequent cases. The covering between floors is presented by the beaten clay construction resting on wooden beams. The upper floors were also flat-roofed.

**The planning and building techniques of ordinary dwellings in Truso and Mna were identical to the buildings which, in general,**

were widespread in the highlands of East Georgia. We should recall here again the Georgian terms introduced to the Ossetian language concerning the building of the house, such as: *erdo* – an aperture in the roof for letting the smoke out; *kirin* – a solidified house built of stone mortar; *begara* – aid provided for building a house during non-working days etc. (Gamrekeli 1961).

**Churches.** Religious buildings of Truso and Mna should be divided into three periods:

**The first period** comprises 5 monuments built in the High Middle Ages. They are: The church of Zemo (resp.: Upper) Tepi, the church of the Suatysi valley, the Kvemo (resp.: Lower) Sameba (resp.: Trinity) church of Suatysi, Mna churches of St. Mary and Archangel.

**The second period** includes 12 monuments of the Late Middle Ages and the 19<sup>th</sup> century built with the so-called popular rules. They are the following: St. Basili's church in Resi, St. George's church of Kvemo (Lower) Tepi, St. George's church of Gimara, the church in Kartsopeli, St. George's church of Zemo (Upper) Desi, the middle and upper Sameba (resp.:Trinity) churches of Suatysi, the church of Zemo (Upper) Okroqana, the church of the Savior in Shevardeni// Shavardeni, the church of Giorgitsminda in Nogkau and Kobi.

**The third period** is connected with the activities of the "Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus" and includes



Relief decorations of the Trinity, Gostibe and Tsetskhlisjvari churches and the Mindelauri Tower

three monuments: St. George's church in Tsotsolta, the nunnery of the Dormition of the Virgin in Abano, and a domed church in Kobi.

During the first period, the construction of monastic buildings also took place over the Truso Pass in historical Dvaleti. Out of them, the following churches have been preserved until now: "Khozita-Mairami", the chapel of Nuzali, the church of Tlia, the ruins of the Nari St. George's shrine – *Nardzuari*, *Khutsau-Dzuari* (village Pallag-Komi and the ruins of the church built near Regakhi – the shrine of *Deity*), *Dzlesi Dzuari* (*Dzlevis Dzuari* – resp.: the Cross of Victory) in Dabakalaki etc. Here should be noted the Iconic Christian terminology as it has an obvious likeness with Georgian such as: *dzuari* – the shrine (parallel to Georgian *jvari* – resp.: cross); *markho* – *markhva* (resp.: lent); *tarangeloz* – *mtavarangeloz* (resp.: Archangel); *kere*– *kveri* (resp.: round loaf); *shaneba* – *sameba* (resp.: trinity); *matskhvari* – *matskhovari* (resp.: The Savior) etc.

Monuments of these periods in Truso and Mna are the typical samples of Georgian religious monastic architecture. On the top of the St. Mary's church in Mna an Asomtavruli inscription is preserved. The archivolt of its southern window is also typical in the religious architecture of the eastern mountainous region.

All of these five churches can find many analogs in the planning-structural schemes of Georgian church halls of this period.

The monuments of the second period do not obey one certain rule from the architectural point of view. In many cases, even the strict laws for the church building are violated (e.g. in the St. George's church of Zemo (Upper) Desi the only door is on the east, and the altar is arranged on the west); almost none of the churches apart from the St. George's church of Gimara has apses. There is no semicircular arched covering. It is frequently built in dry masonry and walls are uneven. The tin covering mostly rests on the wooden beams.

Such kind of monuments can be encountered almost in whole Georgia, especially in mountainous regions. As for analogs in Khevi, we can mention Ioane Natlismtsemeli (resp.: John the Baptist) church in Stepantsminda, Kviratskhoveli (resp.: Sunday of Life) church in Gaiboteni, St George's church of Arkovani in Kanobi, Khurtisi fortress church etc.

St. George's church in Tsotsolta is of the lowest quality out of these three monuments of the third period. It is clear that in this case, the community wanted to build a comparatively bigger church, which would serve accordingly the villages of the upper reaches of the Terghi valley (Sivrati, Resi, Zemo (Upper) and Kvemo (Lower) Tepi, Gimara, Burmasigi and Tsotsolta itself).

### **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

The architecture of Truso and Mna reflects clearly that this region was part of the *Georgian world* from ancient times. Both in secular and religious architecture, the monuments of this historical region find many parallels with the architecture of different regions of Georgia.

Undoubtedly, there are differences between the architecture of various parts of Georgia caused by many factors (climate conditions, historical property, the impact of neighbors, religious imaginations etc.) but common denominator is really noticeable. In fact, the appearance of the Ossetian element in this region in the Late Middle Ages affected only the language aspect, while the building tradition continued similar to other parts of Georgia.

## MIGRATION OF THE POPULATION FROM THE UPPER REACHES OF TERGI TO NORTH OSSETIA

By the influence of the political conjuncture, some authors unconditionally connected the migration of the Ossetian population from Truso and Ghuda with the politics of the Georgian government that, according to them, tried intentionally for a long time to withdraw Ossetians “*from the historical lands of the East Ossetia*”.

To learn the reasons for the migration of Ossetians from the upper reaches of Tergi, it is necessary to analyze the existing ethnic-social processes here. From the corresponding section of the book, it is clear that Ossetians settled in Truso in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually, they were integrated into the Georgian state, and so by the time of the spread of the Russian rule in Georgia, the Ossetian population of the upper reaches of the Tergi and Aragvi had regarded themselves as the part of the Georgian political organism. This fact is clearly demonstrated in the works of Seka Gadiev - the 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer and founder of the Ossetian prose. The demographic picture changed radically after the introduction of the Russian rule. The number of the Ossetian population increased considerably, which in a way was caused by the growth of the base for substantial resources resulted from the radical changes in farming (Topchishvili 2019: 10-11).

The radical transformation of social and economic conditions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1930s-1940s had a particular impact on the dynamics of the demographic processes of the Ossetian population in the upper reaches of Tergi. Historically, the main field of farming in this region was cattle breeding (sheep breeding in later periods) and arable farming. It is true that stock-raising had the leading role but animal feeding was difficult in winter, and before the Russian rule the transhumance (seasonal movement of livestock for pasture) was not attested (Itonishvili, 2015: 43-44). Consequently, the sheep farming was a small-scale branch (Itonishvili 1969: 224). Part of summer pastures were rented to the lowland shepherds from the valley which raised the degree of their integration. In terms of the



existing farm resources, it was possible to provide subsistence to the limited number of people in the gorge. For this reason, Truso was not so densely populated before the 19th century (Togoshvili 1969: 196).

Before the Russian rule, the necessity to supply essential agricultural products for their households connected the inhabitants of Truso with the Georgian valley-dwellers. The harvest gathered from arable lands was not enough for people living in the upper reaches of Tergi and made up for the shortage from the villages of the lowland. The Ossetians living in Truso basically grew the spring wheat, barley and rye. In ethnographic life in the 1860s, grain crops were attested which could resist the mountainous regions comparably. (Robakidze 1985; 131-132; Gelashvili 2012: 293; Reynegs 1796). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the farming of grain crops was reduced in the villages of Truso and Khevi, and the potato took the leading role.

The important precondition for the migration of the Ossetian population of the upper reaches of Tergi was the changing of the vector of the farming system from the south to the north from the end of the 19th century. This process took place against the background of the radical changes in traditional practices, and the social-economic environment. Significant changes were made in the livestock of the region in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Caucasian Wars ended at that time, and winter pastures of the northern Caucasus became available. It increased the prospect of the small livestock (sheep breeding) vastly. From the 1970s and 1980s, the inhabitants of Khevi and Truso widely applied the winter pastures of Chechnya and Kizlar where they kept the sheep from October till the end of April. Besides, due to the gradual development of capitalism, sheep breeding went beyond the frames of narrow home consumption and its share increased immeasurably in the local economy subordinating the whole farming interests (Jalabadze 1961: 201-2002). The development of the economic potential gave a chance to the increase in population numbers.

The changes in the social-political and farming environment made in the 1920s century were accompanied by the transformation of ethnosocial relations, forms of settlement, and constructions. There were changes in the rules of interrelation between the community,

village dwellers, and family members as well as accessibility to the farming resources and income; there were new demands on the living conditions, which were also reflected on the dynamics of the moving of the population.

In the 1930s, on the initial stage of the collective-farm movement, different kinds of farm organizations were established (Makalatia 1934: 72-83). Private individuals were deprived of their sheep and livestock and attached to the collective farm. The terraces located on the slopes were turned completely into hayfields regarding them as nonprofitable. From then, arable farming was possible only on the plots in the lower belt. Such plots were comparatively convenient to be cultivated by tractors. The collective farms necessarily limited the use of not only traditional primitive tools but also the activity of individual farmers. Little by little, the practice of growing grains was completely put to an end (Itonishvili 2015: 37). A situation like this made the inhabitants of Khevi more dependent on the agricultural products imported from the northern Caucasus because the past economic relations and communications with the regions of Georgian lowlands were weakened.

The traditional trade system collapsed from the very beginning of Soviet rule. If in the past, as personal individuals, the Ossetians sold their livestock products in the lowlands of east Georgia but from now, they had to pass them on to the state. At the same time, the contacts between the Ossetians and Mokheves were reduced in terms of farming. In densely populated Ossetian villages, both ordinary people and leaders who were involved in the collective farm activities were the local Ossetians. They did not keep those frequent communications with the neighboring Georgians as before. The breaking down of the traditional bonds made the population of the upper reaches of Tergi fully dependent on the government policy as the border with the northern Caucasus was strictly controlled by the state. In parallel to collectivization, the state almost took over the realization of agricultural production. The farmers were obliged to hand over the main part of their harvest to the manufactures (National Archives of Georgia 1942: 14). Such a situation intensified the desire of moving from the upper reaches of Tergi to the northern Caucasus rich with

farm products. The traditional trade system collapsed from the very beginning of Soviet rule. If in the past, as personal individuals, the Ossetians sold their livestock products in the lowlands of east Georgia but from now, they had to pass them on to the state. At the same time, the contacts between the Ossetians and Mokheves were reduced in terms of farming. In densely populated Ossetian villages, both ordinary people and leaders who were involved in the collective farm activities were the local Ossetians. They did not keep those frequent communications with the neighboring Georgians as before. The breaking down of the traditional bonds made the population of the upper reaches of Tergi fully dependent on the government policy as the border with the northern Caucasus was strictly controlled by the state. In parallel to collectivization, the state almost took over the realization of agricultural production. The farmers were obliged to hand over the main part of their harvest to the manufactures (National Archives of Georgia 1942: 14). Such a situation intensified the desire of moving from the upper reaches of Tergi to the northern Caucasus rich with farm products.

Alongside the social and political transformations, the types of housing and settlement have changed accordingly. In the villages of the Truso Gorge, a considerable group of people lived in one large community and was satisfied with basic living conditions. After the Sovietization of Georgia, such a settlement was completely inappropriate for the modified social-cultural requirements. The individual lifestyles of families required a separated dwelling construction that meant the development of the village in a new way. Traditional dwellings did not meet the modern requirements, whereas building a new house was connected with big expenses that in its turn, created certain preconditions for settlement. Heavy living conditions and little opportunity for social-economic development pressed the people to look for their jobs and dwellings in the North Ossetia. Due to the intensified migration, it was comparatively difficult to sell a house in Truso. Only the local Ossetians might buy it. As a result, moving to a different place caused material damage to the family. In Truso, there are still houses that underwent only minor modifications (e.g. they have tin roofs and windows, etc.). In contrast to the Khevi villages, gasification

did not take place here. It intensified the desire of improving the living conditions even more in the gorge suffering from the shortage of timber. It can be said that the possibility of comfortable housing in the city of Orjonikidze was a considerable motivation for the residents of the Truso Gorge to move there.

In the 1920s, the issue of education was very acute in the Kazbegi region. The complex relief, severe natural surroundings, and remoteness of the mountainous area hampered the construction of schools. By 1932, only two of the schools in the Kazbegi region met the requirements. Schools were opened in Truso villages too, but the houses rented from the peasants were utterly unsuitable for educational facilities (The National Archives of Georgia, Fund 284: 49-51). Later, before the 1990s, due to the high-intensity migration of the population, only one boarding school was preserved in Kobi and Truso for receiving education.

From the very beginning of its existence, the soviet government carried out the intentional migration of large groups of the population that involved the Ossetians as well. In 1921-1928, twenty-one thousand people migrated from Dvaleti to the north Caucasus and Georgia (Kaloiev 1967: 63). The ethnographer B. Kaloiev considered that the migration policy of the communists coincided with the interest of the Ossetians, and the settlement of the mountainous Ossetians in the north Caucasian valley and the southern foothills played a particularly positive role in their national development. Those who migrated in 1921-1928 got a benefit of the lands confiscated from the upper-class Kozaks, the Ossetian, and Georgian seigneurs (Kaloiev 1967: 63). The settlement of the Ossetians living in the upper reaches of Tergi, in the abandoned dwellings of the Ingush people deported from the north Caucasus, and the migration of the Ossetian population from Kazbegi was somewhat the continuation of the process started from 1944 (Kaberti 1989: 96).

Alongside the deportation of the Vainakh people to Central Asia, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was abolished on March 7, 1944, by the order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and their territory was divided between the neighboring republics. The Itun-Kale district, the western part of the Sharoi district, the southern parts of

Galanchozh, Galashk, and Prigorodny districts as well as the south-eastern part of the Gizeldon district of the Republic of North Ossetia were included in the territory of Georgia. The Akhalkhevi District of the Georgian SSR was created based on the joined territories covering about 2.000 square km. In the same year, the territories that were transferred to Georgia – the south-eastern part of the former Gizeldon district of the North Ossetian Republic, and the districts of Galashk and Prigorodny – were subordinated to the Kazbegi region (The National Archives of Georgia, Fund600: 76; Lukyanovich 2015: 69).

In accordance with the resolution of the council of the People's Commissariat of the USSR on February 1944, regarding the issue of joining the territory of the former Checheno-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic into the Stavropol Krai (resp.: region), the Daghestan ASSR, the North Ossetian ASSR and the Georgian SSR, each of them was obliged to deport the collective farmers forcibly to the emptied villages by April 15, 1944 (including about 500 households from Georgia). Meanwhile, by March 15, 1944 they had to provide resourcing/recruitment arrangements of the districts transferred to them and start the springtime farming operations. In addition, they were instructed to develop measures for the further settlement and development of the former Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic. (The National Archives of Georgia, Fund600: 61-65; Patiev 2004: 109-110). To promote the resettlement the Soviet government established even certain benefits for volunteers (The National Archives of Georgia, Fund600: 94; Patiev 2004: 116).

In 1944 started the resettlement of the Ossetian population to the north Caucasus. They settled in the surroundings of Vladikavkaz on the former dwellings of the Ingush people who were forcibly deported by Stalin's regime. Among the population of Truso the dynamics of resettlement was increased by the economic benefit, comparatively accessible education, close family, and friendly bonds. The severe environmental conditions of Truso, poor infrastructure, and the desire to escape from patriarchal relations intensified the motivation to leave these places. Consequently, part of the Ossetians settled in lowland villages and even in the towns of Georgia. As it seems, the spontaneous uprooting and moving to the north Caucasus was oriented mainly

towards North Ossetia. The households in Truso owned 1-2 livestock on average and 2-3 sheep. The collective farms were basically oriented towards sheep breeding and accordingly kept a flock of sheep in their possession. The natural and geographic environment, as well as farming conditions in the Kazbegi region, made it impossible for families to exist with such resources. Thus, the migration of the population to the north Caucasus was a certain way out.

Due to the spontaneous nature of the migration process, the government found it difficult to control. It became hard to identify the exact number of households moved from the region to the North Ossetia, their deregistration, to organize moving of the personal belongings to the new residential places, to register officially the split families. The disputes often took place between the relocated and remained collective farms. Individual families were not separated formally – part of them stayed in Truso, and part of them moved to the North Ossetia (The Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 14; 2). It should be said that the local authorities regarded the migration of the population from the region as an undesirable phenomenon. In this respect, the opinion was expressed to strongly prohibit the migration from one place to another (The Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 14; 3).

From Truso, Kobi and Ghuda Ossetians moved to the following villages of the north Caucasus: Dlindalina, Bazurkino, Balta, Gizel, Chernorechie, Kantisi, Aliurta, Ekansova, Arikikau, Kost-kau. Koban; Chermek, Terek, Nartov; they also moved from Gimara mainly to the outskirts villages of the region: Chermen, the village Nartov in the region of Kosta Khetagurov, the village Kantisi in the Chaluksk region (The Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 14: 64-68).

Many people desired to move to the former Ingush dwellings from the Ossetian villages of Shida (resp.: Inner) Kartli as well. In 1946-48, the Ossetian population of eight villages settled by the Ossetians in the mountainous zone of the Ateni Gorge and Shida Kartli applied to the local authorities to migrate them to the territory abandoned by the North Caucasian inhabitants. Although they justified their desire by the lack of land and low profit, unlike the Truso inhabitants, the mentioned Ossetians looked sufficiently rich (Alimbarashvili 2019: 333-338).

After the migration of a part of the Ossetians to the north in 1944, Truso underwent radical demographic changes. The gorge was abandoned very fast. From then, it only retained the function of summer pastures or a summer place for local people.

The part of the population that remained in the region expanded kindred relation in the north Caucasus where they could always send the young people to receive education, could get a benefit for job seekers or simply could move to improve the living conditions. It should be mentioned that the resettlement of the Ossetians did not reduce the cattle-breeding in the Kazbegi region. On the contrary, such a situation was even convenient for increasing sheep breeding. The share of sheep breeding grew even more in this period.

A significant part of the Ossetian families was divided. In frequent cases, the core family lived in the North Ossetia, and only old members stayed in Truso. In summer, the Ossetian shepherds of the collective farms drove flocks of sheep belonging to the collective or private farms to the mountain pastures of the Kazbegi region and the northern valleys in winter (The newspaper *AkhaliKhevi* 1945: #25).

On January 9, 1957, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet rehabilitated the Chechen and Ingush peoples, returned them to the Caucasus, and restored their autonomy. In this regard, the Presidium of the Georgian Supreme Soviet made the following decision to restore the border between Georgia and the Russian SFSR which existed before March 7, 1944 (The Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia,1165), though the resettlement process of the Ossetians was not slowed down. Conversely, in 1959-1970, the migration was carried out more intensively, and in the basins of Truso and Kobi, the number of the Ossetians halved within 10 years. The dynamics of Ossetian migration in 1939-1989 from Kazbegi region looked as follows: 3.529 persons of Ossetian nationality lived in the region in 1939; in 1959 – 2.007; in 1970 – 983; in 1979 – 598; in 1989 – 445 (National Statistics Office of Georgia; The Population of Georgia).

Easier communications, economic benefits, relatively accessible education, family, and friendly kindred increased the aspiration of not only the Ossetians but also the Georgians (Mokheves) to the north. As a result, a substantially large and well-integrated Georgian diaspora

was created in Orjonikidze (present Vladikavkaz) which exists up to now.

From the materials of the scientific literature and field-ethnography obtained in the research region, it can be seen clearly that the migration from the high mountainous villages of the upper reaches of Tergi was mainly determined by the economic, political, and ethnocultural factors. The migration from the high mountainous villages to the lowlands was the common tendency. The intensity and peculiarity of the migration to the north Caucasus are reflected in the cemeteries in the upper reaches of Tergi. The villages situated above the Kasara passage – Resi, Tepi, Zakagori, Gimara, Suatisi, Karatkavi, Desi, Tsotsolta, and Abano had been abandoned before the 1960s, and the graves of the following years can hardly be seen. In the villages before the Kasara pass: Nogkau, Shevardeni//Shavardeni, and Okroqana – some of the graves even date back to the 1980s and 1990s.

The issue of education should be noted separately. According to field materials, the children who lived in the villages deep in Truso went to Kobi boarding school. Moving to the north Caucasus was obviously favorable in this respect, too. Moreover, even the Georgians often went to Orjonikidze to receive secondary education.

Due to the natural and geographical conditions, it was easier for the Ossetian population of the Kazbegi region to establish contacts with the Russian Federation than with the Autonomous Okrug of South Ossetia. Thus, culturally and economically, they were more linked with North Ossetia, and it was also psychologically easier for them to move there.

Relying on field materials, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ossetians used the Truso lands only as summer pastures and as temporary summer residence. The number of permanent residents was sufficiently reduced. The disorder of the 1990s affected the region in its way. The abduction of flocks of sheep and the robbing of shepherds were frequent. In the background of radical political, economic and demographic transformation, sheep breeding as the leading branch in the region, was considerably decreased. The Truso Gorge became less perspective from an economic standpoint and it was completely abandoned.



After the collapse of the communist regime, the transhumance was impossible between Georgia and the north Caucasus as a result of the disorder of the 1990s, the closed borders with the Russian Federation, and particularly, the tightening of the visa regime in 2006. Part of the Ossetians who had certain contacts with the Kazbegi region faced the dilemma: they had either to refuse to live in Russia and survive only with poor economic resources in Georgia or move to the Russian Federation for permanent residence. In both cases, they would have to reject the farming system that had been established for decades. It was clear from the very start that the transhumance of flocks of sheep between the borders of two states would be connected with big material expenses and bureaucratic obstacles. They preferred to live in Russia and completely left the settlements of the Kazbegi region. Thus, the mentioned migration process from the upper reaches of Tergi to South Ossetia was caused by farming, economic and ethnocultural factors.

The practice of winter and summer transhumance between the Kazbegi region and the north Caucasus was finally concluded. Today, the new direction of farming contacts can be noticed related to the movement of stockbreeders between the Kazbegi region and eastern Georgia. Lately, in the Truso Gorge together with the Mokheves summer pastures have been used by the stockbreeders from the lowland regions of Georgia and Azeri shepherds from Iormughanlo, whereas the great part of flocks of sheep is driven from Kazbegito winter pastures of the Kartli valleys.

Consequently, we can conclude that the voluntary migration of the Ossetians from Kazbegi region started in 1944. They settled in the villages of the Ingushs who were deported by the Stalin regime. Because of the easier communication, economic benefits, comparatively accessible education and close family and friendly bonds with the North Ossetia, the intensity of the migration was high in the following period, too. The substantial motivation to move to *Orjonikidzewas* the possibility of providing convenient living conditions as the Soviet government paid less attention to the development of the infrastructure (electrification, gasification, roads) in the abandoned villages. As soon as the appropriate circumstances

occurred, the Ossetians left the Gorge immediately. In 1944-1980, the main part of them moved to the Russian Federation and settled in the villages of the deported Ingushs, captured by the North Ossetia. The migration among the Ossetians was also inspired by the changes of the ethnocultural vector, which meant substituting the Georgian orientation with the Russian one. Before the Russian domination, the integration of the Ossetians into the *Georgian world* was a natural process that meant the gradual familiarization and assimilation with the Georgian material and spiritual cultural components (Robakidze 1985: 131-132; Kantaria 1980: 100-154). However, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century the attitude changed in this respect, and the Ossetians turned to the Russians.

Among the Ossetian population, there is a widespread narrative about the forcible deportation of their ancestors from the upper reaches of Tergi. However, the above-mentioned materials make it clear that the migration was mainly caused by economic, social, and ethnocultural factors. The Ossetians left this place to improve their living conditions.

## CONCLUSION

This interdisciplinary work was written using historical, ethnological, art history, architectural and archaeological approaches. The book introduces Truso in a new way culturally, socially, politically and economically.

Recently, a fair number of publications in Russian have been circulated on the issues of Truso (also Kobi) and the upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge as a whole (Kazbegi municipality of Georgia). This territory, where the Ossetian population lived for a period of time, is located near the Georgian Military Road and is strategically very important for both Georgia and Russia. The books, newspaper articles, TV programmes and films produced in Russia/Ossetia concerning this region, or *the East Ossetia* in their view, generally present the history of the region in a tendentious way and completely neglect the written or other kinds of sources. Their creation is inspired by the interest in capturing certain territories, which is sanctioned by the high political officials. The appropriation of the Truso Gorge will enable the Kremlin to control the section of the Georgian Military Road, which is the shortest way connecting Russia with Armenia and Iran. With the help of falsified history and fictional myths, the Kremlin is trying to present this territory as the ancient homeland of the Ossetians, annex it to Ossetia and thus maintain control over the territory of great importance to Russia.

The Ossetian/Russian falsifiers of history deliberately avoid the Georgian historical sources and existing scientific literature; they often offer the reader these sources with their interpretation and introduce inadequate translation into scientific circulation. In fact, this is part of propaganda, with the help of which they are trying to convince the population of North Ossetia and self-proclaimed South Ossetia that they, undoubtedly, must return the lost historical territories. All of this serves to maintain a political discourse in favour of the Kremlin's interests.

The upper reaches of the Tergi Gorge embraces two geographical units – Khevi and Truso. Initially, the ethnographic group of Georgian

mountaineers – the Tsanars lived here and therefore, the land inhabited by the Tsanars was called the Tsanareti Gorge. For a number of reasons (political, demographic, etc.) most of the Tsanars moved to the plain – to Kakheti and new processes started from the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the region. Part of the Tsanars, who did not migrate to the lowlands, concentrated mainly in Khevi – “from Kobi to Gueleti”. However, they lived even higher – in the “country” of Mna, which encompassed the Tergi Gorge from Kobi to the narrowest place of Kasara and the gorge of the Mna River. Meanwhile, above Kasara/Kasris Kari the ethnic composition of the population changed. In Georgian sources and documents, this territory was called Truso and the locals were known as Trusoeli i.e. residents of Truso. From the 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Georgian mountaineers – Dvals started to move and settle in the empty and scarcely inhabited territory of Truso. Consequently, the residents of Truso were mentioned as the Dvals of Khevi (Georg: Khevshi Dvalni). The Dvals migrated from Zakha through Truso// Kheladuri pass. It should be underlined that the migration of the Dvals to Truso did not cause the change of ethnic composition of the population as the Dvals, too, were the Georgian mountaineers.

From a demographic point of view, Truso, like other territorial units of the mountains of eastern Georgia, suffered greatly at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century from the invasions of Tamerlane and the plague pandemic. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Dvaleti, adjacent to Truso, the ethnic composition of the population underwent changes – the Dvals were gradually replaced by Ossetians from the North Caucasus – Kurtat and Alagir. The main part of the Dvals dispersed to different parts of Georgia, and the rest were gradually assimilated by the newly arrived Ossetians. Nonetheless, the assimilation of the Dvalis continued until lately which is testified by the fact that the population of Zakha nearby Truso was bilingual (Georgian and Ossetian) until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The significant part of the residents in the Zhghele (Mamisoni) Gorge spoke Georgian and used many Georgian words in Ossetian speech.

From the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ossetian ethnic unit was gradually distributed in the territory of Georgia earlier inhabited

by the Dvals, particularly, the area of Maghran-Dvaleti (the source of the Didi Liakhvi River) and Truso (the source of the Tergi River). The Georgian population was gradually replaced by the Ossetian. The migrated Ossetians mixed with a certain part of the Georgian population. Ethnic mixing is confirmed by the documents of Vakhushti Bagrationi according to which, "The inhabitants of Truso are Ossetians Dvals" i.e. the Ossetinized Dvals lived in Truso. Besides Dvaleti, the Ossetians assimilated the Dvals in Truso. Like Magran-Dvaleti, the Ossetian ethnic group in Truso was relatively small as these parts of the mountains could not accommodate a large population. For a long time the "land" of Mna between Khevi and Truso remained Georgian. The settlement of the Mna area by Ossetians and the Ossetization of the remaining Georgian population began only at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the migration of ethnic Ossetians to the Mna area and their mixing with the Georgian population. The migration of Ossetians to the Mna area, in turn, was caused by the resettlement of Georgian residents of Mna to different villages of Khevi. Initially, Khevi and Truso were state lands. After the formation of Satavados (i.e. counties), the region was included in the Ksani Seristavo (princedom) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and from the late Middle Ages (17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries) it was under the Aragvi Eristavs (prince). Since 1743, Truso and Khevi were ruled by the children of Tsar Heraclius II. However, even later, the inhabitants of Truso were referred to as the "Ossetians of Aragvi". The migration of the Ossetians to this part of Georgia took place in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; this was not a single process and continued until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the same time, they gradually moved forward to the Mna Gorge and Kobi basin where they settled eventually at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. So, until the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of Truso were Georgian highlanders. Later they were replaced by the Ossetians, who in turn were called the inhabitants of Truso.

The fact that Truso was a Georgian ethnic region from the very beginning is evidenced by written sources, as well as linguistic material – toponyms (both oconyms and microtoponyms), which survived despite the changes of the ethnic composition of its population. The archaeological excavations have not been carried out

in Truso until today. However, the archaeological survey gives hope that archaeological artifacts discovered in the future will confirm that Georgians have lived here since ancient times. The members of the complex expedition (G. Gogochuri, G. Gagoshidze) even in 2018 found the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian lapidary inscription on the church of the Virgin (St. Mary) in Mna in which we read: „Christ, have mercy on the children of Makari”. As the Ossetian informants report, the Georgian text was also inscribed on the 10<sup>th</sup>-century church of Archangel built at the junction of the rivers of Tergi and Suatsi. The most important is that the Ossetian scholars have long appealed on the stela of the grave in Suatsi, which was smuggled out of Georgia during the Soviet period. According to them, the construction date was inscribed on it -1326 and as if, the Ossetian text was written with the Syriac-Nestorian alphabet. In the roughly cut inscription, all the five Georgian vowels and nine consonants are visible: Ⴑ (resp.: g), Ⴐ (resp.: d), Ⴑ (resp.: v), Ⴐ (resp.: t), Ⴑ (resp.: k'), Ⴐ (resp.: m), Ⴑ (resp.: s), Ⴐ (resp.: q'). These Georgian graphemes are analogous samples of the epitaph of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the village of Shevardeni. Actually, the monument belongs to the period of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and not to 1326. The ethnic Ossetians did not build such tombstones in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were buried only in above-ground and semi-terrestrial tombs. Naturally, Ossetians living in both Truso and the valleys of the North Caucasus were not able to erect stone stelae over the above-ground and semi-terrestrial tombs. A number of facts have been revealed that the Ossetians of Truso when they started placing tombstones on their graves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also made inscriptions in Georgian.

The fact that Truso was an inseparable part of the Georgian world is confirmed by both secular and religious architectural monuments. The church buildings built in Truso in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries find parallels only in Georgian architecture, in particular, the small churches dating to this time in Truso are similar to the monuments in Khevi, Mtiuleti, Gudamakari and Shida Kartli mountains in general. There are similar secular buildings in Truso and the above provinces, such as the so-called backed towers. In North Ossetia, the territory of an

earlier settlement of Ossetians, the backed towers were completely unknown. This type of secular constructions, built of massive stones, was typical not only for the mountainous part of Shida Kartli but also for other parts of Georgia (is confirmed also in southwestern Georgia). The research confirms that in the late Middle Ages, the appearance of the Ossetian element and the assimilation of the Kartvelian tribes actually influenced only the linguistic sphere, while the local building traditions were preserved as in the whole of Georgia.

The Ossetians of Truso (as well as the Ossetians living in Dvaleti) traditionally had economic ties only with the rest of Georgia. The Ossetians from Truso began to establish trade and economic ties with the North Caucasus only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the development of urban life in Vladikavkaz. At the same time, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ossetians from Truso migrated both to the North Ossetia and the lowlands of eastern Georgia (simultaneously, local Georgian mountaineers – Mokheves moved to Vladikavkaz).

During the Soviet period, changes in the socio-political and economic environment were accompanied by the transformation of ethnic and social relations, inter and intracommunity relationships, the forms of settlement and buildings, access to agricultural resources and income, new living conditions. In 1944, the mass, voluntary deportation of Ossetians from the Kazbegi region began. They settled in the villages of the Ingush people, deported by the Stalinist regime.

Due to the easy communication, economic benefits, comparatively accessible education and close family and friendly ties, the migration of the Ossetians from Truso to North Ossetia became more intensive in the Soviet period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a rapid exodus of the remained ethnic Ossetians began in Truso, who took with them a large number of state cattle and sheep.

The Georgian written sources, toponyms, archival or ethnographic materials, lapidary inscriptions discovered in Truso and architectural monuments analyzed in this paper, show that the upper reaches of the Truso Gorge was the area of the ancient settlement of Georgians and Georgia's historical territory.

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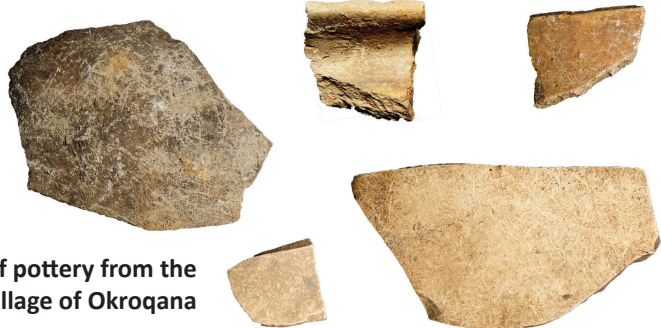
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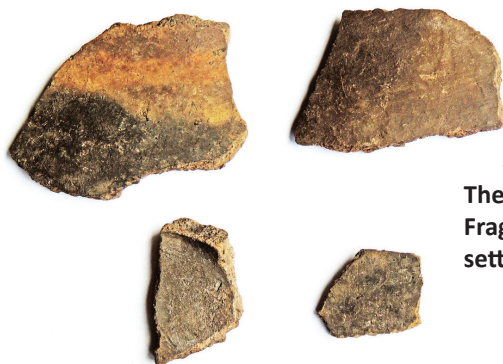
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Georgian Travel Guide



**Fragments of pottery from the village of Okroqana**



**The village of Mna.  
Fragments of pottery from the settlement mound**



**Mna Church of the Virgin, Southern façade**



**Mna Church, eastern façade, asomtavruli inscription**



**A copper cup with a mkhedruli inscription from the Mna Church**



**A stone cross with a mkhedruli inscription on the south façade of the Mna Church**



**Zakagori and the Church of the Archangel**



**Zakagori from the south**



**The village of Burmasigi**



**The village of Resi**



**The village of Gimara**



**The village of Burmasigi**



**The village of Tsotsolta**





**The village of Kartsofeli**



**The village of Suatisi**



**Suatisi Trinita Church**



**The village of Abano**



**The village of Ketrisi**



**The village of Kvemo Desi, The Backed Tower**



**The village of Okroqana**



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